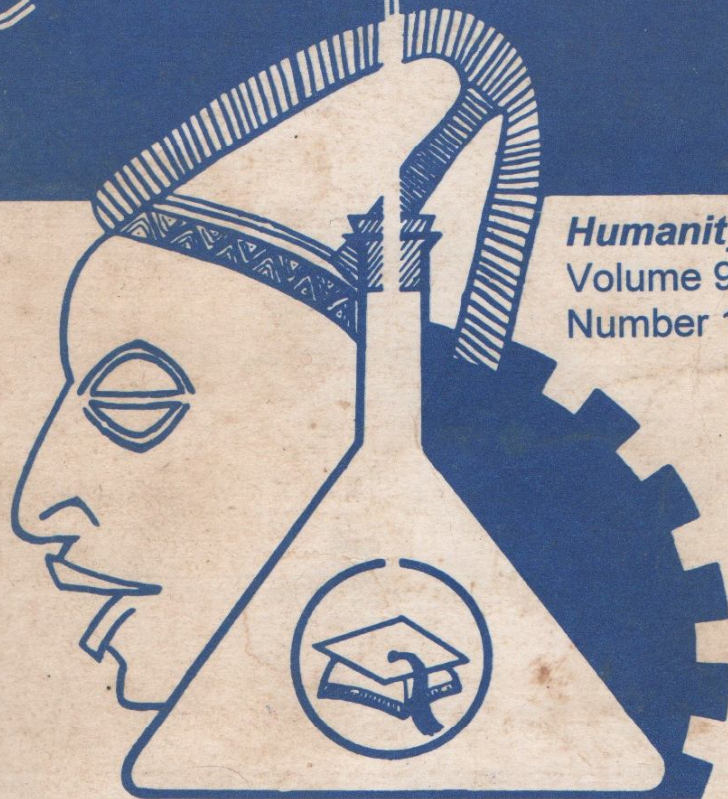


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TOWARDS A FUNCTIONAL ESP PROGRAMME IN NIGERIA: AN ILLUSTRATION WITH A NIGERIAN UNIVERSITY

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Introduction

The global goal of education is the total development of the individual's cognitive, moral and psychomotoric horizons. This triad of any meaningful, purposeful and functional education has also been referred to as the development of the three "h's": the head, the heart and the hands (Lawal, 2000:74). Language, being an important vehicle through which education is attained, constitutes the nucleus of, and the piston in, any education programme. It is against this backdrop that language education occupies a central position in the educational process through the activation of the individual's listening, speaking, reading and writing skills.

English for Specific Purposes (ESP), a "task-based, activity-oriented programme" (Babatunde, 1991; Babatunde, 2001) emerged with a view to achieving that lofty goal of language education. Concerned mainly with the teaching and learning of English based on the needs of the learners through the specification of "what exactly the students are expected to do through the medium of English" (Ajileye, 1999:143), ESP aims at making the use of English more efficient, effective and functional. It is our intention in this paper to appraise the ESP programme today in Nigeria through a critique of the programme in Ladoke Akintola University of Technology (LAUTECH), Ogbomoso. This is done by evaluating what we call the *core* ESP triangle: the Material, the Teacher and the Learner. The paper finally submits that a collaborative effort, including that of the *cover* ESP triangle (the Parents, the University Administration and the Government) is needed to put ESP on its rightful pedestal.

Research Methodology

Our methodology is basically interactional. Based on certain requirements that teachers and materials should meet, we interacted with them to determine their effectiveness. Research questions were posed to a group of learners in various disciplines to define their attitudes to, and impressions of, the ESP programme in the university being studied. Our findings inform our suggestions or recommendations.

Scope and Purposes of Research

The scope of this study covers the core stakeholders in the ESP programme. Each of these is evaluated and assessed. It is foregrounded that ESP is concerned with the Use of English course, not other courses offered under the title of General Studies. We also consider the parents, the university administrators and governments as agents whose involvement, or lack of it, directly or indirectly affects the success or failure of the ESP programme in Nigeria. Our purposes, thus, are to find out why there is a progressive communicative incompetence among the Nigerian students and to proffer solutions to the problems discovered.

ESP In Nigeria: Review and Objectives

ESP evolved in Europe since the 1960's purposely to solve the immediate communicative needs of students of English as a Second Language (ESL) (Olukpe, 1993:4). In Nigeria, for the purpose of this paper, we assume that it emerged in the 1980's under the banners of COMSKIP (Communication Skills Project for Nigeria Federal Conventional Universities) and COMSKIPTech (Communication Skills Project for Universities of Technology, Agriculture and Selected Colleges of Education in Nigeria) as maintained by Alabi (2000). The need for ESP arose from the realization that various disciplines have their peculiar varieties of English based mainly on their lexicon (registers, terminologies and jargons), situations, functions, structures, etc. The ultimate objective behind the ESP, as the term suggests, is the enhancement of the students' communicative competence in English language with special reference to their varying disciplines. The particularized divisions of ESP are harmonious with the schemata of Strévens (1977) and Hutchinson and Waters (1987) summarized below:

- EAP- English for Academic Purposes
- EST- English for Science and Technology
- EOP- English for Vocational or Occupational Purposes
- EBE- English for Business and Economics
- ESS- English for Social Sciences

Thus, after the inaugural meeting of the proposed Nigerian Association of Teachers of English for Specific Purposes in Polytechnics and Colleges of Technology in early 1986 and the eventual workshop on ESP and communication skills in Polytechnics and Colleges of Technology in late 1986, the Nigerian government began in 1988/89 to sponsor Communication Skills Project, the aim of which, according to the project Document, is to "improve the communicative skills in English of Nigerian...students...."

ESP or COMSKIP/COMSKIPTECH was consequently launched into the systems of thirteen conventional Federal Universities seven technological universities and a few polytechnics. Before long, the twin projects successfully "have put in place students-centred activity in most universities as opposed to the traditional lecture based method of instruction..." (Abudulkadir, 1993:454) and have greatly "made teachers of lecturers. The ability of teachers to manage large classes has also been greatly enhanced" (Abdulkadir, *ibid*). With the introduction of ESP in the Federal Universities, State Universities promptly began to launch same into their academic programmes in order to make their students "ESP-compliant" as well. On most occasions, as the case of LAUTECH also shows, ESP programme is imparted into the students via what is being referred to as General Studies (GNS) which incorporates ESP *per se* with some other aspects of knowledge (History, Philosophy, Psychology, Logic, etc).

While considerable successes have been attained by the ESP, it is still bedeviled and ensnared by many problems. For instance, while Olaofe (1993:199) painfully laments that:

The priority areas of many of the EAP programmes are yet to be determined. So also is the feasibility of the programmes in the midst of adversities. Inadequate funding of the programmes, lack of resources, (human and material) and student motivation, as well as doubtful management skills and effective evaluation modes are some of the problems the programme is facing at the moment.

Enuesike (1993:288) regrets that:

Our bane at the Use of English Unit of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka is that too few teachers teach far too many students in too short a time. The adverse effects of this phenomenon are diverse. In the first place, efficiency is crucified at the altar of fulfillment of a time-table. Secondly, staff members are left with little time to research and update themselves. Furthermore, no time available (*sic*) for standard materials production.

The Objectives of ESP

The general objectives of ESP are: training the learners in being active in workshops and seminars; understanding the fluent spoken English at different contexts; communicating functionally, especially for appropriate purposes; taking active part in academic discussions; reading quickly and understanding the complexities and subtleties of academic prose; understanding lectures and taking notes; writing concise academic English, etc.

In LAUTECH, with reference to the foregoing objectives, the ESP (i.e. EST, to be specific) programme featuring GNS 101 and GNS 102 courses, sets to facilitate the development of efficient study skills by the students; present parts of speech and related concepts within the context of message creation rather than from the strictly grammatical perspectives; lead to the acquisition of communicative skills which are particularly relevant to the effective performance in an English – medium Science and Technology learning environment; develop more specialized communication and functional language skills in the students; and to introduce students to the cultural dimensions of scientific inquiry and discourse.

An Appraisal of the LAUTECH ESP Programme

Broadly, three stakeholders are involved in the ESP programme in the classroom. These are the material, the teacher and the learner. It is the 'mutual cooperation' of this *core* trio that brings about a functional programme, with the support of the *cover* trio (to be discussed shortly). The relationship among these core three can be represented as follows, being our modified form of the famous Ogden's and Richard's (1923) triangle.

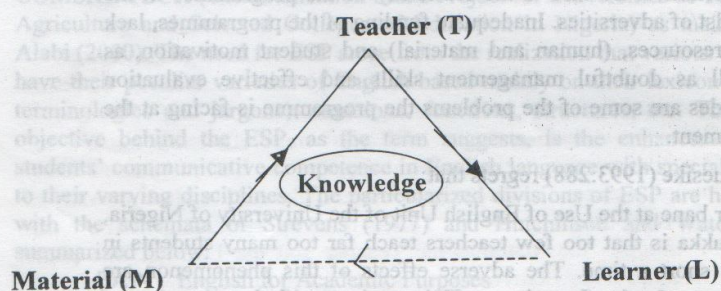


Fig. 1 The Core ESP Triangle

The straight line between M and T shows that their relationship is direct, as that of the relationship between T and S. The single arrows on lines MT and TL indicate that M can only reach the S through the mediation of T. In other words, M attains its peak at T who brings it down to the level of L. Moreover, the broken arrow between M and L shows that though there is a direct, linear relationship between M and L, L cannot have a good grasp of M without T, instantiating his defective knowledge. The broken line between M and L further underscores the arbitrary relationship between M and L, implicating that proper education can only reach L via T; and if L reaches M directly, his knowledge is 'broken' or limited.

It appears evident in our model and the foregoing explication that the mid-way between effective teaching and functional learning is the teacher. The thrust of teaching/learning is the material. If the material is learner-centred, student-friendly, task-based and goal-oriented, the learner will benefit immensely from it and the teacher will find it easy to teach or implement. However, if there is a "mismatch" between the teacher and the learner (i.e. the teacher is not competent, qualified and goal-oriented) or between the material and the learner (i.e. the material lacks merit in terms of content, organisation and style, making it drab, clumsy and vague), or the learner is not well suited for the challenges of the programme, the ESP programme will crumble, rendered sterile and ineffectual.

The Material

This is the channel through which knowledge is passed across to the learner. Not much teaching and learning can be achieved without appropriate materials. Low (1989:136) observes that "teaching materials are one of the major determinants of what gets taught in language-teaching programmes". The success or failure, hence, of the ESP largely depends on the material because as noted by Husain Daif (in Quirk and Widdowson, 1985:224), mismatch often exists between the teaching material and the learner if such material is deficient of necessary features and qualities that can match the needs. A good material that poises to meet the learner's needs must, among other things,

- (i) provide stimulus to learning by encouraging and motivating learners through content and activities that engage their thinking abilities;
- (ii) facilitate coherent and clear unit structure that will bring about substantial chances of learning by providing organisation and systematic arrangement of the teaching-learning process;
- (iii) incorporate reinforcement strategies that will enhance language learning through sustained and improved experiences with language;
- (iv) reflect a balance outlook of the various units with manageable learning tasks; and
- (v) introduce teachers to new techniques by opening vistas into the need areas of experience and broadening the basis of teacher training.

A functional material, it can be gainfully surmised, must reflect four aspects: content, language, style and task. These four encircle the learner.

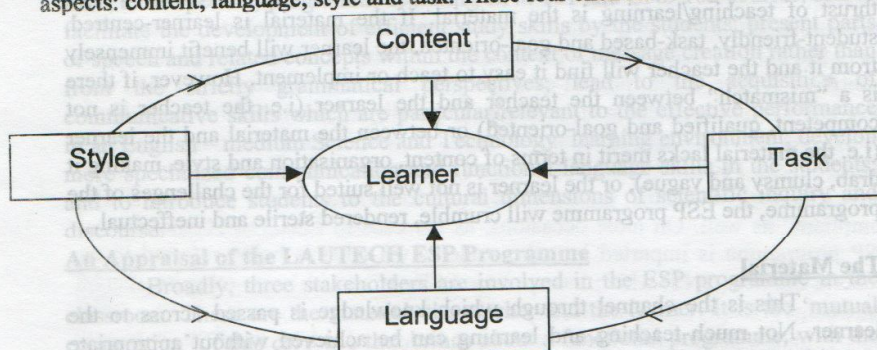


Fig 2: A Functional ESP Material Model

Appraising the materials in use from the mirror of the preceding discussion, it is observed that they need some revision, if not a complete overhaul. The materials lack depth and the treatment of the topics is mostly vague or ill-defined. For instance, the 'Concept Formation' unit in the "Use of English" materials, apart from overlooking tasks like other units, pays a superficial, cosmetic attention to grammar, which in our opinion should be emphasized most in the programme. This is because the problems of the learner's communicative incompetence are often traced to poor grammar.

Both Joshua (2000) and Odebunmi (2001) discuss the errors of the Nigerian students in two universities. Faulty concord, wrong spelling, first language interference, poor grammatical features, pleonasm and confused homonyms are identified by Joshua while Odebunmi showcases instances of grammatical, lexico-semantic, stylistic and orthographic errors. A good ESP material should be geared towards correcting these embarrassing errors.

Though, effort is made in "English for Science and Technology Students", the second material to include few instances of structural disorganisation are its bane. Note taking and note making are not treated while writing does not enjoy the pride of place given to its twin skill, reading. Besides, it is opined that rather than duplicate the materials, the two would have been better produced as a well-structured book. The materials for ESP in LAUTECH, as for many other Nigerian universities, are not appropriate, hence below average.

The Teacher

This is the agent through which learning is imparted to the learner. Without the teacher, no ESP programme can exist. The teacher must know his onions well and realise his role as the link between knowledge and the students. Some of the problems engendering educational development in Nigeria relate to the teacher. Many teachers are redundant, uncommitted, indolent and unproductive. Without the teacher playing his roles well by relating properly with the material to gain more insights and doing the actual teaching, the progress of language education will continue to be thwarted.

In the quest for efficient language teaching programmes, UNESCO organized a seminar on the teaching of modern languages (amongst which English ranks high) in 1953. The seminar arrived at certain prerequisites that could bring about effective teaching rightly on the part of the teacher. According to UNESCO, as cited by Asua (1992:105-106), a language teacher must have:

- (i) an excellent control of the language to be taught (good pronunciation, clear and expressive reading abilities);
- (ii) correct and fluent speech;
- (iii) ability to write the language; ability to read fluently difficult texts;
- (iv) a good scientific and linguistic knowledge of the language to be taught; knowledge in the past and present system of sounds; grammatical structures; formation of words and the ability to put this knowledge into practical use in class; and
- (v) a vast knowledge of the literature and civilization of the foreign country; he should be introduced into psycho-pedagogy and into the theoretical and practical problems in teaching especially into the methods and techniques of the teaching of a foreign language and use of audio-visual aids.

Bearing these criteria in mind, the present researcher x-rayed the ESP teachers in LAUTECH and found out that, though with varying degrees of competence (including all the above) and performance (commitment to work, punctuality and promptness), almost all of them have the necessary tools to finish the job. By any standard, based on our findings, their competence and performance, regardless of not being absolutely perfect, are well high satisfactory, or above average.

The Learner

This is the target of the ESP programme as everything it is about is geared towards his/her better improvement and enhanced knowledge. Without the cooperation and responsiveness of the learner, the programme, a learner-centred phenomenon, fails and crashes. The attitude of the learner is greatly

important. While positive disposition towards knowledge results in learning and understanding, negative disposition results in dearth of assimilation and comprehension.

In the Nigerian context, given the example of LAUTECH students, the attitude of the students to ESP of GNS courses is at best lackadaisical. Many of them consider ESP as more of a liability than an asset. Numerous students "stab" the GNS lectures because of their patent unseriousness or outlandish apathy (i.e. "no be GNS?") having the illusion that ESP is a course they can read up a day before the exam and make at worst a "let my people go" (i.e. "40-44" or "E" grade), the lowest pass marks. This unwholesome, lack-lustre attitude mostly accounts for mass failures often recorded in GNS courses in many Nigerian Universities including LAUTECH. And, given the logical sequence of Martin Luther King's maxim, "injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere", it follows that the students' unseriousness in GNS/ESP threatens and diminishes their seriousness in their major courses. Since language, which ESP seeks to perfect, is the medium through which instruction and learning take place, a good mastery of language and a positive disposition to GNS are no doubt a catalyst to learners' good performance in their various disciplines, and vice versa.

Given that the learners are well suited for the programmes, they all have the required credit in English in their WAEC, SSCE, NECO, results, it is found out that their rating is just average. Many average students in the ESP class will perform better if they are positively disposed to the programme.

Findings

To illustrate our findings in the ESP programme in the Nigerian university system, which is a microcosm of LAUTECH, the following bar chart presents a summary. The chart is a broad categorisation of the earlier-mentioned terms: "above average" (AA), "average" (A) and "below average", (BA). To attain more specificity, the chart identifies three degrees/levels of each term; high, mid and low. Though, it is said that the standard of the materials is below average, our findings at close examination reveal a high level of that category. Also the quality of the teachers, which is 'above average', operates at the low level of that category. And to turn the ESP programme around, more than that low level is required. Lastly, the learners whose disposition to ESP is in conflict with their suitability for the programme are just mid-average, neither low nor high.

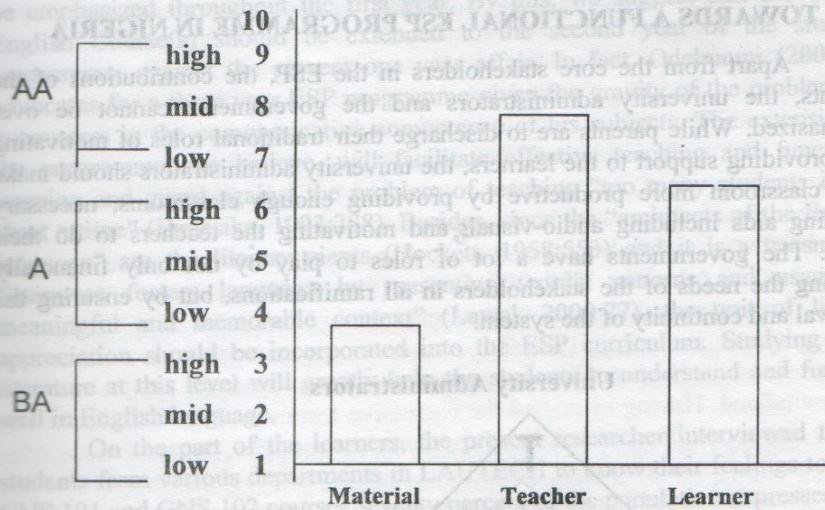


Fig. 5: The ESP Chart in LAUTECH

In essence, our study reveals a regressive curve of the ESP programme in Nigeria. It is evident that most of the materials used for the teaching of ESP are not suitable or appropriate. The teachers, who are not perfect but are often qualified, do a difficult and thankless job of teaching unserious students, whose attitude to the programme is negative.

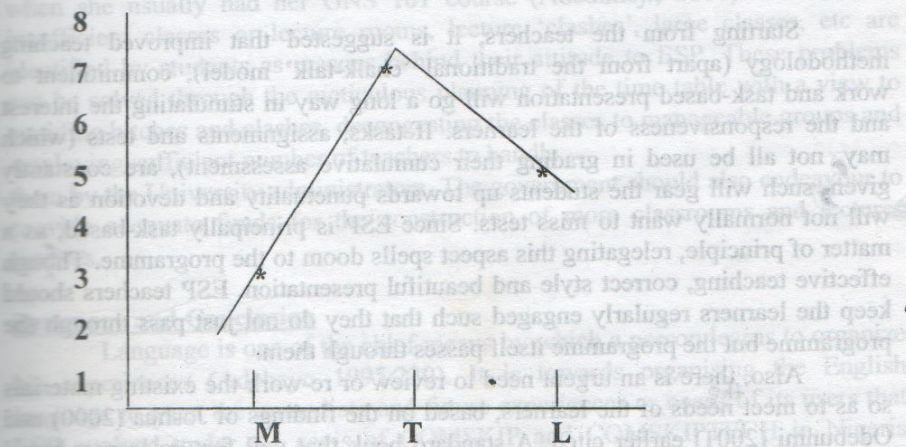


Fig. 5, The Regressive Curve of the ESP in Nigeria.

TOWARDS A FUNCTIONAL ESP PROGRAMME IN NIGERIA

Apart from the core stakeholders in the ESP, the contributions of the parents, the university administrators and the governments cannot be over emphasized. While parents are to discharge their traditional roles of motivating and providing support to the learners, the university administrators should make ESP classroom more productive by providing enough classrooms, necessary teaching aids including audio-visuals, and motivating the teachers to do their work. The governments have a lot of roles to play by not only financially meeting the needs of the stakeholders in all ramifications, but by ensuring the survival and continuity of the system.

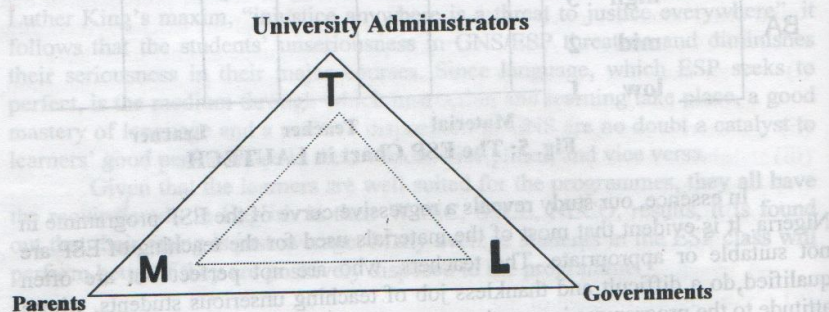


Fig.6, The Cover ESP Triangle (enclosing the core triangle).

Starting from the teachers, it is suggested that improved teaching methodology (apart from the traditional 'chalk-talk' model), commitment to work and task-based presentation will go a long way in stimulating the interest and the responsiveness of the learners. If tasks, assignments and tests (which may not all be used in grading their cumulative assessment), are constantly given, such will gear the students up towards punctuality and devotion as they will not normally want to miss tests. Since ESP is principally task-based, as a matter of principle, relegating this aspect spells doom to the programme. Though effective teaching, correct style and beautiful presentation, ESP teachers should keep the learners regularly engaged such that they do not just pass through the programme but the programme itself passes through them.

Also, there is an urgent need to review or re-work the existing materials so as to meet needs of the learners, based on the findings of Joshua (2000) and Odebunmi (2001) earlier cited. A standard book that will feature learner-based tasks such as study questions and discussion topics as well as rich content and good style needs to emerge. In revising the materials, study skills and grammar should

be emphasized throughout the first year. By this, we suggest that the Use of English Course(s) should be extended to the second year of the students programme, against the present one year affair. In fact, Odebunmi (2001:78) advocates for a three year ESP programme given the gravity of the problems he encounters in the communicative competence of his subjects. The extension of the programme, we believe, will facilitate effective teaching and functional learning and guard against the problem of teaching "too many students in too short a time" (Enuesike, 1993:288). Besides, since the "architects of the English language" are the literary giants (Hockett, 1958:553) and it is a truism that "literature fosters language by presenting words, patterns and usages in meaningful and memorable context" (Lawal, 2000:77), the unit of literary appreciation should be incorporated into the ESP curriculum. Studying some literature at this level will greatly help the students to understand and function well in English language.

On the part of the learners, the present researcher interviewed twenty students from various departments in LAUTECH to know their feelings towards GNS 101 and GNS 102 courses. Seventy percent of the population expressed their indifference to, if not disdain for, the programme. Their responses, however, are eye-opening as they show that their attitudinal disposition is based on some 'external' factors (i.e factors outside the 'core' ESP triangle but relate to our cover ESP triangle). A medical student complained he could not be positively disposed to GNS in a situation where he would have to attend his classes at 7 o'clock in the morning. A similar opinion is expressed by an Engineering student who complained that she was always tired at 5 o'clock in the evening when she usually had her GNS 101 course (Adedimeji, 2000). Problems of insufficient classes or lecture rooms, lecture 'clashes', large classes, etc are identified by students as reasons behind their attitude to ESP. These problems can be solved through the meticulous planning of the time table with a view to avoiding hitches and clashes, decongesting the classes to manageable groups and employing sufficient number of teachers to handle them by the University administrators. The government should also endeavour to provide adequate funds for the construction of more classrooms and lecture theatres.

Summary and Conclusion

Language is one of the chief means by which a person learns to organize his experiences (Adebayo 1995:230). It is towards organising the English language to meet the immediate and future experiences or needs of its users that ESP evolved under the aegis of COMSKIP and COMSKIPTECH in Nigeria around the mid-eighties. About fifteen years after, studies show that there is a sustained decline in English language use among virtually all categories of

undergraduate students in Nigeria. The bulk of the problem is traceable to instances of 'mismatch' between the materials used for teaching and the actual needs of the learners. It is advanced that good materials, that will drill the students in the use of appropriate and grammatical constructions and open their eyes to the rudiments of listening, speaking, reading and writing effectively, need to emerge. The teachers and the learners of English in Nigeria are also expected to turn a new leaf by working towards blasting blunders out of our undergraduates in their spoken and written discourses. This is very important and urgent because English language remains the most important language in the world today (cf. Adegbija, 1992: 207; Ofuya, 1996:138).

This paper evaluates the ESP programme in Nigeria through a critique of the programme in LAUTECH, Ogbomoso. It contends that to combat the common errors in English language use among the students the programme has to be revitalized. Having identified the regressive fortunes of the ESP, the paper submits that a collaborative effort of the *core*, the material, the teacher and the learner, and the *cover* triangles, the parents, the University administrators and the governments, is needed to put education generally or language education or ESP, specifically on a firm pedestal. Through improving the quality of materials and extending the period of teaching-learning with the development of the system itself, in all ramifications, our ESP will be more functional and the education programme will be more result-oriented.

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