

## VALIDATION OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE COURSE SYLLABI FOR AGRICULTURE STUDENTS

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**Abstract:** In agricultural education English plays a decisive role in wide-ranging communication situations. In State Agricultural Universities (SAUs) in Maharashtra one English language course is prescribed to the first semester of B. Sc. Agriculture degree programme. It was found that these students face considerable problems in English usage notwithstanding the medium of instruction is English and the rural background of the majority of them. They run into inaccurate exercise of all the four skills of language, especially speaking and writing. Given that, it was decided to design a comprehensive syllabus which would meet all inclusive needs of the students. Hence, based on what these students need in order to function effectively through English either as a means to learn agricultural sciences and cope with academic prerequisites of the subject-specialization or as a medium of communication in varied occupational and social settings. Consequently, based on the needs expressed by the students and the suggestions of the teachers two syllabi were designed considering the credit system and time allotted to English language course. For this purpose English Language Teaching experts were also consulted and their opinions were treasured. The syllabi so designed were validated for applicability and substantiation following appropriate procedure. Newly designed syllabi will fulfil their English language needs – in-study and post-study.

**Key words:** Validation, needs, syllabus design, agriculture English

**Introduction:** The agriculture discipline is a vital and crucial phenomenon as it directly deals with issues, in a straight line, related to livelihood of nearly 65% Indian population and has direct and indirect effect on the Indian economy, in turn, agriculture education is vitally important. Undoubtedly, English has become the language of science and technology around the world; agriculture discipline is no exception. Hence, agriculture English course acquires distinctive significance. Unfortunately, this course doesn't meet the comprehensive needs of the students. Hence, there was a huge need to design such course(s). Roberto Rabbini (2002) says a syllabus is an expression of opinion on the nature of language and learning; it acts as a guide for both teacher and learner by providing some goals to be attained. Stec (2011) identifies five factors for syllabus implementation: lesson aims, content, procedures, syllabus users (teachers, learners) and teaching materials. The classical approaches to curriculum design and management could not respond adequately to the requirements of the new situation. Now, there is a need to make more investigations in order to introduce reforms and innovations in agricultural education to make it more responsive to the needs of the society and the nation as a whole as well as advancement of agriculture and allied sciences. Needs analysis plays important role in this respect. "A failure to begin an English for Specific Purposes (ESP) course design process by carrying a systematic needs analysis is claimed to result in a course that is not relevant to the students' needs and hinders the teaching/learning process," (Munby, 1978;

Hutchinson and Waters, 1987). Therefore, a study was carried with the objective of designing need based syllabus and its validation. Therefore, for designing these syllabi a questionnaire was rendered on 400 students and 40 teachers were interviewed with a structured set of questions from all the four SAUs in Maharashtra. Suitable statistical tools were used for analysis.

**Motivation:** The students from B.Sc. Agriculture degree programme at State Agricultural Universities (SAUs) in Maharashtra study an English language course as a part of requirement of the degree. This course chiefly teaches communication skills to a restricted extent. It mainly emphasizes on writing skills related to business and official communication; reading, listening and speaking skills have been given an inadequate prominence. Therefore, this course forms just incomplete components and lacks important ones. It doesn't contain the components which are immediately related to the subject specialization and ones which are useful at various communication settings. Hence, it does not meet the essential and entire needs of the learners and does not enable the learners to function effectively at academic, professional and social settings. It must be taken into account that agriculture graduates need to interact with the farmers, scientists and other sections of the society. These students will face serious difficulties as they learn a language, which runs around narrow domains. Therefore, there was a problem, which deserved ardent investigation, as the subject has to deal with vital issues, which directly relate to the welfare of the majority of the population of the country for agriculture is the base of Indian

economy. Therefore, it was indispensable to clutch this concern sincerely. The educational structure of SAUs is based on semester system. One academic year contains two semesters of about 20-22 weeks including the examinations: mid-term, semester end theory and practical examination. Also, there are a specific number of credits (theory and practical) a student can undertake during each semester. Duration of one credit of theory is one hour a week and for practical one credit is of two hours' session a week. The number of credits during the entire degree programme is definite and the students cannot exceed the limit of number of credits. The present English language course carries two credits i.e. (1+1), one theory and one practical credit per week. Hence, it was necessary to maintain the credits while designing the syllabi. Two credits of the present English language course were distributed between the two designed courses. Based on the recommendations of both the respondents, teachers and students, the researcher designed two syllabi; one structural syllabus of one theory credit course i.e. (1+0) for first semester and one practical credit course (0+1) incorporating communication skills for next semester. The study was conducted with the objective to validate designed syllabi for their relevance and legitimacy.

**Methodology:** Both the syllabi were examined for the content validity by determining how well the contents are appropriate for the learners. The syllabi designed were validated by seeking the views of the learners. For this purpose a group of 30 B.Sc. (agriculture) students other than the sample was selected randomly and the views of the teachers were also called for the same and a group of 30 teachers excluding the sample was selected randomly for the purpose. Both the groups selected were from College of Agriculture, Dapoli. The responses of the respondents were rated on three point continuum. The options given to respondents were Highly Relevant, Somewhat Relevant and Not Relevant and the scores were assigned 3, 2 and 1, respectively. For analysis t-Test (t-Test Paired Two Samples for Means) was used.

#### Results And Discussion

**Reliability:** A syllabus is reliable only when it gives consistently the same results when applied to the same sample. The reliability of the scale found out by using Test and Re-Test method. The views of both the groups i.e. 30 learners and 30 teachers (excluding sample area) were sought. After a period of 15 days again the opinions of the same respondents were taken and thus two sets of scores were obtained for each syllabus.

The contents of the syllabi designed are given in tables 1 and 2.

**Table (1): Syllabus I Structural English**

Sl. No.	Units	Contents
1.	Grammar	Study of tenses, Study of voices, Word order and Sentence organization (basic word order, inversion, verb before subject, fronting, information structure and emphasis), Various sentence structures (questions, question tags, negative structures, imperatives, exclamations, direct speech, indirect speech, relatives, preparatory, ellipsis i.e. leaving word out), Subject-verb agreement
2.	Vocabulary Exercises	Word classes, Confusable words and expressions, Spelling, Synonyms and antonyms, Exercises on phrases & idioms (e.g.: dust and ashes, doorstep of doom, boundaries of knowledge, Apple of one's eye, in a fix etc). Scientific (Agricultural) vocabulary exercises
3.	Text Related to Agriculture	<i>Is rural India really shining or is it just a poster image?</i> : M.S. Swaminathan; <i>Many practical difficulties plague a farmer today</i> : Suresh Pal and Alka Singh; <i>What do farmers want from the government?</i> : ThooranNambi; <i>Need for more stringent measures to save ground water</i> : K. Palanisami; <i>Current topics viz. Food Security Bill, IPF Rights</i> (Note: here teachers will explain the complex agriculture vocabulary)
4.	General English Text	<i>The most important creature on earth</i> : S.A. Abbasi; <i>Role of Technology in Women's Work</i> : (From report by the Task Force on Health: National Commission on Self-employed Women); <i>Man Versus Machine</i> : Mahatma Gandhi; <i>The Childless one</i> : Jai Nimbalkar; <i>Lamb to the Slaughter</i> : Roald Dahl; <i>AIDS</i> : (From the transcript of the dialogue between Dr. VinayKulkarni and SanjivaniKulkarni of the AIDS Information Centre, Pune); <i>New Applications</i> : Chandlee Stokes; <i>Jurassic Park</i> : Michael Christon; <i>The Bandit Brouhaha</i> : Anil Sari; <i>Stephen Hawking's Cosmic Journey</i> : Leslie Arnold

<p><b>Reference Books:</b> <i>Practical English Usage</i> by Michael Swan, Oxford, New International Indian Edition, 2007; <i>Discourse skills in English: a Course Book for Students of Science and Technology</i> by Holliday, A., Jacob, G. and Narkar, M. Mumbai: Frank Bros. and Co; <i>Oxford English Grammar</i> 1<sup>st</sup> Edition by Sidney Greenbaum, Oxford University Press India, 2005; <i>English Grammar and Composition</i> by Rajendra Pal &amp; Premlata Suri, Sultan Chand and Sons, 2011; <a href="http://en.wikibooks.org/wiki/English_in_Use">http://en.wikibooks.org/wiki/English_in_Use</a> (E-Book on Grammar)</p>
<p><b>Supplementary Material:</b> Journals on agricultural social sciences, Magazines on agriculture, Popular articles, Books on grammar and composition, etc.</p>

**Table (2): Syllabus II  
Comprehension and Communication Skills in English**

Sl. No.	Units	Contents
1.	Reading Skills	Reading comprehension; Improving reading skills; Passages for understanding; Skimming and scanning; Understanding meanings of difficult words; Understanding logical relationship between sentences, Effective note making
2.	Writing Skills	Paragraph writing; Effective letter writing (personal & professional); Job application and CV writing; Technical report writing; Press release & News writing; Précis, synopsis, abstract and summary writing
3.	Speaking Skills	Importance of stress and intonation; Oral presentation of reports: seminars and conferences, features of oral presentation, regulating speech, physical appearance, body language, posture, eye contact, voice; Group discussion; Interview (interviewee and interviewer), Speaking on various occasions
4.	Listening Comprehension	Improving listening skills, Avoiding bad listening habits, Listening to audio CDs and other devices and actively responding to it. Listening to lectures, talks and speeches and taking notes
<p><b>Reference Books:</b> <i>Cambridge Advanced English: Student's Book</i>: Jones Leo (1998), New Delhi: Cambridge University Press (for communication skills); <i>Business Correspondence and Report Writing</i>: R. C. Sharma; <i>Written Communication in English</i>: Saha Freeman; <i>English for Practical Purposes</i> by Patil Z. N. et al. MacMillan</p>		
<p><b>Supplementary Material:</b> ESP textbooks, Research journals, Scientific &amp; technical reports, Periodicals on agriculture, Audio/visual devices for improving listening &amp; speaking skills, Newspapers, News articles on recent activities in agriculture, Material useful for conversation at social settings, Success stories etc.</p>		

**Validation:** For validation of the syllabi t-Test (t-Test Paired Two Samples for Means) was applied on the scores collected and recollected after 15 days from the

fresh sample of 30 each of the students and the teachers. The following table gives the means of the scores collected and recollected from the students for syllabus I (Structural English).

**Table (3): Mean scores obtained from students and teachers on syllabi I & II**

Sl. No.	Syllabi	Respondents	Means		t-value	
			Test	Re-test	Students	Teachers
1.	Syllabus I	Students	70.76667	71.46667	-1.157282 (Syllabus I) <b>Test</b>	-0.525742 (Syllabus I) <b>Test</b>
		Teachers	70.9	71.13333		
2.	Syllabus II	Students	41.13333	41.43333	-0.619079 (Syllabus II) <b>Re-test</b>	1.1105147 (Syllabus II) <b>Re-test</b>
		Teachers	40.86667	40.23333		

For comparison between the scores obtained from the learners and the teachers on the contents of the syllabi, as given in the tables 1 and 2, were compared with the scores obtained again after 15 days from the same respondents as given in the table 3. From the table it is observed that there was no significant difference found between each pair of scores given in

respective tables. Moreover, the means calculated for the scores of both the respondent for both the syllabi found in the range of 89.40 to 95.82 per cent.

**Conclusion:** The analysis of reliability and validity of the course contents from the students and teachers opinions indicates that the syllabi designed by the researcher are useful and relevant to the agriculture

students. It also proves that the newly designed syllabi fulfil the entire needs of the students.

**Recommendation/Implication:** The syllabi validated are to be introduced to the B.Sc. Agriculture degree programme at the Maharashtra SAUs.

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