
Framework of Course Design in English for Specific Purposes

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Abstract:

Albania's opening to the world in early nineties, the socio politic change together with the expansion of trade and economy, brought an increasing need in English language and communication in different spheres of life. The change in communication demand brought up the need of English for Specific purposes, the language to be used by professionals in different field of work and education. This new trend in language communication demands a change in syllabus design and implementation. Designing an ESP course poses a major challenge for many English teaching instructors considering the recent emergence of this necessity and consequently the lack of proper education and training in the field.

This paper aims to introduce a framework for developing a new ESP course by investigating the most important criteria to be kept in mind and the steps to be followed when designing and ESP syllabus in general and BE in particular. By taking in consideration the wants and needs of stakeholders in the course such as students, potential employers and syllabus designers, criteria such as need analysis, defining goals and objectives, selecting teaching materials and teaching methods, evaluation system etc., are all important issues to consider before designing any course of ESP in order to teach successful classes.

By means of literature review and personal experience as a lecturer of ESP, I have tried to shed some light in identifying the steps necessary to design and carry out an ESP course. When the course

designer initiates the work with the in-depth needs analysis research and selects and arranges the course materials and teaching methods around the students' want and needs, the teaching process will be more effective and the course has more chances to be a success.

Key words: English for Specific Purposes, course design, needs analysis, stakeholders

INTRODUCTION

English for Specific Purposes (ESP) has been identified as a learner-centered approach to teaching English as a foreign or second language. Among the major characteristics is that it meets the needs of adult learners who need to learn a foreign language to use it in their specific professional fields, such as business, science, technology, medicine, agriculture, and academic learning.

Hutchison and Waters (1987:21) described ESP as an approach to language teaching which aimed to meet the needs of particular learners. In the same line, Mackay and Mountford (1987:2) defined ESP as the teaching of English for clearly a utilitarian purpose, which is usually defined with reference to some occupational requirements (e.g. bank tellers, mechanic engineers) or for vocational training programs (e.g. hotel staff and tourist guides). In ESP syllabus, the teaching content is central to the special language content needed to reach the specialized aims required by learners. According to Kennedy and Bolitho (1984: 3), ESP is based on "an investigation of the purposes of the learner and the set of communicative needs arising from these purposes". GE (General English) unlike ESP, is the type of English taught as a second language along with other subjects for educational purposes. EGP does not urge the learners to use English for any real immediate communicative purposes. On the other hand, ESP is English taught for specialized learners with some specific vocational and educational purpose in mind. Therefore, ESP utilizes

methodology and activities which focus on the language appropriate to these activities. As a specific approach to language teaching, ESP requires that all decisions regarding content and method to be based on the learner's reason for learning (Hutchinson and Waters, 1987: 19).

English for Specific Purposes (ESP) is an emerging and developing branch of English Language Teaching in Albania. ESP instruction is regarded by many to be centered around teaching a special lexicon and translating numerous texts. Unfortunately such methods did not reflect students' interests and caused low motivation in learners. The introduction of new teaching methods in ELT and therefore the spread of the student-centered approach in Albania as well as the continued increase of international contacts in various spheres, the design of ESP courses in order to prepare students for professional communication in workplace and elsewhere has had considerable change and improvement. Course designing can be an intimidating process for many instructors. What are the steps to follow in order to develop a course that meets the needs and wants of the learner? Where do they start? What about selection of teaching material? How to address the students' poor motivation?

This paper aims to give an overview and steps to be followed in order to develop an ESP course. It will be helpful to teachers in so solving some of the problems they may come across in ESP course designing.

Graves (1996) suggests that a systematic syllabus design consists of six steps: (1) *student's needs analysis*, (2) *determining goals and objectives of the course*, (3) *conceptualization of the content*, (4) *selection and development of teaching materials and activities*, (5) *organizing the content and the activities of the course*, and (6) *Evaluating the course*. Course development is not rigid but rather flexible and an ongoing process, one in which the teacher makes necessary changes to meet students' interests and needs, while the course is still running.

DEVELOPING AN ENGLISH FOR SPECIFIC PURPOSES COURSE

1. Students' Needs Analysis

Needs analysis is the first and crucial step in designing syllabus. Many problems in ESP classes and result when instructors do not take in consideration learners' interests and disregard students as a source of primary and essential information. As a result, it has been given considerable attention in making sure that the ESP course serves a particular group's interests (Graves K., 1996; Harrison R., 1996; Hutchison T. & A. Waters, 1987;). Generally speaking, students' needs analysis includes all the activities to collect information about students' learning needs, wants, wishes, etc... Students' need analysis also involves looking at the expectations and requirements of other people included in the process, the stakeholders such as the instructors, administrators, potential employers.

The information is beneficial in drawing the goal and objectives of the teaching learning process. When needs are clearly stated, the learning aims can be expressed more easily and the language course can become motivating. The selection of tasks and materials can also be based on the results of the analysis. The result of the analysis of the learners' needs may give clear information of the tasks and material that might be attractive to them. This step is important in organizing the content and activities since it identifies the sequence of real life activities that could be adopted in the teaching -learning process. In other words, all activities in designing syllabus are dependent on the needs analysis process and result.

Conducting a students' analysis might beneficial in two ways. First, it reflects learners' "present situation" - their level of knowledge ESP, knowledge in professional field, motivation, etc.

The second one, reflects "target situation" what learners want to achieve, their ESP needs.

Collecting information about students' current and future needs of ESP could be achieved in several ways. Different questionnaires, case studies, surveys, interviews, etc. In Business English field, learners might list areas of the field where they think ESP will be needed in their potential future employment (for example, product marketing, loans, negotiating business deals with foreign customers , writing or/and translating business documents from English into Albanian, etc.).

Collection of information of what students want forms only a part of what the instructors will teach in the course. There are also other things to be taken in consideration, such as curriculum, guidelines of the teaching institution, means available, etc., which cannot be overlooked. Nevertheless, in course design and development, students' analysis will be a helpful tool for instructors to meet the required and desired in goals and objectives identification, conceptualizing the content of the course, selection of teaching materials, and course assessment and evaluation.

2. Determining the goals and objectives of the course

Formulating goals and objectives for a particular ESP course gives the instructor the possibility to envision the course, to foresee how the course will be. In language learning, As K. Graves (1996) explains, goals are “general statements of the final destination, long term purpose of the course, the level students need to achieve” (Graves, 1996,). When stating the goals, the course planner has to keep in mind that they are related to a potential job in the future or communication of the target language community (Harmer, 1991,). Objectives, on the other hand, are more detailed and specific ways in which the goals are planned to be achieved (Graves, 1996). In other words, they may refer to teachable chunks such as „language functions, activities, skills, language type or a combination of them all“ (Harmer, 1991).

Objectives should be in compliance the goals, realistic and relevant to how the teacher conceptualize the content of the course. In his book D. Nunan (1988) provides details how a course planner should conceptualize objectives:

Students will be able to

Students will develop

Students will learn that ...

Students will be aware of ...

... (Nunan, 1988).

3. Conceptualization the Content

Selecting the content, that is choosing and analyzing the necessary content related to the needs analysis and the goals and objectives is the next step in line. According to Reilly 1988, we need to: 1. define what the students should be able to do as exactly and realistically as possible, as the result of the instruction; 2. rank the syllabi in order of importance according to the desired outcomes; 3. evaluate available resources and match them with the syllabi; 4. designate one or two syllabi as dominant 5. review how combination and integration of syllabus types can be achieved and in what proportion; 6. and translate decisions into actual teaching units.

Conceptualizing the content is a context-related process. When taking into account information about the students, goals, course instructors need to identify what are the aspects of ESP that might be integrated, and used as the central part of the course in order to address students' needs and expectations. There may be different ways of conceptualizing the content. Language Instructors might want to concentrate on developing "basic skills", vocabulary awareness, communicative competence, intercultural competence, etc.

In addition, we need to identify language function and language expression related to the jobs. Language functions are things the speakers do with their language in communication (Savignon, 1983). Greeting, negotiating, and giving information can be given as examples. Language expressions are utterances

that are expressed in an appropriate context for particular function. Greeting a client in the morning can use „good morning“ as the expression. Language functions and language expressions are not only focusing on the grammar accuracy, but also „utterances of communication“ in which this kind of teaching method is considered to be more meaningful since it focus in based on the target. Cultural understanding needs also taken into consideration.

Following the structural approach, the same textbooks have been used for a long time in Albania for all the students. But students are all different and with the rapid development of the world, changes in students' needs and interests are inevitable.

4. Selection and development of teaching materials and activities

During this stage, instructors rely heavily on teaching materials" availability for selection of teaching materials. This is usually used as a justification and explanation for the occurrence of the same syllabus in different courses.

Nevertheless, there are cases when course instructors are dependent on the materials and are required to use the same textbook repeatedly. In principle, there is nothing wrong in using the same teaching materials, if the course is conceptualized around the use of a learner-centered approach. There are many cases when the same materials and resources such as podcasts, newspapers article or story can be used for to sharpen learners' reading or listening comprehension skills etc. According to Graves (1996,) teaching materials are "tools that can be figuratively cut up into component pieces and then rearranged to meet the needs, abilities, and interests of the students in the course". He states that, in order to select materials the following issues should be taken into account:

- Appropriateness of the materials, so that the students will feel comfortable, meaning that the material should be relevant to their interests and language level.

- Effectiveness in achieving the course purposes
- Feasibility, the material should be in accordance with the students' capabilities so the course difficulty will be lower.

The source of materials can be:

- Mass media, published materials (textbooks, journals, magazines)
- From real speech (lecturers, hotel communication, seminars)
- Specially written
- Simplified and adapted from public materials or instances of real speech. (Graves K., 1996: 27)

The lack of materials can be prevailed over by giving certain task related to the future task. Using semi authentic materials is suggested. The four language skills need to be related to the real situation activities. Tasks aim at activities, which would enable students to deal with situation related to their future employment

5. Organizing the content and the activities of the course

Course organization is important since it provides the teacher and the students with a clear picture of the process that is ahead. Course designers begin with the planning of a new course as soon as they have finished formulating the objectives and chosen teaching materials and resources. Activities may be organized in various ways. In ELT the following pattern is traditionally used: "pre-activity, activity, follow up". Course instructors start with what results from the need assessment that the learners already know or the more common method of starting with a simple task followed by more complex tasks and activities. The course may be arranged and organized in approaches which are known as cycle approach or as matrix approach .The instructor uses the cyclical approach to introduce the learners with a cycle of activities which follow a consistent

sequence. While in the matrix approach, the course instructor gets involved in many activities and eventually with the passing of the time, selects which ones to continue to use (Graves, 1996). The course designer may sequence the content and activities referring to the standard operational procedure (SOP) of the related job in the relevant profession. There is a need for the identification of the tasks performed in each job position and the identification of the tasks is further sequenced based on the operational and functional procedure. These procedures are followed by the assessment and analysis of some particular information related to the culture understanding and standard performance required for those tasks. In ELT, this approach is known as Task-Based Approach (TBA). As it is mentioned earlier in this article, course instructors are recommended to be flexible while planning the course, i.e. to be prepared to adjust the syllabus and make slight changes in the course when in progress, so that they students interests and needs can be best addressed.

6: Evaluating and assessing the course

At the final stage of course design, instructors have the need to evaluate and assess their courses with the aim to check, and then improve and promote their effectiveness. There are two various ways to evaluate the course meaning, implicitly and explicitly. During implicit evaluation which takes place during the semester, the instructor uses questionnaires, surveys, talks, etc so learners, by their grades, participation, and motivation, give clues to the instructor on how their learning process is going on. On the other hand, explicit evaluation happens when at the end of the course or after students have experienced it, when instructors ask the learners about their attitude towards the subject matter, teaching methods, tasks and activities, teacher's performance etc. Course evaluation is a challenging step for the instructor. Unless the course instructor is open-minded in hearing and implementing learners' comments, there is no successful course evaluation.

Course instructors involve in the assessment process and assess in order to determine the students' progress in language proficiency whereas evaluation might be called as the process of collecting and interpreting information in relation to an educational program (Nunan, 1990). In other words, by assessing the instructor tries to find out the learner has acquired and functions can perform in English, whereas evaluation points out learners' reason for failure or success and recommends ways to improve their acquisition of the language. Assessment is an on-going part of the entire process and it can be useful in order to provide feedback on the effectiveness of the course. In addition, course evaluation should be almost always integrated in teaching. The instructor must to know whether goals and objectives of the course have been met, whether the expectation of the learners was fulfilled, if the teaching methods were effective, or if the case that new things and procedures should be involved in process of course design.

CONCLUSION

Developing a new course is a challenging, but a very important, process. As the first step in course design before language instruction initiates, instructors will need to formulate the goals and objectives of the course, then as a second step conceptualization of the content is necessary, followed by a careful selection of teaching materials, then comes the fifth step of course planning, and the last phase that of evaluation and assessment. It should be pointed out that a particular group of learners are of central importance, therefore the whole process of course design is learner centered. Course design and development means more than just planning an ESP language learning course. Considering that course instructors are constant learners, which means that during their professional experience, teaching concepts, and methodological knowledge continuously change. Every academic year, brings new students with different needs which come from different background.

Therefore, it is necessary and important to frequently modify and adjust so as to meet the needs and wants of a particular group of students. In addition, events may take place in an unexpected or unplanned way in the classroom setting requiring flexibility from the course instructor who should be open to making necessary changes while in the course of teaching. They should be able see what can or should be modified, added or deleted, or changed to make the course reflect students' interests and needs. Therefore, course design and development cannot be seen as a static but rather as an on-going and continuously developing process.

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