

ENGLISH FOR SPECIFIC PURPOSES DESIGN PROCESS: A BRIEF RESEARCH REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

This article aimed at stating some important steps to consider when we think of English for specific purposes design in educational contexts. In fact, designing a suitable learning curriculum and thinking about appropriate ways of dealing with that in the context of English for specific purposes (ESP) has been among the most challenging issues in the field for a long time. Establishing a balance between the outlines, content including the language units to integrate in the course and methods to be used in teaching and assessing learning is not an easy task for course designers and teachers of English for specific purposes. Therefore, sharing some helpful information about different steps to go through in order to have a successful ESP course is crucial. It should be stressed that all the stages in an ESP course design are correlated and they work together to produce a learning curriculum focused on course content well selected and organized with suitable methods of teaching and evaluating skills of involved learners. One must remember that not paying a close attention to stages involved in ESP design will result in an unsuccessful course leading to a lack of interest from learners. To that end, the only way that can help all the people involved in the ESP educational process to make ESP courses more effective and interesting is to comply with all the requirements mentioned in each step of the ESP design process suggested in this article. Pieces of information provided in this article are mainly from some literature review on ESP design and the personal experience of the author.

Keywords: *Design process, English for specific purposes*

RESUME

Cet article a pour but d'indiquer quelques étapes importantes à prendre en compte lorsque l'on pense à la conception de l'anglais de spécialité dans des contextes éducatifs. En fait, la conception d'un programme d'apprentissage approprié et la réflexion sur les moyens adéquats de le traiter dans le contexte de l'anglais de spécialité (ESP) figurent depuis longtemps parmi les questions les plus difficiles à résoudre dans ce domaine. Établir un équilibre entre les grandes lignes du cours, le contenu, y compris les unités linguistiques à intégrer dans le cours, et les méthodes à utiliser dans l'enseignement et

l'évaluation de l'apprentissage n'est pas une tâche facile pour les concepteurs de cours et les enseignants d'anglais de spécialité. Il est donc essentiel de partager des informations utiles sur les différentes étapes à franchir pour réussir un cours d'anglais de spécialité. Il convient de souligner que toutes les étapes pour la conception d'un cours d'anglais de spécialité sont corrélées et qu'elles travaillent ensemble pour produire un programme d'apprentissage axé sur un contenu de cours bien sélectionné et organisé avec des méthodes appropriées d'enseignement et d'évaluation des compétences des apprenants impliqués. Il ne faut pas oublier que si l'on ne prête pas une attention particulière à ces étapes, le cours ne sera pas réussi et les apprenants ne s'y intéresseront pas. Pour cette raison, la seule façon d'aider toutes les personnes impliquées dans le processus d'enseignement d'anglais de spécialité à rendre les cours beaucoup plus efficaces et plus intéressants est de respecter toutes les exigences mentionnées dans chaque étape du processus de la conception du cours d'anglais de spécialité suggéré dans cet article. Les informations fournies dans cet article proviennent principalement d'une revue de la littérature sur la conception de l'anglais de spécialité dans des contextes éducatifs et de l'expérience personnelle de l'auteur.

Mots-clés : *Processus de conception, anglais à des fins spécifiques*

INTRODUCTION

This study is focused on stating some important stages to consider when we think of ESP design in learning teaching contexts. It is very important to specify here that the issue of ESP design process or steps has been among the most challenging aspects of English for specific purposes for a long time. To that end, sharing some useful information about different steps to go through when dealing with ESP courses is crucial. Actually, it is not an easy task for course designers and teachers of English for specific purposes to establish a balance between the outlines, content including the language units to integrate in the course and methods to be used in teaching and assessing learning. For that reason, providing some important information on different steps to go through in order to have a successful ESP course is crucial. It should be reminded that all the stages in an ESP course design are correlated and they work together to come up with a learning curriculum focused on course content well selected and organized with suitable methods of teaching and evaluating skills of involved learners. One must remember that anyone willing to devote studies or work on ESP design courses is expected to pay a close attention to stages involved in ESP design in order to have a successful course that will result in a high interest from learners. To that end, the only way that can help all the people involved in the ESP educational process to make ESP courses more effective and interesting is to comply with all the requirements mentioned in each step of the ESP design process suggested in this article. To gather all information provided in this article, the author mainly focused on

some literature review about ESP design and his personal experience as an ESP practitioner.

OVERVIEW

There are five different main stages to consider when reflecting on ESP courses: needs assessment, syllabus design, materials selection and production, teaching-learning procedure including methods and techniques, and evaluation. All these concepts should be viewed as interacting dynamically rather than being considered as separated or linearly-related activities. It is very important to note that they represent overlapping and interdependent phases. (Dudley-Evans and St John, 1998:121)

Nevertheless, to design a relevant ESP course we should also take some other elements into account first. Those elements can include the Situation analysis which focuses on general requirements of learners and institutions, their profiles as well as the existing materials or textbooks. It is only after examining profiles of learners and institutions we have to deal with that we can start the very first stage from the list of steps suggested by Dudley-Evans and St John (1998:121). The paragraphs below deal with each of the stages mentioned in turn.

NEEDS ASSESSMENT

The importance of needs assessment has been mentioned by many authors of ESP design. This step of ESP design is inescapable. In ESP teaching context, considering real needs of learners or what language is needed for in the present and target situation is crucial. In my opinion, needs assessment can also be a systematic approach applied to identify what stakeholders expect learners to gain in terms of communicative competence in a specific context. That is why McDonough (1984: 29) states that pedagogically speaking, needs should always be defined as the learners' requests in order to communicate efficiently in specific situations.

The idea of analysing the language needs of students as a starting point for curriculum development has become almost synonymous with ESP. for this reason; ESP experts consider examining learners' goals and the set of communicative requirements arising from these goals as their priority.

In addition, we have to recognize that the analysis of the specific needs of learners can be viewed as the introduction to an ESP course design. That is to say, we cannot talk about an effective ESP course without a careful analysis of learners' need because this first step determines the reasons and procedures that should be used to achieve satisfactory communicative results. (Hutchinson & Waters 1987: 53)

As Johns (1991: 67) mentions, "the rationale for needs analysis is that by identifying elements of students' target English situations and using them as the basis of EAP/ ESP instruction, teachers will be able to provide students with the specific language they need to succeed in their courses and future careers". It is obvious that language units to be part of the course materials should come from the result of needs assessment.

To conclude for now, the reasons for conducting a needs analysis are to determine the relevance of the course materials to the learners' situations, to justify the accountability of the textbook or course content to all the constituents involved in the situations, to describe and explain learners' differences in terms of needs and style and, finally to produce efficient materials or textbooks that will fulfil learners' requirements and needs as wholly as possible. Long (2005) the section on theories of needs analysis provided further in this paper gives more details about needs analysis process; however, the paragraphs below mention some brief concepts we need to consider when dealing with a needs assessment.

The term needs has to be understood as the learners' requirements aiming at communicating effectively in the target situations which can be academic or professional (Hutchinson & Waters 1987, Robinson 1980, 1991, West 1993). However, as mentioned by Benyelles (2009: 26), an ESP course will not only involve requirements from students, but will also consider the different levels of language skills of the learners in order to specify the conditions of their learning situation. This implies that needs analysis taxonomy may be viewed differently, however two main types of needs (Target Needs and Learning Needs) are the main concepts used by ESP experts in their literature and practices. Let's deal with them in turn in the following paragraphs.

Actually, needs analysis has usually been identified as a complex process. Taking into account what Hutchinson and Waters (1987: 54) say about the topic, target needs is focused on what learners need to do in the target situation. More explicitly, it has to do with the linguistic elements needed to achieve specific communicative purposes.

Hutchinson and Waters (1987: 54) suggest Necessities, Lacks, and Wants as further subdivisions of target needs. For them, Necessities are the academic or occupational requirements of the target situation, that is, what the learner has to know in order to function effectively in the target situation; Lacks are what the learners are deficient in, that is, what they ignore or cannot perform in English; and Wants are the learners' personal expectations and hopes towards acquiring English, that is, what they would like to gain from the language course.

In fact, another thing ESP practitioners should take into account to design a relevant course content is the learners aims; however, these usually contrast with the lacks identified by the teacher or the necessities of the target situation. To this end, West (1993) suggests to add the concept *constraints* as fourth type in subdivisions of target needs. According to (Benyelles 2009: 31), the term constraints refers to the non-pedagogic limitations that can control a course planning process; it can include the role of the national or stakeholders policy and financial restrictions which the ESP experts conducting needs analysis should be aware of once or even before they start the process.

Apart from a relevant needs analysis of the target situation revealing what learners will learn, Hutchinson and Waters (1987: 54) suggest the question "How will the learners learn". The learning needs which are described through this question are very important simply because it helps ESP experts discover what learners need to do in order to learn. As for Robinson (1991: 7), learning needs are "what the learner needs to do to actually acquire the language". Referring to the discussion above, learning needs will be focused on data collection in relation to the learning situation which takes into account learners' type, cultural awareness, proficiency level in English, available materials or textbooks, existing resources, and all necessary information that can help the ESP practitioners provide students with appropriate knowledge.

Furthermore, the outcomes from the data collected about learning needs will provide an overview of learners' feelings and attitudes to learn a foreign language in specific contexts. ESP researchers will then have to determine the language skills needed by learners and evaluate their actual proficiency level in order to compare the different levels of achievement at the end of the course.

To sum up, although there are various approaches from different authors to identify students' needs, the most common points from the experts mentioned above (West, Hutchinson and Waters, and Robinson) are based on the collection of the same type of information during the needs analysis stage. Those pieces of information includes: The target situation, learners' language lacks and their wants, and the learning situation. It is only after the identification and analysis of learners' needs that ESP practitioners can think of the next step which is syllabus design.

SYLLABUS DESIGN

The task of curriculum development has usually been given to ESP practitioners, who are very often ESP teachers. The issues related to syllabus design planned for specific purposes courses have been challenging ESP practitioners for a long time. Actually, we have to recognize that designing a course program for a specific group in a particular situation is not an easy task

if the course designers really aim at meeting learners' needs and achieving their goals.

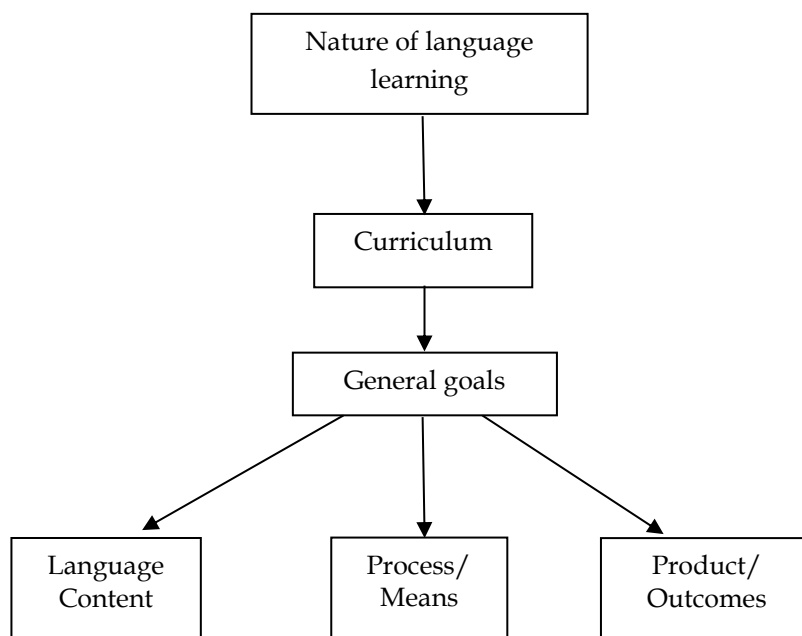
The term syllabus can be defined as a document which specifies what will or what should be learnt by a specific group of learners (Hutchinson and Waters 1987: 80). In the same thoughts, Robinson (1991: 34) mentions that syllabus is "a plan of work and is, thus, essential for the teacher, as a guideline and context of class content." Referring to the above definitions of the concept syllabus, we can obviously see that a syllabus is like a database for a relevant course materials selection. Thus, it helps the teacher know from where to start and where to go, moving smoothly towards the learners' goals for learning.

Actually, the needs and the goals of the learners, including the activities that will take place in the classroom cannot be separated from syllabus design. It is just to say that the syllabus is viewed as a teaching instrument to make learning easier. A syllabus should contain well organised classroom activities according to learners' goals and requirements after the process of needs assessment.

Considering the discussion above, we cannot deal with syllabus design without mentioning the term product since it should be very well understood. Dubin and Olshtain (1986:43) state that in a syllabus the term product means the specific expected outcomes of a course. Usually those outcomes are proposed by the stakeholders or the planners of curricula of all subjects involved in a major or field. It should be specified that those outcomes are supposed to be related to the real needs of learners. So it is always important to think of the real-life situations of learners before setting goals for their subjects. To that end, knowledge-oriented outcomes are not encouraged. Instead, designers are highly recommended to focus on skill-oriented outcomes. Actually, what learners are going to do with the target language, in terms of real-life tasks while and after the learning process, prevails.

The diagram presented by Dubin and Olshtain(1986:43) about curriculum planning process has been adapted by the researcher as below:

Figure 1: Curriculum planning process



In conclusion, ESP course designers should take into account all of the various parameters that can influence ESP courses design. To have appropriate and practical course materials or textbooks, needs analysis should be well conducted.

MATERIAL PRODUCTION

Another crucial stage in ESP design is the one related to material selection. This step becomes easier if needs assessment has been well conducted. It is difficult to find already set ESP textbooks, especially in EFL context. Johns (1991) focuses on this important question. One of the main problems he presents in his work is that ESP teachers find themselves in a real situation where they are expected to go from needs analysis to the course production and evaluations. In DRC context, we have to mention that the teachers on whom this burden is put are expected to do so with almost no preparation time and specific training.

Actually, when we examine the current situation of ESP design, ESP course designers do not have enough time to start the journey from needs analysis to materials development and evaluation. Taking on all this responsibility

throughout the teaching learning process is really a very complex task for ESP teachers who are expected to respect their regular schedules as teachers. The notion of time in the teaching process is of crucial importance especially in ESP, simply because going through this research leading to course material relevant to the learners' needs and goals requires enough time.

In addition, the production of relevant material and suitable activities cannot be viewed as a simple task for ESP teachers who are generally neither professional material designers nor subject or domain specialists; also in general, only few ESP teachers have in reality some training in the skills and techniques of material development.

In their attempts to assist and guide ESP teachers in producing relevant course materials or textbooks, Hutchinson and Waters (1987: 106-108) list some important principles to be stressed out as purposeful objectives in designing pedagogical course materials. In teaching learning process, when materials are relevant to learners' needs and goals, teachers do not really teach but, just the materials will encourage learners to learn; so according to Hutchinson and Waters (1987: 106-108), a relevant course material or textbook should contain: interesting texts; enjoyable activities which stimulate the learners' thinking capacities; opportunities for learners to use their existing knowledge and skills; and a content which both learners and teachers can cope with.

Furthermore, adequate material can provide a comprehensible and rational language unit structures which will take both the teachers and the learners towards a range of activities maximising the chances of learning. Consequently, course materials have to be clear and systematic, but flexible enough to allow for creativity and variety during the process. They should, therefore, supply appropriate and correct representation of language use as viewed in the real world of the learners. (Ibid, 1987: 107)

It is unquestionable that In English for specific purposes, analysing the present and target situation will provide necessary basic data that can guide materials designers to establish the process through which the course will be presented. To that end, combining the different outcomes related to the learners needs, the learning environment and the pedagogical approach, it will be possible to produce the needed ESP course with relevant course materials or textbooks.

It is important to state that traditionally, it has been supposed that the language to include in the course materials for learners should be simplified in some way for easy access and acquisition. Currently, it is highly recommended that the language to put in the course material should be authentic, related to the real-life world of learners.

To conclude, it is now obvious that ESP teachers are expected to embark on the journey starting with needs assessment up to producing and presenting the language content and the course activities in a various ways. That will enable ESP teachers to help and motivate students to learn the target language needed to improve their academic or occupational knowledge, depending on the context.

TEACHING-LEARNING

After assessing needs and designing the course program, another crucial responsibility of ESP practitioners will be the performance of the task of teaching; which should be understood as the stage of facilitating learning. Students need to be given communicative activities to achieve their goals for learning. To that end, ESP teachers have to take on various roles, they are therefore considered as: instructors, facilitators, role-advisors, monitors, co-communicators, classroom managers and consultants. (Benyelles, 2009: 42)

Nevertheless, very often, ESP teachers face various problems of different nature. As already mentioned in previous paragraphs in this paper, the main one is the fact that ESP teachers are called upon to carry out new assignment and perhaps with no specific training. So ESP teacher become like teachers of General English who have, unexpectedly, found themselves required to teach students with special needs. To be more explicit, ESP teachers have to adapt and adjust themselves in order to deal with a new situation and environment for which they are not generally well trained and equipped.

Another difficulty encountered by ESP teachers when dealing with specific situations; is that of knowledge specialist. To cope with this, Hutchinson and Waters (1987: 163) state that "ESP teachers do not need to learn specialist knowledge. They require three things only: a positive attitude towards the ESP content; knowledge of fundamental principles of the subject area; an awareness of how much they probably already know." In other words, ESP teachers should be able to ask intelligent questions when collaborating with subject experts.

Referring to the paragraph above, Robinson (1991) insists on flexibility as a key value needed by ESP teachers in order to change from being general language teachers to being specific purpose teachers, to cope with different groups of particular learners, and to perform different tasks. The principle of flexibility implies an eclectic approach to the teaching methods. Eclecticism will allow ESP teachers to go through an open door for any method or technique which could fit in a given situation. Teachers will then have a kind of freedom to select any method or technique that can be suitable in their teaching learning context.

To sum up, ESP teachers should implement different teaching methods, techniques and materials in order to help learners reach their goals in terms of practical competence. Teaching learning should reflect the real-life world of learners. In other words, bringing the learners' real academic or professional world into the classroom through activities is highly recommended.

EVALUATION OR ASSESSMENT

The last step in ESP design is devoted to the evaluation and assessment. The assessment and course evaluation are two important stages in ESP teaching process. Checking whether a course has been successful or not, has a great impact on the future of ESP design in a given context. An ESP course is normally set up to fulfil particular learners' needs and enable them to perform specific tasks with the target language. So, assessing whether or not this goal has been reached is crucial.

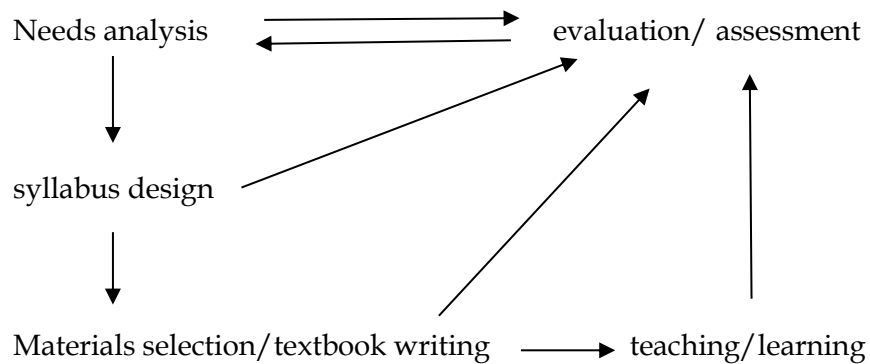
In fact, ESP course has well specified objectives, which have to be assessed and measured in terms of how well they have been provided and served. To help ESP practitioners assess or evaluate the success of their course process, Hutchinson & Waters (1987) suggest a complementary procedure based on two levels discussed as follows:

While or after teaching, one thing to think of is the learner assessment. This procedure main task is to measure the learners' performance and level of proficiency. In other words, the teacher would like to know what the learners actually know in terms of language knowledge at a given level of the course achievement. This kind of assessment can also elicit learners' linguistic problems and difficulties, and can help the teacher set other views for pedagogical solutions in the next courses.

Another thing to consider is the course evaluation. ESP practitioners should also spare time for course evaluation. This process can help ESP practitioners check whether the objectives set have been achieved or not.

Briefly speaking, ESP experts have to take the two kinds of assessment into account in order to have feedback on the efficiency of the course, the teaching methods and materials, and the improvement of the necessary revisions in the ESP course design.

Figure 2: Stages in an ESP design procedure



Notes: The figure above has been adapted by the researcher referring to the one by Dudley-Evans and St John (1998:121).

CONCLUSION

This article aimed at stating some important stages to consider when we think of developing ESP course in the educational contexts. Thus, the author encourages anyone willing to work on the path of English for specific purposes courses development to take the information given in this article into account; starting from the needs assessment to the curriculum and learning outcomes evaluation. Therefore, the language content dimension, the process dimension, the product dimension, and assessment should all be related to general goals and specific objectives of the ESP course design.

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