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PARAMETERS OF COURSE DESIGN IN ESP

В статті розглядаються кроки та критерії інтегрованого підходу щодо створення курсу англійської мови.
Ключові слова: створення курсу, англійська для спеціальних цілей, активне навчальне оточення, параметри.
The article deals with the study of the steps and the criteria for an integrated approach to course design in ESP.
Key words: course design, ESP, active learning environment, parameters.

Course design is one of the key stages in ESP. Hutchinson and Waters [4] see ESP as an *approach* rather than a *product*, by which they mean that ESP does not involve a particular kind of language, teaching material and methodology. Streven's [7] definition of ESP makes a distinction between four *absolute characteristics* and two *variable characteristics*. Robinsons [6] accepts the primacy of needs analysis in defining ESP. We tend to accept the definition of Dudley-Evans and St. John [2]. They believe that a definition of ESP should reflect the fact that much ESP teaching, especially where it is specifically linked to a particular profession or discipline, makes use of a methodology that differs from that used in General Purpose English teaching.

There are a number of parameters that need to be investigated in making decisions about course design.
1. How should we teach?
2. Should the course be intensive or extensive?
3. Should the learners' performance be assessed or non-assessed?
4. What is the role of needs' analysis?
5. Should the role of the teacher be that of the provider of knowledge and activities, or should it be as a facilitator of activities arising from learners' wants?
6. Should the course have a broad or narrow focus?
7. Should the course be pre-experience or experience?
8. What is the role of materials?

The first question can be answered quickly. The list of technological innovations we have accepted into our daily lives goes on and on. But technology seldom plays the same natural role in classrooms that it does in other areas of our daily lives. There is a tremendous need for practical, understandable information about integrating technology in classroom instruction.

It is helpful to propose a simple structure learners can use to organize and carefully examine a large amount of information. Such organizational structure can be called the **ACTIVE** learning environment [1, p.166]. The word **ACTIVE** is an acronym for the characteristics of technology-facilitated learning, environments that are most beneficial to students. The classroom tasks should be:

Active – tasks require cognitive behavior that emphasizes the transformation of information into personal knowledge.

Cooperative – tasks require meaningful interaction among students.

Theme-based – tasks are flexible and multidisciplinary based on an organizing theme.

Integrated – tasks emphasize content area knowledge and use technology tools to encourage learning this content in ways that are meaningful.

Versatile – tasks make efficient use of technology skills and develop those that can be applied repeatedly.

Evaluative – tasks allow the assessment of the student's ability to use the knowledge and skills we want them to learn.

The danger in committing to a convenient organizational structure or to a single model of instruction must be recognized. Effective educational practice is much too complicated to be characterized by any recipe and the types of learning students must accomplish cannot be addressed in any one way. But we should increase the probability that certain productive classroom practices and beyond involving technology be employed. Students should experience ACTIVE learning environments more frequently.

During an intensive ESP course the learners' time is totally committed to that ESP course. In contrast, an extensive ESP course occupies only a small part of a student's timetable or a professional person's work schedule. There are clear advantages in the intensive course. The students are totally focused on their purpose for learning English. They have no distractions and, because of the availability of time, a great deal of variety in the activities can be introduced. This total focus on the ESP course and the absence of other distractions can mean that the intensive course makes the most effective use of time available for English and study communication skills. Students can be provided with extensive courses that also have some advantages. The course can run in parallel with the subject course or the professional activity and can relate to it, adapt to it as the learners' experience or needs change, and generally remain flexible. In the situations where the ESP course is part of the timetable and learners are assessed, the profile of ESP as a subject is raised, thereby increasing motivation.

The reasons for assessment can be grouped under two main headings: for feedback to aid learning and for comparable measure of competence. Comparable

measures are the reason for public examinations and regular assessment or testing within educational institutions. Assessment as an aid to learning encompasses benefits such as reinforcement, confidence building, involvement and building of strengths [2, p. 210].

Needs analysis is neither unique to language teaching nor within language training. However, needs analysis is the corner stone of ESP and leads to a very focused course. Needs analysis is the process of establishing the *what* and *how* of a course; evaluation is the process of establishing the effectiveness. Neither of these activities are one-off activities – they both need to be on-going.

Needs analysis in ESP now encompasses the following:

A. professional information about the learners: the tasks and activities learners are/will be using English for – *target situation analysis* and *objective needs*;

B. personal information about the learners: factors which may affect the way they learn such as previous learning experiences, cultural information, reasons for attending the course and expectations of it, attitude to English – *wants, means, subjective needs*;

C. English language information about the learners: what their current skills and language use are – *present situation analysis* – which allows to assess (D);

D. the learners' lacks: the gap between (C) and (A) – *lacks*;

E. language learning information: effective ways of learning the skills and language in (D) – *learning needs*;

F. professional communication information about (A): knowledge of how language and skills are used in the target situation – *linguistic analysis, discourse analysis, genre analysis*;

G. what is wanted from the course;

H. information about the environment in which the course will be run – *means analysis* [2, p.125].

To establish a workable course design, means analysis is suggested [3, p.133] as an adjunct to needs analysis. Means analysis looks at the environment in which a course will be run or in the other words, the environment in which a project will take root, grow healthily and survive.

The question of the role of the ESP teacher is a very important and a controversial one [4; 9; 5]. In many situations the teacher expects, or is expected, to control the class, to provide information about skills and language, to control the activities, possibly moving into pair or group work for part of the class, but always at the suggestion of the teacher. In these situations the role for the teacher generally matches the expectations of the learners. This teacher role can be defined as teacher as provider of input and activities.

In other situations the ESP teacher managers rather than controls. S/he may not make decisions about the course design but will negotiate with the learners about what is most appropriate to include, and when to include it. S/he will often get members of the class to bring material for exploitation in class. We see this role as teacher as facilitator or teacher as consultant. A development of this is where the teacher knows relatively little about the content or the skill that is being taught in the ESP class, and proceeds by pulling together and organizing the information that the learners, and – if possible – their lecturers or instructors, are able to provide about the language or skill.

The two teacher roles that have been described are at opposite ends of a continuum that goes from teacher as total "controller" (or "dictator") [8] to one as a total facilitator. There are many positions on the continuum between these two ends. In many situations the role of the teacher may constantly move between that as "provider of knowledge" and that as "facilitator" or "consultant". A good ESP teacher will have certain information to impart to the students; there is no harm in sometimes doing this in a traditional way, provided that room is also allowed for less teacher-centered activities, such as pair or group writing, or problem-solving activities. At other times the teacher may move towards a stance in which s/he as an equal works out a strategy for a reading or a writing task together with the students.

The expectations of the learners must be taken into account. One group of learners may welcome the teacher's adoption of a facilitator role, another may find it completely alien; but this does not mean that attitudes cannot change or be changed.

Speaking about ESP course design we should also take into account its scope. ESP course can have a narrow focus. By a narrow focus [10] we mean that we concentrate on a few target events. A narrow focus is appropriate where the needs are limited and the learners are convinced of the importance of concentrating just on those needs.

By a broad focus we refer to a situation where we concentrate on a range of target events, such as study or professional skills, or a variety of genres. A broad focus has the advantage that it allows to deal with a number of skills even if the actual need is one skill. This may be especially useful if motivation is a problem. Learners may be basically happy with a specific focus in the ESP course, but will still welcome, as a change to normal routine, some general conversational work, or some presentation of background information about English-speaking countries.

Pre-experience course can be understood as the course when the learners do not have experience of target situation at the time of this course. Parallel with experience course can be understood as the English course running concurrently with the study course or professional activity [2, p.151]. There is always an advantage in teaching ESP to learners who already have some subject or professional knowledge. The

teacher is able to draw on the learners' knowledge, to ask them to give examples from this knowledge and to make use of certain learning strategies that are familiar from learning about their subject or profession.

Materials are used in all teaching. Four reasons for using materials which seem significant in the USP context are:

- as a source of language;
- as a learning support;
- for motivation and stimulation;
- for reference.

In some situations, where English is a foreign not a second language, the ESP classroom may be almost the only *source* of English. Materials then play a crucial role in exposing learners to the language, which implies that the materials need to present real language, as it is used, and the full range that learners require.

As *a learning support*, materials need to be reliable, that is, to work, to be consistent and to have some recognizable pattern. This need not mean a rigid unit structure; there wouldn't be a fixed format.

To enhance learning, materials must involve learners in thinking about and using the language. The activities need to stimulate cognitive not mechanical processes. The learners also need a sense of progression.

To *stimulate* and *motivate*, materials need to be challenging yet achievable; to offer new ideas and information whilst being grounded in the learners' experience and knowledge; to encourage fun and creativity. The input must contain concepts and/or knowledge that are familiar but it must also offer something new, a reason to communicate, to get involved. The exploitation needs to match how the input would be used outside the learning situation and take account of language learning needs. The purpose and the connection to the learners' reality need to be clear.

Many ESP learners have little time for class contact and rely on a mix of classes, self-study and *reference* material. For self-study or reference purposes, materials need to be complete, well laid out and self-explanatory. The learner will want explanations, examples and practice activities that have answer and discussion keys.

The materials will need to take account of different learning styles and allow for the explorer, who will follow through a train of thought; the browser, who will pick and choose at random; and the systematist, who will work through methodically. This implies that an important feature is the overt organization of the material – through informative contents pages and an index.

All this places high demands on the materials and great pressure on materials writers. Not surprisingly, producing one hour of good learning material gobbles up hours of preparation time. Each stage of finding suitable carrier content,

matching real content to learning and real world activities, composing clear rubrics, planning an effective layout, is time-consuming. Preparing new materials from scratch for every course taught is clearly impractical.

In conclusion we must admit that in planning a course, ESP teachers should first be aware of the options and of the limitations arising from institutional and learner expectations. In some circumstances, course design may be carried out before the course takes place and the details may be revised either during the course or after the course has been run. Initial revisions may be major, but thereafter the details may only need fine-tuning. In other circumstances the teacher may be designing the course while teaching takes place or negotiating the course with the learners and reacting quickly to the needs as expressed at the beginning of the course and as they change over the period of the course. It is generally important in such situations that the ESP teacher has a good deal of experience in both teaching, materials provision and writing. It is also important to have a range of materials available.

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