

A LEARNER-CENTERED APPROACH IN TEACHING BUSINESS ENGLISH

In teaching BE there has been a gradual move away from a top-down approach to the development of the content and methodology of business language programmes through a process of consultation and negotiation with trainees. Such learner-centred programmes attempt to incorporate into the classroom information by and from the learners themselves .

Syllabus is being considered not as a set of prescriptive edicts, but as the documentation and systematization of classroom practice. Syllabus designers are becoming concerned with identifying principles of effective teaching from within the classroom itself . We can use a number of methods for collecting data about students' needs: questionnaires, interviews, observation, case studies, tests etc. It is for teacher to decide which activities of those listed, either singly or in combination, will yield the most reliable information for course planning purposes.

The data collection itself is not the final stage in needs analysis. A key feature of BE courses is the negotiation & agreement on course objectives. BE courses usually involve compromise, as a trainer cannot satisfy all the students all the time. Therefore it is important to take all of the trainees' objectives into account & to reach a negotiated agreement, which aims to satisfy all the people some of the time.

The following principles can be applied to BE teaching practice:

1. The content and methodology of workshops should be perceived as being personally relevant to participants. Following the principle that students learn best when they have a personal investment in the programme, workshop content should, as far as possible be derived from the participants themselves.
2. Theory should be derived from practice: 'teachers should be encouraged to derive theoretical principles from a study of classroom practices, rather than being exposed to a set of principles and being required to apply these. These practices need not be exemplary. Rather they should represent a range, including good, mediocre, and bad teaching. In fact, one can learn as much from instances of poor practice as one can from instances of successful practice.
3. The approach should be bottom-up rather than top-down.
4. Teachers should be involved in the structuring of the BE programmes.
5. Teachers should be encouraged to observe, analyze, and evaluate their own teaching.

Business English courses based on these principles do not attempt to downplay or discredit theory. On the contrary, they seek to demonstrate the importance of theory by linking it to practice.