

APPROACHES TO COURSE DESIGN IN ESP

According to Hutchinson and Waters, course design is the process by which the raw data about a learning need is interpreted in order to produce an integrated series of teaching-learning experience, whose ultimate aim is to lead the learners to a particular state of knowledge. This entails the use of the theoretical and empirical information available to produce a syllabus, to develop a methodology for teaching those materials and to establish evaluation procedures by which progress towards the specified goals will be measured.

Three main approaches to course design can be identified: language-centred, skills-centred, and learning centred.

1. LANGUAGE-CENTRED APPROACH: (PERFORMANCE)

Language-centred approach is the simplest and more familiar kind to English teachers. It is an approach that focuses on the linguistic performance of the learner in the target situation (Hutchinson and Waters, 1987: 65). This approach aims to draw direct connection between target situation and the content of ESP course. It proceeds as follows:

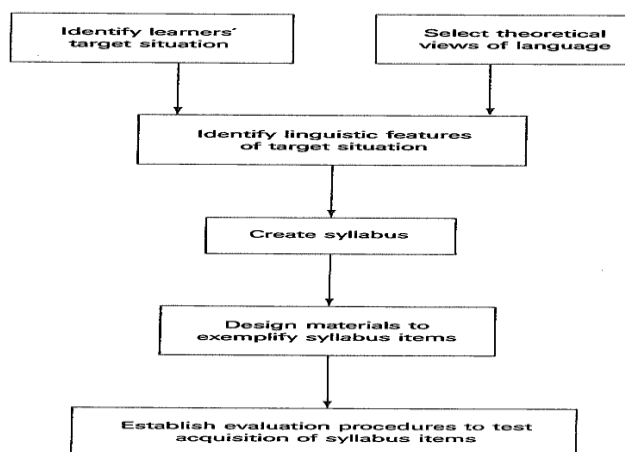


Figure.1 Language- Centred Approach to ESP Course Design

However, it has a number of weaknesses:

1. It starts from the learner and their needs. It might be considered a learner-centred approach. The learner is simply used as a means of identifying the target situation.
2. It is a static and inflexible procedure, which can take little account of the conflicts and contradictions that are inherent in any human endeavor.
3. It appears to be systematic. The fact that knowledge has been systematically analysed and systematically presented does not in any way imply that it will be systematically learnt. Learners have to make the system meaningful to themselves. And unfortunately we have to

admit that we do not know enough about how the mind actually goes about creating its internal system of knowledge.

4. It gives no acknowledgement to factors which must inevitably play a part in the creation of any course. Data is not important in itself.

5. The lg-centred analysis of target situation data is only at the surface level. It reveals very little about the competence that underlies the performance.

This course design fails to recognise the fact that, learners being people, learning is not a straightforward, logical process. A lg-centred approach says: ‘This is the nature of the target situation performance and that will determine the ESP course.’

2. SKILLS-CENTRED APPROACH (COMPETENCE)

This approach aims at helping learners to develop skills and strategies which will continue after the ESP course. Its aim is not only to provide language knowledge but to make the learners into better processors of information. The figure below presents this model.

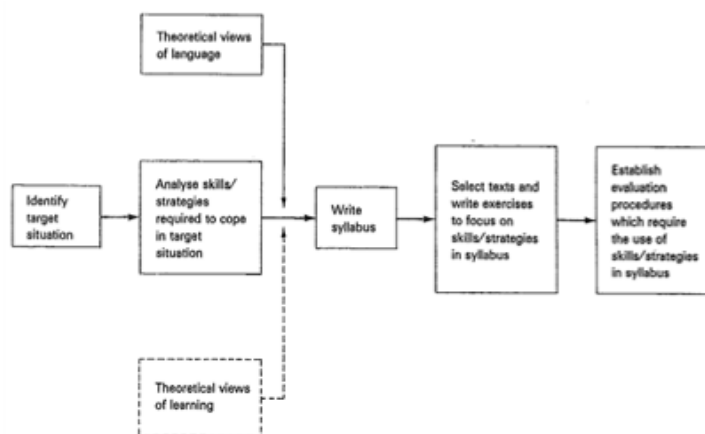


Figure.2 Skills Centred- Approach to an ESP Course Design

Hutchinson and Waters (1987) state that the role needs analysis in this approach is to help the ESP practitioner discover the potential knowledge and competences of the learner, and their perspectives of the target situation.

Skills centred model view language in terms of how the mind of the learner processes it rather than as an entity in itself. In addition, it tries to build on the positive factors that the learners bring to the course, rather than just on the negative idea of ‘lacks’. Finally, it frames its objectives in open-ended terms, so enabling learners to achieve at least something. Yet, in spite of its concern for the learner, the skills-centred approach still approaches the learner as a *user* of language rather as a *learner* of language.

3. A LEARNING-CENTRED APPROACH (COMPETENCE)

A learning-centred course differs from a traditional teaching-centred (language /skills centred) course in several ways (Weimer, 2002).

First, the balance of control in a learning-centred class will change. What does this mean? A common belief is that in a teaching,-centred environment, where teachers are seen to be the only source of information and are likely authoritative, the feeling of responsibility for learning is higher. This is why, in case some students’ fail to learn, teachers blame themselves

because they believe that good learning depends entirely on good teaching. Consequently, teaching-centred courses designers ensure control over many aspects of the course.

In contrast, in a learning-centred situation, students are ultimately responsible for their own learning using different strategies. For example they have to engage in assigned learning activities and exert the effort required to learn. So if students are supposed to take responsibility for their own learning, it is time to give them more control over the way learning experiences are structured. In addition to this, teachers delivering a learning-centred need to control aspects of the course to ensure that they meet their professional responsibility to create a course that addresses certain learning outcomes. In the same line, students need to control aspects of the learning environment to meet individual learning goals and maintain motivation.

The idea behind this approach is that the learner is the main actor in the learning process for this to happen it takes the following principles:

- ✓ Learning is totally determined by the learner who uses his knowledge and skills to make sense of new information.
- ✓ Learning is not just a mental process; it is a process of negotiation between individuals and society.
- ✓ Course design is negotiation process in which both the target situation influences the features of the syllabus and also it's a dynamic process in which means and recourses vary from time to time.

Despite the fact of being: a language, learning, or skills- centred approach; making the ESP course as dynamic and flexible as much as possible is the most important thing. Hence, a clear understanding of students' needs and the demands of the target situation will serve in developing the appropriate materials and methodologies needed to function effectively in a given domain.

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