

Lecturer: Dr. Somia BOUDINAR
ESP Module: Semester 2

Lecture 7: ESP Course Design

Lecture Description:

The lecture provides a clear distinction between curriculum, course, and notions. This lecture examines the process of designing an English for Specific Purposes (ESP) course, focusing on the interrelated components of curriculum development, syllabus design, and course planning. It highlights the importance of conducting a thorough needs analysis and how findings inform curriculum goals, content selection, teaching methods, and evaluation procedures.

Learning Objectives: By the end of this lecture, students will be able to:

1. Differentiate between curriculum, syllabus, and course notions in the ESP context.
2. Understand the role of needs analysis in shaping ESP course content and objectives.
3. Identify various types of ESP syllabi and their applications.
4. Describe the stages involved in ESP course design.

Introduction

Designing an effective English for Specific Purposes (ESP) course requires careful consideration of several key factors. Unlike general English courses, ESP focuses on meeting the specific language needs of learners in professional, academic, or occupational contexts. To create a relevant and practical course, it is essential to analyze the learners' goals, their learning environment, the expertise of the instructors, and the methods of assessment and feedback.

7.1. Distinctions between Curriculum, Syllabus and Course

In the context of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) teaching, understanding the differences between the terms *curriculum*, *syllabus*, and *course* is essential for effective course planning and delivery. Although these terms are sometimes used interchangeably, they refer to distinct concepts that play unique roles in the design and implementation of language programs.

- **Curriculum** refers to the broad framework outlining the overall educational goals, content areas, and instructional strategies for a program or institution. It sets the general direction and philosophy behind a language teaching program. Dubin and Olshtain (1991, pp. 34-35) argue that “a curriculum contains a broad description of general goals by indicating an overall educational cultural philosophy which applies across subjects together with a theoretical orientation to language and language learning with respect to the subject matter at hand.” and add that a curriculum is often “reflective of national and political trends as well.”
- **Syllabus** is a more detailed plan derived from the curriculum that specifies the actual topics, materials, learning outcomes, and assessment methods for a particular course. It acts as a guide for teachers and students throughout the duration of the course. “A syllabus provides a set of criteria for materials production, it defines the kind of texts to look for or produce, the items to focus on ... a syllabus can be one of the most damaging for the course design if wrongly used. It is clear that the syllabus is an important document in the teaching / learning process, a syllabus is a model, a statement of an ideal” (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987)
- **Course** represents the actual instructional experience, including all the activities, lessons, and interactions that take place between teachers and learners over a set period. It is the practical realization of the curriculum and syllabus.

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This distinction is crucial for ESP practitioners as it helps clarify their responsibilities in designing tailored language programs that meet learners' specific needs while adhering to institutional or programmatic requirements. The following table illustrates the major differences:

Aspect	Curriculum	Syllabus	Course
Definition	"The overall educational framework and philosophy guiding a program."	"A detailed outline of topics, materials, and goals for a specific subject."	"The actual instructional experience, including activities and teaching."
Scope	"Broad and general, covering an entire educational program."	"Specific to a particular course or subject area."	"Focused on daily lessons and teaching sessions."
Purpose	"To guide overall program goals and learning outcomes."	"To organize content and assessments for a course."	"To deliver teaching and learning in practice."
Content	"General content areas, skills, and competencies to be developed."	"Specific units, lessons, and topics planned for the course."	"Activities, exercises, interactions, and tasks undertaken during teaching."
Audience	"Curriculum designers, administrators, and policymakers."	"Primarily teachers and students involved in the course."	"Teachers and students engaged in the classroom."
Flexibility	"Generally fixed and designed for long-term planning."	"Can be adapted based on learners' needs and contexts."	"Most flexible, adjusted dynamically during instruction."
Examples	"A university's ESP program framework or education policy."	"The syllabus for 'Business English for Engineers'."	"Weekly classes, assignments, exams, and class activities."

Table 1. Distinctions between Curriculum, Syllabus and Course

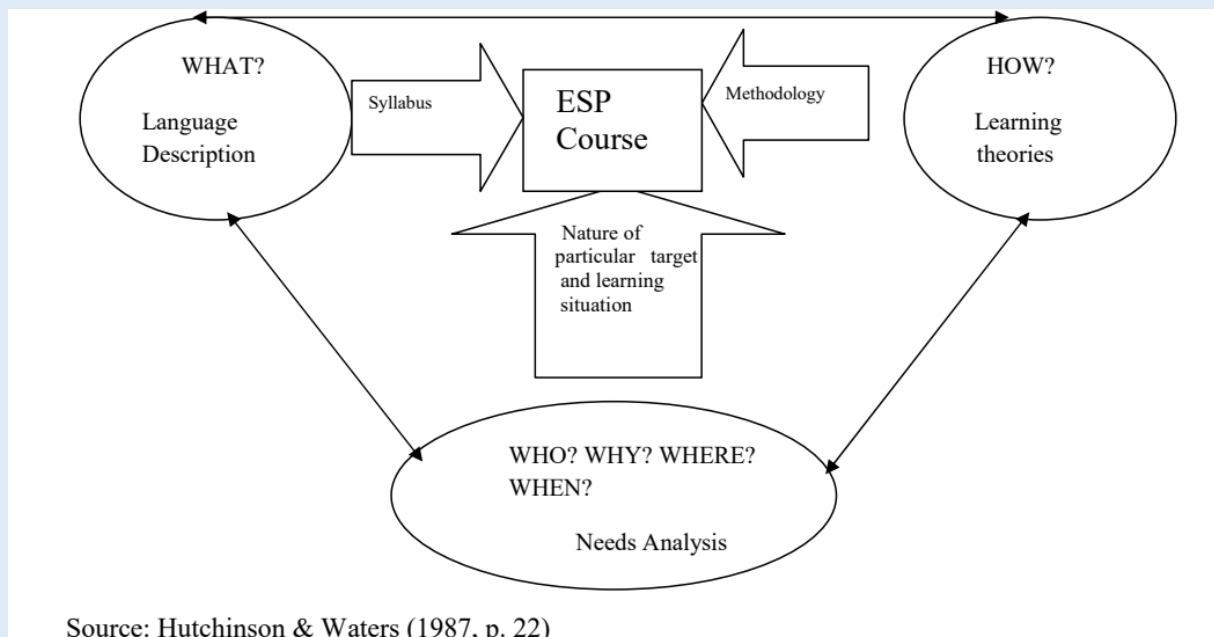
7.2. Definition of Course Design

Course Design is a major issue in the context of English for Specific Purposes; in addition, it is regarded as a fundamental area of research for many ESP teachers, practitioners and researchers. According to Hutchinson and Waters (1987, p.65), course design is "the process by which the raw data of learning need is interpreted in order to produce an integrated series of teaching-learning experiences, whose ultimate aim is to lead the learners to a particular state of knowledge." Moreover, Richards et al. (2002) believe that the concept of '*course design*' in ESP refers to the development of a language programme or a set of teaching materials; it comprises how a syllabus will be carried out. That is to say, course design refers to the process of planning tasks, activities and language components in line with the learners' needs and expectations.

7.3.Criteria of ESP Course Design

Hutchinson and Water (1987, p.22) highlight that there are three factors affecting ESP course design where the interdependence between them in the course design process is very important: Language description, Learning theories, and Needs Analysis. Henceforth, the role for the course designer is to ensure that all three of these factors are integrated into ESP course.

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Source: Hutchinson & Waters (1987, p. 22)

Figure 1. Factors Affecting ESP Course Design

According to Hutchinson and Waters (1987), the language description involves questions like “What topic areas will need to be covered?” “What does the student need to learn?” “What aspects of language will be needed and how will they be described?” You can only find the right answers to these questions if you have been able to set exact goals and objectives of the course. Designing a syllabus analyses ‘what’ the course is going to be about. Setting goals and objectives of the course in advance is inevitable. The aim of language description is to understand the features of the development stages and incorporated the ideas in the course design.

As it is shown in the figure above, Hutchinson and Waters (1987, pp.21-22) categorize the questions under three criteria: language descriptions, theories of learning and NA. The first factor ‘*language description*’ refers to “the way in which the language system is broken down and described for the purpose of learning” (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987, p. 23). This factor raises the question “what”; thus, the answer identifies the language knowledge that the learner needs to be included in the course. The second factor is ‘*learning theories*’ that covers the methodologies that explain how people learn a language. In this respect, Hutchinson and Waters (1987, p.23) emphasise that “it is the learning theory which provides the theoretical basis for the methodology, by helping us to understand how people learn”, in line with the change of the learning styles and strategies. The third factor is ‘*needs analysis*’ which investigates the questions “who”, “why”, “when” and “where” in relation to the target and learning situations.

Hutchinson and Waters (1987, p.21) sustain that ESP course design is “fundamentally a matter of asking questions in order to provide a reasoned basis for the subsequent processes of syllabus design, material writing, classroom teaching and evaluation”. In the same respect, Dudley-Evans and St John (1998, p.145) list the main features of ESP course design and recommend useful steps for ESP course designers to take into consideration while designing courses for ESP learners. They list the following questions:

- Should the course be intensive or extensive?
 - Should the learners’ performance be assessed or non-assessed?
- Should the course deal with immediate needs or with delayed needs?

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- Should the role of the teacher be that of the provider of knowledge and activities, or should it be as facilitator of activities arising from learners' expressed wants?
- Should the course be pre-study or pre-experience or run parallel with the study or experience?
- Should the materials be common-core or specific to learners' study or work?
- Should the group taking the course be homogeneous or should it be heterogeneous?

Asking these questions before planning the course design permits the ESP course designers to be well prepared and organised. Specifically, the ESP teacher has to balance out some of these parameters that are linked to institutional and learner expectations (Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998).

Conclusion

In conclusion, a well-designed ESP course is fundamental to meeting the unique demands of specialized learners. By carefully planning the course structure and content based on needs analysis, ESP practitioners can ensure their programs are relevant, engaging, and effective in preparing learners for professional or academic success.

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Lecture 8: Approaches to ESP Course Design

Lecture Description:

This lecture introduces students to the key theoretical approaches to course design in English for Specific Purposes (ESP). It outlines and compares the language-centered, skills-centered, and learning-centered approaches. Through examples and analysis, students will explore how each approach addresses learner needs, course objectives, and instructional content. The lecture also emphasizes the importance of selecting a suitable approach based on the context, learner profile, and the specific purposes of the ESP program.

Learning Objectives: By the end of this lecture, students will be able to:

1. Define and describe the three major approaches to ESP course design.
2. Compare and contrast the language-centered, skills-centered, and learning-centered approaches.
3. Evaluate the strengths and limitations of each approach in relation to different ESP teaching contexts.
4. Justify the choice of an approach based on analysis of learner needs and course goals.

Introduction

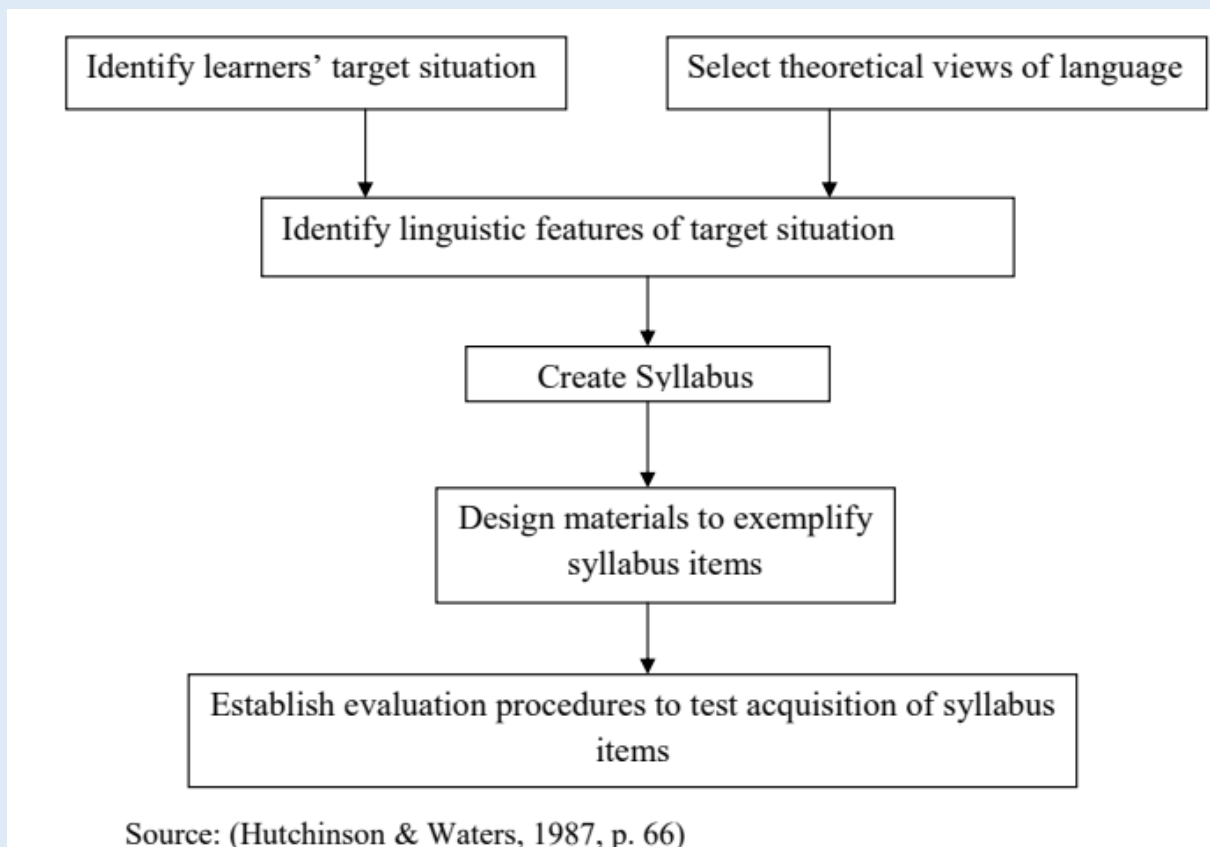
In fact, course design process entails the adoption of an approach that prescribes the way a syllabus, materials and teaching methodology is to be developed. In this respect, Hutchinson and Waters (1987, p.65) identify three approaches to ESP course design namely language-centered, learning-centered and skills-centered.

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8.1.Language-Centred Approach

According to Hutchinson and Waters (1987, p.65), a language-centred approach to course design is an approach that focuses on the linguistic performance of the learner in the target situation. In other words, it draws a direct connection between the target situation and needs of knowledge to find out the linguistic features of that target situation, and then create a syllabus after those materials are designed and evaluation procedures. As it is explained by Hutchinson and Waters (1987, p.67), this approach starts with the identification of the target situation of the learners in combination with selection of appropriate theoretical views of the language. Furthermore, the target situation will be analysed via investigation of its linguistic features. Afterwards, the syllabus will be designed with its components and teaching materials to establish a final evaluation of the proposed process and scheme of work for the syllabus items.

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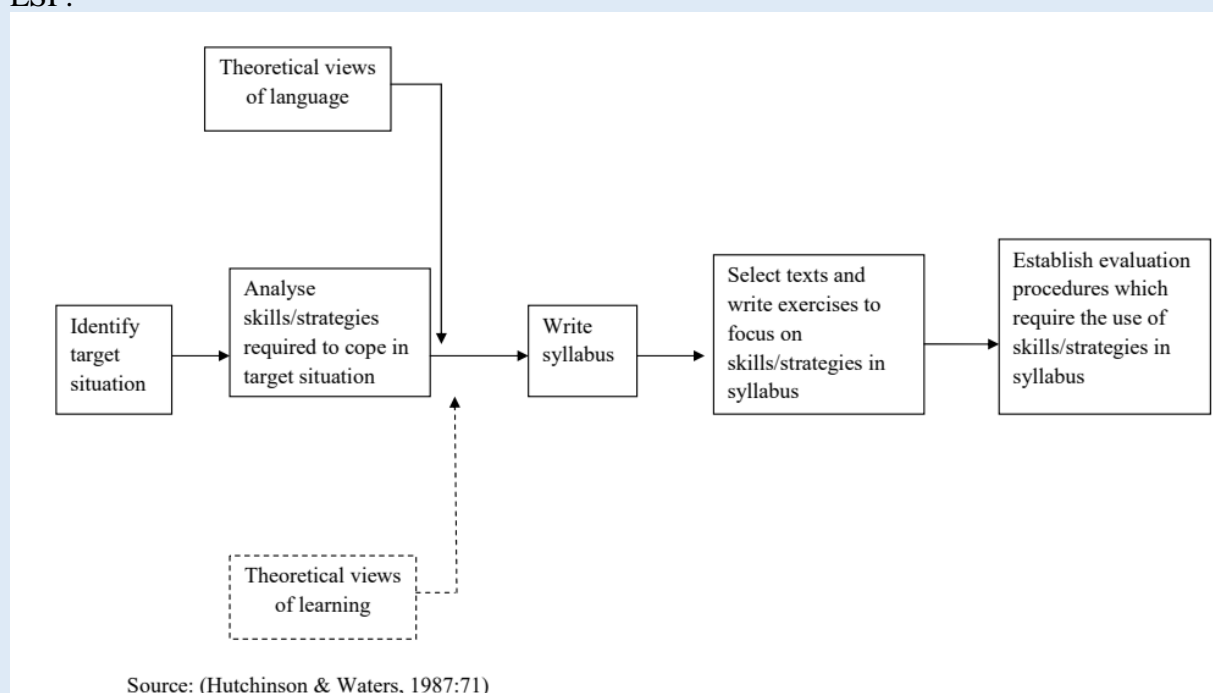
Although the language-centred approach is regarded to be the simplest and the most common among ESP course developers, this latter becomes subject to criticism. language-centred course design has been widely criticised due to the fact that it neglects the learners' needs, motivation and expectations as it put so much focus on the target situation. This approach is estimated to be inappropriate to design a flexible syllabus as it proceeds from one assumption that set the learner aside and perceives learning as a linear process (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987, pp.67-68). In other words, this approach is a straightforward process which opposes with the fact of learning and learners' philosophy which cannot be always systematic and logical (Basturkmen, 2010).

8.2.Skills-centred Approach

Contrasting with the previous approach where the learner's preferences and competence are overlooked, "the skills centred course [...] will present its learning objectives (though probably not explicitly) in terms of both performance and competence." (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987, p.69). In other words, this approach to ESP course design puts the learner in the position of a language user rather than being a language learner as it emphasizes "the processes of language use not language learning" (Hutchinson and Waters, 1987, p.70). The main focus of the skills-centred approach is to enable the learners promote their skills and strategies after the course. The skills centred approach process starts by identifying the target situation through analysing the needed skills and strategies in the target situation. Besides, it gathers the theoretical views of both language and learning. The next step of this approach is writing the syllabus, then selecting texts and writing exercises focusing on the skills and strategies of the syllabus. Finally, it establishes different evaluation procedures that require the use of the skills and strategies in the syllabus; although this approach puts on significant consideration to the learner in terms of how s/he

processes language, this model considers the learner, “as a user of language rather than as a learner of language” (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987, p.70).

Skills-centred approach enables the course designer to discover the potentials and abilities that the learner brings to the ESP classroom. By this approach, Widdowson’s goal oriented and process-oriented courses are distinguished. The entire success of a programme is not achieved at the target situation because of time and students’ experiences. Therefore, the process oriented course is intended to enable learners achieve a purpose of constantly developing proficiency as the learning process goes on. The learners are expected to achieve what they can within a given time constraint. The process-oriented approach concentrates on skills. Skills-centred approach is said to be a reaction to constraints of learning imposed by limited time, resources and idea of specific registers of English as a basis for ESP.



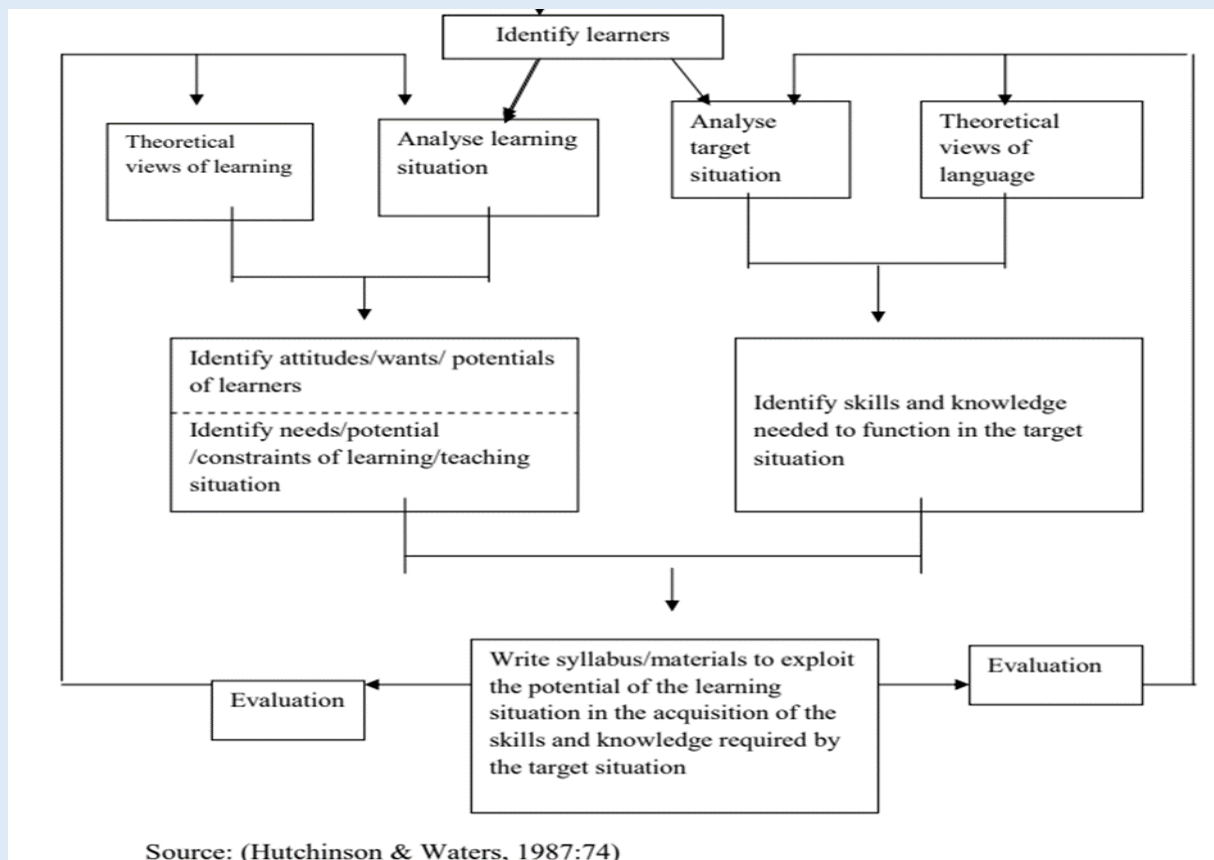
8.3.Learning Centred Approach

The learning-centred approach involves the investigation not of the competence that enables the learners to function yet to discover how this competence is acquired. This approach is defined by Hutchinson and Waters (1987, p.72) as:

learning is seen as a process in which the learners use what knowledge or skills they have in order to make sense of the flow of new information. Learning, therefore, is an internal process, which is crucially dependent upon the knowledge the learners already have and their ability and motivation to use it.

The learner is taken first into consideration at the first step of analysing the learning situation, at writing the syllabus and then at writing the materials. He is considered also at the phase of teaching the materials and finally at evaluating his achievement. Therefore, the learner has an active and central role in the course design. That is to say, the learning centred approach considers the learner at all the stages of preparing an teaching the course.

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Source: (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987:74)

Hutchinson and Waters (1987) suggest a learning-centred approach to ESP. They argue that other approaches give too much attention to language needs, whereas more attention should be given to how learners learn. They suggest that a learning needs approach is the best route to convey learners from the starting point to the target situation. Learner needs are approached from two directions; target needs and learning needs. Target needs are defined as “what the learner needs to do in the target situation” (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987, pp.54-56). They are broken down into three categories: necessities, lacks and wants.

- Necessities are considered to be “what the learner has to know in order to function effectively in the target situation”.
- Lacks are defined as the gaps between what the learner knows and the necessities.
- Wants are described as “what the learners think they need” (Nation, 2000:2).

The second focus in this approach is on learning needs, referring to numerous factors, including who the learners are, their socio-cultural background, learning background, age, gender, background knowledge of specialized contents, background knowledge of English, attitudes towards English, attitudes towards cultures of the English speaking world and studying English. Learning needs also involve:

- Teaching and learning styles with which the learners are familiar
- Appropriate or ineffective teaching and learning methods
- Knowledge of specialized contents that teachers should have
- Suitable instructional materials and study location
- Time of study and status of ESP courses
- Expectations about what learners should achieve in the courses
- How necessary the courses are for the learners

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Hutchinson and Waters (1987) also recommend that needs analysis be checked constantly. They also stress the use of multiple methods of data collection – such as interviews, observation, and informal consultations with sponsors, learners and others involved – to deal with the complexity of target needs.

Finally, while the language-centred approach emphasises on learner's performance, the skills-centred approach concentrates on his competence, and the learning –centred approach pursues to determine how this competence is acquired to perform effectively.

Conclusion

As a conclusion, understanding the various approaches to ESP course design is essential for creating effective and relevant learning experiences tailored to specific learner needs. Each approach—whether language-centered, skills-centered, or learning-centered—offers unique advantages and challenges. By carefully selecting and adapting these approaches, ESP practitioners can develop courses that not only address the learners' immediate communicative goals but also promote long-term language proficiency and professional competence.

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Lecture 9: ESP Course Design Process

Lecture Description:

This lecture presents a step-by-step guide to the ESP course design process, outlining the stages involved in developing a specialized English course from start to finish. It emphasizes the importance of aligning course components with learners' needs, professional or academic contexts, and institutional goals. Students will explore how needs analysis, objective setting, syllabus design, material development, and assessment interconnect to form a cohesive and functional course.

Learning Objectives: By the end of this lecture, students will be able to:

1. Identify the main stages in the ESP course design process.
2. Explain how each stage (needs analysis, syllabus design, material development, teaching, assessment) contributes to effective ESP instruction.

Introduction

Designing an ESP course is a systematic and goal-oriented process that involves multiple interconnected stages. It is a step-by-step process of course design in ESP, starting from identifying learners' needs through needs analysis, moving to setting learning objectives, selecting content, choosing appropriate methodology, and finally evaluating the course. A thorough understanding of this process enables ESP practitioners to create purposeful, learner-centered, and context-relevant courses.

9.1. Course Design Process

Designing ESP course requires taking into account the following issues: innovation, matching the results of NA, production of new materials and modification or adaptation of approaches to fit learners' needs (Robinson, 1991, p. 34). Course design is a process that consists of several steps. In this vein, Robinson (1991, p.34) believes that course design is the product of a dynamic interaction between the results of NA, the course designers' approach to syllabus and methodology, and existing materials. According to Graves (2000), a systematic course design consisting of six steps that are:

1. Conducting needs assessment and needs analysis
2. Determining the goals and objectives of the course.
3. Conceptualizing the content.
4. Selecting and developing materials and activities.
5. Organising the content and activities.
6. Evaluating

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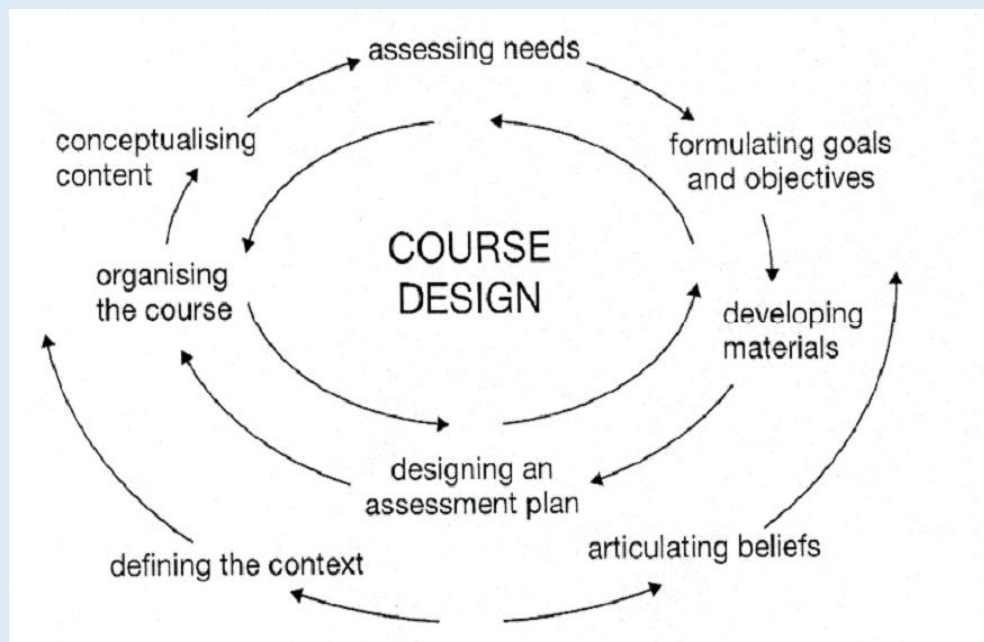


Figure 1 . Graves' Model of Curriculum Design (2000. p.15)

Regarding course design process, Graves (2000) clarifies that ESP course designers do not necessarily give any of the steps any precedence over others, mentioning that ... "there is no hierarchy in the processes and no sequences in their accomplishment. As a course designer, you can begin anywhere in the framework, so long as it makes sense to you to begin where you do" (p.15).

1- Conducting needs analysis

Needs Analysis is the first step in the designing of the course in ESP; it provides the teacher with rich data to decide on the nature of particular target and learning situation. Many researchers (Munby, 1978; Hutchinson & Waters, 1987; Robinson, 1991; Jordan, 1997; Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998; Basturkmen 2006; and Basturkmen, 2010) confirm that needs analysis is an essential step in any language course design that can provide detailed and selective goals in addition to academic support to meet the learners' needs in the course period. The second section is devoted to a comprehensive explanation to this paramount step in ESP course design.

2- Determining the goals and objectives of the course.

Setting goals and objectives is the second stage that is determined by the analysis of learners' needs; in which the teacher can make decision about matching the goals that are possible and realistic to be reached in the available time. Graves (1996, p.17) define goals as "general statements of the overall, long-term purposes of the course". In other words, goals respond to the learners' needs which are distinctive. On the other hand, objectives are the "the specific ways in which the goals will be achieved" (Graves, 1996, p.17).

As ESP learners will use the language in real life situations; the ultimate goal of the ESP course is to promote learners' communicative competence. In this respect, Nation and Mocalisto (2010, pp.6-7) summarise the different goals that ESP courses intend to achieve which are:

1. to encourage students to exploit all the elements of the language that they know in order to make their meanings clear;
2. to encourage students to communicate in a wide range of everyday situations;
3. to promote students' communicative competence by developing their ability to understand and speak accurately and fluently about a wide range of topics in English;

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4. to develop students' speaking and listening skills necessary for participating in classroom discussions with an introduction to oral presentation and critical listening skills.

Henceforth, the course design should be built upon realistic goals and attainable objectives which should be matched and restricted to the learners needs, and consistent with the language content.

3- Conceptualizing the content.

After setting goals and objectives, the ESP practitioner needs to decide about the topics that should be related to the field of the learners and the language areas to be covered. Content conceptualization is often related to the identified needs and the determined goals and objectives. Hutchinson and Waters (1987) list many parameters that help in selecting the content as shown in this table:

Table 1. ESP Course Parameters Adapted from Hutchinson and Waters (1987, pp.100-101)

Language description	Structural, notional, functional, discourse based
Language points	Structures, functions, vocabulary
Micro-skills	Deducing meaning of unfamiliar words
Text types	Manuals, letters, dialogues, experimental reports, visual texts, listening texts
Subject matter area	Medicine, economics, biology, mathematics
Content organization	By a set of patterns of components, by a variety of patterns, by a focus on certain skills like communicative ones
Content sequencing	From easier to more difficult, to create variety, to provide recycling,
Content organizing	To units, to topics, to skills

In this stage, it is necessary to identify language function and language expression in relation to the needs and objectives of the learners either for academic or professional purposes. Henceforth, the ESP teacher should maintain the balance between the lessons to be taught and the language features in which the lesson is covered.

4- Selecting and developing materials and activities.

In this phase, ESP practitioner shifts attention to search for the appropriate materials that can appropriately support attaining the course goals and objectives. In this respect, Graves (1996, p.27) defines teaching materials as: "tools that can be figuratively cut up into component pieces and then rearranged to suit the needs, abilities and interests of the students in the course". Consequently, teaching materials differ in ESP according to the discipline and the situations where learning is taking place, for instance, listening to dialogues in medical English, delivering different types of presentations in business area, reading specialized texts for biologists, writing specific reports for engineers...etc. Selecting the appropriate materials is a challenging task for the ESP teacher; Harding (2007, pp.10-11) recommends some useful guidelines in this respect:

- Use contexts, texts and situations from the students' subject area. Whether they are real or simulated, they will naturally involve the language the students need.
- Exploit authentic materials that students use in their specialism or vocation- and do not be put off by the fact that it may not look like 'normal English'.
- Make the task authentic as well as the texts. Get the students doing things with the material that they actually need to do in their work.

Hutchinson and Waters (1987, p.107) claim that "materials provide a stimulus to learning, good materials do not teach but they encourage learners to learn". Henceforth, the ESP teacher needs to

select suitable materials that are relevant to the course objectives and language content, in addition to the different learning styles and preferences.

5- Organising the Content and Activities

This step plays a vital role in the organization of the content and so the activities. After setting the goals and objectives of the ESP course and choosing the appropriate content, then deciding about the suitable materials, after that, the ESP teacher should organize those activities with the appropriate content to have a clearer course to be taught. While organizing ESP course, Basturkmen (2010, p.61) asserts that the course designers should decide about:

- **Types of units:** such as: skills, vocabulary, genres, functions, notions and disciplinary, professional or cultural content.
- **Items in the units:** such as: which genres, semantic sets and functions.
- **Sequencing:** what should come first, second and so forth and decisions made according to considerations such as: immediate and less immediate need, levels of difficulty with easier items before more difficult items and logical flow.

Briefly, course organization acts as the plan that provides the teacher and the students with a clear idea of what will be taught and what will be learnt.

6- Evaluating

The final stage in ESP course design is concerned with evaluating the results of implementing the previous stages. Hence, it is indispensable for both ESP teachers and learners to determine whether their aims and objectives were attained or not. Dudley Evans and St. John (1998, p.13) define evaluation as “a process which starts with the specification of what information to be collected and which ends with the production of changes in the present activities or future ones.” In fact, evaluation stage attempts to reveal the learners’ progress and to what extent the course was effective. Moreover, it can detect the aspects that were not successfully covered in the learning situation. Hutchinson and Waters (1987) propose two levels of evaluation mainly: “learners’ assessment” and “course evaluation”.

A. Learners’ Assessment

“Assessment refers to the processes and procedures whereby we determine what learners are able to do in the target language” (Nunan, 1992, p. 185). In the same vein, Hutchinson and Waters (1987, p.151) believe that “its real meaning lies in understanding the reasons why it was given and what it tells the students about how they might improve their future work.” In the same line of thoughts, Dudley Evans and St John (1998) assert that learners in ESP should be assessed on their performance when using English in their target situation. As a matter of fact, the results of the assessment process helps in informing the teacher about the learners’ achievement of the previous set objectives, moreover, the assessment findings demonstrate the rate of the effectiveness and quality of the course (Brown, 1996).

B. Course Evaluation

As the ultimate aim of ESP course is to meet the learners’ needs; it seems to be necessary to check to what extent this course responds to the learners’ requirements. According to Hutchinson and Waters (1987, p.156), “course evaluation aims to find out whether the objectives of the course are being fulfilled in accordance with its design”. Therefore, this process is conducted to check the appropriateness of the used materials, classroom activities, methodologies or any aspects of the teaching-learning situation. In this respect, Hutchinson and Waters (1987, p.153) present clearly that a set of inquiries has to find answers in order to examine the effectiveness of the course. These questions are:

- Is the course fulfilling the learners’ language learning needs?

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- Has the course fulfilled?
- Is the course fulfilling the learners' language needs?

As a conclusion, Nunan (1998, p. 118) believes that the data obtained from the evaluation process aid the teacher to decide whether a course needs to be modified or altered in any way so that objectives may be achieved more effectively. In case certain learners are not achieving the goals and objectives set for a course, it is necessary to determine the reasons. Consequently, evaluation is not simply a process of obtaining information, it is also a decision-making process.

Conclusion

A well-structured ESP course design process ensures that every component of the course—from needs assessment to evaluation—works cohesively to meet the specific goals of the learners. By following a systematic design approach, educators can align instruction with learners' academic or occupational requirements, leading to more meaningful and effective language learning outcomes.