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DESIGNING AN ESP COURSE FOR STUDENTS OF BUSINESS JEDDAH UNIVERSITY
ELKAMEL BRANCH

AMAL M.A. IBRAHIM

Assistant Professor

Languages Department, Faculty of Science and Arts (Elkamel Branch), Jeddah University



AMAL M.A. IBRAHIM

ABSTRACT

Despite the growing demands for English for Specific Purposes (ESP) instruction in Saudi. ESP courses are still limited to learning specific lexicon and translating texts. Attention should be drawn to the design of ESP courses which can help to prepare learners for future professional communication. In response to these needs, this study is an attempt to provide a guided approach to ESP course design for Saudi senior business students at tertiary level. It first reviews current literature and case studies related to ESP course design. When designing an ESP course, the main issue is the analysis of learners' specific needs. Others issues addressed include: determination of realistic objectives; integration of grammatical functions and acquisition skills; and assessment and evaluation. Although ESP contexts view these issues from their own perspectives, the proposed framework for ESP course development is argued as being of benefit to teachers who may face problems in ESP course design.

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INTRODUCTION

ESP courses have become popular recently in countries where English is taught as a Foreign Language and many institutions and universities offer ESP courses for senior students. With the globalization of trade, economy and the continuing increase of international communication in various fields. The demand for English for Specific Purposes is expanding, especially in countries where English is taught as a Foreign Language. The previous years the instruction has been limited to specialized lexicon and sentence structures. The approach which ignores the learners' personal interests leads to low motivation in students' English studies and in turn, poor performance later when they use English in their future profession.

It is important to help students adapt to today's competitive society, meaning that university English colleges and faculties need to design ESP courses that can help in preparing learners for future professional communication. Designing a new ESP course involves issues such as what to teach, how to teach or where to star In addition to that using Podcast which is valuable in ESP because it provides a way for learners to access up-to-date, "authentic" audio and video materials in any content area that interests them. Designers can use "...podcasts as a basis for listening comprehension exercises, as a means of generating conversation based on students' reaction to podcasts, and as a way of providing each and every student diverse listening materials" (Beare, esl.about.com).

Before choosing a particular podcast for learners, designers consider the basic ESP principles of needs assessment and authenticity of texts and tasks. What do your learners need to be able to do in the target language? Will this podcast help them achieve that goal? Remember that for your ESP learner, you need to select a particular podcast because it addresses a specific goal or objective in your curriculum. Based on an integrated approach, this study puts a model of ESP course framework and critically analyses elements of ESP course design like: needs analysis; course goals and objectives; course details; materials design; and finally, assessment and evaluation.

Literature review

The growth of the ESP movement is a result of the fast development of the world economy and has been greatly affected by ELT methodology and the development of Applied Linguistics. The first approach to ESP course design focused on the grammar and lexical items of a particular domain of English. Language use became the key emphasis in the ESP world, known as the functional-notional approach. In the early 80s, it was found that there was a certain need underlying a particular language use and in addition, the process of learning and learning skills needed to be taken into account (Dudley-Evans & St John 1998).

Analyzing the specific needs of a particular learner group serves as the prelude to an ESP course design, because it determines the 'what' and 'how' of an ESP course. Chen (2006) also reached the conclusion that ESP course designers should firstly explore and identify the learners' potential needs. The existing concept of needs analysis in ESP, according to Dudley-Evans and St John (1998) includes consideration of the following aspects:

- 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 like 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 us to assess (D).
- D. The learners' gap 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 are outcomes of the course?
- H. Information about the environment in which the course will be run – means analysis.

In the ESP curriculum design for Greek EFL students of computing, Xenodohidis (2002) states that, in addition to needs assessment, the course development process should include determination of goals and objectives. The goals should be realistic and the objectives should be appropriate to the goals to avoid de-motivation Nunan, (1988) as cited in Xenodohidis(2002).

Also when designing an ESP course is that grammatical functions, acquisition skills, terminology, specific functions of discipline content are main parts of the ESP course. In the meantime, general English language content should also be integrated into the course since content-related language cannot function without general English language content(Yong, 2006).

When developing an ESP curriculum, three abilities need to be integrated into it for the purpose of successful communication in occupational settings. The three abilities encompass the ability to use particular jargon in specific context; to use generalized set of academic skills; and finally the ability to use every day informal language to communicate effectively(Gatehouse ,2001) Therefore, ESP course designers should take into account how to integrate the three abilities into the components of an ESP course.

In the course design process two important issues that should be included in are assessment and evaluation. Dudley-Evans & St John (1998) pointed out that assessment is a process of measuring what

learners know and what they can do, whereas evaluation reveals how well the ESP course works with emphasis not only on successful factors but also on modifying less successful aspects.

Background to the Business English course

Arabic is the national language in Saudi and English is taught as a foreign language. All subjects are taught in Arabic at the majority of colleges and universities, while English is included in the school curriculum as a compulsory subject. With the adoption of English as the international language for communication and its wide use all over the world, more and more colleges and universities place an emphasis on running different kinds of English courses for their students to enable them to become more competent in their future career.

At the Elkamil University there must be compulsory undergraduate course in Business English for senior students at the Department of Business. The purpose is to raise their English proficiency in business settings as well as to prepare them for successful communication in their future profession. After three years' study in Business and general English, students have a professional understanding of Business and their English level is sufficient to start the Business English course. Following this pathway of study, it is an appropriate time in their university studies for them to get into English studies which meet their future business needs.

Overview of a university English for Business Purposes course

The Business English course is organized extensively and is oriented towards pre-experience learners because they usually have no experience in business upon course entry. Since the Business English course runs parallel to those subject courses, students can relate their subject knowledge to the Business English context. The target learners' performance is assessed at the end of the semester because the course is compulsory along with other subjects. It focuses on the four language skills of listening, reading, writing and speaking because it is unrealistic for the students to predict which specific skill their future jobs will require.

There is freedom to choose a suitable textbook for the target group. The resources that are used in class mainly focus on one textbook with some supplementary materials. For example; articles, business newspaper and some visuals are often used for listening practice, and podcast. The materials are authentic because students' language proficiency is sufficiently advanced all the dialogues in the textbook are recorded from real business contexts. Meanwhile, the reading texts are samples from international company brochures and newspapers, not written for language teaching purposes, but for the students' needs. It is possible to conduct a pre-course needs analysis directly with the participants through questionnaires and informal discussions and interviews. Course evaluation can be done by means of tests, student feedback, teacher self-reports and documents.

Before the course starts, students have acquired specific content-based knowledge. From the first year to the third year they take a compulsory general English course and most of them have passed the College English Test. This Business English course serves as the connection between their professional knowledge and their English proficiency to further develop their English competency in the real business context.

Goals and objectives

The aim of this course is to prepare the senior students for their future career because after the graduation they are going to seek employment in international companies. Before recruitment, resumes are sent out to companies and interviews are conducted, therefore, job application constitutes a vital part of the course. In their future business career, they may find themselves working in a company using English as a medium of communication with other business people from all over the world, or where English is widely spoken.

Goals

By the end of the course, students should be equipped with business terminology and write competently in English. They should be capable of writing appropriate business letters, e-mails and faxes as well as a good resume. They must have the ability of understanding business articles in newspapers, understanding and conducting general business conversation as well as maintaining relationships with the target community.

Objectives

The objectives for each skill are as follows:

Listening: To understand telephone messages and conversations in business settings and understand business news reports.

Speaking: To interact effectively with native speakers in job, workplace interviews as well as business settings. To respond effectively to telephone messages and job interviews

Reading: To understand a variety of texts and discourse, such as business reports, documents and newspaper articles.

Writing: To write resumes business-related letters, faxes and e-mails.

Course details

The course takes place over two academic semesters, duration of 30 weeks or 120 hours (2 hours/day; 2 days/week). Group sizes are usually between thirty and forty students. The 'target learners' are senior undergraduates at the Department of Business and the content of the course is made up of textbook and supplementary materials and visuals.

Outline for the whole course

The course covers four language areas speaking, listening, writing, and reading in which the following are taught:

Speaking: Introductions; job interview; using the telephone; conversations.

Writing: Resume; job application letters; business letters; faxes ; e-mails; notes; memos.

Listening: Telephone messages, business conversations, and business news.

Reading: Business documents, texts, newspaper articles.

Considering the target learners' overall language proficiency, the authentic materials are considered to be appropriate although they may find the vocabulary unfamiliar.

Needs Analysis

In order to conduct a thorough needs analysis before the course, a triangulation of questionnaires, informal discussions with learners and other lecturers, interviews with ex-students and lecturers, and observation of former students' actual workplace experiences is conducted. During the course, learner performance and assignments are assessed; tests results are analyzed after the course. This combination of pre-course, mid-course and post-course analyses is conducted in to see what students' needs to learn and improve upon through this course. The feedback is then \used as a basis for consideration of how the following year's course should be designed.

Rationale

Using questionnaires is one of the most popular research methods because it gives a large amount of information about different issues like communication difficulties, preferred learning styles, preferred classroom activities, attitudes and beliefs (Richards, 2001). In this study, questionnaires are initially used to elicit information about learners' attitudes towards this course, and what they want to learn in this Business English course before the semester start. The content of the questionnaire is crucial for the course designer because it has direct effect on whether the real needs can be identified.

Interview with the instructors who taught the general English course in the previous year, designer of the course can gain insights into the learners' current English proficiency, their weaknesses and strengths in the four skills. Informal discussion allows students to convey their ideas and thoughts spontaneously and does not take much time to plan or prepare. Exploration of information can then be obtained by interviews before designing of the questionnaire, which may help designers to get a sense of what the focus and topics should be in the questionnaire (Richards 2001). Interviews can be conducted throughout the semester when the learners encounter new problems. Lastly questions, interviewing the ex-students are another effective way of gathering data and it could be very valuable to observe those ex-students in operation because they have a profound understanding of the effectiveness of the course. Assessing and evaluating learners' performances and assignments during the course can be very effective to know their actual problems during this course. After analysing the feedback, to the following course could be valuable for both teachers and learners. In addition to that a mid-term test and end of semester examination are very important to check their progress, to ascertain what they already know as well as what they do not know.

Needs Analysis

A combination of pre-course, mid-course and post-course analysis is conducted in order to see what students need to learn and improve upon through this course. The following (Table 1) shows the structure of the needs analysis:

Table 1: The Structure of the Needs Analysis

Pre-course Needs Analysis	Questionnaires Interviews Informal Discussions
Mid-course Needs Analysis	Feedback from learners’ performance and assignments Mid-term Test Results
Post-course Needs Analysis	Final Test Results

Pre-course Needs Analysis

The use of questionnaires can produce a large amount of information about many different issues such as communication difficulties, preferred learning styles, preferred classroom activities, attitudes and beliefs (Richards, 2001). In this particular research context, questionnaires are initially used to elicit information about learners’ attitudes towards this course, and what they want to learn in this Business English course before the semester start. Also, informal discussion allows students to convey their ideas and thoughts spontaneously and does not take much time to plan or prepare.

Interview with the teachers who taught the general English course in the previous year enables designer of the course to gain insights into the learners’ current English proficiency, their specific weaknesses and strengths in the four skills. Finally, with carefully prepared questions, interviewing former students is another effective way of gathering data. It is very worthwhile observing their actual performance in the workplace because they have a profound understanding of the effectiveness of the course.

Mid-course Needs Analysis & Post-course Needs Analysis

Assessing learners’ performances and assignments during the course can be an effective way in ascertaining the real problems of the students during this course. Furthermore, a mid-term test and end of semester examination are also important to check their progress, since this shows what they already know as well as what they do not know.

Course framework

Table 2 Course grid for GIT Business English course

Target events	Rhetorical Awareness and skills area	Language use Grammar	Vocabulary	Function	Topics	Materials
Writing personal CVs, Business letters and email	Structuring and lay out of paragraph using proper rhetorical style	Tenses	Positive action verbs model verb phrases	Inquiring Apologizing Questioning	Letters Writing CVs Writing Genuine Business Letter	Main Textbooks Supplementary visual business writing, t some authentic letters, faxes, and memos
Telephoning and social conversation	Taking and Leaving message Making offers and requests agreeing and disagreeing	Tenses	Positive action ,verbs model verb phrases	Persuading Negotiating Turn-Taking	Meeting jobs Interview, Making Appointments	

	giving reasons					
Reading business Discourse	Skimming for gist Scanning for detail information guessing word from context	Tenses	Phones numbers ,spelling, names Prepositions	Persuading Negotiating Turn-Taking	Finance and E commerce topics	
Understanding conversation and newspaper report	Listening for specific information	Tenses	Job interviews Meeting Business report			

The starting point for this Business English course framework are the target events in the four language skills in which the senior Business students need to perform in their future professions. These target events are divided into rhetorical awareness and related skill areas, along with associated functions. The framework also considers linguistic aspects-grammar and vocabulary involved in each target event. However, the course does not simply concern linguistic items and micro skills, but also materials and career content topics for each individual class.

Assessment

Self-assessment and peer assessment increase motivation, autonomy, and direct involvement through the implementation of the following: oral production (student self-checklist; peer checklist; listening to tape-recorded oral production to detect pronunciation or grammar mistakes); peer editing; and listening comprehension (Brown, 2001). Dudley-Evans and St John (1998) state that peer assessment is greatly effective as learning aid which is very beneficial in large classes because teachers are frequently burdened with grading assignments. A range of class activities focusing on achievement, involvement and progress can be provided for assessment such as asking them to grade their efforts made in class and personal experience to learning. Students can also be asked to reflect upon how well they use the target language to fulfil tasks, and identify what they are not able to do (Graves, 2001). Achievement assessment can be used to examine the extent to which learners have learned what has been taught.

Moreover, the result of the assessment can inform teachers about individual learner’s achievement of the learning objectives as well as provide the feedback on the effectiveness and quality of this course(Brown,1996).

Course evaluation through observation

Robinson (1991) points out that observing past students whose working may be an effective means in seeing to what extent the ESP course has fully equipped them for workplace needs. After such observation, the course designer is able to reorganize the course materials for the following year students.

Mid-course and end-of-course evaluation

Since this course lasts two academic semesters, a mid-course evaluation questionnaire can be given to learners in order to fine-tune the course before it finishes(Feez, 1998). End-of-course evaluation can be achieved through analyzing learners’ outcomes, particularly, their final examination results and performance. They can also be asked to review their work and keep diaries of what they think easy/difficult, interesting/uninteresting. The findings from such diary input can be analyzed periodically (Hedge, 2000).

Student feedback and teacher self-evaluation

After each class, it is helpful to ask the learners to evaluate the class to provide feedback to the teacher(Hedge, 2000). However, informal discussion with individual students could be a more appropriate and spontaneous means for students to express their opinion about the course. It could also be valuable for teachers to evaluate themselves by filling in a self-assessment sheet or keeping a log book(Hedge, 2000).

CONCLUSIONS

This paper has investigated the origins of ESP development and then discussed some key issues relevant to ESP course design on the basis of the empirical studies by ESP professionals. ESP course design should start from analyzing learners' particular needs and wants. Based on learners' needs and their future language use, objectives and goals of the course can be determined, a process which involves consideration of specific grammatical functions, terminology comprehension, and the abilities required for future workplace communication. It must be known that ESP is not teaching lists of technical vocabulary. Assumptions and intuition about language use in ESP situations are probably inaccurate needs analysis. It should include observations of the language use in context. Materials should be appropriate and authentic. As ESP professionals, the course designer must prepare to find out how language is used in real world situations and teach that language. Knowledge of discourse and genre analysis is crucial for us. The course designer must be ready to develop courses that teach authentic language from many different fields, based on accurate needs analysis and appropriate materials and methodologies. One must acknowledge the fact that much of the language that our students need will not be found in any course books or pre-packaged materials; therefore one must be willing and able to prepare our own. Naturally, to prepare ourselves to do all of this, they must take advantage of training and professional development opportunities in ESP, and they should rely on the expertise of more experienced colleagues. Teaching ESP is demanding, time consuming, and different for every group of students. ESP is a challenge for all who teach it, and it offers virtually unlimited opportunities for professional growth of ESP. Eventually, assessment and evaluation should also be integrated into the design process to ensure that these goals and objectives are achieved. This study finally puts forward a proposal for an ESP course framework targeted to senior students of Business in University of Jeddah Elkamel Branch. It is hoped that this study may bring benefits to other ESP course designers involved in developing similar courses in Saudi universities or similar contexts.

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