

Approaches to Course Design Comparison before Implementing an ESP Course for Finance Managers of ArcelorMittal Algeria Company

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Abstract:

The aim of this paper is to study and compare the main approaches to course design before the design of an ESP course for finance managers of ArcelorMittal Annaba company.

English for work place course is different from English for academic purposes one. This is due to the characteristics of every type and to the different approaches that are followed while designing the course.

In our paper we try to highlight three approaches to course design; language centred course design, skills centred course design and learning centred course design. The purpose of this comparison is adopting one or two approaches or combining the advantages of all of them in order to design an efficient ESP course that satisfies the needs of our population who are finance managers.

Key words: ESP, workplace, course design, language centered, skills centered, learning centered.

Introduction

Definition of ESP:

In defining English for Specific Purposes the main pioneers in this field focus more on the learners' needs and purposes.

Mackay and Mountford (1978) define ESP as: "ESP is generally used to refer to the teaching and learning of a foreign language for a clearly utilitarian purpose of which there is no doubt". For Mackay and Mountford, since the purpose of the learner is clear, teaching should not go beyond this last one.

Robinson's (1991) defines ESP and puts the learner in the center of focus, he states: " An ESP course is purposeful and is aimed at the successful performance of occupational or educational roles. It is based on a rigorous analysis of student needs and should be tailor made".

Dudley-Evans (1997) definition of ESP was influenced by Strevens (1988) absolute and variable characteristics of ESP.

The absolute characteristics they fixed are:

- ✓ ESP is defined to meet specific needs of the learners
- ✓ ESP makes use of underlying methodology and activities of the discipline it serves
- ✓ ESP is catered on the language appropriate to these activities in terms of grammar, lexis, register, study skills, discourse and genre.

The variable characteristics they defined are:

- ✓ ESP may be related to or designed for specific disciplines
- ✓ ESP may use, in specific teaching situations, a different methodology from that of general English

2

Approaches to Course Design

Before designing any course, researchers stress upon knowing the different approaches to course design and basing the last one on one or combination of two or three approaches. Hutchinson and Waters (1987) identified there three main approaches to course design. These approaches are still gaining ground in field of languages course design because they cover in details all the related aspects, notions and theories that should be taken into consideration before the design of any course.

I- Language-centred course design

This approach to course design focuses on making a close link between the material and content of the ESP course and the analysis of the target situation. It aims at putting the ESP learner in a real situation by undertaking a needs analysis that shows his needs, lacks and wants.

As it is described by Hutchinson and Waters (1987, p66) this approach proceeds by identifying learners' target situation and selecting in parallel theoretical views about the

language, then identifying the linguistic features of the target situation. Then, creating a syllabus which is followed by designing materials to exemplify syllabus items. The final step in this approach is establishing evaluation procedures to test the acquisition of syllabus items.

Hence this approach to ESP course design is a logical process that starts from the identification of the learners' target situation to the material design and to the evaluation procedures.

However language-centred course design is criticised of being a straightforward process which contradicts with the fact of learning and learners' thinking which cannot be always straightforward and logical. Basturkmen (2010: 59) also criticises this approach of producing systematic learning in the learner by basing it on the systematic analysis and presentation of linguistic data characterising a certain type of specialised discourse.

Hutchinson and Waters (1987) point out the weaknesses of language centred approach as:

- The learning needs of students are not accounted for at all. It is therefore not learner centred but simply learner restricted
- This language centred approach is a static and inflexible procedure which contradicts with the nature of needs analysis which is an ongoing process and authentic one that should never be static.
- The language centred model gives no acknowledgment to factors playing part in the creation of the course like the types of texts chosen to be included in the course for example. These texts may be boring to students.

3

II- Skills centred Course Design

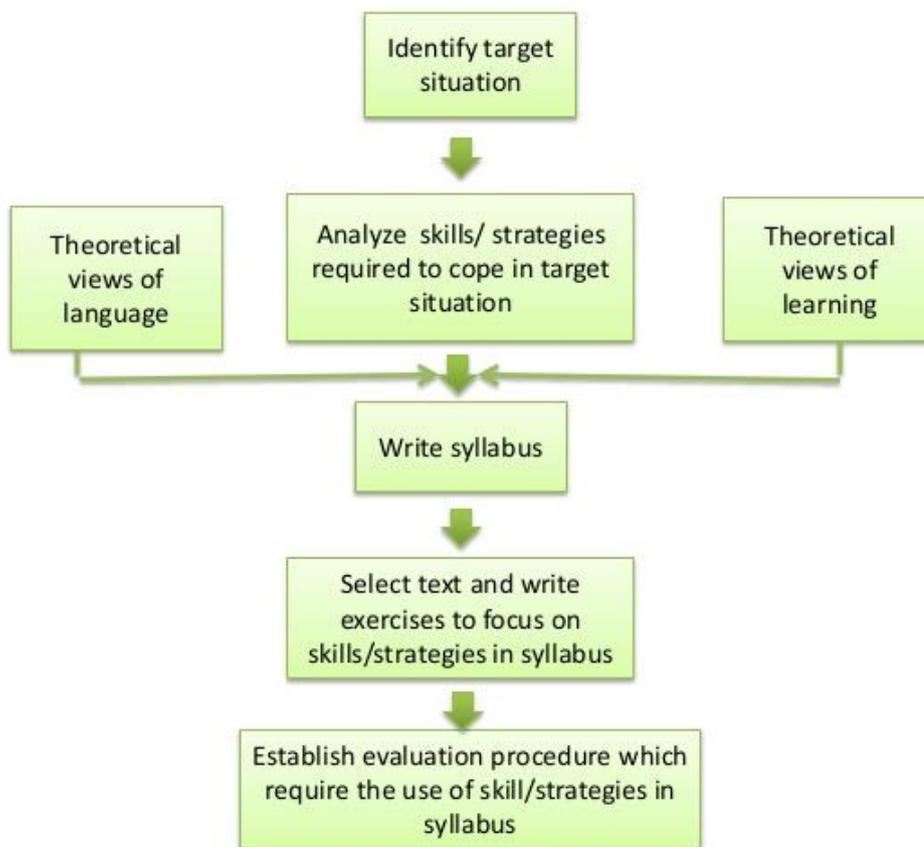
Contrary to the language centred course design which is criticised for the surface data that gathers and analyses, the skills centred course design aims to get away from the surface performance data and looks at the competence that underlies the performance. As Hutchinson and Waters confirm (1987: p 69) "A skills centred course, therefore, will present its learning objectives (though probably not explicitly) in terms of both performance and competence". This can be referred to as the theoretical fundamental principle of the skills centred course design.

The other fundamental principle to this course design has a pragmatic basis that derives from a distinction made by Widdowson (1983) between goal oriented courses and process oriented courses. Holmes (1982) points out : “ In ESP the main problem is usually one of time available and student experience. First , the aims may be defined in terms of what is desirable, i.e to be able to read in the literature of the students’ specialism, but there may be nowhere near enough time to reach this aim during the period of the course. Secondly, the students may be in their first year of studies with little experience of the literature of their specialism.... Accordingly both these factors may be constraints which say right from the start, the aims cannot be achieved during the course”.

Holmes stresses upon the narrow understanding of “needs” and interpreting it only as the target situation necessities. If it is interpreted so, a large number of students will fail in their ESP course. He confirms that the ESP course and the target situation are seen as continuum of constantly developing degrees of proficiency with no cut-off point of success or failure. The emphasis in ESP course, then, is not on achieving a particular set of goals, but on enabling the learners to achieve what they can within the given constraints.

Hence the skills-centred course design goes beyond the constraints on learning imposed by limited time. It tries to help students develop their skills even after the end of the ESP course. It is based on a deep analysis that helps discover the underlying competence that enables people to perform in the target situation and enables the course designers to discover what the ESP students brought with them to the ESP course. This is because learning is giving and taking from both sides the teacher and learner. Besides that the ESP learner is an adult who is experienced and who has his own learning strategies that needs only to be discovered.

The skills centred course design is clarified as:



(figure 1: source Hutchinson and Waters, 1987, p. 71)

The skills centred approach proceeds by identifying the target situation through analysing the needed skills and strategies in the target situation. It proceeds also by gathering 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 ends with establishing evaluation procedures that require the use of the skills and strategies in the syllabus.

Therefore, if we compare the skills centred approach with the language centred one; we can say that the skills centred model gives more attention to the learner and his contribution to the course and enabling him to achieve something from the course. However it has not reached the level of perfection because of its concentration more on the side of language use, i.e. it sees the ESP learner more as a user of the language. Hutchinson and Waters (1987, p. 70) state: “yet, in spite of its concern for the learner, the skills-centred approach still approaches the learner as a

user of language rather than as a learner of language. The processes it is concerned with are the processes of language use not of language learning”

III- Learning Centred Approach

This approach is also referred to as a learner centred approach. Its main focus is the learner and his motivation of using the language. 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”.

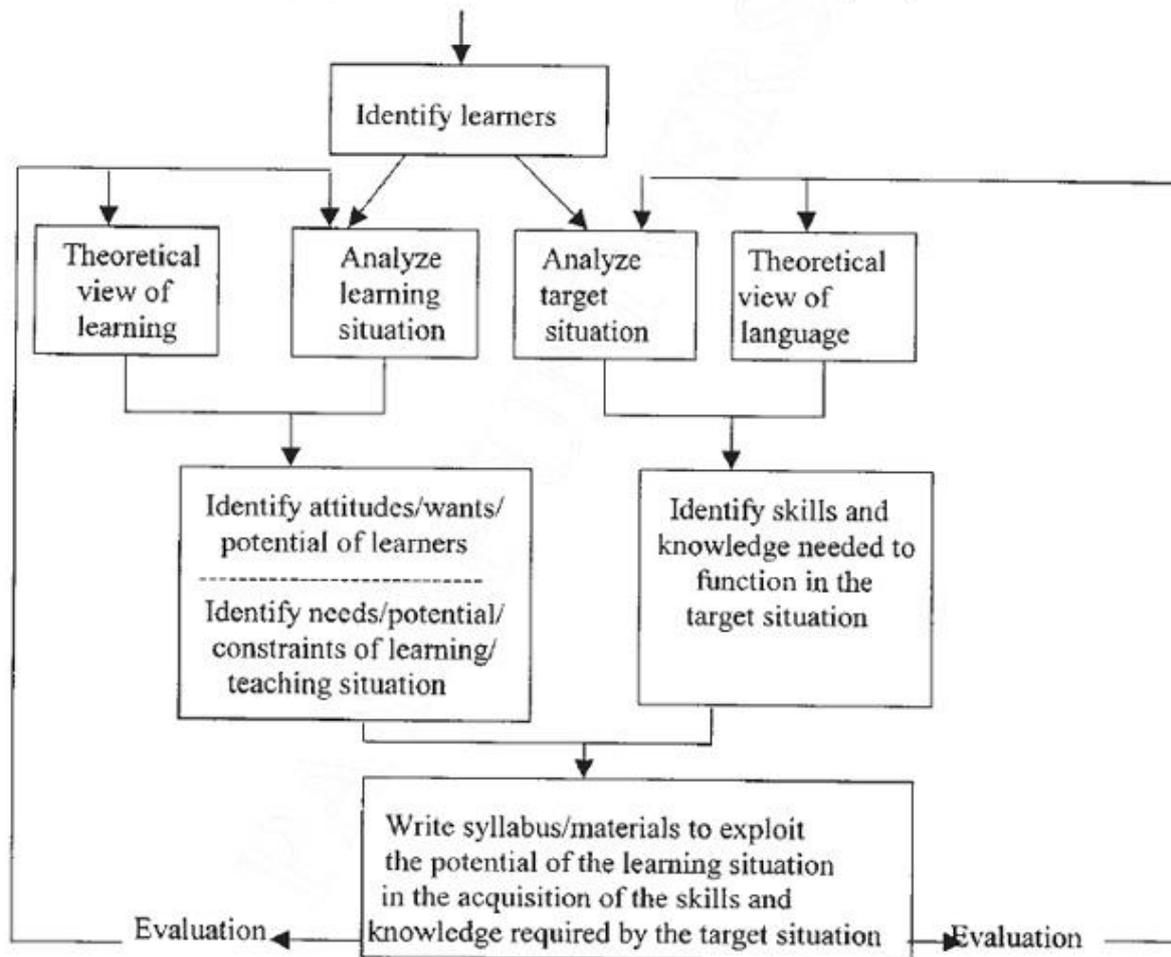
The starting point of learning in the learning centred approach is the experience in terms of knowledge and skills of the learner who proceeds in learning new knowledge and competence by the use of what he already has as experience. He advances more in learning by the high level of motivation he has for using the target language.

This approach is rather called learning centred than learner centred because this last one is not the only factor to be taken into consideration. Learning englobes many stakeholders in the learning process such as the teacher, the school or institution and the society.

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

Hutchinson and Waters (1987, p. 74) illustrate well the learning centred course design process in their diagram.

Figure 2: Learning-centered Course Design Framework
(Adapted from Hutchinson and Waters, 1987. p. 74)



(Figure 2: source Hutchinson and Waters, 1987, p. 74)

This approach depends on a thorough and deep needs analysis for the learners and their target and learning situations. It is based also on gathering theoretical views of both language and learning. It focuses on identifying the attitudes, wants and potentials of the learners by identifying the skills and knowledge needed to function in the target situation. At the same time this approach does not neglect identifying the constraints of learning and teaching situations.

The following step of the approach is writing the syllabus and preparing materials to be included in the course and this in order to exploit the potential of the learning situation in the acquisition of the skills and knowledge required by the target situation.

However and contrary to the skills centred and language centred approaches evaluation at the learning centred approach is not considered as final step. It is rather considered before and after writing the syllabus and it is an ongoing process.

Conclusion

To conclude this comparison of approaches to course design, we can say that no one of these ones can be fully rejected and declared inefficient. We see them rather complementary because of the lacks of each one if it is adopted alone. In language centred course, the learning needs of students are not taken into consideration. It is henceforth not learner centred but simply learner restricted. It is also a static and inflexible procedure which contradicts with the nature of needs analysis which is an ongoing process. As for skills centred approach, it can lead to a failure of the course if it does not enable the learners to achieve what they can within the given constraints. And as for learning centred approach it will also fail if it does not gather theoretical views of both language and learning.

Therefore depending on the course designer and on the nature of the ESP learner and what he wants to achieve from the ESP course an appropriate approach can be adopted or a combination of two or of all of them can be done.

8

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