

Introducing a framework for Course Design in Teaching English as a Foreign Language for Afghan Universities

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ABSTRACT

English as foreign language (EFL) is as a sub division of English Language Teaching (ELT) is claimed to be relevant to the communicative needs of a specific group of professional or occupational foreign learners or other than the native language learners. This relevance is usually achieved through need analysis by which one can come up with what the learners already know, what they need to know, and finally what they want to know. The range of activities can be captured by a set of- What, Why, When, Where, Who and How-research based questions. The answers to these questions will come into the process of course design so as to assure that the course is in the right track.

Since today English is the number one language of communication in the whole world for almost all businesses, universities, social media, and even among non-native speakers of the language, as an example it is taught in all Afghan universities in different faculties, therefore, there has been a great impact on the type of the course which are taught. It is without doubt that EFL teachers who have to teach ESP courses are now more conscious about the latest developments in the theory and methodology in the branches of EFL, types of EFL, features of EFL, characteristics of EFL, and genre analysis of EFL. Currently ESP teachers carry the responsibility of designing the courses, creating effective learning settings in the class, discovering and analyzing the needs of the learners as well as evaluating not only their students' performance, in tests, but also their career prospects.

In this article, EFL will be defined and analyzed from different prospective based on different theories of different writers, the most important ones being. Considering all the mentioned concerns and opportunities in mind, today, teaching EFL at university level is a requirement for all students in Afghan universities as well as to those who have already graduated and worked in different fields, in order to be able to teach EFL professionally we need to find out the new ways and courses to teach and its challenges which will be mainly discusses in this article.

Key Words: *Need Analysis, Course Design, Syllabus, Assessment, Necessities, Gap, Materials*

Abbreviations: ELT = English Language Teaching, EFL = English as Foreign Language, ESP= English for Specific Purposes,

Introduction

Course design is the process by which raw data about a 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 (Hutchison and Waters, 1987).

So let us assume that we have completed our needs analysis and reviewed the theoretical models of learning a language, we now have to face the crushing question: What do we do with the information we have gathered? (Hutchison and Waters, 1987).

To have a suitable answer for the above mentioned question, the information I gathered from many resources, will be used as a source to develop this course module. Hutchison and Waters believe that asking questions about learner needs will not in itself design a course. But when we come to designing our course, we will find yet another series of questions. The data from our need analysis can help to answer these questions. But care is needed: there is necessary one to one transfer from need analysis to course design. We have seen already that answers from one area (what students need) and another (What students want) may conflict(1987,p.65).

To answer to this significant doubt about need analysis, I have already considered some external constraints such as, classrooms facilities and time, which will help interpret the need analysis based on the external constraints too. Therefore, this Module is designed based on three types of course designs suggested by Hutchison and Waters, as the following:

a. Language -centered course design

This is the simplest kind of course design process and is probably the one most familiar to English Teachers. Though this type of course design is criticized but to consider it along with the other types and use them together then there will much positive results than only considering one type or the other.

b. Skill- centered course design

The skill- centered approach to ESP has been widely applied in a number of countries. Students in universities and colleges in Afghanistan have limited, but important need to read subject texts in English because they are unavailable in mother tongue. The Skill-centered model, therefore is a reaction both to the idea of specific registers of English as a basic for ESP and to the practical constraints in learning such as limited time and resources. In essence it sees the ESP course as helping learner to develop skills and strategies which will continue to develop after the ESP course itself. Its aim is not to provide a specified corpus of linguistic knowledge but to make learners into better processors of information.

c. Learning - centered Course designing

The learning-centered approach is based on the principle that learning is totally determined by the learner. As teachers we can influence what we teach, but what learners learn is determined by the learners alone. 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 up on the knowledge the learner already have and their ability and motivation to use it.

The most important elements in a course design are the following which will be discussed one by one:

1. **Goals and Objectives of the Course**
2. **The Need Analysis**
3. **Syllabus Design**
4. **Material Development**
5. **Methodology**
6. **Evaluation of the Course**

1. Goals and Objectives of the Course

Hutchison and Waters claim that designing a course fundamentally is a matter of asking questions in order to provide a reasoned basis for the subsequent process of syllabus designing, materials writing, classroom teaching and evaluation. The main goals of designing the ESP module will answer to the following questions; theoretical and practical, general and specific questions such as: Why, Who, Where, when, what and How

1. Why does the student need to learn?
2. Who is going to be involved in the process teaching and learning?
3. Where does the learning take place? What potential does the place provide? What limitation does it impose?
4. When is the learning to take place? How much time is available? How will it be distributed?
5. What does the student need to learn? What aspects of language will be needed and how will they be described? What level of proficiency must be achieved? What topic areas will need to be covered?
6. How will the learning be achieved? What learning theory will underline the course?

In order to describe the goals and objectives of a course, answers to the above mentioned questions are essential. The following are the answers may help:

1. The students who are pursuing different fields do need to study further on their own major therefore, they need to know specific English in order to be able to have access to field based materials as well as to be able to communicate outside the class in English related to their fields.

2. This will need to cover not just students, but all the people who may have some direct effect on the process: teachers, sponsors, inspectors etc.

3. The learning will take place in all Afghan universities where English is taught as a foreign language and the universities will prove this opportunity for the students to learn better English related to their fields of studies. There will be some limitations such as time and space for large classes.

4. The course will be for four semesters in two years. The course will start with the very basic items of the language as they are passing to next semester their level of English will also improve so therefore the course level will also be progressive from Primary to Pre-intermediate, then to intermediate, and finally to upper intermediate. In case students want to continue learning English, they will need to follow advanced course outside the university.

5. The students need to know first of all General English one semester in the university and they should have background knowledge of the English Language. Then they will learn field based English terminology and the activities will also be provided as such. Their level of proficiency will be improved both in general and in specific English. The topics will be covered based on their professional subjects of their fields.

6. The students will be provided many opportunities of improvement that will enable them to communicate in the class and reflect what they have learnt outside the class or in their work fields. Learner centered methodology will be used to give more chances to the students, theoretical and practically.

2. The Need Analysis

Hutchison and waters believe that all courses are based on a perceived need of some sort. Otherwise why would English find its way on to a school or university? Someone at some time must have decided there was a need for it.

We would still maintain that any course should be based on an analysis of the learner need. This is one way in which ESP procedures can have a useful effect on General English and indicate once more the need for a common approach. The answers to the analysis will be different, but the questions that need to be asked are the same.

In the learner-centered approach, "What do we mean by need?" The answer to this question would be the ability to comprehend and produce the linguistic features of target situation, for example the ability to understand passive voice. First of all we need to make a basic distinction between different target needs (what the learner needs to do in order to learn). Target Needs is something like an umbrella term, which in practice hides a number of important distinctions. It is more useful to look at the target situation in terms of:

a. Necessities

This is the type of need determined by the demands of the target situation that is what the learner has to know in order to function effectively in the target situation. For example, a businessman might need to understand business letters, to communicate effectively as sales conference; therefore ESP course Module will be designed considering the necessities of student who need to learn English. The student will be provided target situation need based materials so that they can function effectively both in the class and able to communicate outside the class using the skills they have learnt in the class.

b. Gaps

To identify necessities alone, however, is not enough, since the concern in ESP is what the needs of particular learners. We also need to know what the learner knows already, so that we can then decide which of the necessities the learner lacks. Afghan university students mostly lack the background knowledge in English; therefore the ESP course Module will focus on those gaps to fulfill them so that the learners will be able to use their learning outcomes outside the classroom or in their work affairs.

c. Wants

So far, we have considered targets needs only in an objective sense, with the actual learners playing no active roles. But the learners too, have a view as to what their needs are. Learners may have a clear idea of the 'necessities' of the target situation; they will certainly have as to their 'lacks'. But it is quite possible that the learners' views will conflict with the perceptions of other interested parties: course designers, sponsors, teachers...

The analysis of target situation needs is in essence a matter of asking questions about asking questions about the target situation and the attitudes towards that situation of the various participants in the learning process.

3. Syllabus Design

A syllabus is a document which says what will (or at least what should) be learnt. But in fact there are several different ways in which a syllabus can be defined. This stems from the fact that the statement of what will be learnt passes through several different stages before it reaches its destination in the mind of the learner. Each stage on its route imposes a further layer of interpretation.

In designing this Course module the following syllabus types based on Hutchison and Waters (1987) have influenced a lot:

- a. The Evaluation syllabus
- b. The organizational Syllabus
- c. The materials Syllabus
- d. The Teacher Syllabus
- e. The classroom syllabus
- f. The learner syllabus

4. Materials Development

Materials writing and developing is one of the most characteristic features of a course. A large amount of EFL teachers' time may be taken up in writing materials. There are a number of reasons for this:

a. A teacher or institution may wish to provide teaching materials that will fit the specific subject area of particular learners. As in designing module there have been many attempts so select and gather need based materials in order facilitate learning process for Afghan undergraduate EFL learners.

b. EFL teachers are trying their best to provide update materials for the students

c. The materials in this course module are helping all EFL teachers to follow the framework in order to be able to design new materials for their students.

For these and other reasons, there is already an established tradition of EFL teachers producing in-house materials. Rightly or wrongly, materials writing is a fact of life for a large number of EFL teachers, and so, accepting, this fact, let us look at some techniques for producing useful and creative materials.

We can start by asking ourselves the questions: What are materials supposed to do? In defining their purpose, we can identify some principles which will guide us in the actual writing of material for this module.

a. Materials provide a stimulus to learning. Good materials will, therefore contain:

- Interesting texts
- Enjoyable activities
- Opportunity provider
- Real life related Topics

b. Materials help to organize the teaching-learning process, by providing a path through the complex mass of language to be learnt. Good materials should, therefore, provide a clear and coherent unit structure which will guide teacher and learner through various activities in such a way as to maximize the chances of learning. This structure should help the teacher in planning lessons and encourage in the learner a sense of progress and achievement. On the other hand, materials should not be so tightly structured as to produce a monotonous pattern of lessons.

c. Materials reflect the nature learning task. We must now take a more humble view and recognize that language learning is a very complex and little understood process. Materials should try to create a balanced outlook which both reflects the complexity of the task yet makes it appear manageable (Hutchison and Waters, 1987).

5. Methodology

The methodology in designing a course module should be directly based on learning centered methodology. The details are provided below:

a. Second language learning is a developmental process. Learners use their existing knowledge to make the new information comprehensible. Only in this way learning can happen, comprehension proceeds learning. The learner existing state of knowledge is, therefore, a vital element in the success or failure of learning, and the good teacher will consequently try to establish and exploit what the learner already know. Afghan university students should have enough pre Knowledge so that they can progress along with the class and those who already have some knowledge of English.

b. Language learning is an active process. It is not enough for the learners just to have the necessary knowledge to make things meaningful; they must also use that knowledge. Afghan university students are

recommended to be very active in participating in the activities and sharing their experiences with the rest of the class and their teachers.

c. Language learning is a decision making process. In the traditional classroom the teacher made all decisions, but today both students and teachers decide together in some aspect of the course. Afghan students will be provided more chances of making decisions along with their ESP teachers in regarding their course materials and methodology.

d. Language learning is not just a matter of linguistic knowledge. The most fundamental problem of second language learning is mismatch between the learner's conceptual/ cognitive capacity and the learners' linguistic level. They grow together in MT.

e. Language Learning is not the learner's first experience with language. Every second language learner is already communicatively competent in one language. They do not know specific forms, words or possibly some of the concepts of the target language, but they know what communication is and how it is used.

f. Learning is an emotional experience. Our concern should be to develop the positive emotions as opposed the negative ones, for example:

- Using pair work and group work to build on existing social relationship
- Giving more time for students to think and avoiding pressure
- Putting less emphasis on the product (the right answer) and more on the process of getting an answer
- Making interests, funs, variety, are primary considerations in materials and methodology.

6. Evaluation of the Course

Development in the theoretical bases of language teaching were indicating a need to pay more attention to the individual learner, and as the same time the worlds of commerce and technology were producing a host of people with specific language learning needs. A demand was generated as a result of for courses which would equip particular with the necessary skills to carry out particular tasks in English. These same pressures have generated an equally strong need for a more open and coherent approach to evaluation. Any language teaching course has certain evaluation requirements, but in EFL these requirement are brought sharply into focus by the fact that the ESP course normally has specified objectives. EFL learners and sponsors are investors in the course and they want to see a return on their investment of time or money. The manger of the EFL course are accountable to these investors, this accountability has produced a demand for more and better evaluation procedures. Two levels evaluation have thus been brought into prominence.

1. Learners' Assessment

2. Course Evaluation

1. Learners' Assessment: As with any language course there is a need to assess student performance as strategic points in the course, for example, at the beginning and at the end. But this assessment takes on a greater importance in ESP, because ESP is concerned with the ability to perform particular communication tasks. The facility to assess proficiency is, therefore, central to the whole concept of ESP. The results of this kind of evaluation, for example, enable administrations, teachers and learners to decide what changes to make for the next courses.

2. Course Evaluation: A second important form of evaluation is the evaluation of the EFL course itself. This kind of evaluation helps to assess whether the course objectives are being met – whether the course, into other words, is doing what it was designed to do. This type of evaluation should be a feature of any kind of ELT course.

These two forms of evaluation are not always distinct. Evaluation of the learner reflect not just the learner performance but to some extent the effectiveness of the course too. An EFL course is, after all, supposed to be successful; it is set up in order to enable particular learners to do particular things with language. If consistently fails to meet this objective, then something must be wrong with the course design; the objective may be too ambitious given the resources available; the analysis of the learners' initial competence may be wrong; the methodology may be inappropriate.

Conclusion

The EFL courses will be implemented by the Afghanistan Higher Education Ministry in coordination with all Afghan universities teaching English as a foreign language. The departments of English are reasonable for the practical implementation of the course in accordance to the course module that has been designed based on the need and recommendation of English teachers from various universities across Afghanistan.

First of the three should be a joint committee from all Afghanistan Universities to set together and critically analyze and review this ESP course module so that practical designing of new courses based on this module start and in near future all Afghanistan universities will have one unified syllabus for the challenging teaching of English as an unallocated subject for the students of other departments. The EFL course will be designed in coordination with all departments requiring English as subject. Then as it is described in the module there is going to be three Booklets; The student book should be designed in accordance with recommendation of this module which will include four books with different level of learning, starting from:

1. Primary
2. Pre Intermediate
3. Inter Mediate
4. Upper Inter Mediate

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Abstract in Persian

چکیده

ادعا می شود که زبان انگلیسی به عنوان زبان خارجی (EFL) یک بخشی از آموزش زبان انگلیسی (ELT) میشود که مربوط به نیازهای ارتباطی گروه خاصی از زبان آموزان خارجی حرفه ای / شغلی یا غیر از زبان آموزان اصلی است. این ارتباط معمولاً از طریق تجزیه و تحلیل نیازمندی ها حاصل می شود که از طریق آن می توان آنچه را که زبان آموزان قبلاً می دانند ، آنچه را که باید بدانند ، و یا آنچه را که می خواهند بدانند ، به دست آورد. طیف وسیعی از فعالیتها را می توان با مجموعه ای از سوالات- چه ، چرا ، چه وقت ، کجا ، چه کسی و چگونه-محور تحقیق کرد. پاسخ به این سوالات شامل طراحی برنامه آموزشی دارد تا دریافته شود که آنچه تدریس میشود شامل کدام برنامه (کورس) میشود یا نه و یا آیا در مسیر درست در حرکت هستیم یا نه؟

از آنجایی که امروزه انگلیسی تقریباً برای همه مشاغل ، پوهنتون ها ، رسانه های اجتماعی و حتی در بین صحبت کننده گان اصلی این زبان محور اصلی ارتباطات در تمام جهان است ، به عنوان نمونه در تمام پوهنتون ها افغانستان در پوهنکی های مختلف تدریس می شود ، بنابراین تأثیر زیادی بر نوع برنامه ها (کورس) درسی گذاشته شده است. شکی نیست که استادان EFL که باید کورس های ESP را آموزش دهند ، در مورد آخرین تحولات تئوری و میتودیک در شاخه های EFL ، انواع EFL ، ویژگی های EFL ، ویژگی های EFL و تحلیل ژانر EFL آگاه تر هستند. در حال حاضر استادان ESP مسئولیت طراحی کورس ها ، ایجاد تنظیمات یادگیری مؤثر در صنف ، کشف و تجزیه و تحلیل نیازهای زبان آموزان و همچنین ارزیابی نه تنها عملکرد دانش آموزان خود را در آزمون ها ، بلکه چشم انداز شغلی آنها نیز بر عهده دارند.

در این مقاله ، EFL از آینده نگر مختلف بر اساس تئوری های مختلف نویسندگان مختلف تعریف و تجزیه و تحلیل خواهد شد که مهمترین آنها هاجیسون و واترز ، دادلی اوانز و سنت جان ، استریونز هستند. با توجه به همه نگرانی ها و فرصت های ذکر شده ، امروزه آموزش EFL در سطح پوهنتون الزامی برای همه دانشجویان در پوهنتون های افغانستان و همچنین برای کسانی است که قبلاً فارغ التحصیل شده و در زمینه های مختلف کار کرده اند ، تا بتوانند EFL را به صورت مسلکی تدریس می کنند. روش ها و دوره های جدید آموزش و چالش های آن را که عمدتاً در این مقاله مورد بحث قرار می گیرند ، دریابیم.