

## THE PROCESS OF DESIGNING A WORK-RELATED ENGLISH COURSE

**Abstract:** Course designing is a complex process which as a result should have a useful and productive course based on the learners' needs. Work-related courses pose increasing demands on teachers as course designers. This paper aims at investigating necessary steps in the process of designing work-related courses. Course-developing process starts with the analysis of principles, environment and needs, which is followed by making decisions on content and sequencing, format and presentation and monitoring and assessing. Finally, the course is evaluated in order to check if it is successful and where it needs to be improved.

**Key words:** course designing process, course model, environment and needs analysis, evaluation.

### Introduction

Great expansion in science, technology and economy during the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century created the demand for an international language and led to accepting English as the primary language for international communication. Consequently, English for specific purposes (ESP) has become one of the most important segments of English language teaching (ELT). Due to the trend of globalization around the world, companies are becoming more and more internationalized and employees are required to possess a certain level of knowledge of English language. Business English (BE), as a branch of ESP, has attracted increasing interest and awareness. The need to design and teach relevant BE courses increased and planning and designing an appropriate work-related course that suits a target group became very challenging. The content of individual courses may vary considerably, but they are always determined by the learners' needs and objectives.

As a result of these changes, a new generation of learners was generated. These learners are people who know exactly why they are learning

the language and they do not only need to know English, they also need to develop a range of communicative language competences in order to be able to perform their job-related tasks properly. Consequently, attitudes towards learners changed. The importance of the learners and their attitude to learning become an integral part of course designing and they are seen to have different needs and interests which influence their motivation to learn. This encouraged the development of courses in which relevance to learners' needs and interests was dominant.

The course designing process should be based on a comprehensive model. Nation and Macalister (2010, p. 3) suggest a model presented in Fig. 1. The model consists of three outside circles and a subdivided inner circle.

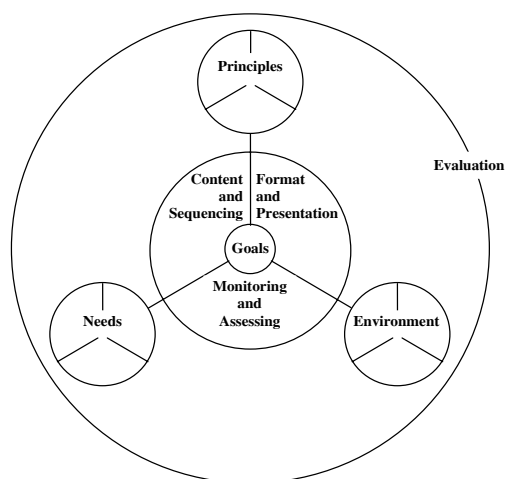


Fig. 1 – course designing model

### 1. Course designing model

The outer circles (principles, environments, needs) involve practical and theoretical considerations that will have a major effect in guiding the actual process of course designing. There are a wide range of factors to be considered when designing a course and they are considered in three sub-processes: environment analysis, needs analysis and the application of principles. Environment analysis gives insight into factors related to learners, teachers and the learning situation. After conducting needs analysis, course designers acquire data on the present proficiency, future needs and wants

of the learners. The application of principles involves deciding on the most important principles and their application through the whole design process. The inner circle has goals at its centre. This is meant to reflect the importance of having clear general goals for the course.

The content and sequencing part of the inner circle represents the items to learn in a course, and the order in which they will be presented. Consideration of content ensures that the learners are getting the best return for learning effort in terms of the usefulness of what they will meet in the course, and that they are covering all the things they need to cover for a balanced knowledge of the language.

The format and presentation part of the inner circle represents the format of the lessons or units of the course, including the techniques and type of activities that will be used in the learning process. This is the part of the course that the learners are most aware of. Therefore, it is important that it is guided by the best available principles of teaching and learning.

The monitoring and assessment represent the need to give attention to observing learning, testing the results of learning, and providing feedback to the learners about their progress. It provides information that can lead to changes at most of the parts of the course designing process.

A large circle drawn completely around the whole model represents evaluation. Although it is a generally neglected aspect of course designing, it involves looking at every aspect of a course and provides information if the course is adequate and where it needs improvement.

## **2. Environment Analysis and Needs Analyses**

Environment analysis, also called situation analysis, is an important part of course designing because at its most basic level it ensures that the course will be usable (Nation, Macalister, 2010: 14). Environment analysis involves considering the factors that can arise from the learners, the teachers and the teaching and learning situation.

BE learners typically have a great deal of knowledge in their own field and want to achieve job-related objectives requiring specific linguistic competence. For example, they primarily might need English to be able to give presentations, make phone calls, participate in meetings, conduct negotiations, write reports, etc. Apart from general information, such as age,

sex, mother tongue, educational and professional background, the teacher designing a BE course for a specific group of learners should pay attention to various factors. They often study English at the same time as they do a full-time job. Thus, they may come to classes tired and distracted. Also they might come to classes reluctantly because their manager is expecting them to attend classes. Learners in the same group are unlikely to have the same level of language knowledge. All these can influence the designing of the course, as well as the atmosphere during the course and most importantly the results and how successful the course is.

The BE teachers' role is manifold. Harding lists five key roles of teachers as follows: teacher or language consultant, course designer and materials provider, researcher, collaborator and evaluator (Harding, 2007: 7). Teachers as course designers are often faced with various problems. For many teachers, formal training has been largely related to general English language teaching. Once they start teaching and designing a BE course, teachers might find themselves dealing with subject matter that they have little knowledge of. They may find they have far less knowledge and experience in the subject than their learners, who belong to a specific discourse community with the knowledge of specialist language. Bridging the gap between what the learners know and what the teacher knows is a vital step towards a successful course.

The teaching and learning situation can also affect the successfulness and usability of the course. For instance, a suitable classroom, seating arrangement, available time, i.e. if there is enough time for the learners to reach the goals, available resources, i.e. if the course is unusable if the planned material is too expensive or requires technology facilities that are not available.

The formal concept of needs analysis was largely established during the 1970s. It is directed mainly at the goals and content of a course and can broadly be described as identifying what learners will be required to do with the foreign language in the target situation. It makes sure that the course will contain relevant and useful things to learn and it examines what the learners already know and what they need to know.

Hutchinson and Waters (Hutchinson, Waters, 1987) divide needs into target needs and learning needs. Target needs refer to: necessities (what the learner has to know to function effectively), lacks (what the learner knows and does not know already) and wants (what the learners think they need). Needs are not always clear and are always changing so

it is important that needs are observed from a variety of perspectives at a variety of times. The perspectives can vary according to the type of need, the source of information, the data-gathering tool, and type of information. Times of needs analysis can include needs analysis before a course begins, needs analysis in the initial stage of a course, and ongoing needs analysis during the running of the course. If a course is to be repeated with different learners, then needs analysis at the end of the course is useful as well.

Needs analysis is a kind of assessment and thus can be evaluated by its reliability, validity and practicality. Reliable needs analysis involves using balanced, standardized tools that are applied systematically. Valid needs analysis involves looking at what is relevant and important. Practical needs analysis is not expensive, does not occupy much of the learner's and teacher's time, provides clear, easy-to-understand results and can easily be incorporated into the course designing process.

Needs analysis should be a collaborative investigation involving employers as sponsors, teachers as course designers and learners. It should analyze a range of needs using various data-gathering tools. The quality of data depends mostly on selecting appropriate data gathering techniques. In view of the complexity of needs, it is desirable to use more than one method. The choice depends on the time and resources available.

The most frequently used methods are questionnaires and interviews. Questionnaires are standard tools, they do not take long to administer and it is often possible to get information from a large number of learners. Interviews can be useful after questionnaires, especially if interviews can be arranged to confirm initial comments or conclusions about needs. In an interview the teacher can probe response and thus gain an in-depth understanding of actual needs. Additionally, unclear questions or answers can be clarified during the interview. Ideally, the teacher should have interviews with in-company course coordinators, students' managers and with individual students. During these interviews the teacher can gain insight into their company's foreign language needs and get answers to crucial questions such as the following:

- What does the company want the students to be able to do in English?
- What are your staff's most urgent short-term needs for English?
- Which area is the most important for the job: speaking, writing, reading or listening?
- Have the students had any training before and what kind of previous training courses have been arranged?

- What is the learners' attitude towards learning languages?
- What do the learners find most difficult about English?
- What kind of feedback does the company want from the teacher?

Needs should not be considered only in terms of target situation needs. It is not enough to base a course design simply on the target objectives. It is also necessary to take into account potentials and constraints of the learning situation, the need for a task to be enjoyable, fulfilling, manageable, generative, etc. The course's general orientation is the target situation, but the specific content is a response to learning needs.

The course designer must also concentrate on the answers to the following questions:

1. Why are the learners taking the course? Is attending the course mandatory or optional?
2. What is the learners' attitude towards the BE course?
3. How do the learners learn?
4. What is their learning background? What methodology will appeal to them?
5. What resources are available?
6. Where will the course take place? Are the surroundings pleasant, dull, noisy, cold, etc.?

### 3. Language Teaching Principles

It is very important that course design makes a connection between the research and theory of language learning and the practice of designing courses in order to help teachers make the right decisions on how learning can be encouraged. The studies on language and language acquisition can guide the choice of what to teach and how to sequence it, and they can emphasize the importance of thoughtful processing of teaching material, the importance of taking into account individual differences and learning styles and the learner's attitude and motivation.

Nation and Macalister (2010) suggest that, in order to design a useful and productive course, teachers should pay special attention to the following principles:

1. A language course should provide the best possible coverage of language in use through the inclusion of items that occur frequently in the language, so that the learners get the best return for their learning effort.
2. A language course should train learners how to learn a language, so that they can become effective and independent language learners.

3. A language course should progressively cover relevant language items, skills and strategies.
4. The course should help the learners to make the most effective use of previous knowledge.
5. A language course should provide activities aimed at increasing the fluency.
6. The learners should process the items to be learned as deeply and as thoughtfully as possible.
7. The course should be presented so that the learners have the most favorable attitudes to the language, users of the language, use of the language and their chances of success in learning the language.
8. There should be opportunity for learners to work with the learning material in ways that most suit their individual learning style.
9. The selection, gradation and assessment of the material in a language course should be based on a careful consideration of the learners and their needs, the teaching conditions, and the time and resources available.
10. Learners should receive helpful feedback which will allow them to improve the quality of their language use.

#### 4. Goals

A BE course has to be tailored to meet the needs of learners who have specific needs based on professional contexts of communication and who have already mastered general English. These learners are preparing for a wide range of jobs, such as managers, accountants, financial advisors, secretaries and the similar. The selection of content for a course is based on topics, themes or work-related situations, and it is useful to check to see that the language items are covered in the most useful way. Business people do not always need to know the full complexities of English grammar. Certain concepts are typically discussed in business-related situations, e.g. describing changes and trends, quality, products, processes, strategies. Hence some structural areas may require more attention, such as conditionals in negotiating or modality for expressing possibility or politeness. Making well-justified decisions about content is one of the most important parts of course designing. If poor content is chosen, then excellent teaching and learning may result in a poor return for learning effort. Some teachers break goals down into smaller well-specified more linguistically powerful functional areas such as comparing and contrasting, expressing cause and effect, recommending, agreeing and disagreeing. This breaking into smaller units is especially useful for monitoring and assessing the learners' progress.

## 5. Monitoring and Assessment

The purpose of the monitoring and assessment of the course design is to decide what to test and how to test it and to make sure that the learners will get the most benefit from the course. This involves carefully observing the learners and the course, and suggesting changes to the course and the way it is run. The major types of monitoring and assessment that can occur as part of a course are listed in Nation and Macalister (Ibid: 108-109):

1. Placement assessment – the learners are assessed at the beginning of a course to see what level of the course they should be in.
2. Observation of learning – while the course is running, the activities that the learners do are carefully monitored to see if each particular activity is likely to achieve its learning goal.
3. Short-term achievement assessment – at regular intervals during the course, the learners may be monitored to see what they are learning from the course.
4. Diagnostic assessment – it is useful to know where learner's strength and weaknesses lie and where there are gaps in their knowledge. This is an attempt to locate areas of needs and it can be done through interpreting the results of placement tests, achievement testing, and proficiency testing, through observing learners in learning tasks, interviewing learners and through diagnostic tests.
5. Achievement assessment – usually at the end of a course, and perhaps at one or two other points during the course, the learners are assessed on what they have learned from the course.
6. Proficiency assessment – proficiency assessment is based on items drawn from the language as a whole rather than from the content of a particular course. It tries to measure a learner's language knowledge in relation to other learners who may have studied different courses or in relation to areas of language knowledge that are based upon an analysis of the language. Proficiency assessment has the goal of seeing what learners have reached in their knowledge of language.

## 6. Evaluation

The aim of this part of course design process is to decide how to check if the course is successful and where it needs to be improved. Evaluation looks at all aspects of the course design process to see if the course is the best possible one. Evaluation requires looking both at the results of the course and the planning and running of the course.



## Conclusion

The demand for cost-effective business English courses tailored to specific needs with clearly defined goals is growing constantly. Therefore, teachers as course designers have to plan classes thoroughly and successfully. A comprehensive course designing model, which includes environment and needs analysis, language teaching principles, adequate content, presentation, monitoring and evaluation, is a useful tool which helps teacher pay better attention to the learners' specific needs, highlights the difference between individual students, makes sure that lessons address the students' particular needs and individual learning styles and with this information, the teacher can define course goals, identify topics and situations for discussion, select and create the most appropriate and useful learning materials and activities.

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## PROCES STVARANJA KURSA POSLOVNOG ENGLISKOG JEZIKA

**Rezime:** Proces stvaranja kursa poslovnog engleskog jezika je složen process na koji utiču različiti faktori. Neophodno je uzeti u obzir detaljnu analizu okruženja, prvenstveno samih polaznika, predavača i situacije u kojoj se odvija proces stvaranja i održavanja kursa, analizu potreba polaznika i principa predavanja stranog jezika. Na osnovu toga moguće je doneti ispravne odluke u vezi sa sadržajem kursa, redosledom obrađivanja jedinica, načinom prezentovanja gradiva i evaluacijom celokupnog kursa. Detaljno isplaniran kurs ne samo da olakšava rad predavača već i omogućava polaznicima da pohađaju kurs koji je po svom sadržaju relevantan i koji zadovoljava njihove potrebe za engleskim jezikom nastale zbog radnog okruženja.

**Ključne reči:** process stvaranja kursa, model kursa, analiza potreba i okruženja, evaluacija.