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The Development of ESP Approaches .

A B S T R A C T

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A R T I C L E   I N F O

Being the lingua-franca, English became dominant in every aspect of education, trade, commerce and international relations. English language teachers are required to respond for the needs of their learners. Such needs range from basic skills to advanced and specific needs. It is such advanced and specific needs which are the interest of English for Specific Purposes are. Motivated by the learning theories and views of language learning, the ESP practitioners have been trying with several approaches to respond to the needs of the students. While there are as many approaches to English for Specific Purposes as there are practitioners, this paper examines the three dominant approaches: language-centered, skills-centered and learning-centered approaches to course design. It highlights the development of each approach and sheds the light on its merits and demerits.

تطور نظريات تدريس اللغة الانكليزية للأغراض الخاصة

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الخلاصة:

كونها لغة مشتركة ، أصبحت اللغة الإنجليزية مهيمنة على كل جانب من جوانب التعليم والتجارة والعلاقات الدولية كونها لغة مشتركة . لذلك تطلب من معلمي اللغة الإنجليزية الاستجابة لاحتياجات المتعلمين من اللغة الانكليزية . تتدرج هذه الاحتياجات من المهارات الأساسية إلى الاحتياجات المتقدمة والخاصة والتي تهم اللغة الإنجليزية لأغراض خاصة حيث حاول ممارسو ESP بعدة طرق للاستجابة لاحتياجات الطلاب. في حين أن هناك العديد من مناهج اللغة الإنجليزية لأغراض خاصة التي تبنى على أساس احتياجات المتعلمين من اللغة الانكليزية .في هذا البحث سيتم عرض النظريات الثلاثة السائدة

وسيتم تسليط الضوء على تطور كل نظرية من هذه النظريات وعلى المزايا والعيوب لكل نظرية من هذه النظريات الثلاثة .

Section one

Introduction

1.1 Statement of The Problem

English for Specific Purposes (ESP) has become an essential need for English Language teaching and it seems that (ESP) is not well known and is not applied in an adequate way in the ELT Community . English language is spoken around the world and there are millions of native speakers and more, that have English language as a second language. Working in commerce , industry , and other life fields that require people to have adequate command of the language both spoken and written have generated the demands to examine the ESP approaches also the need of various groups of learners or people who need to have sufficient command in English language skills is necessary .

1.2 Aims of The Study

This study aims to :

1. Shed the light on the importance of ESP approaches to course design.
2. Review the three dominant approaches ;
3. highlight the development of each approach and
4. shed the light on the merits and demerits of each approach .

Section Two

Theoretical Background

2.1 Defining English for Specific Purposes (ESP)

English for Specific Purposes (ESP) can be defined as the role of English in a language course or programme of instruction in which the content and aims of the course are fixed by the specific needs of a particular group of learners. For example courses in **English for academic purposes**, **English for science and technology**, and English for Nursing. These courses may be compared with those which aim to teach general language proficiency, **English for general purposes**.

The following is a brief comparison between ESP courses and general ELT courses.

Areas	ESP	ELT
1. Goals	*External* Communicate at work	*Internal* Develop grammar
2. Learners want to:	Use the language to achieve specific purposes such as communicating in air-traffic control tower	Use the language to achieve general purposes such as developing grammar and comprehension
3. Focus	when, where and why learners need the language – (situated language focus)	Language usage (proper use of language); General language focus, at daily life
4. What to teach	Depends on learners needs, and the context of use	Depends on general communicative needs and general context of use
5. Domain of knowledge	Very specialized, and difficult even for native speakers	Very general, and easy for native speakers
6. Teacher skills	Should be able to design courses in areas that he has never studied or mastered	Should be able to design courses in areas familiar to him
7. Duration	For specific and usually short period of time	For longer and fixed period of time

ESP can be pursued by English language teachers to cater for the wide range of students' needs. Such needs vary in nature and in complexity. Students may need simple instruction in operating computers or office gadgets. Yet, others may need intensive instruction in medical English where all aspects of the ESP course pose a challenge for both students and course designers.

In any ESP course, there are conventionalized procedures which have now been institutionalized in the ESP community. All ESP courses follow a somehow a standard protocol: needs analysis, analyzing special discourse, developing the curriculum and evaluation.

According to Chambers (1980)needs analysis is concerned with establishing and achieving communicative needs in the target communicative situation. In this simple definition, needs analysis means finding out what the learners need to be able to communicate effectively each in their own daily life, profession or work. However, the notion of needs analysis has changed dramatically over the years.

According to Dudley-Evans & St John (1998), needs analysis consists of eight components which are:

1. Target situation analysis and objective needs
2. Wants, means and subjective needs
3. Present situation analysis:
4. Lack or gap between what students know and what they should know
5. Learning needs
6. Information about the language use
7. What is wanted from the course?
8. Means analysis or how the course will be delivered.

Needs analysis and analysis of specialist discourse are connected process in the design of ESP curricula. Here, **specialist discourse** means the communication

and language use in the target field of the ESP course. Several courses focus on the content of the target field. ESP courses pays more attention to the content. ESP courses are different than general courses. General courses focus on different aspects such as learning strategies. However, ESP courses focus on the content of the target situations. Investigating specialist discourse can be achieved using three ways: *ethnographic methods*, *genre analysis* and *corpus analysis*.

2. 2 ESP Approaches
Course design in ESP is the phase where all analyses and descriptions gleaned from the needs analysis and the description of specialist discourse become a reality. The course designer's task is to produce a series of teaching-learning activities by which the objectives of the course can be achieved. There are three major approaches to ESP course design: *language-centered*, *skills-centered* and *learning-centered approaches*.

2.2.1 Language-centered Approach
Language-centered approach to ESP course design focuses on mapping the language used in the classroom with the language of the target discourse community. It is by far the oldest approach, and it is the most prevalent one in the practice of ESP teaching (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987: 66). The language-centered approach establishes strong connections between the outcomes of the target situation analysis and the contents of the ESP learning materials.

Language-centered approach starts by analyzing the learners' target situation. It takes into account the current views of language learning and attempts to select the one which is most appropriate to the target situation. The linguistic features of the target situation are identified. Then the course designer proceeds to creating the syllabus. The next step is to develop the course materials in the light of

the syllabus items. The final step is to develop the evaluation procedures to test if the students mastered the syllabus items. The flow of the language-centered approach to ESP course design is illustrated in Figure (1) below.

Language-centered approach to ESP course designing has received much criticism. Ahmed (2014: 24) argues that the language-centered approach is superficial and static. It is a surface-level approach because "it looks at the particular language of the situation, but it doesn't really focus on how the students will actually have to learn this language or how they might actually go about using it. It does not deal with the creation of the language in any fundamental way". Because the focus is on language forms, it is static because the materials cannot be adapted quickly to the reactions and needs of the students. Whereas the language-centered approach starts with learners' analysis, it is not in fact a learner-centered approach. It uses the learners in identifying the target needs and nothing else.
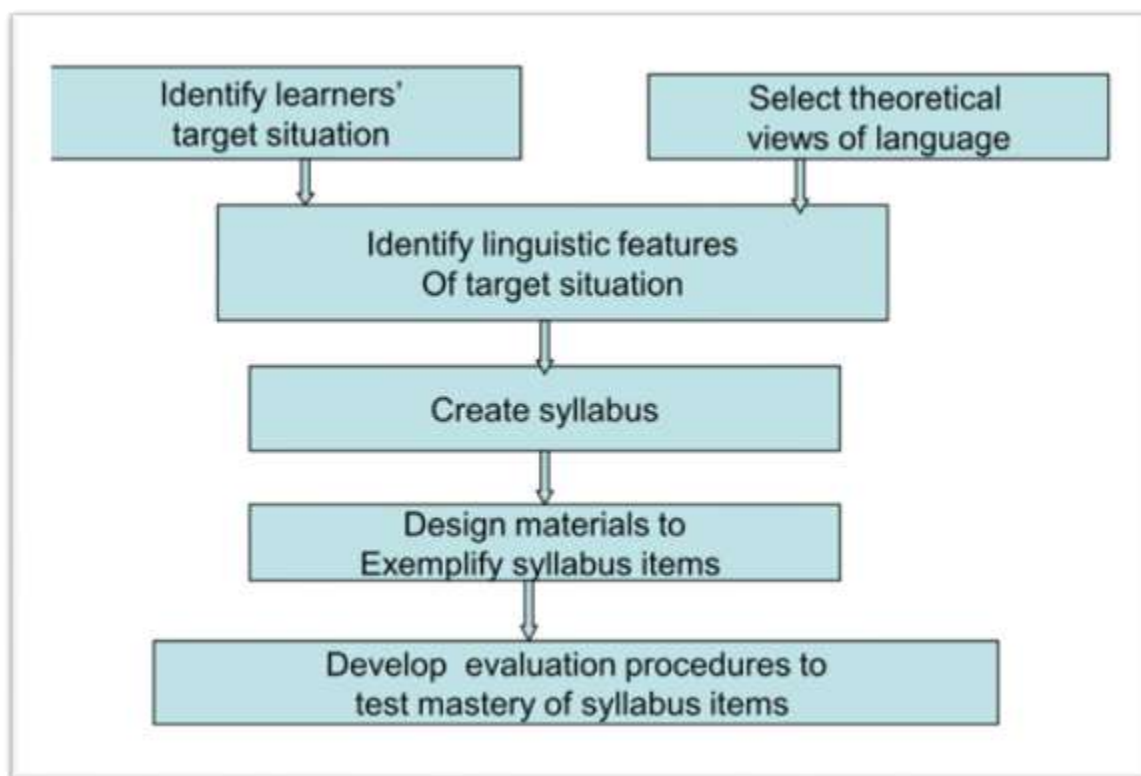

Figure 1: Flow of Language-centered ESP Approach adapted from Hutchinson and Waters (1987)

On the other hand, Jendrych (2013: 45) summarizes the language-centered approach in ESP. She states that "at the early stages of ESP teaching, courses were aimed mainly at specialized linguistic competence. In the 1970s, specialized terminology and functional language were regarded to be the priorities in ESP courses. Courses were, to a great extent, language-oriented, and their main aim was to teach specialized lexis and grammar".

Another criticism of the language-centered approach originates from ignoring the learners. Zhu & Liao (2008: 91) states that the language-centered

approach is "the simplest and most familiar one, [it] aims to draw as direct connection as possible between the analyses of the target situation. It seems to be very logical, however, static and inflexible, only at the surface level". The syllabus completely ignores students' state of knowledge and their individual skills. Every student is treated in the same manner and is expected to acquire information at the same pace as his or her peers. Lacking flexibility, error tolerance and proper feedback, this method will always struggle to counter errors arising from the influence of users not used to such a linear system. Language-centered course design is praised for its logical approach, but at the same time criticized for inflexibility, as it views learning as a logical and uncomplicated process, which effectively prevents it from gaining more supporters (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987).

2.2.2 Skills-centered Approach

Widely used in Latin American countries, a skills-centered approach to ESP course design takes the skills of the learners into the heart of the design process. Zhu & Liao (2008: 91-92) claim that the skills-centered approach is based on theoretical and pragmatic foundations, and it aims to develop the students' competence. The basic **theoretical hypothesis** is that underlying any language behaviour are certain skills and strategies, which the learner uses in order to produce or comprehend discourse. A skill-centered approach aims to get away from the surface performance data and look at the competence that underlies the performance. A skill-centered course, therefore will present its learning objectives in terms of both performance and competence. The **pragmatic foundation** lies in the attempt of achieving the course's goal in the short time available to the learners.

The skills-centered approach was widely used in Latin American countries. However, there are a very few cases where it was used in the Arab world. For example, Belmekki & Bensafa(2016) assumed this approach to analyze the difficulties facing the master physics students in writing their scientific reports. They concluded that "using skills-centered approach as a framework of ESP, ESP teachers are provided with the necessary knowledge and tools needed to cope with their students' needs in the specialized arena" (ibid, p.69). Skills-centered approach

to ESP course design views learning as an opportunity to help learners develop the target skills and strategies, and it hopes that such skills and strategies will continue to develop even after the ESP course is over. The governing principle is to make learners better processors of the information rather than passive receivers of it.

The skills-centered approach to ESP course design starts with *identifying the target situation.* It then proceeds to *analyze the skills and strategies* which the learners require to cope in their target discourse community. The role of needs analysis in a skills-centered approach serves two purposes. Firstly, it provides a basis for discovering the underlying competence that enables the students to

perform in the target situation. Secondly, it enables course designers to discover the potential knowledge and abilities that the learners bring to the ESP classroom. Reviewing the theoretical views of language and learning, the course designers *outline the syllabus* of the course. The *content development* is carried out by selecting texts and exercises which focus on the target skills and strategies. The students are expected to practice and master the target skills. The final step is to *develop the evaluation procedures* of the students' performance in using the target skills and strategies. The design flow of the skills-centered approach is depicted in Figure (2).

Despite being more effective than the language-centered approach, the skills-centered approach has been subject to criticism from practitioners and researchers in ESP. One of the major drawbacks of the skills-centered approach is that course designers focus on the achieving the goals without having detailed plans on how to do so.

Another limitation of the skills-centered approach is that teachers design the skills and activities for the entire class. Hence, there is no room for considering the individual needs and levels of the learners. Some researchers warn that "planning out in great detail goals and the realization of those goals on a general basis might be a waste of time to a certain extent. Yet we need to do this, for it is our only option. We need to be careful when we do this, and not get too caught up in

it"(Ahmed, 2014: 25). Finally, the skills-centered model still perceives students as users oflanguage instead of learners of language and is more concerned with procedures of language use rather than language learning.
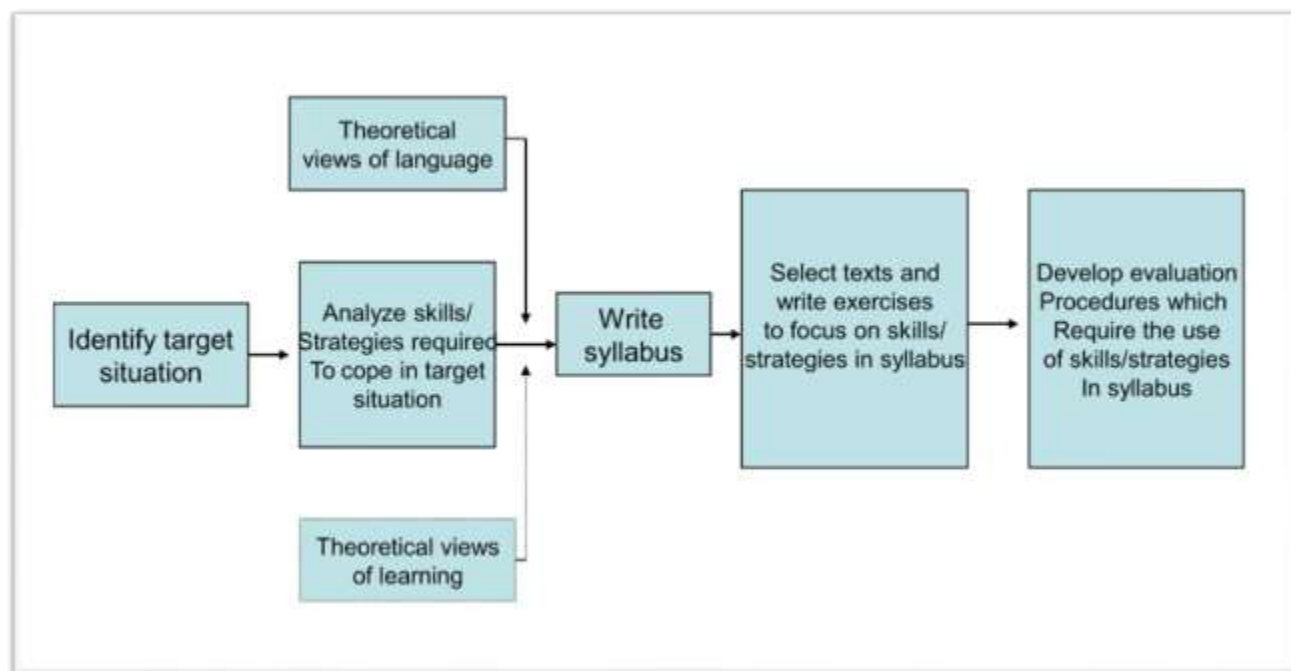
Figure 2: The Flow of Skills-centered Approach, adapted from Hutchinson and Waters (1987, p. 71)

2.2.3 Learning-centered Approach

The learning-centered approach pays more attention to the learner. It assumes that the learner decides what to learn and how to learn. The role of the teacher is seen as a facilitator, though the teacher can influence what to learn and how to learn. Learning is meaningful only when the learners use the learnt knowledge and skills in the target discourse community. The learning-centered

approach builds upon the skills and knowledge which the learners bring into the classroom.

Hutchinson & Waters (1987: 71) assume that the learner is not the only factor to consider in learning. The learning-centered approach involves both the competence that enables someone to perform and how that competence is acquired. As such, the learner is considered at every stage of the course design and implementation. Jendrych (2013: 48) argues in favor of the learner-centered approach. She states that

"a learner-centered approach provides students with lots of opportunities to practice analytical and creative thinking, problem solving, and decision making. It teaches critical and constructive thinking, evaluation and forecasting and thus contributes to the development of conceptual thinking. A learner-centered approach encourages students to defend their ideas and to

reflect on their thinking when they take decisions, critically compare, and evaluate options or design an action plan. It also allows them to compromise and reach a consensus when they work in teams. The use of didactic case studies in tertiary education is a prime example of a learner-centered approach".

The learning-centered approach kicks off the process with two parallel modules which have to be combined at a certain point in the course design. The first moduel examines the theoretical views of learning and analyzes the learning situation. Then it identifies the attitudes, needs and wants of the learners. It analyzes the constraints of learning and the learning situations. The second module

analyzes the target learning situation in the light of the theoretical views of language. Then it identifies the skills and knowledge the learners need to function in the target discourse community. The two modules meet at the stage of writing the syllabus and the development of the content materials.

In learning-centered approach the methodology cannot be just grafted on to the end of an existing selection of syllabus items and texts. It must break down the syllabus design process into two levels. This general syllabus can be used as the basic for the selection of texts and writing of exercise/activities: on the basis of this the material writers can prepare materials and the materials themselves will produce a detailed language syllabus. This can be produced from the needs analysis. Gaps and overlaps can then be dealt with. At the same time, it maintains relevance to target needs.After completing this step, a stand-alone evaluation is done for each module. The flow of the learning-centered model is shown in Figure (3) below.
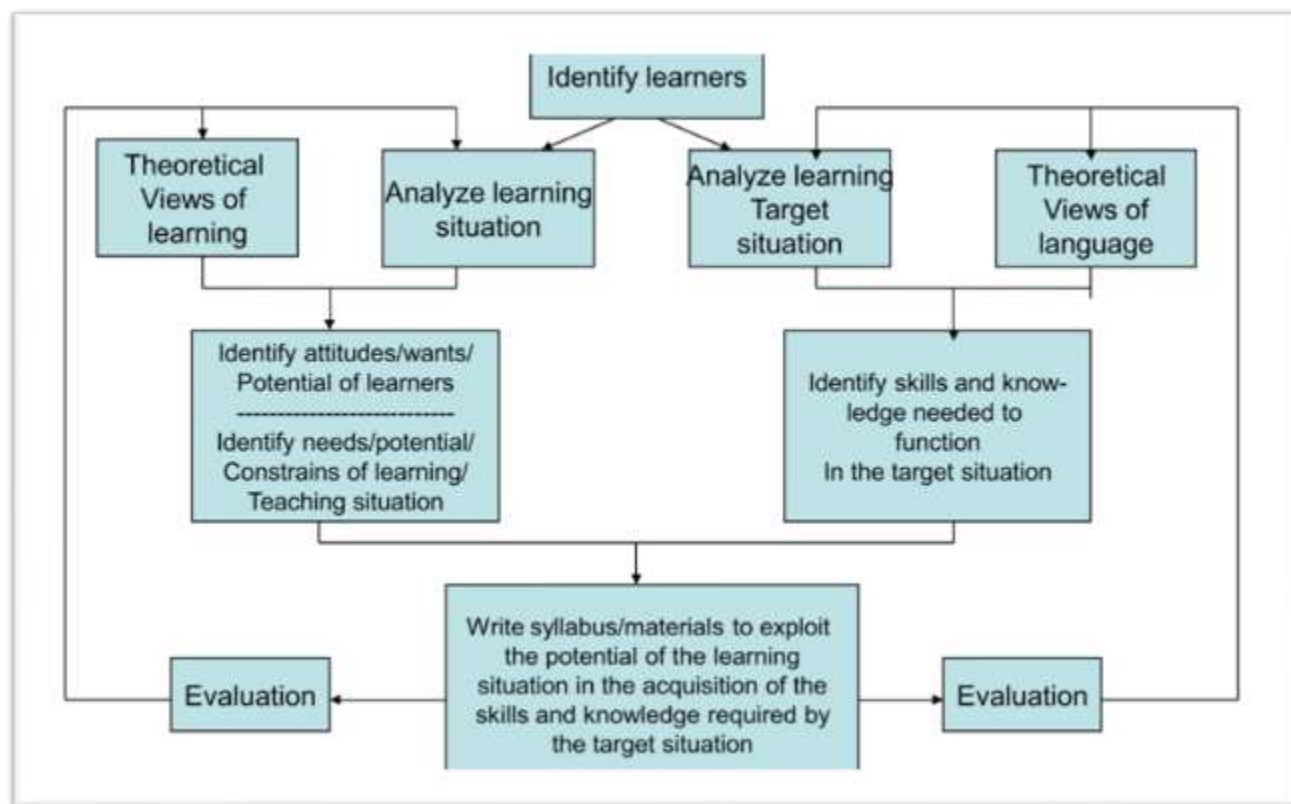
Figure 3: Learning-centered Approach Design, adapted from (Hutchinson and Waters 1987, p. 74)

Ahmed (2014: 25) argues that the main implications of a learning center approach are basically the ability of teachers to take what they have been doing in their course planning with a certain grain of salt. There is no such thing we will ever do in the classroom that is going to work for every single learner in the same way and we cannot expect to it to. Each learner has their own cognitive structure, their own preferences, their own wants, and their own histories. We cannot get to their heads directly, thus we really don't have access to a lot of the information that we might actually need to have access to in developing our courses.

The learning-centered approach has been extensively used in the ESP contexts. Recently, it was extended to the English for Academic Purposes domain.Kashef, Pandian, & Khameneh(2014)have implemented the learning-centered approach to change the attitudes and improve the reading skills of 80 undergraduate engineering students.The authors hoped that "a learning-centered EAP instruction which considers the learners' needs and learning process and takes into account the appropriate skills and techniques necessary for this purpose can help the learners accomplish their goals." The study concluded that "a learning-centered instruction which focuses on learners' learning process and needs can

change students' negative attitudes toward EAP reading and compensate for their dissatisfaction with teacher-centered EAP classes."

The learning-centered approach was also extended to domains far from simple language learning. For example, Li (2015) adapted the learning-centered approach to design a course for students of translation and oral interpreting. At the end, "the course was evaluated through tests, a questionnaire on course evaluation, students' learning journals and semester summaries. It is found that this course design had been effective, judging from the results relating to the objectives, the students' feedback on the course and the teacher."

3. Summary and Conclusions

This paper examined the ESP approaches to course design. The three major approaches are language-centered, skills-centered and learning-centered. The language-centered approaches focuses on the language, and it does not consider the needs of the students and the target discourse community. The skills-centered approach attempts to equip the students with the skills and strategies needed to cope in the target discourse community. Despite being better than the language-centered approach, the skills-centered approach leaves the course designers to deal with dilemma of planning how to achieve the desired goal. The last approach is known as the learning-centered approach. It focuses on the learners and assumes a parallel mechanism of analyzing the needs, learners and the target discourse community. The learning-centered approach has proved more effective than the other two approaches. It was extended to other domains such as English for Academic Purposes and oral interpretation.

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