

IDENTIFYING ESP COURSE GOALS AND THEIR ENABLING OBJECTIVES

Pleşca (Ciudin) Galina, University Lecturer, PhD student
Department of English and French for Specific Purposes, Moldova State University

Elaborarea unui curs ESP implică determinarea unor scopuri și obiective corespunzătoare. Aceasta presupune formularea scopurilor în așa fel încât ele să fie realizabile iar obiectivele măsurabile. La elaborarea cursului ESP trebuie să se pornească de la analiza necesităților specifice ale cursanților, ca mai apoi în baza acestor necesități să se identifice scopurile și obiectivele cursului. Această lucrare este

o încercare de a arăta diferența dintre scopuri și obiective pe de o parte, și relația de cauză și efect pe de altă parte. Aflându-se într-o relație ierarhică, scopurile sunt mai generale pe când obiectivele sunt mai specifice. În așa fel, fiecărui scop îi va reveni câteva obiective măsurabile care-l va ajuta să se realizeze.

Cuvinte - cheie: ESP, analiza necesităților, dezvoltare curriculară, scop, obiectiv, evaluare

English for Specific Purposes has become very popular in the recent years. It has grown to become one of the most important aspects of the English Foreign Language (EFL) teaching. Most universities have chosen to provide ESP courses for their students instead of the traditional English for General Purposes (EGP), as ESP courses better prepare undergraduates for their future professional or occupational activities, a world-widely recognized fact.

English for Specific Purposes or ESP refers to the teaching and learning of English as a second or foreign language where the aim of the learners is to use English in a particular academic, professional or occupational domain and it encompasses both EOP (English for Occupational Purposes) and EAP (English for Academic Purposes).

Hutchinson and Waters in their attempt to define ESP, focus not so much on what ESP is, but rather on what ESP is not, as according to them, ESP is a variety of the many possible kinds of language teaching. They explain that ESP should not be seen as a matter of teaching 'specialized varieties' of English, nor as a matter of science words and grammar for Scientists, Hotel words and grammar for Hotel staff and so on. It is neither different in kind from any other form of language teaching in that it should be based in the first instance on principles of effective and efficient learning. It is rather an approach to language learning, based on learner's needs and directed by specific and apparent reasons for learning [1, pp.18-19].

Dudley-Evans supports Hutchinson and Waters's view in this regard and agrees that 'ESP is an approach to language teaching in which all decisions as to content and method are based on the learner's reason for learning'[1, p.19]. He even describes ESP as an 'attitude of mind'.

In her book *Developing Courses in English for Specific Purposes* Basturkmen states that 'In ESP the learner is seen as a language learner engaged either in academic, professional or occupational pursuits and who uses English as a means to carry out those pursuits. External goals suggest an instrumental view of language learning and language being learnt for non-linguistic goals. In a general ELT situation, goals are generally linguistic (such as, development of oral competence or a wide vocabulary, or ability to use a wide range of grammatical structures). In an ESP situation, it is understood that the learner would want to achieve 'real world' objectives, objectives requiring specific linguistic competencies' [2, p.8]. This same idea is strongly supported by Mohammad Kaosar Ahmed in his paper *The ESP Teacher: Issues, Tasks and Challenges* [3, p.5].

According to the absolute characteristics of ESP drawn from Dudley-Evans and St John's, an ESP course should be designed to meet the specific needs of the learners and be centered on the language appropriate to the specific content of the course [4, pp.4-5]. Therefore, needs analysis has definitely shaped its importance by the fact that it offers the ESP course provider the opportunity to choose and decide what to include in the course.

Basturkmen explains that 'Needs analysis in ESP refers to a course development process. In this process the language and skills that the learners will use in their target professional or vocational workplace or in their study areas are identified and considered in relation to the present state of knowledge of the learners, their perceptions of their needs and practical possibilities and constraints of the teaching context. The information obtained from this process is used in determining and refining the content and method of the ESP course [2, p.19].

In Hutchinson and Waters's view 'much of the work done by ESP teachers is concerned with designing appropriate courses for various groups of learners. Thus, whereas course design plays a relatively minor part in the life of the General English teacher – course here usually being determined either by tradition, choice of textbook or ministerial decree – for ESP teacher, course design is often a substantial and important part of the workload' [1, p.21].

Hutchinson and Waters consider that ESP course designing is 'fundamentally a matter of asking questioning in order to provide a reasoned basis for the subsequent processes of syllabus design, material writing, classroom teaching and evaluation' [1, p.21]. They explain that the ESP teacher needs to have the knowledge about several things, such as why the student needs to learn, who is going to be involved in the process, what the student needs to learn, what aspects of language will be needed, and many others. Having investigated the questions an ESP teacher

should ask himself, Hutchinson and Waters summarized them under three categories: *Language Descriptions*, *Theories of Learning* and *Needs Analysis*. Even though these three items look like separate entities, their interdependence in the syllabus design process is of greatest importance. They show their relationship in the following manner:

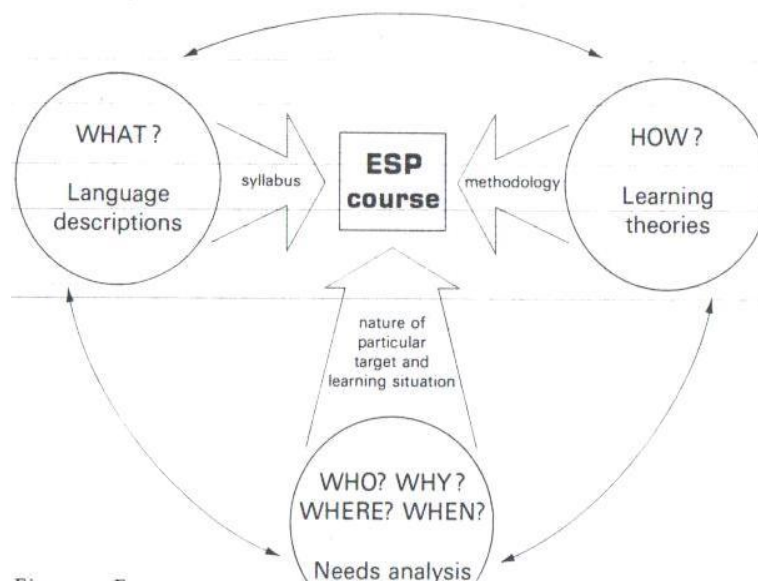


Figure 1: Factors affecting ESP course design (Hutchinson and Waters 1987, p. 22)

Considering these factors helps ESP providers better understand what to focus on in their course design. Thus, while designing an ESP course, it is of paramount importance to appropriately identify the course goals and their ‘enabling’ objectives. Well-stated, clear goals and objectives are fundamental to both teaching and learning, as they hold teachers accountable for what their students learn. Objectives, whether they are called ‘enabling’, learning, behavioral, instructional, or performance are terms that refer to descriptions of student performance that are used to make inferences about learning. [5, p.1]

In her book *Designing language courses: A guide for teachers*, Kathleen Graves states that ‘goals are a way of putting into words the main purposes and intended outcomes of your course’ [6, p.75] while ‘objectives are statements about how the goals will be achieved.’ [6, p.76]. She gives an analogy of a journey explaining that ‘the destination is the goal, the journey is the course and the objectives are the different points you pass through on the journey to the destination’ [6, p.75].

According to Graves goals can help teachers stay on the course both as he/she designs and teaches the course as well as bring into focus teacher’s vision and priorities for the course. She emphasizes that goals should be general statements but not vague. Therefore, there should always exist a tendency to make goals more specific if we want to achieve them. Goals should address what can be realistically achieved within the constraints and resources of the course, that is, who the students are, their level, the amount of time available, the materials available, etc. We may start with grand goals but then realize that we cannot achieve them all because there is not enough time, the learners’ proficiency is lower than initially determined, or we had not considered carefully about the language steps or objectives necessary to achieve the goal.

The objectives on the other hand, are learnable and teachable units that together can constitute a goal. They provide a link between expectations, teaching and grading. That is why, a learning objective should clearly communicate specific student performance and should define what the teacher will have the students do. Therefore, objectives must be measurable and achievable because only by achieving the objectives, the goal can be reached. This is the main reason, why the objectives must always relate to the goal. (see Fig 2)

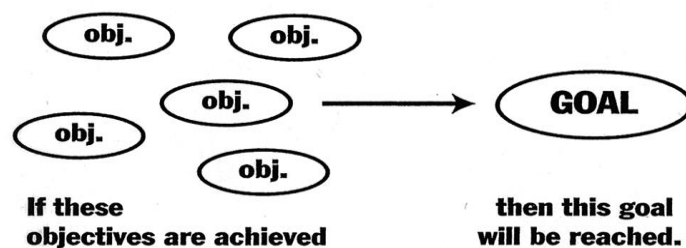


Figure 2: Cause and Effect Relationship between Goals and Objectives (Craves 2000, p.77)

The next step, according to Graves is to break the performance goals down into their constituent parts in order to identify ‘learnable and teachable units’ to include in learning or ‘enabling’ objectives [6, p.76].



Figure 3: For Every General Goal There Are Multiple Specific Objectives (Craves 2000, p.77)

The more specific the objective is, the better chances for the goal to be achieved. This hierarchical relationship shows that every goal will have several objectives to help achieve it. If we acknowledge this truth, we can ensure that our performance goals are achievable and the learning objectives measurable.

There are two particularly useful theoretical frameworks that can help ESP teachers to write appropriate goals and objectives. The first one is that of *communicative competence* that supposes the ability to use language correctly and appropriately in order to accomplish a communication goal, thoroughly explained by Canale and Swain and Savignon in their works *Theoretical bases of communicative approaches to second language teaching and testing* and respectively *Communicative language teaching: State of the art*. The second framework is that of the *Communication Task / Language Analysis*, which uses the construct of communicative competence to break down a communication task, identified through an ESP needs assessment, into its separate areas of competency or skills. With this information, the ESP teacher can write measurable enabling objectives for each performance goal.

We can also use Heinrich’s **The ABCD method** of writing clear and measurable objectives. ‘Heinrich suggests **The ABCD method** of writing objectives as an excellent starting point for writing objectives. In this system, "A" is for audience, "B" is for behavior, "C" for conditions and "D" for degree of mastery needed.

1. **Audience (A)** – Who? Who are your learners?
2. **Behavior (B)** – What? What do you expect them to be able to do?
3. **Condition (C)** – How? Under what circumstances or context will the learning occur? What will the student be given or already be expected to know to accomplish the learning?
4. **Degree (D)** – How much? How much will be accomplished, how well will the behavior need to be performed, and to what level?’ [7, p.1]

Once the behaviors, conditions and degrees of mastery for each objective are established, the ESP teacher can use them to determine what types of assignments, tests or alternative assessment he / she should use in the course, thus tying the objectives with evaluation.

Concluding all the things mentioned in this article, we can state that the importance of identifying and formulating goals and objectives derives from the fact that they can:

- help the ESP teacher / provider build a clear vision of what he /she will teach;
- help the ESP teacher / provider to define priorities and to make choices about what to teach and how to teach;
- hold the ESP teacher / provider accountable throughout the course;

- provide the basis for the assessment plan.

Consequently, clear goals make teaching purposeful while clear objectives serve as a bridge between needs and goals.

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