

## Using the Communicative Language Teaching Approach (CLT) in Teaching English for Specific Purposes (ESP)

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**Abstract:** Recently, ESP teaching and learning in Sudanese higher education has undergone unexpected development particularly after the implementation of Arabicization in 1991. Many ESP departments in the tertiary level started to rely on their ESP instructors to select or design ESP course materials for the various academic disciplines. However, most of these ESP instructors do not adhere to the students' needs and interests as well as they mainly focus on structural patterns and lexis. Therefore, this study attempts to suggest the CLT approach as an alternative to replace the traditional structural method when designing ESP course materials. The CLT approach can best meet the students' needs, interests and motivation as CLT offers perfect pedagogical combination of communicative skills and implicit structural patterns.

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### Introduction

From the early 1960's English for Specific Purposes (ESP) has grown to become one of the most prominent areas of EFL teaching today (Anthony, 2007). Its development is reflected in the increasing number of international universities offering different postgraduate degrees in ESP courses to overseas students in English speaking countries. However, many international journals are dedicated to serve ESP-SIG group of IATEFL and TESOL (Anthony, 2007).

English for Special Purposes (ESP) is young and developing branch of EFL in Sudan and it has undergone a slow but definite growth over the past few years. A. A. Mohamed (1995) stated that in 1994 the ministry of Higher Education to largely decrease the drawbacks of Arabicization in tertiary level has handed over control of university curriculum and syllabus design to universities themselves. This has led to rapid increase in English courses aimed to specific academic and professional disciplines, for instance, Business English in place of traditional General English. Amna Bedri (2006) emphasized that the flux of foreign investing companies at the beginning of this millennium have sought job applicants with good command of workplace business English to occupy the vacant managerial positions, poor ESP applicants have been deprived. Huckin (1985) describes ESP learners as professional communicators and argued that ESP course materials should reflect the complexity and the systematic professional communication in real-life communities. However, for many years ESP instructions were limited to train special lexicon and translating

academic texts for ESP students. Of course, such method did not reflect students' interest and resulted in low learner motivation and poor participation.

With the widespread of the learner-centered approach as a communicative learning method, much attention has been paid to design ESP course materials that can prepare students for professional communication. However, designing ESP course materials that can best benefit students' interest and needs is an obstacle for many ESP instructors. Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to suggest a framework for ESP course materials that can help ESP instructors to overcome the barriers they may face when designing ESP course materials.

### Statement of the Problem

Certainly, the field of the ESP is regarded as a revolution in the EFL that focuses on the learner's interests and needs. The aim of any ESP course material is to develop the professional communication skills of the learner and makes the learner able to communicate well in the workplace. However, many ESP instructors do not pay attention to the students' interests and needs when designing ESP course materials. Therefore, ESP instructors should focus on students' interests and needs when compiling ESP course materials so as to promote the students'-centered communicative approach.

### Significance of the study

This study demonstrates the difference between ESP and GE course materials design. Hutchison (1887) pointed out that GE teachers rarely conduct a needs analysis to find out what was necessary to

achieve. Meanwhile, ESP instructors are much more aware of the importance of needs analysis and they think very carefully about the goals that the learners are going to achieve when designing ESP course materials. Thus, this study shows the difference between ESP and GE approaches and suggests a framework for ESP instructors and materials writers when designing ESP course materials.

### Paper questions

1. How can ESP instructors develop a new ESP course using CLT approach?
2. What are the stages ESP instructors have to follow when designing ESP course?
3. What can be done to increase students' poor motivation and interests?
4. What are the appropriate CLT teaching activities?

### The Roles of ESP Instructor

Dudley Evens & St. John (1998) identified five roles for the ESP instructor: 1. Teacher, 2. Course material designer, 3. Collaborator, 4. Researcher, and 5. Evaluator. David Nunan (1991) emphasized the biggest role of ESP instructor as course materials designer and curriculum developer. Obviously, Nunan (1991) gave ESP instructors the responsibility for developing the curriculum and argued that ESP instructors need the time, the skills and the support to do so. Nunan recognized the issues of time, skills and support as key factors for instructors when designing and developing curricula. This paper is intended to provide Sudanese ESP instructors with theoretical support for developing ESP course materials. Obviously, there are some key notions about ESP that ESP instructors should consider when designing ESP course materials such as:

#### I. Absolute and variable characteristics of ESP

Stevens (1988) defined ESP by identifying its absolute and variable characteristics and made a distinction between 4 absolute and 2 variable characteristics.

Absolute characteristics are:

- designed to meet specific needs of the learners
- related to content to particular disciplines, occupations and activities
- centered on the language appropriate to those activities in syntax, lexis, semantics, discourse and analysis of this discourse

• in contrast with General English

Variable characteristics

- Restricted as to the language skills to be learned

- Not taught according to nay pre-ordained methodology

#### II. Characteristics of ESP course

Carter (1983) stated that there are 3 features of common to ESP course: a) authentic material, b) purpose-related orientation, and c) self-direction. Dudley-Evens (1997) claimed that ESP should be taught to intermediate and advanced level learners and using authentic materials is entirely feasible. The use of authentic content materials is indeed feature of ESP particularly in self-directed study and research tasks. Purpose-related orientation refers to the simulation of communicative tasks required of the target setting.

#### III. The meaning of the word "special" in ESP

Perren (1974) noted: special language and specialized aim are two entirely different notions. Mackay and Mountford (1978) stated that the only practical way in which we can understand the notion of special language is as a restricted repertoire (list) of words and expressions selected from the whole language because that restricted repertoire covers every requirement within a well-defined context, task or vocation. However, Mackay and Mountford (1978) clarified that a specialized aim refers to the purpose for which learners learn a language, not the nature of the language they learn. Consequently, the focus of the word "special" in ESP ought to be on the purpose for which learners learn and not on the specific jargon or registers they learn.

However, since this study is focusing on ESP course materials design using CLT approach, the researcher considers that the students' needs analysis is the most essential notion of an ESP course-developing process. Thus, this study starts with students' needs analysis as a corner stone for ESP course materials design.

### Students' Needs Analysis

Needs Analysis involves the assessment of the needs for which a learner or group of learners may require language. As a research area, it started in the early 1970s along with the development of the communicative approach, and has gone through substantial developments in the 1970s and 1980s owing much to the work done by Richerich (1972) and Munby (1978). Proponents of the communicative approach argued that the selection of instructional materials should be based on a systematic analysis of the learners' needs for the target language.

It is very important to start an ESP course developing process with an analysis of the target group of students (Hutchison & Waters, 1987). Many problems in L2 language classes are a result of teachers who do not pay attention to students' interests and needs and ignore students as a source of essential information (D. Nunan, 1991). With the spread of

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) much emphasis in L2 methodology has been paid to the learner instruction. As a result, needs analysis has been given considerable attention in making a particular course that serves a particular group of interest (Graves, 1996; Harrison, 1997; Hutchison & Waters, 1989).

Dudley-Evens (1998) pointed out that students' needs analysis can give two kinds of information. The first reflects students "Possession" their current level of L2-ESP, content knowledge in L1 & L2, motivation and method of learning they have experienced. The second information is what students want to achieve "ESP needs". Moreover, D. Nunan (1991) suggested different ways of finding information about students' needs and previous learning experience in higher education. This can be done through questionnaires, surveys, group discussions and individual talk with students. For instance, Business English students may be asked to list areas using ESP context such as selling insurance, opening bank account, and dealing in customers' complaints, negotiating business deals, currency exchange rate or translating business documents from English into Arabic.

However, finding out this information about students' needs and interests does not mean that an ESP instructor should teach ONLY what students want. There are factors to consider such as the curriculum framework, institutional structural guidelines and standardization. These factors cannot be ignored when designing an ESP course material for any academic or professional discipline. Therefore, in developing a new ESP course material, students' needs analysis will help an ESP instructor to bring together the required goals and objectives using the communicative approach as we are going to see in this paper.

### Goals & Objectives of the Course

Graves (1996) stated that ESP instructors have to formulate clear goals and objectives that meet students' needs which are going to be achieved. By setting up realistic and achievable goals and objectives, the course-developing process can be attainable. Graves (1996) explained the difference between goals and objectives that the objectives are teachable chunks of sentences which form the essence of the course while the goals can be achieved through the teaching skills. David Nunan (1991) demonstrated a clear description of how ESP instructors should state objectives as:

- Students will learn that ...
- Students will be aware of ...
- Students will develop ...

Therefore, clear understanding of goals and objectives will help ESP instructors to "select"

appropriate material to teach and "how" it should be taught. Concerning "how" it should be taught, this paper takes the communicative language teaching (CLT) approach as role-model for designing an ESP course materials using CLT content.

### CLT Syllabus Design

CLT rose to prominence in the 1970s and early 1980s as a result of many disparate developments in Europe and America. The advent of the Europe Common market led to widespread European migration and consequently there was a large population of people who needed to learn foreign languages for work or for personal issues. At that time children were increasingly able to learn foreign languages in schools. Consequently, a number of secondary schools offering languages rose worldwide in the 1970s and 1980s as part of a general trend, curriculum broadening and modernization. As a result, foreign languages study ceased to be confined to the elite academies.

This increasing demand put pressure on educators to change their teaching methods. Traditional methods such as Grammar Tradition (GT) assume that students were aiming for the mastery of target language and students were willing to study for years before expecting to use the language in real life. However, these assumptions were challenged by adult learners who were busy with work and by school children who were less academically able. Educators realized that to motivate these students an alternative approach with a more immediate payoff is necessary. The trend of communicative approach in education provided a further pressure for educators to change their methods. The communicative approach holds the notion that active learning is more effective than passive learning. This idea gained traction in schools and there was a general shift towards using techniques where students were more actively involved such as pair and group work in language classroom.

The development of CLT was helped by new academic ideas. In Britain, applied linguists began to doubt the efficacy of the situational language teaching, the dominant method of teaching in UK in the 1970s and 1980s. This was partly in response to Chomsky's (1956) insights into the nature of language. Chomsky (1956) has shown that the structural theories of language prevalent at the time could not explain the creativity and variety evident in real communication. In addition, British applied linguists such as Henry Widdowson (2002) began to see that a focus on structure was also not helping language students. Widdowson (2002) saw a need for students to develop communicative skills and functional competence in addition to mastering language structure.

Graves (1996) pointed out that the selection of ESP syllabus is based on the availability of materials that determine the course content. He added that teaching materials are tools that can be used figuratively, cut into pieces and rearranged materials to suit the needs, abilities and interest of the students in the course. In CLT syllabus, the appropriateness of course materials includes students comfort, language level, communicative situations, interest and relevance. D. A. Wilkins (1972) created communicative language-learning materials that would meet the needs of the European immigrants who want to learn foreign languages to get jobs. Wilkins (1972) categorized CLT materials into (1) Notional categories including concepts such as time, location, frequency and quantity, and (2) Functional categories that include communicative acts such as offers, complaints, denial and request rather than the traditional categories of grammar and vocabulary. These materials concentrated on various social meanings and structural grammar was explicitly studied. Similarly, there was a study at the University of Illinois (1974) that investigated the effects of the explicit communicative teaching of learning. The study encourages learners to take risk while communicating and to use language constructions other than rote memorized patterns. The study concluded that students who were taught with CLT approach performed significantly better in grammatical and communicative tests than students who had been taught with traditional methods.

### Characteristics of CLT

David Nunan (1991) characterized five features of CLT that reflect the need and desire of learners as well as the connection between the language as it is taught in the classroom and as it is used outside the classroom.

1. An emphasis of learning to communicate through interaction in the target language.
2. The introduction of authentic texts into the learning situation
3. The provision of opportunities for learners to focus not only in language but also on the learning process
4. An enhancement of the learners' own personal experience as important contribution element to classroom learning
5. An attempt to link classroom language learning with language activities outside the classroom

Thus, in the classroom CLT often takes the form of pair and group work and that requires negotiation and cooperation between learners, fluency-based activities that encourage students to develop their confidence, role-plays in which students practice and

develop language functions as well as an explicit use of grammar and punctuation focused activities.

### CLT Course Content

For several years, ESP teaching in Sudan was characterized by the grammatical structural approach. Different students from different academic disciplines have been taught almost the same textbooks and syllabuses content for a number of years. Inevitably, students' needs, interests and expectations are changing rapidly with the rapid development of the world. Therefore, there should be a shift in L2 pedagogy as well as the selection of the course content. However, this paper offers a solution by establishing CLT approach as course content that serves best the students' needs.

The CLT content is not a content-free process (Widdowson, 2002). ESP instructors have to take into account the students' goals and objectives when conceptualizing the content of the course. Dell Hymes (1972) pointed out three aspects teachers have to consider when using CLT as course content. Teachers should develop students' communicative competence; grammatical knowledge of syntax, morphology, phonology as well as social knowledge about how and when to use utterances appropriately (Wikipedia). More specifically, the CLT content can teach students how to speak and write potentially in their academic and professional field. Another important aspect is the intercultural competence; the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately with people from different foreign cultures. The last aspect which is the vocabulary awareness aspect can equip students with vocabulary they need to understand the subject matters as well as to prepare them to communicate professionally.

Consequently, one of the goals of using CLT course content is to develop the intercultural communicative competence. Students can develop the productive language skills and accomplishing these skills interactively.

### CLT Materials Development

Johns (1990) asked centered question "do ESP textbooks really exist?" Johns (1990) stated that ESP instructors find themselves in a situation where they are expected to produce a course that exactly matches the needs and interests of a group of learners, but are expected to do so with very limited time. He commented that many ESP instructors are not provided with ample time for needs analysis, materials research development. Simmons & Page (2010) emphasized the fact that it is important for ESP instructors to give themselves time to listen to the students voice especially in the current educational climate which is dominated by standardization and

testing. However, they suggested these activities to be included in CLT materials which are:

- Role-play
- Interviews
- Information gap
- Games
- Language exchange
- Surveys
- Collaborative Writing
- Pair and Group work
- Learning by teaching

However, not all courses that use the CLT approach will restrict to these activities solely. Some courses will make students take occasional communicative drills and grammar quizzes. The point of using grammatical quizzes is to teach grammar explicitly and intuitively.

### CLT Course Planning

After selecting the appropriate classroom activities, ESP instructors start to organize the classroom activities that best serve the needs and interests of students. Traditional, CLT course planning has the following patterns:

1. Pre-activity: teachers start with what students already know or with a fairly simple task
2. Main Activity: teachers use certain activity to pass to more complex activity
3. Follow-up Activity: to assess the production of students

It is recommended that teachers should be flexible in course planning, i.e. they can adjust the materials accordingly and make slight changes in the course in order to address effectively students interests and needs.

### Course Evaluation

As we can see, developing a new course has many stages but they are inevitable. Before teaching, ESP instructors need to formulate goals, objectives, select teaching materials, conceptualize the content, plan the course and be ready to evaluate the course. However, course evaluation is the last but the most important process of course development. Cummins (1979) introduced two different ways to evaluate the on-going process of the course which are:

1. Implicit evaluation: takes place during the semester that students' grades, participation and motivation give clues to the ESP instructor on how the students' learning is going on.
2. Explicit evaluation: takes place at the end of the course or after students have experienced it. The explicit evaluation can be done through questionnaires, surveys and interviews that teachers ask students to express their attitudes towards the

studied subject matters, instructional method and classroom activities.

According to Cummins (1979) course evaluation is a brave step that ESP instructors have to do and they should be open-minded to implement the comments of students and they must be flexible when redesigning the course materials.

### Conclusion

The purpose of this paper is to introduce a framework for developing an ESP course based on CLT approach. It is clear that using CLT approach in ESP course materials can fulfill the students' academic and professional interests, needs and motivation. Thus, this paper starts with (1) the role of ESP instructor, followed by (2) students' needs, (3) Goals and Objectives, (4) CLT syllabus design, (5) CLT characteristics, (6) CLT content, (7) CLT materials, (8) CLT course planning, and ends by (9) course evaluation. Thus, this paper suggests that ESP instructors have to be flexible to consider the students' needs, interests and motivation when designing course materials. Moreover, ESP instructors should be open-minded that they have to consider the students' evaluation comments and make the necessary changes in the course materials that benefit students' learning goals and objectives. I have provided some valid solutions for ESP instructors that to use CLT approach when designing ESP course materials as CLT can meet the students' needs, interest and motivation. The CLT approach can provide ESP students with the communicative skills they will use in their professional. In addition to that, the CLT approach does not neglect the structural pattern but teaches grammar implicitly so that students can focus on the content rather than the meaning of single words. Therefore, this paper points out important facts that when designing ESP course materials, ESP instructors should not translate some relevant subject matter articles to teach certain ESP discipline through these articles. In fact, ESP instructors have to exert a lot of efforts starting from students' needs analysis and ending by the evaluation of the course.

### List of Abbreviations used in the study

CLT	Communicative Language Teaching
ESP	English for Specific Purposes
ESP-SIG	Special interested Group of ESP
GE	General English
GT	Grammar Tradition
IATFL	International Association of Teachers of English as a Foreign Language
TESOL	Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Language

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