# An Introduction to Syllabus Design and Evaluation by Roberto Rabbini

## Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to examine the currents running through syllabus design and to highlight the issues relevant to teachers considering creating their own curriculum with specific reference to those based in Japan. It will hopefully also help instructors better evaluate their own programs and course books. It is therefore concerned with linguistic theory and theories of language learning and how they are applied to the classroom.

In the past, the focus of syllabuses has shifted from structure to situations, functions and notions to topics and tasks. In fact, as Nunan (1988:52) suggests, with the development of the latter it is palpable that "the traditional distinction between syllabus design and methodology has become blurred". So, how should we initially define syllabus?

## Syllabus: A Definition

A syllabus is an expression of opinion on the nature of language and learning; it acts as a guide for both teacher and learner by providing some goals to be attained. Hutchinson and Waters (1987:80) define syllabus as follows:

At its simplest level a syllabus can be described as a statement of what is to be learnt. It reflects of language and linguistic performance.

This is a rather traditional interpretation of syllabus focusing as it does on outcomes rather than process. However, a syllabus can also be seen as a "summary of the content to which learners will be exposed" (Yalden.1987: 87). It is seen as an approximation of what will be taught and that it cannot accurately predict what will be learnt. Next, we will discuss the various types of approaches available to course designers and the language assumptions they make.

## Product-Oriented Syllabuses or synthetic approach

Also known as the synthetic approach, these kinds of syllabuses emphasize the product of language learning and are prone to intervention from an authority.

### The Structural Approach

Historically, the most prevalent of syllabus type is perhaps the grammatical syllabus in which the selection and grading of the content is based on the complexity and simplicity of grammatical items. The learner is expected to master each structural step and add it to her grammar collection. **As such the focus is on the outcomes or the product.**

One problem facing the syllabus designer pursuing a grammatical order to sequencing input is that the ties connecting the structural items maybe rather feeble. A more fundamental criticism is that the grammatical syllabus focuses on only one aspect of language, namely grammar, whereas in truth there exists many more aspects to language. Finally, recent corpus based research suggests there is a divergence between the grammar of the spoken and of the written language; raising implications for the grading of content in grammar based syllabuses.

### The Situational Approach

These limitations led to an alternative approach where the point of departure became situational needs rather than grammatical units. Here, the principal organizing characteristic is a list of situations which reflects the way language and behavior are used every day outside the classroom. **Thus**, **by linking structural theory to situations the learner is able to induce the meaning from a relevant context.**

One advantage of the situational approach is that motivation will be heightened since it is "learner- rather than subject-centered" (Wilkins.1976: 16). However, a situational syllabus will be limited for students whose needs were not encompassed by the situations in the syllabus. This dissatisfaction led Wilkins to describe notional and communicative categories which had a significant impact on syllabus design.

### The Notional/Functional Approach

Wilkins' criticism of structural and situational approaches lies in the fact that they answer only the 'how' or 'when' and 'where' of language (Brumfit and Johnson. 1979:84). Instead, he enquires "what it is they communicate through language" (Op.Cit.:18). **Thus, the starting point for a syllabus is the communicative purpose and conceptual meaning of language i.e. notions and functions, as opposed to grammatical items and situational elements which remain but are relegated to a subsidiary role.**

In order to establish objectives, the needs of the learners will have to be analyzed by the various types of communication in which the learner has to confront. Consequently, **needs analysis** has an association with notional-functional syllabuses. Although needs analysis implies a focus on the learner, critics of this approach suggest that a new list has replaced the old one. Where once structural/situational items were used a new list consisting of notions and functions has become the main focus in a syllabus. White (1988:77) claims that "language functions do not usually occur in isolation" and there are also difficulties of selecting and grading function and form. Clearly, the task of deciding whether a given function (i.e. persuading), is easier or more difficult than another (i.e. approving), makes the task harder to approach.

**The above approaches belong to the product-oriented category of syllabuses.** An alternative path to curriculum design would be to adopt **process** **oriented** principles, which assume that language can be learnt **experientially** as opposed to the step-by-step procedure of the synthetic approach.

## Process-Oriented Syllabuses or the analytical approach

Process-Oriented Syllabuses, or the analytical approach, developed as a result of a sense of failure in product-oriented courses to enhance communicative language skills. It is a process rather than a product. That is, focus is not on what the student will have accomplished on completion of the program, but on the specification of learning tasks and activities that s/he will undertake during the course.

### Procedural/Task-Based Approaches

Prabhu's (1979) 'Bangalore Project' is a classic example of a procedural syllabus. Here, the question concerning *'what'* becomes subordinate to the question concerning *'how'*. The focus shifts from the linguistic element to the pedagogical, with an emphasis on learning or learner. Within such a framework the selection, ordering and grading of content is no longer wholly significant for the syllabus designer.

Arranging the program around tasks such as information- and opinion-gap activities, it was hoped that the learner would perceive the language subconsciously whilst consciously concentrating on solving the meaning behind the tasks. There appears to be an indistinct boundary between this approach and that of language teaching methodology, and evaluating the merits of the former remain complicated.

A task-based approach assumes that speaking a language is a skill best perfected through practice and interaction, and uses tasks and activities to encourage learners to use the language communicatively in order to achieve a purpose. Tasks must be relevant to the real world language needs of the student. That is, the underlying learning theory of task based and communicative language teaching seems to suggest that activities in which language is employed to complete meaningful tasks, enhances learning.

### Learner-Led Syllabuses

The notion of basing an approach on how learners learn was proposed by Breen and Candlin (1984). Here the emphasis lays with the learner, who it is hoped will be involved in the implementation of the syllabus design as far as that is practically possible. By being fully aware of the course they are studying it is believed that their interest and motivation will increase, coupled with the positive effect of nurturing the skills required to learn.

However, as suggested earlier, a predetermined syllabus provides support and guidance for the teacher and should not be so easily dismissed. Critics have suggested that a learner-led syllabus seems radical and utopian in that it will be difficult to track as the direction of the syllabus will be largely the responsibility of the learners. Moreover, without the mainstay of a course book, a lack of aims may come about. This leads to the final syllabus design to be examined ; the proportional approach as propounded by Yalden (1987).

### The Proportional Approach

The proportional syllabus basically attempts to develop an **"overall competence"** (Op.Cit.:97). It consists of a number of elements with theme playing a linking role through the units. This theme is designated by the learners. It is expected initially that form will be of central value, but later, the focus will veer towards interactional components ; the syllabus is designed to be dynamic, not static, with ample opportunity for feedback and flexibility (ibid:100).

The shift from form to interaction can occur at any time and is not limited to a particular stratum of learner ability. As Yalden (ibid:87) observes, it is important for a syllabus to indicate explicitly what will be taught, "not what will be learned".

This practical approach with its focus on flexibility and spiral method of language sequencing leading to the recycling of language, seems relevant for learners who lack exposure to the target language beyond the classroom. But how can an EFL teacher pinpoint the salient features of the approaches discussed above?

## Syllabus Design and Evaluation

Initially, several questions must be posed. Do you want a product or process oriented syllabus? Will the course be teacher or learner led? What are the goals of the program and the needs of your students? This leads to an examination of the degree to which the various elements will be integrated, which is of great significance to White (1988:92) who comments:

A complete syllabus specification will include all five aspects : **structure, function, situation, topic, skills**. The difference between syllabuses will lie in the priority given to each of these aspects.

Eclecticism is a common feature of the majority of course books under the communicative banner currently on offer. Attempting to combine the various aspects of language has also been addressed by Hutchinson and Waters who state:

Any teaching material must, in reality, operate several syllabuses at the same time. One of them will probably be used as the principal organizing feature, but the others are still there (op.cit.:89).

What should the language teacher based in Japan make of this review? What points are relevant to them?

Traditionally, the grammar-translation method (mid-nineteenth century to Second World War) has been the staple of the language class in Japanese secondary education in spite of efforts from programs such as JET. Students are expected to understand and memorize lists of vocabulary, phrasal verbs / idioms, grammar rules etc for the purpose of translating selected texts and preparation for university entrance tests. On graduating from either high school or university, many students remain unable to communicate at even a basic level.

Widdows and Voller (1991) found that Japanese learners desired oral-aural skills whilst rejecting a need for structural knowledge or technical writing. As Long and Russell (1999:27) observe:

It seems reasonable after years of English classes focused on grammar, Japanese students would want more conversational practice, want to have more confidence and better speaking skills.

This implies that a syllabus focusing on the communicative aspect of language would satisfy the needs and desires of young Japanese adult learners. Group psychology, years of passive learning and the grammatical syllabus under attack here, ensure that most 15 to 25 year olds in Japan remain at the false beginner / elementary level in communicative terms. Such learners lack confidence in their productive skills and require communicative activities to activate the language they have learned whilst building their self-assurance. The importance of adopting a communicative approach is compounded by the fact that the university entrance examinations are the "true driving force of EFL education in Japanese high schools" (Gorsuch 1999:9). Despite requests by the Japanese Ministry of education for syllabus designers to regard the four skills of reading, writing, listening and speaking equally, materials writers continue to base their trade on helping students prepare for exams. In viewing language as a system of grammatical and vocabulary items, the "communicative ethos of the course of study" (ibid:9) is neglected.

In light of this background, and given the monolingual nature of Japanese society and the lack of exposure to the target language outside the classroom, a task based strategy with a blend of approaches and emphasis on communicative learning, may well be one of the most suitable types of syllabus design on offer for language learners in Japan.

## Conclusion

Clearly, there is a vast amount of material to disseminate when considering syllabus design. The numerous approaches touched on here all offer valuable insights into creating a language program. The synthetic approaches of structuralism, situational and functional-notional, all have objectives to be attained, a content to be processed and learnt. The foundations of the product syllabuses remain fundamentally similar, whereas the underlying assumptions about language and language learning from the analytic approaches differ greatly: process type syllabuses assert that learning a language is transient and cannot be itemized ; pedagogical procedure takes precedence over content.

If our assumptions about the nature of linguistics and language learning is one of "language as communication" (Richards and Rodgers 1986:69) then a syllabus based around activities and tasks which promote real and meaningful communication will seem advantageous. We have shown that the false beginner in Japan will have learned structural rules to a surprisingly complex degree, yet may find it difficult to use, or indeed, may never have had an opportunity to use the language learned. Consequently, the belief that learning is facilitated by activities that include real communication, may be the most suitable belief to adopt in the Japanese classroom.

Further points to consider when critically reviewing a syllabus are the objectives of the course as well as the needs of the learners. Ultimately, and perhaps ideally, a hybrid syllabus will result purely due to pragmatic reasons. As Hutchinson and Waters (1987:51) suggest:

It is wise to take an eclectic approach, taking what is useful from each theory and trusting also in the evidence of your own experience as a teacher.

Thus, to what extent has an integration of the various approaches taken place? Does the syllabus specification include all aspects? If yes, how is priority established? These questions must also form part of the criteria when designing or assessing your own syllabus.

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# Key Issues in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) Curriculum Development

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Based on insights gained from developing the curriculum for Language Preparation for Employment in the Health Sciences and a review of the literature on ESP, this paper is intended to offer theoretical support for ESL instructors developing ESP curricula for ESL contexts.

## Background Information and Statement of Purpose

In late 1999, I was asked to develop a content-based curriculum for a ten-week course for a select group of immigrants living in Ottawa, Canada. The course was held at Algonquin College of Applied Arts and Technology and was funded by the Language for Employment Related Needs Project (LERN). The curriculum consisted of two distinct phases: language delivery and employment awareness. Although the employment awareness phase (independently developed and delivered by Local Agencies Serving Immigrants) was an integral component of the program, the focus of this paper is on insights gained from the language-delivery phase.

Dudley Evans and St. John (1998) identify **five key roles for the ESP practitioner**:

* teacher
* course designer and materials provider
* collaborator
* researcher
* evaluator.

It is the role of ESP practitioner as course designer and materials provider that this paper addresses. The premise of this paper is based on David Nunan's observations about the teacher as a curriculum developer.

It seems fairly obvious that if teachers are to be the ones responsible for developing the curriculum, they need the time, the skills and the support to do so. Support may include curriculum models and guidelines · and may include support from individuals acting in a curriculum advisory position. The provision of such support cannot be removed and must not be seen in isolation, from the curriculum (Nunan, 1987, p. 75).

Nunan recognized that issues of time, skills and support are key for teachers faced with the very real task of developing curricula. The intent of this paper is to provide the ESL instructor as ESP course designer and materials provider with theoretical support. This paper begins with a discussion of the origins of ESP. Some key notions about ESP are then addressed:

* absolute and variable characteristics
* types of ESP
* characteristics of ESP courses
* the meaning of the word 'special' in ESP

Key issues in ESP curriculum design are suggested: **a) abilities required for successful communication in occupational settings; b)content language aquisition versus general language aquisition; c) heterogeneous versus homogenous learner group; and d) materials development.**

## The Origins of ESP

Certainly, a great deal about the origins of ESP could be written. Notably, there are three reasons common to the emergence of all ESP: the demands of a Brave New World, a revolution in linguistics, and focus on the learner (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987).

Hutchinson and Waters (1987) note that two key historical periods breathed life into ESP. First, the end of the Second World War brought with it an " ... age of enormous and unprecedented expansion in scientific, technical and economic activity on an international scale · for various reasons, most notably the economic power of the United States in the post-war world, the role [of international language] fell to English" (p. 6). Second, the Oil Crisis of the early 1970s resulted in Western money and knowledge flowing into the oil-rich countries. The language of this knowledge became English.

The general effect of all this development was to exert pressure on the language teaching profession to deliver the required goods. Whereas English had previously decided its own destiny, it now became subject to the wishes, needs and demands of people other than language teachers (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987, p.7).

The second key reason cited as having a tremendous impact on the emergence of ESP was a revolution in linguistics. Whereas traditional linguists set out to describe the features of language, revolutionary pioneers in linguistics began to focus on the ways in which language is used in real communication. Hutchinson and Waters (1987) point out that one significant discovery was in the ways that spoken and written English vary. In other words, given the particular context in which English is used, the variant of English will change. This idea was taken one step farther. If language in different situations varies, then tailoring language instruction to meet the needs of learners in specific contexts is also possible. Hence, in the late 1960s and the early 1970s there were many attempts to describe English for Science and Technology (EST). Hutchinson and Waters (1987) identify Ewer and Latorre, Swales, Selinker and Trimble as a few of the prominent descriptive EST pioneers.

The final reason Hutchinson and Waters (1987) cite as having influenced the emergence of ESP has less to do with linguistics and everything to do psychology. Rather than simply focus on the method of language delivery, more attention was given to the ways in which learners acquire language and the differences in the ways language is acquired. Learners were seen to employ different learning strategies, use different skills, enter with different learning schemata, and be motivated by different needs and interests. Therefore, focus on the learners' needs became equally paramount as the methods employed to disseminate linguistic knowledge. Designing specific courses to better meet these individual needs was a natural extension of this thinking. To this day, the catchword in ESL circles is learner-centered or learning-centered.

## Key Notions About ESP

In this discussion, four key notions will be discussed. They are as follows: a) the distinctions between the absolute and variable characteristics of ESP, b) types of ESP, c) characteristics of ESP courses, and d) the meaning of the word 'special' in ESP.

### Absolute and Variable Characteristics of ESP

Ten years later, theorists Dudley-Evans and St John (1998) modified Strevens' original definition of ESP to form their own. Let us begin with Strevens. He defined ESP by identifying its absolute and variable characteristics. Strevens' (1988) definition makes a distinction between four absolute and two variable characteristics:

I. Absolute characteristics:

ESP consists of English language teaching which is:

* designed to meet specified needs of the learner;
* related in content (i.e. in its themes and topics) to particular disciplines, occupations and activities;
* centred on the language appropriate to those activities in syntax, lexis, discourse, semantics, etc., and analysis of this discourse;
* in contrast with General English.

II. Variable characteristics:

ESP may be, but is not necessarily:

* restricted as to the language skills to be learned (e.g. reading only);
* not taught according to any pre-ordained methodology (pp.1-2).

Anthony (1997) notes that there has been considerable recent debate about what ESP means despite the fact that it is an approach which has been widely used over the last three decades. At a 1997 Japan Conference on ESP, Dudley-Evans offered a modified definition. The revised definition he and St. John postulate is as follows:

I. Absolute Characteristics

* ESP is defined to meet specific needs of the learner;
* ESP makes use of the underlying methodology and activities of the discipline it serves;
* ESP is centred on the language (grammar, lexis, register), skills, discourse and genres appropriate to these activities.

II. Variable Characteristics

* ESP may be related to or designed for specific disciplines;
* ESP may use, in specific teaching situations, a different methodology from that of general English;
* ESP is likely to be designed for adult learners, either at a tertiary level institution or in a professional work situation. It could, however, be for learners at secondary school level;
* ESP is generally designed for intermediate or advanced students;
* Most ESP courses assume some basic knowledge of the language system, but it can be used with beginners (1998, pp. 4-5).

Dudley-Evans and St. John have removed the absolute characteristic that 'ESP is in contrast with General English' and added more variable characteristics. They assert that ESP is not necessarily related to a specific discipline. Furthermore, ESP is likely to be used with adult learners although it could be used with young adults in a secondary school setting.

As for a broader definition of ESP, Hutchinson and Waters (1987) theorize, "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" (p. 19). Anthony (1997) notes that, it is not clear where ESP courses end and general English courses begin; numerous non-specialist ESL instructors use an ESP approach in that their syllabi are based on analysis of learner needs and their own personal specialist knowledge of using English for real communication.

### Types of ESP

David Carter (1983) identifies three types of ESP:

* English as a restricted language
* English for Academic and Occupational Purposes
* English with specific topics.

The language used by air traffic controllers or by waiters are examples of English as a restricted language. Mackay and Mountford (1978) clearly illustrate the difference between restricted language and language with this statement:

... the language of international air-traffic control could be regarded as 'special', in the sense that the repertoire required by the controller is strictly limited and can be accurately determined situationally, as might be the linguistic needs of a dining-room waiter or air-hostess. However, such restricted repertoires are not languages, just as a tourist phrase book is not grammar. Knowing a restricted 'language' would not allow the speaker to communicate effectively in novel situation, or in contexts outside the vocational environment (pp. 4-5).

The second type of ESP identified by Carter (1983) is English for Academic and Occupational Purposes. In the 'Tree of ELT' (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987), ESP is broken down into three branches: a) English for Science and Technology (EST), b) English for Business and Economics (EBE), and c) English for Social Studies (ESS). Each of these subject areas is further divided into two branches: English for Academic Purposes (EAP) and English for Occupational Purposes (EOP). An example of EOP for the EST branch is 'English for Technicians' whereas an example of EAP for the EST branch is 'English for Medical Studies'.

Hutchinson and Waters (1987) do note that there is not a clear-cut distinction between EAP and EOP: "· people can work and study simultaneously; it is also likely that in many cases the language learnt for immediate use in a study environment will be used later when the student takes up, or returns to, a job" (p. 16). Perhaps this explains Carter's rationale for categorizing EAP and EOP under the same type of ESP. It appears that Carter is implying that the end purpose of both EAP and EOP are one in the same: employment. However, despite the end purpose being identical, the means taken to achieve the end is very different indeed. I contend that EAP and EOP are different in terms of focus on Cummins' (1979) notions of cognitive academic proficiency versus basic interpersonal skills. This is examined in further detail below.

The third and final type of ESP identified by Carter (1983) is English with specific topics. Carter notes that it is only here where emphasis shifts from purpose to topic. This type of ESP is uniquely concerned with anticipated future English needs of, for example, scientists requiring English for postgraduate reading studies, attending conferences or working in foreign institutions. However, I argue that this is not a separate type of ESP. Rather it is an integral component of ESP courses or programs which focus on situational language. This situational language has been determined based on the interpretation of results from needs analysis of authentic language used in target workplace settings.

### Characteristics of ESP Courses

The characteristics of ESP courses identified by Carter (1983) are discussed here. He states that there are three features common to ESP courses: a) authentic material, b) purpose-related orientation, and c) self-direction.

If we revisit Dudley-Evans' (1997) claim that ESP should be offered at an intermediate or advanced level, use of authentic learning materials is entirely feasible. Closer examination of ESP materials will follow; suffice it to say at this juncture that use of **authentic content materials**, modified or unmodified in form, are indeed a feature of ESP, particularly in self-directed study and research tasks. For Language Preparation for Employment in the Health Sciences, a large component of the student evaluation was based on an independent study assignment in which the learners were required to investigate and present an area of interest. The students were encouraged to conduct research using a variety of different resources, including the Internet.

Purpose-related orientation refers to the simulation of communicative tasks required of the target setting. Carter (1983) cites student simulation of a conference, involving the preparation of papers, reading, notetaking, and writing. At Algonquin College, English for business courses have involved students in the design and presentation of a unique business venture, including market research, pamphlets and logo creation. The students have presented all final products to invited ESL classes during a poster presentation session. For our health science program, students attended a seminar on improving your listening skills. They practiced listening skills, such as listening with empathy, and then employed their newly acquired skills during a fieldtrip to a local community centre where they were partnered up with English-speaking residents.

Finally, **self-direction is characteristic of ESP courses** in that the " ... point of including self-direction ... is that ESP is concerned with **turning learners into users**" (Carter, 1983, p. 134). In order for self-direction to occur, the learners must have a certain degree of freedom to decide when, what, and how they will study. Carter (1983) also adds that there must be a systematic attempt by teachers to teach the learners how to learn by teaching them about learning strategies. Is it necessary, though, to teach high-ability learners such as those enrolled in the health science program about learning strategies? I argue that it is not. Rather, what is essential for these learners is learning how to access information in a new culture.

### The Meaning of the Word 'Special' in ESP

One simple clarification will be made here: special language and specialized aim are two entirely different notions. It was Perren (1974) who noted that confusion arises over these two notions. If we revisit Mackay and Mountford's restricted repertoire, we can better understand the idea of a special language. Mackay and Mountford (1978) state:

The only practical way in which we can understand the notion of special language is as a restricted repertoire of words and expressions selected from the whole language because that restricted repertoire covers every requirement within a well-defined context, task or vocation (p. 4).

On the other hand, a specialized aim refers to the purpose for which learners learn a language, not the nature of the language they learn (Mackay & Mountford, 1978). 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.

## Key Issues in ESP Curriculum Design

In this section, key issues in ESP curriculum design for ESL contexts are examined. The issues explored here are a product of my professional experience developing the curriculum for Language Preparation for Employment in the Health Sciences. This experience has been supported with a review of the literature on ESP.

### Abilities Required for Successful Communication in Occupational Settings

Cummins (1979) theorized a dichotomy between basic interpersonal communication skills (BICS) and cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP). The former refers to the language skills used in the everyday informal language used with friends, family and co-workers. The latter refers to a language proficiency required to make sense of and use academic language. Situations in which individuals use BICS are characterized by contexts that provide relatively easy access to meaning. However, CALP use occurs in contexts that offer fewer contextual clues.

After having developed and taught the curriculum for Language Preparation for Employment in the Health Sciences, I have reached the conclusion that there are three abilities necessary for successful communication in a professional target setting. I have added a third skill or ability to Cummins' theory in order to complete the ESP picture.

The first ability required in order to successfully communicate in an occupational setting is the ability to use the particular jargon characteristic of that specific occupational context. The second is the ability to use a more generalized set of academic skills, such as conducting research and responding to memoranda. With the health science group, this was largely related to understanding a new culture. The third is the ability to use the language of everyday informal talk to communicate effectively, regardless of occupational context. Examples of this include chatting over coffee with a colleague or responding to an informal email message.

The task for the ESP developer is to ensure that all three of these abilities are integrated into and integrated in the curriculum. This is a difficult task due to the incredible amount of research required. Close collaboration between content experts and the curriculum developer was not possible during the development stages for the health science curriculum. In retrospect, the experience and knowledge of health science faculty would have lessened the workload in this area tremendously. Fortunately, there does exist a wealth of information on academic and general language skills. The trick involved in the interweaving process is to develop a model that best integrates the restricted repertoire with the academic and general for the learners in question.

In the case of Language Preparation for Employment in the Health Sciences, there were so many possible potential future occupational settings to research and I had to cope with limited development time. I simply opted to identify academic skills that were transferable to most health science occupational settings. This required an inventory of all possible health science occupations, identification of the past occupational experiences of the learners in the pilot program, and identification of academic language skills. All of this information was then cross-referenced with the general language objectives for the identified group of learners.

It is my opinion that because ESP requires comprehensive needs analysis and because the learning-centred curriculum is not static, it is impossible to expect that the developer be in a position to identify the perfect balance of the abilities noted above for any particular group of learners. In reality, a large part of this responsibility is that of the instructors; it is the instructors who are in the best position to identify changing learner needs and who are in the best position to ensure that all students receive a balanced diet of language.

### Content Language Acquisition Versus General Language Acquisition

When I first received the proposal for the health science pilot program, the ratio of content to language instruction had already been identified: 2 hours of content lecture for every 23 hours of language/content instruction. Given this starting point, one of the central questions that needed to be answered was how much time would be devoted to vocabulary and content knowledge acquisition, as opposed to the time spent developing general and academic language skills.

Although a tentative balance was drafted prior to classroom delivery, the balance shifted on a daily basis. In the end, it was determined by both instructors that more time need be allotted for pure content and more time need be created for team-taught activities. The final weekly breakdown of 25 hours consisted of the following:

* 8 hours of Integrated Language Learning (ESL instructor)
* 6 hours of Health Science Lectures (content instructor)
* 4 hours of Workplace Communication (jointly facilitated)
* 3 hours of Medical terminology (content instructor)
* 2 hours of Pathophysiology (content instructor)
* 2 hours of Applied Computer Skills (ESL instructor)

The first thing that is apparent from this breakdown, is that time devoted to developing general language and academic skills far outweighs the time devoted to the acquisition of content knowledge. However, it was recommended that the content instructor be present for a considerable more amount of time; it was observed that there was such an overlap between content knowledge, academic proficiency, and general language that we could better interweave many of the activities as a team.

The learners indicated that they desired more opportunity to interact with the content instructor, in addition to attending the old-style lecture format. Indeed, both instructors noted that the students were highly motivated to attend the content lectures and yet additional support from the ESL instructor was required because, in order to meet the learners' needs, we could not teach the restricted repertoire in isolation. What is more, it was highly unreasonable to assume that the content instructor would take on the role of ESL instructor.

Finally, it was observed that the majority of the students with post-secondary training in the health sciences possessed a basic knowledge of Greco-Latino terminology. Consequently, we determined that less time would be devoted to learning terminology in order to follow the content lectures. Most of the students could already recognize meaning, but not produce it. It was determined that more time should be allotted for work on pronunciation and learning the spelling of health science terminology. Moreover, much more time would be spent on communication for the workplace; in this way, they students would be afforded ample opportunity to integrate and practice the restricted repertoire acquired in content lectures and the everyday language acquired in the language classes.

### Heterogeneous Learner Group Versus Homogeneous Learner Group

There are a number of variables which characterize a heterogeneous learner group. I argue that variations in language level, prior education and work experience can be accommodated only to a certain extent. Minimum entrance standards must be established in the areas of language level, motivation, and prior education and experience. Most importantly, these standards must be strictly enforced at the time of placement.

Due to the limited time frame for the development of the health science pilot program curriculum and the fact that the program was scheduled to begin in the middle of the academic term, the minimum general language entrance requirement was dropped from high to low intermediate in order to generate a large enough pool of suitable candidates. Although no pre or post-test was to be administered by evaluation team, I was required to recruit twice the number of students to be admitted to the program: 20 students would be in the pilot group and 20 would be in the control group. In the end, 16 students formed each group. The result was that there were some genuinely intermediate students mixed in with a majority of high intermediate, and a few advanced students.

Based on observations of a four-week English for Business course, Yogman and Kaylani (1996) conclude that there appears to be a minimum proficiency level that is required for students to participate in predominately content-related activities. This supports my finding that those students who were struggling to catch up with general language proficiency simply found the content activities to be overwhelming.

One student in the health science program commented that she had to learn both the language and the content at the time. This particular student was at such a disadvantage because, whereas the other students were doctors and dentists, she had no prior education or work experience in health science. Another student was an experienced doctor, but possessed a very low level of language proficiency. Either case would have been frustrating for anyone. One strategy we began to employ was to have the intermediate students focus on developing their listening skills during the content lecture. Those students without the background knowledge, who possessed the language skills, were to ask for clarification from their peers or instructors. The advanced students were encouraged to record as much detail as possible, carry out supplemental reading that pertained to the lecture topics and to assist their peers whenever possible.

### Materials Development

Do ESP textbooks really exist? This is central question Johns (1990) addresses. One of the core dilemmas he presents is that "ESP teachers find themselves in a situation where they are expected to produce a course that exactly matches the needs of a group of learners, but are expected to do so with no, or very limited, preparation time" (Johns, 1990, p. 91).

In the real world, many ESL instructors/ESP developers are not provided with ample time for needs analysis, materials research and materials development. There are many texts which claim to meet the needs of ESP courses. Johns (1990) comments that no one ESP text can live up to its name. He suggests that the only real solution is that a resource bank of pooled materials be made available to all ESP instructors (Johns, 1990). The only difference between this resource bank and the one that is available in every educational setting -- teachers' filing cabinets -- is that this one is to include cross-indexed doable, workable content-based (amongst other) resources.

It is my experience that this suggestion is not doable. If teachers are so pressed for time, will they have the time to submit and cross-index resources? Rather, I believe that there is value in all texts - some more than others. Familiarizing oneself with useful instructional materials is part of growing as a teacher, regardless of the nature of purpose for learning. Given that ESP is an approach and not a subject to be taught, curricular materials will unavoidably be pieced together, some borrowed and others designed specially. Resources will include authentic materials, ESL materials, ESP materials, and teacher-generated materials.

Note that an excellent point of departure for novice ESP curriculum developers is with lists of ESL publishers which have been made publicly available on-line. Browsing publishers' sites takes a few minutes, review copies can be requested immediately and copies can be sent express.

## Concluding Remarks

This paper has discussed the origins of ESP, addressed key notions about ESP and examined issues in ESP curriculum design. The content of the paper was determined by a need identified based on my professional experience as an ESL instructor designing and delivering the content-based language program - Language Preparation for Employment in the Health Sciences. These issues, where possible, have been supported by current and pertinent academic literature. It is my sincerest hope that these observations will lend insight into the challenges facing the ESL instructor acting as ESP curriculum developer.

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# Content-based Business English Course for EFL

Yi-chen Chen
This course plan is designed for an English for Specific Purposes (ESP) program with a content-based syllabus, and is designed especially for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners. Controversial issues—like whether to focus on learning process or product, and the proportion of language and content—are taken into consideration specifically to meet EFL learners’ needs. Learners in the program will use English to complete a business-related task—developing a marketing plan. They will be trained to make a formal oral presentation and to write business documents in formal English.

## Introduction

This course plan is designed for English as Specific Purposes (ESP) program with a content-based syllabus, and is designed especially for English as Foreign Language (EFL) learners. In EFL countries, people do not have immediate needs of using L2 learned in their daily lives; one common situation of putting English into use is to utilize it in particular occasions, such as in workplaces because of career needs. Therefore, ESP education is getting popular recently.

Business English—a branch of ESP curriculum—is especially prevalent due to the trend of globalization around the world. As companies are becoming internationalized, employees are required to possess a certain level of English proficiency to raise the competitiveness. The following ESP course design is centered at developing a marketing plan. Controversial issues—like whether to focus on learning process or product, and the proportion of language and content—are taken into consideration specifically to meet EFL learners’ needs. Learners will learn to use English in completing business-related tasks, including giving formal oral presentations and writing business documents.

## Theoretical Background

### English for Specific Purposes

Since the communicative approach emerged in the late 1960s, being capable of using a language in real-world communication becomes the main objective in the field of language teaching (Richards, 2001). Unlike the traditional Structural Method that focuses on learners’ grammatical competence, Communicative Language Teaching approach (CLT) emphasizes communicative competence—**the ability not only to apply the grammatical rules of a language in order to form grammatically correct sentences but also to know when and where to use these sentences and to whom (Richards, Platt & Platt, 1998).**
Responding to this new trend, the ESP movement has emerged and put practical concerns of language learning in the first place. Learners of ESP are those who have already mastered general English but still need it for use in their jobs. Therefore, specialized linguistic characteristics of different disciplines are studied and integrated into language teaching syllabus designs. Learners’ needs and expectations, moreover, have become the basic principle for course designs (Richards, 2001).

In terms of ESP course design, **a task-based approach is recommended**. On the one hand, students in an ESP course are usually adults who come for special needs, such as needs in the workplace; therefore, special constraints might operate in the teaching context, like an unavoidable absence (Cunningworth, 1995, p.133). On the other hand, since an ESP course aims at developing abilities and skills for learners to deal with real-life situations that they would encounter, problem-solving tasks should be the main stream in the courses (Cunningworth, 1995, p.134). As a result, a task which can give learners not only a sense of achievement but opportunities to evaluate their performances against real-world criteria would be important for an ESP course.

### Content-based Syllabus

A content-based syllabus, or a topical syllabus, is developed in accordance with the principles of ESP. One common issue of the syllabus design is whether a product or a process should be the main focus. **Hutchinson and Waters (1983, as cited in Nunan, 1993, p.49) suggest that the best work in the ESP area usually focuses on a process rather than a product**. **However, in real world situations, language often acts as a means in the process of completing tasks.** Therefore, ESP should pay attention to not only the process of learning, but also the product.

Another issue of **content-based syllabi is the way of grading tasks.** With ESP and a topical syllabus, an obvious means of grading content is with reference to concepts associated with the subject questions (Nunan, 1993, p.70). However, the crucial point is to let learners understand the relationship between language and content. Therefore, in Mohan’s (1986) model, content facilitates learning not merely through language but also with it; **an ESP course could be organized by classroom activities which combines specific practical aspects and general theoretical aspects.**
In addition to the above concerns, the balance of content and language is also important. Content should be a vehicle to drive language learning (Hadley, 2001). In a content-based syllabus, the language is the bones and skeleton while the content is the flesh and blood; the language could be seen as a means to complete a content task. Therefore, not only the content but also the four language skills should be taught.

However, unlike ESL countries where learners use the language often in their daily life, in EFL countries, the language is rarely used outside classrooms. It is comparatively easier for ESL learners to master the language in specialized contexts than for EFL learners. Therefore, though students in ESP program are supposed to master general language skills, students in EFL context should give special attention to language skill training.

### Course Rationales

The present course design is planned for ESP students. Paying special attention to the issues mentioned above, this course would be designed as a content-based language course program with the following criteria:

* The course is a self-contained program consisting of several modules.
* The process of learning is as important as the product.
* The course would be comprised of many tasks. The tasks are steps to complete the final product.
* The course is sequenced by the steps in accomplishing the final product.
* Language is given more emphasis than content. Four-skill training is integrated into every task.

## Descriptions of the Course Designs

### Applicable Situations

This program is targeted business-related language training. The course can be implemented in Vocational Training Centers. It can be adopted by local companies that aim at entering international markets or by multinational enterprises that want to improve employees’ language proficiency. The program can also be a part of a school course for College of Commerce in college-level schools. The span of one course program would last twelve weeks, with ten topics covered.

### Subjects

#### Entry and Existing Levels

The target students are adult EFL learners. Their English proficiency level should be better than intermediate. They are required to take an English proficiency test before they enter the program in order to prove that they reach proper proficiency levels. The lowest accepted test scores would be 550 on the TOEIC test, or other equally comparable scores.

In terms of content knowledge, learners who take this program probably have college degrees and have been in the workplace for a couple of years, or they could be college students majoring in business, management, or international trade. They either have real hand-on experiences about business, or they have professional subject knowledge of business.

In terms of language proficiency, learners in the program have reached an intermediate level—the level at which the program starts. The level learners maybe expected to reach at the end of the program would be high-intermediate.

### Topics and Materials

The main topic of the program is “marketing.” Subtopics are step-by-step procedures of making a marketing plan. Starting from analyzing current situations of a target company, the program moves on to set up objectives for a business, to investigate targeted markets, and to design marketing tactics; the final step is to prepare emergency measures about market controls.

Since the program is content-based and learners have reached an intermediate level of proficiency, no additional explanation and separate class hours would be given to language instructions. However, during the process of the program, all four skills—reading, listening, speaking, and writing—would be practiced while understanding content, discussing problems, and completing tasks. One article for reading would be given every class; vocabulary would be learned.

In addition, to raise students’ interests and to introduce business cultures from around the world, videos are integrated. By watching videos, students’ listening ability will improve; in addition, the videos can display different business cultures in other countries. In the following plan, the American TV reality show “The Apprentice” is used. The TV series is about a group of people fighting for becoming the apprentice of the millionaire, Donald Trump. They took business tasks and competed with each other; the one who beat all other competitors becomes the apprentice. Each episode is used as a case study.

### Course Sequence

The program is self-contained in order to fit businessmen’s uncertain schedules. Therefore, except for the final two weeks which are designed for project presentations, the other ten weeks cover ten different topics. The sequence of the ten topics ia based on the sequence of making a marketing plan. In brief, the course sequence follows the content sequence.

## Syllabus Design

### Week 1

**Topic:** Starting from the Beginning—Introduction to Marketing

**Content Objectives:**
  1. To define “marketing.”
  2. To develop concepts of marketing.
  3. To understand the marketing management process.

**Language Objectives:**
  1. To become familiar with vocabulary.
  2. To use a “graphic organizer” in developing ideas.
  3. To write paragraphs by using concept maps.

**Hand-on:** The Apprentice.
  1. To become acquainted with the process the competition.
  2. Discuss which group wins and why.
  3. Use a “graphic organizer” to picture the marketing plans in the episode.

### Week 2

**Topic:** What is a “Marketing Plan”

**Lead-in:** The Apprentice.
  1. Use a “graphic organizer” to picture the marketing plans in the episode.
  2. Guess/discuss which group will win and why.

**Content Objectives:**
  1. To figure out elements of a marketing plan.
  2. To understand the structures of a marketing plan.
  3. To know standard planning frameworks.

**Language Objectives:**
  1. To become familiar with vocabulary.
  2. To use words learned in discussion.

### Week 3

**Topic:** Getting to Know How to Analyze Situations

**Content Objectives:**
  1. To know terminology of marketing research
  2. To understand the marketing research process
  3. To use marketing research techniques and tools.
  4. To figure out components of MKIS (Marketing Information Systems).

**Language Objectives:**
  1. To become familiar with vocabulary.
  2. To design a marketing research tool, like an interview protocol or questionnaires.
  3. To practice using the designed techniques, like a simulated phone interview.

**Hand-on:**
  1. Choose a target product or a service.
  2. Develop marketing tools, and conduct a small-scale marketing research.

### Week 4

**Topic:** Understanding Markets—How to Analyze Situations

**Content Objectives:**
  1. To learn situation-analyzing skills and tools, like SWOT analysis, PETS analysis, and Five-Force analysis.
  2. To compare and contrast the tools and their uses.

**Language Objectives:**
  1. To learn how to write paragraphs to compare and contrast things.

**Hand-on:** The Apprentice.
  1. Discuss which group wins and why by using the tools in analyzing situations.

**Task 1**: Marketing Plan Step One: Analysis
  1. Pick a company/organization.
  2. Find information about the selected company/organization by using marketing research techniques.

### Week 5

**Topic:** Understanding Markets—How to Analyze Situations

**Content Objectives:**
  1. To see examples of SWOT analysis about Starbucks Coffee and Nike.
  2. To read and discuss a case study about Kentucky Fried Chicken in Japan.

**Language Objectives:**
  1. To become familiar with vocabulary.
  2. To practice scanning and skimming skills while reading.
  3. To recognize structures of an article.

**Hand-on:**
  1. Fill out a factual sheet of KFC case study.

**Tasks 1**: Marketing Plan Step One: Analysis
  1. To analyze the target company/organization by using SWOT analysis.

### Week 6

**Topic:** Acting SMART—How to Make a Smart Business Objective

**Lead-in**: The Apprentice.

**Content Objectives:**
  1. To differentiate “objectives” and “aims or goals”.
  2. To know SMART principles of setting up objectives.

**Language Objectives:**
  1. To become familiar with vocabulary.
  2. To write objective statements by using dependent clauses.

**Task 2.** Marketing Plan Step Two: Objective
  1. Set up a marketing objective, such as a new product/case to promote.
  2. Remember to follow SMART principles.

### Week 7

**Topic:** Playing Strategically—Strategic Development.

**Lead-in:** The Apprentice.
  1. List all advertising and promotion skills used.
  2. Analyze strategies and discuss which group would win.

**Content Objectives:**
  1. To introduce the Introduction to Product Life Cycle (PLC)
  2. To understand important principles of writing advertising messages.
  3. To brainstorm useful and creative marketing tools.

**Language Objectives:**
  1. To learn terminology related to business and marketing.
  2. To brainstorm a catchy slogan that ryhmes.
  3. To negotiate ideas by using words learned.

**Task 3.** Marketing Plan Step Three: Strategies and tactics.
  1. Develop a suitable plan for promoting the target company/organization.

### Week 8

**Topic:** Everything Under Control—How to Manage a Marketing Plan

**Content Objectives:**
  1. To know the implementation process
  2. To understand total quality and marketing
  3. To learn how to establish and maintain a relationship with customers.

**Language Objectives:**
  1. To develop an action checklist.
  2. To become familiar with vocabulary.
  3. To search for inferential information in articles.

**Hand-on:** The Apprentice.

**Task 3.** Marketing Plan Step Three: Strategies and Tactics.

### Week 9

**Topic:** Present Well—How to Make an Effective Business Presentation

**Content Objectives:**
  1. To introduce eight secrets for a knockout presentation.
  2. To differentiate good and bad PowerPoint presentation designs.
  3. To tell the dos and don’ts of effective PowerPoint presentations.

**Language Objectives:**
  1. To learn transitional signals and words used in public speaking.
  2. To use business terminology in simulated meetings.

**Hands-on:** The Apprentice.
  1. To analyze the presentations by telling good and bad characteristics.

**Task 4:** Marketing Plan Stage Four: PowerPoint Presentation

### Week 10

**Topic:** How to Write a Formal Business Proposal

**Content Objectives:**
  1. To see examples of writing a business proposal.
  2. To understand the structure and points of a proposal.

**Language Objectives:**
  1. To become familiar with writing business proposals.
  2. To recognize appropriate word uses.
  3. To recognize correct formats of writing.

**Task 5:** Marketing Plan Stage Five: Business Proposal Writing

### Week 11 & Week 12

**Topic:** Final Project Presentations.

**Content Objectives:**
  1. To put what was learned into use.

**Language Objectives:**
  1. To use English to present proposals.

**Task 6**: Final Project Presentation
  1. Prepare a PowerPoint presentation and handouts.
  2. Prepare all advertisements or other promotional items, such as posters.

## Evaluation

The final marketing plan consists of five small tasks. Each task would be 10% of the total grade; five tasks would be 50% of the final grade.

The grade for the final project presentation would be 20% for speaking and 20% for written papers. In terms of speaking, an evaluation sheet would be given to students in advance, so that they could grade other classmates while listening to presentations.

The final written proposal would be evaluated using criteria such as "correctness of grammar," "exactness of word use," "appropriateness of format," and "comprehensibility of delivery."

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**TERMINOLOGY**

 **Process-oriented syllabus**

A process-oriented syllabus focuses on the skills and processes involved in learning language. It can be compared with a product-oriented syllabus, which focuses on completed acts of communication, the outputs.

Example
A process-writing syllabus would focus on the processes writers use to complete their tasks, such as collecting information, organizing ideas, drafting and revising, rather than just the features of the products of writing, such as letters, compositions, notes, reports etc.

In the classroom
Working on the writing processes is hard work for learners because it involves thinking, organising and planning, but it is time well-invested in skills that will enable the learner to become an autonomous writer. One way to apply a process approach to tasks is to provide the language they need on demand as they work, rather than before they start. This can be done by the teacher, by referring the learners to useful language lists or dictionaries, or by other learners

**A product-oriented syllabus**

A product-oriented syllabus focuses on things learnt at the end of the learning process (outcomes) rather than the process itself. It can be compared with a process-oriented syllabus, which focuses on the processes of learning. Many people have questioned the validity of separating syllabi into process- and product-oriented and argue that most syllabi are, and must be, a combination of processes and outcomes.

Example
Grammatical, functional and lexical syllabi are product-oriented as they focus on grammatical, functional and lexical outcomes.

**In the classroom**Learners working with a product-oriented syllabus can be supported with other approaches and techniques. For example, teachers can incorporate elements of learner training and development from learner-centred syllabi, or use activities from process-oriented syllabi such as task-based learning

**Structural Method of Learning English**

The structural method of learning English, will suit all under graduates in arts / science colleges, medical, engineering, agricultural colleges etc. in Pakistan.   According to my experience, students in these institutions converse well in English and could reasonably express themselves.  But I am afraid, theirs is a ’mechanical English or picked up English'.  They would be all right in using 'low level English' but beyond that they don't have the wherewithal at all because they have not learnt English in the proper way through comprehensive grammar. Our Pakistani schools don't teach English through grammar at all.  Teachers expect them to pick up the language through various text books.  Don't you think this is a dangerous method? I hold a view that unless one learns English through grammar, he/she can never attain mastery over the language.

My method aims at (i) Clearing any confusion they have been harbouring and hiding all these years and put them on the road to logical English as opposed to mechanical English.(ii) Will put them on a firmer ground to  "writing" good English and make them express themselves effectively and efficiently all their thoughts, especially high level thoughts concerned with the various high class subjects including engineering subjects. (iii)  Will give them a very solid foundation and help them develop a greater confidence  in themselves as regards using English professionally.

 Many teachers have not understood the efficacy of my method or possibly they do not want to learn a new method and seem happy with the traditional grammar.  I feel that the traditional grammar needs a lot of updating.  It met our requirement  all right some 60 -70 years back   but now it  seems completely  out dated and lacking  in many aspects.

 The BBC seems to treat all children in the world as equivalent to British children. How can you teach the language to children from non English speaking homes / countries through stories or story books when they don't understand a word in the story book nor could they construct an English sentence on their own.  Don't you think they need to be taught in the first instance, what is an English sentence and how it is to be constructed etc?  My method aims at that and it could be suitably adapted for school level the world over in non English speaking countries.  These learners most certainly need a different approach altogether and not the 'British model' of teaching the language.

###### **The procedural syllabus**

The Procedural syllabus is associated with Prabhu, Ramani and others (then) at the Regional Institute of English in Bangalore, India. Prabhu was dissatisfied with the Structural-Oral-Situational method which had been developed and was generally in use in the 1960s, so he evolved an approach based on the principle that the learning of form is best carried out when attention is given to meaning (cf. [Palmer, 1917/1968](http://www.finchpark.com/afe/p.htm)). The Bangalore Madras Communicational Teaching Project (CTP) ([Prabhu 1980](http://www.finchpark.com/afe/p.htm); 1984; 1987) was implemented in eight classrooms with 18 teachers and 390 children aged 8 to 15, for periods of one to three years, from 1979 to 1984. Early influences were similar to those of the Malaysian communicative syllabi ([Rodgers 1979](http://www.finchpark.com/afe/qr.htm#R); 1984), but were quickly abandoned. The Project was not set up as an experiment, so evaluation was not part of the original plan, and Beretta and Davies, when carrying out an evaluation in 1984 ([Beretta & Davies 1985](http://www.finchpark.com/afe/b.htm#Benson)), had to use intact classes, rather than operate in a "stripped down environment" ([Beretta 1986a](http://www.finchpark.com/afe/b.htm#Benson)) with limitations on the validity of their findings. They saw the results of the evaluation as on the whole positive, though pointing out the difficulty of designing satisfactory *Which?* type comparative research procedures to evaluate methodologies (cf. [Cronbach 1963](http://www.finchpark.com/afe/c.htm)). However, [Greenwood (1985)](http://www.finchpark.com/afe/g.htm) suggests that none of the accounts of the project  offered sufficient evidence to evaluate the claims made for the procedural syllabus and its associated methodology ([White 1988:108](http://www.finchpark.com/afe/w.htm#White88)).

At the basis of the CTP are tasks which engage the learner in thinking processes, the focus of which is completion of the task rather than learning the language, agreeing with [Krashen (1982)](http://www.finchpark.com/afe/i.htm#Krashen) that language form is acquired subconsciously when the learner's attention is focused on meaning (cf. table 30, below):

Task-based teaching operates with the concept that, while the conscious mind is working out some of the meaning-content, some subconscious part of the mind perceives,  abstracts or acquires (or recreates, as a cognitive structure) some of the linguistic structuring embodied in those entities, as a step in the development of an internal system of rules. The intensive exposure caused by an effort to work out meaning-content is thus a condition which is favourable to the subconscious abstraction - or cognitive formation - of language structure. ([Prabhu 1987:69](http://www.finchpark.com/afe/p.htm)-70). Teaching *through* communication, rather than *for* communication ([Prabhu 1980:164](http://www.finchpark.com/afe/p.htm)) was an important aspect of this programme, though it is interesting to note that the core goal was grammatical, rather than communicative competence, interaction in the target language, or activation and development of learning skills: