European Journal of English Language Teaching
ISSN: 2501-7136
ISSN-L: 2501-7136
Available on-line at: www.oapub.org/edu

DOI: 10.46827/ejel.v10i3.6270 Volume 10 | Issue 3 | 2025

CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT IN LANGUAGE TEACHING: A GUIDE FOR ESP PRACTITIONERS

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Abstract:
Curriculum can be understood as the totality of learning experiences shaped by decisions made by various stakeholders at different levels. In practice, however, English for Specific Purposes (ESP) practitioners—often operating with limited decision-making authority—are left to implement directives formulated by "experts" who may have little or no classroom experience. This article argues that ESP practitioners should play an active role in curriculum development and bear the responsibility of acquiring the knowledge necessary to make informed decisions. To this end, it offers a synthesis of key components essential for curriculum design, moving from theoretical foundations—such as curriculum approaches, backward design, and syllabus design—to practical considerations, including teaching materials, classroom activities, and the role of the ESP practitioner.

Keywords: curriculum development, backward design, syllabus design, ESP practitioners, language teaching

1. Introduction

Curriculum development in language teaching has undergone significant evolution over the past decades, shaped by changing theories of learning, advances in pedagogical research, and the diverse needs of learners. For practitioners in the field of English for Specific Purposes (ESP), understanding these developments is crucial not only for effective teaching but also for assuming a more strategic role as curriculum designers and learning facilitators.

This article provides an overview of key trends in curriculum development relevant to ESP contexts, focusing on several interrelated areas: curriculum approaches, backward design in syllabus development, teaching materials, and learning tasks. By synthesizing research in these domains, the article aims to equip ESP practitioners with

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the theoretical knowledge necessary to move beyond traditional classroom teaching and embrace a broader, more informed perspective on language program design. In doing so, it highlights the versatile role of the ESP practitioner as someone who not only delivers content but also shapes learning experiences tailored to the specific needs and goals of learners.

Ultimately, this review serves as a practical guide for ESP practitioners, offering insights into how contemporary curriculum approaches can be applied in specialized language teaching contexts, and providing a foundation for reflective, evidence-based practice.

2. Curriculum Approaches

Curriculum can be conceptualized as a *plan* for achieving goals (Tyler, 1949). This definition sees curriculum as a predictable series of events that are intended to bring about some sort of behavioral change (Saylor *et al.*, 1981). Pratt (1980) defined curriculum as an organized set of formal education and/or training intentions. Wiles and Bondi (2014) viewed curriculum as "*a process that identifies a philosophy, assesses student ability, considers possible methods of instruction, implements strategies, selects assessment devices and is continually adjusted*" (p.4). All of these curriculum experts subscribe to the linear nature of curriculum.

Curriculum can also be seen as the totality of learning experiences shaped by decisions made by various individuals at different levels. As Caswell and Campbell (1935) put it, curriculum is "*all experiences children have under the guidance of teachers*" (p. 69). Marsh and Willis (2003) described curriculum as "*all the experiences between what the school plans and what the teacher enacts*" (p. 4). Curriculum as experience reflects a humanistic view of education. Another group of experts consider curriculum as an academic discipline with its theories and principles. Curricularists who consent to this academic definition are more concerned with theory than practice (Reid, 1999).

A curriculum approach, therefore, reflects the perceptions, values and knowledge of the parties involved in its design. Curriculum approaches are based on two paradigms (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2018). Each paradigm constitutes several approaches, which are outlined below.

Technical/scientific paradigms	**Non-technical/nonscientific paradigms**
Behavioral, managerial and systems approaches	Humanistic and postmodern approaches

2.1 Behavioral Approach

Dating back to the 1920s, the behavioral approach is still the most dominant approach. It is logical and prescriptive, and draws on scientific principles. Its formulation is based on models and sequential steps. The content, activities and learning outcomes have to be aligned with the goals and objectives. The behavioral approach was influenced by ideas from scientific management theories in the 20's, which were primarily concerned with creating efficiency-driven processes. Cost-effectiveness drove curricular decisions.

Ornstein and Hunkins (2018) argued that the goal of this approach *"was to reduce teaching and learning to precise behaviors with corresponding measurable activities*" (p. 22).

This approach continues to inform curricular practices today. For example, course objectives are still used as a yardstick to design instruction and evaluate programs. The behavioral approach is used as the basis for outcomes-based and standards-based education. Ornstein and Hunkins (2018) pointed out that "*the behavioral approach to curriculum, with its dependency on technical means of selecting and organizing curricula, is likely to continue to serve us well in the future*" (p.22).

2.2 Managerial Approach

One key distinguisher of this approach is its emphasis on supervisory and administrative aspects. In this approach, administrators have the last say in curriculum reform and are less concerned with content than about organization and implementation. They care more about improving curriculum in light of policies, plans, and people on a systemwide basis. They consider curriculum changes as they administer resources and restructure schools. It is similar to the behavioral approach in that it stresses the importance of rational principles and logical steps in curriculum development (Saylor *et al.*, 1981).

2.3 Systems Approach

This approach is influenced by systems theory, which posits that organism in a system function in an interrelated and dependent manner (Bertalanffy, 1969). A small change in one area of the system may disrupt the cohesiveness of the entire system. Viewing curriculum as a system implies careful organization and communication among its institutional members. In this approach, curriculum specialists pay special attention to "*issues relevant to the entire school or school system, not just particular subjects or grades*" (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2018, p. 24).

2.4 Humanistic Approach

As a reaction to an overemphasis on rationality that characterized the preceding approaches, some curriculum leaders shifted their focus to the affective dimension of human experience. "*This approach considers the whole child, not only the cognitive dimension. The arts, the humanities, and health education are just as important as science and math*" (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2018 p. 25). Students' and teachers' views are valuable sources of curricular change and adaptation. Decisions about the curricular content and activities are made through consultations with teachers, parents and curriculum specialists. "*Curriculum specialists who believe in this approach tend to put faith in cooperative learning, independent learning, small-group learning, and social activities, as opposed to competitive, teacher-dominated, large-group learning*" (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2018, p. 25).

2.5 Postmodern Approach

The postmodern approach is an extension of the humanistic approach and is ideologically motivated. Curricularists, subscribing to postmodernist thoughts, regard the process of curriculum development as a means to effect social and political change. The postmodern

worldview opened a window for educators to conjure up a substitute for "*the turmoil of contemporary schooling, which too often is characterized by violence, bureaucratic gridlock, curricular stagnation, depersonalized evaluation, political conflict, economic crisis, decaying infrastructure, emotional fatigue, demoralization, and despair*" (Slattery, 2012, p. 21).

Having discussed curriculum approaches, it is now important to examine backward design as a curricular innovation that addresses the educational purposes of ESP and positions it as a distinct approach to language teaching.

3. Backward Design

According to the Oxford Dictionary, design is the purpose, planning, or intention that exists or is thought to exist behind an action, fact, or material object. By definition, teachers are designers as long as they make a deliberate attempt to plan the instructional process from start to finish. Wiggins and McTighe (2005) pointed out that the teaching profession shares many similarities with design professions. Like architects, teachers create artifacts whose design features are determined by student needs and institutional standards. They also design assessments to guide learning and evaluate the effectiveness of the instructional strategies.

A sound instructional design starts with the end in mind. In prioritizing the smooth management of classroom activities, teachers may inadvertently shift their attention away from ensuring intended learning outcomes and assessing student learning. While classroom activities are essential in achieving the learning objectives, the desired learnings should occupy a central position in the design of individual lessons; that is "*the best designs derive backward from the learning sought*" (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005, p. 14).

The twin sins of traditional design reflect two educational failings (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005). The first relates to the prevalent activity-oriented design, which is described as a hands-on approach to engage students without necessarily leading to any behavioral change in learners. The second issue concerns teachers' tendency to emphasize coverage, with many believing their primary responsibility is to work through the textbook in its entirety. In essence, "*The activity focus is more typical at the elementary and lower middle school levels, whereas coverage is a prevalent secondary school and college problem*" (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005, p. 16). As a result, students may graduate with honors yet have little understanding of how the knowledge they have acquired through rote tasks can be applied in real-world contexts

An excessive focus on teaching can narrow our perspective; that is, it is widely recognized that meaningful learning emerges from participation in classroom activities. It is, however, fallacious to think that learning derives from the act of teaching. Learning occurs when learners fully assimilate the material, and teachers can facilitate this process by clearly communicating the purpose of each activity. In summary, it is essential to consider the following questions: what are students going to benefit from engaging in this activity? Do they grasp why and how the purpose should influence their studying?

What should students be expected to understand and do upon completing a learning activity? (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005).

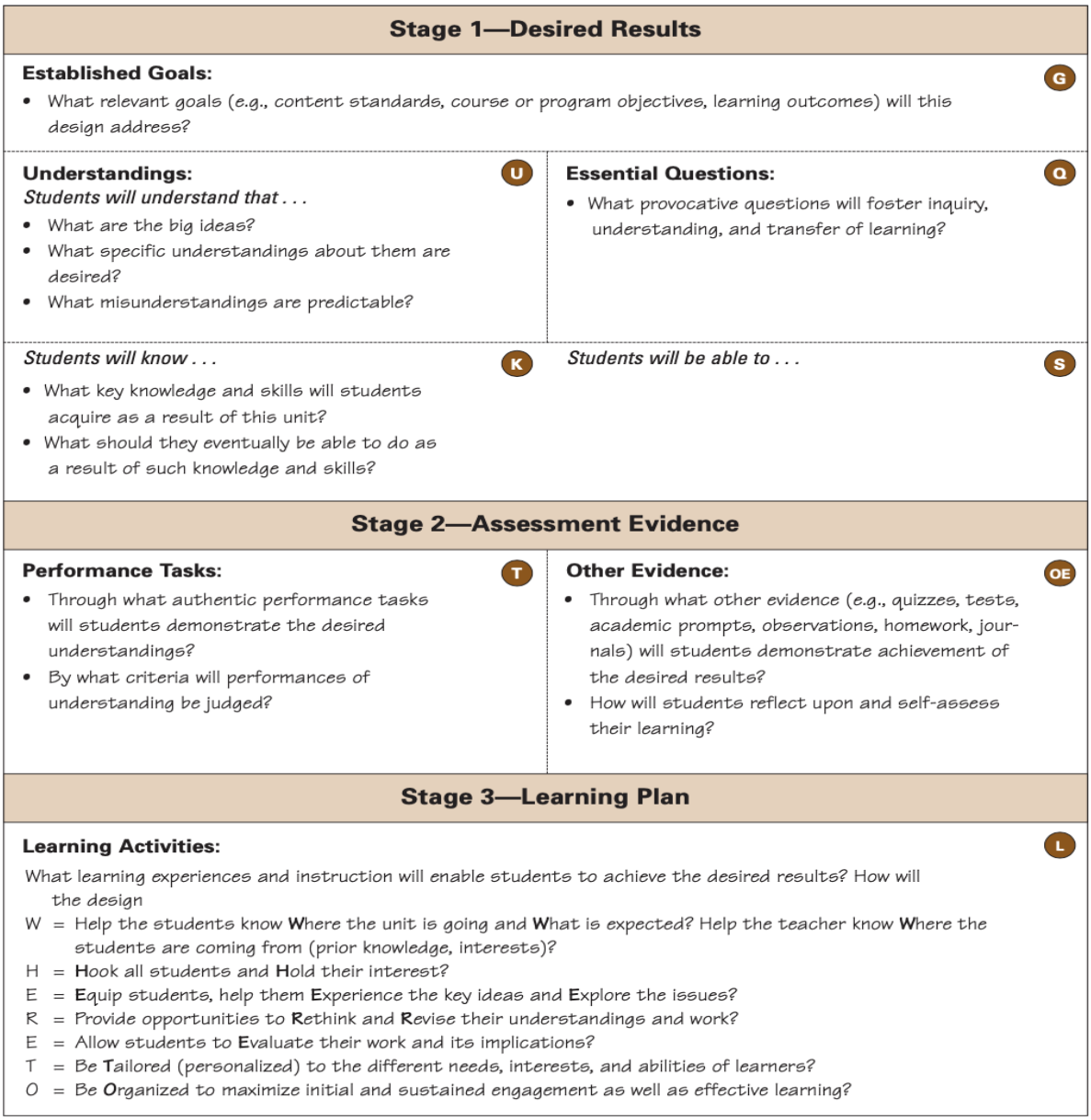
Backward design follows three stages. The first stage starts by asking a series of questions designed to clarify priorities. At this stage, the goals are considered, the established content standards are examined, and curriculum expectations are reviewed. The second stage concerns the means of assessment. At this stage, evidence of mastery precedes the choice of content and activities. This stage encourages teachers to think up ways to measure students' learning. The third stage encompasses the design of learning experiences and instruction. After specifying the desired outcomes and establishing the means of assessment, it is time to think through the most suitable learning activities. In this stage, students are introduced to the knowledge and skills needed to perform effectively and achieve desired results.

Backward design was inspired by backward thinking, which dates back to antiquity. In this respect, Polya (1945) commented:

> *"It does not take a genius to solve a concrete problem working backwards: anybody can do it with a little common sense. We concentrate upon the desired end; we visualize the final position in which we would like to be … working backwards is a common-sense procedure within the reach of everybody, and we hardly doubt that it was practiced by mathematicians and nonmathematicians before*." (Plato, p. 230).

Wiggins & McTighe (2005) version of backward design emphasizes the alignment of the lesson components and the importance of meticulous planning. Ultimately, they proposed a template with design questions to help teachers plan lessons backwards. The template (see Figure 1 below) consists of three stages, each of which contains a set of questions. Although it is not exhaustive in scope, the one-page template has several advantages. First, it provides a 'gestalt' or a snapshot of the key questions in backward design. Second, it helps to verify the extent to which the lesson components are aligned. Third, it provides a quick way to review existing units that teachers have developed. There is an expanded version of this template which allows for more detailed planning.

Figure 1: Page Template with Design Questionnaire for Teachers



Note: Adapted from Understanding by design (p. 22) by G. P. Wiggins & J. McTighe, 2005, Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. Copyright 2005 by Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

In language teaching parlance, backward design has been proposed as an alternative to the prevailing activity-oriented, forward design. Richards (2013) maintained that curriculum planning in language teaching has been influenced by Wiggins & McTighe's model of backward design, which is sometimes described as an 'ends-means' approach (Tyler, 1949; Taba, 1962). This means that the how and what of a course are determined by the ends or goals of the language program. Taba (1962), however, proposed a similar framework, in which assessment is positioned at the conclusion of the design process:

- Step 1: diagnosis of needs,
- Step 2: formulation of objectives,

- Step 3: selection of content,
- Step 4: organization of content,
- Step 5: selection of learning experiences,
- Step 6: organization of learning experiences,
- Step 7: determination of what to evaluate and of the ways of doing it (p. 12).

The teaching approach matters so long as it facilitates the attainment of the learning objectives. Though the learners are at the center of the educational enterprise, decisions about the learning outcomes are determined by the curriculum designer (Richards, 2013). One instance of the use of backward design in language teaching relates to the objective-based approach. A pioneer of this approach was Tyler (1949), who contended:

> *"Educational objectives become the criteria by which materials are selected, content is outlined, instructional procedures are developed, and tests and examinations are prepared. … The purpose of a statement of objectives is to indicate the kinds of changes in the student to be brought about so that instructional activities can be planned and developed in a way likely to attain these objectives."* (p. 45)

Since the 1950s, generations of educators have been trained in the craft of objective setting. Learning objectives are generated systematically and need to satisfy a set of criteria. They should "*describe the aims of a course in terms of smaller units of learning, provide the basis for the organization of teaching activities and describe learning in terms of observable behavior or performance*" (Richards, 2013, p. 21).

Critics of the objective-based approach argue that the process of basing learning on objectives reeks of the efficiency view of education in which the end justifies the means. As a consequence, both teachers and learners become executors of a pre-determined set of objectives dictated by curriculum planners. Opponents of the backward design argue in favor of the activity-oriented approach in which learning activities form the basis of instruction (Richards, 2013).

The integration of backward design in language teaching took a number of appellations, including needs analysis, task-based language teaching, competency-based instruction, standards and the common European framework of reference. Needs analysis was used to determine the learning outcomes by systematically analyzing learners' communicative needs. The starting point of needs analysis is the identification of needs, which are used as the basis for the stipulation of the course aims. Needs analysis follows five steps:

1) Identify learners' communicative needs,
2) Develop statements of learning objectives,
3) Identify linguistic content and skills needed to attain the objectives,
4) Prepare course plans,
5) Select materials and teaching methods (Richards, 2013, p. 23).

In task-based language teaching, needs analysis is also used to compile an inventory of tasks learners need to perform in the target situations. The main of objective

of this approach is the successful performance of the target tasks. In this version of TBLT, development stages are organized as follows:

1) Identify target tasks through needs analysis,
2) Design classroom tasks,
3) Apply TBLT methodology,
4) Identify language and other demands of the tasks,
5) Follow-up language work (Richards, 2013).

Competency-based instruction is an instructional model that focuses on the teaching of competencies. The learning outcomes are formulated on the basis of the knowledge, skills, and behaviors learns are required to be mastered. Schenk (1978) described this approach as:

> *"Competency-based education has much in common with such approaches to learning as performance-based instruction, mastery learning and individualized instruction. It is outcome-based and is adaptive to the changing needs of students, teachers and the community. Competencies differ from other student goals and objectives in that they describe the student's ability to apply basic skills in situations that are commonly encountered in everyday life. Thus, CBE is based on a set of outcomes that are derived from an analysis of tasks typically required of students in life role situations."* (p. vi)

The development stages of competency-based instruction are arranged as follows:

1) Needs analysis,
2) Identify topics for the survival curriculum,
3) Identify competencies for each topic,
4) Group competencies into instructional units,
5) Identify the language knowledge and skills needed for each instructional unit,
6) Choose instructional materials.

Standards and the Common European Framework of Reference provide an inventory of benchmarks, skills, performance profiles and target competencies. This inventory is widely used by educators to set learning objective and outcomes in a variety of teaching contexts. The following activities describe how standards can be employed in the curriculum:

1) Identify the domains of language use that the learners need to acquire,
2) Describe standards and performance indicators for each domain,
3) Identify the language skills and knowledge needed to achieve the standard,
4) Select teaching activities and materials (Richards, 2013, p. 26)

4. Approaches to Syllabus Design

Exploring curriculum approaches and backward design naturally precedes the discussion of syllabus design, a crucial and indispensable stage in curriculum development. During the 1970s, the shift of perspective regarding the nature of language contributed significantly to syllabus design. The view that the primary role of teaching

was to promote communicative competence prompted the question of "What does the learner want/need to do with the target language?'. Syllabuses began to integrate the formal and functional elements of the language. This major change in syllabus design ushered in a new era of language teaching, which was characterized by the design of courses for specific purposes.

Yalden (1983) made a general observation about language teachers' tendency to occupy themselves with issues of methodology rather than considerations of content. "*Teachers of English as a second language are on the whole more used to thinking about methodology than about syllabus design*" (p. 17). Krahnke (1987) defined syllabus as "*the content of the lessons used to move the learners toward the goals*" (p. 9). Syllabus design, on the other hand, was described as a process "*concerned essentially with the selection and grading of content, while methodology is concerned with the selection of learning tasks and activities*" (Nunan, 1988, p. 5).

The process of content selection is influenced by a number of issues. The theoretical perspective held by the syllabus designer has a great impact on the choice of content. For example, the syllabus designer's belief about the nature of language affects decisions with regard to the choices of the formal and functional elements in individual units of the language program. Choices range from purely linguistic syllabi, where the content of instruction is the grammatical and lexical forms of the language, to the purely semantic or informational, where the content of instruction is some skill or information and only incidentally the form of the language (Krahnke, 1987).

Six syllabus types have been discussed extensively since the 'communicative revolution' (Clark, 1987). A structural (or formal) syllabus organizes its units around grammatical items. A notional/ functional syllabus is made up of functions that are performed when language is used to express speech acts. A situational syllabus is one in which the content of language teaching is a collection of real or imaginary situations in which language occurs or is used. A skill-based syllabus is one in which the content of the language teaching is guided by a specific or a collection of language skills. Skill-based syllabi group linguistic competencies together into generalized types of behavior such as the ability to write or speak.

A task-based syllabus and a content-based syllabus are similar in that both are organized not around the linguistic features of the language being learned, but around a set of tasks and topics, respectively. In task-based instruction, the content of the teaching is a series of complex and purposeful tasks that the students want or need to perform with the language they are learning. Language performance is subordinated to task performance. Task-based instruction has the goal of teaching students to draw on a wide range of resources to complete some piece of work – a process. A content-based syllabus is not a language teaching syllabus per se. In content-based language teaching, the main focus of instruction is on content. In other words, the subject matter is primary, and language learning occurs incidentally to the content learning (Nunan, 1988).

The curriculum framework most applicable to ESP today is essentially learner-centered, combining features from "*the product-oriented ends-means model and the process-oriented approach*" (Nunan, 1988, p. 20). In this integrated framework, the course designer

acts like a juggler, keeping aloft the 'balls' representing the needs of the learners, the needs of the teachers and the institution. The program objectives and the choice of appropriate teaching methodology are specified based on the results of needs analysis. As Finney (2002) put it:

> *"The participants in the needs analysis ideally should include as many of the programme participants as possible, and ideally the learners themselves – where they are involved in the specification of course content, there is a greater likelihood that they will perceive it as relevant to their needs and can take an active role in course evaluation. In the integrated approach, needs analysis takes place not only at the pre-course planning stage, but also during the course, contributing to the development of teacher–learner negotiated learning objectives."* (p. 75)

5. Teaching Materials

Materials "*include anything which can be used to facilitate the learning of a language. They can be linguistic, visual, auditory or kinaesthetic, and they can be presented in print, through live performance or display, or on cassette, CD-ROM, DVD or the internet*" (Tomlinson, 2001, p. 66). Published materials are generically produced and include activities and texts that target a wide audience. According to Tomlinson (2014), "*the selection of materials probably represents the single most important decision that the language teacher has to make*" (p, 37). In principle, materials should be selected based on the teaching context and the interests and needs of the teachers, learners and other stakeholders (Tomlinson, 2023).

Coursebooks have been criticized for being superficial and reductionist, imposing uniformity of syllabus and approach, and removing initiative and power from teachers (Tomlinson, 2001). Proponents argue that the coursebook is a cost-effective, time-saving way to provide teachers with the structure needed to plan lessons, monitor progress, and assess learners. The coursebook can also be used to establish credibility and ensure standardization (Torres and Hutchinson, 1994; Hadley, 2014). While examining the challenges and implications of using global English Language Teaching (ELT) coursebooks, Mishan (2022) concluded that "*coursebooks remain the default language learning resource, and that teachers and learners worldwide need, want and value them as ready-made language teaching materials*" (p. 490). The latter conclusion is supported by the results obtained from Tomlinson's (2010) and British Council surveys, where up to 92% regularly use a coursebook and around 65% 'always or frequently' use one, respectively.

A number of solutions have been proposed to reduce dependency on coursebooks. One proposition includes the promotion of 'teacher-generated materials' where the learner occupies a central stage (Block, 1991; Dubin & Olshtain, 1986; Clarke, 1989; Riggenbach, 1988). In this approach to materials development, the language teacher assumes an important role in developing, selecting and adapting materials. "*The personal touch that the teacher can bring to his/her materials is unparalleled by the stereotypical activities that characterize many of them*" (Block, 1991, p. 39). In an attempt to settle the debate over the effectiveness of coursebooks, Tomlinson (2023) proposed a text-driven approach to

language teaching in which coursebooks are designed to provide teachers with texts and tasks which have the potential "*to engage their students affectively and cognitively and which encourage and help the teachers to adapt and supplement the texts and tasks in ways which connect with their learners*" (p.40).

Regarding the issue of authenticity, most researchers stress its motivating effect on learners (Bacon and Finneman, 1990; Kuo, 1993; Little *et al.*, 1994; Mishan, 2005; Rilling and Dantas-Whitney, 2009; Maley and Tomlinson, 2017). Some researchers also contend that authentic materials are the means through which students can experience the language used in real-life situations. Additionally, authentic materials can help learners to build their communicative competence and cultivate positive attitudes towards language learning (Tomlinson and Masuhara, 2018).

On the other side of the aisle, you find scholars and researchers who attack the 'cult of authenticity' by questioning the pedagogical efficacy of authentic materials. Their argument focuses on pedagogical accessibility; more precisely, simplified texts are linguistically more accessible for learners and can be enriched by practicing embedded exemplars of the target language in meaning-focused activities (Day and Bamford, 1998; Ellis, 1999).

With respect to the question of whether ESP practitioners are capable of designing instructional materials, Barnard and Zemach (2014) suggested a list of skills and qualifications that a good ESP practitioner should possess:

a) an acceptable linguistic knowledge of the target language,
b) general teaching experience,
c) teaching experience in the relevant specialism,
d) some degree of knowledge of the relevant specialism,
e) an interest in the relevant specialism,
f) familiarity with learning materials available for the specialism,
g) experience of writing general English materials,
h) an interest in the learning/teaching process,
i) the ability to work with others,
j) the ability to assess the clarity and effectiveness of materials and respond appropriately (p. 313).

With regard to the sequence for preparing materials, Barnard and Zemach (2014) likewise proposed a 13-step procedure:

1) Determine the needs and preferences of the students and institution/corporation through questionnaires and/or interviews,
2) Decide what sort of language contexts the course will focus on (e.g., lectures, business meetings),
3) Decide on the categories for presenting the language in the course (e.g., grammar, function, lexis, situation, topic, communicative skill),
4) Decide what language skills and sub-skills the course will focus on, taking into account learners' and the company's objectives,
5) Design the syllabus; will it be cumulative, or will each unit/lesson be independent?

6) Decide the types of activities that will be used in the course (e.g., individual, pair, group, whole class),
7) Decide on the page layout of worksheets; prepare templates,
8) Prepare the materials,
9) Pilot the materials; collect and collate feedback through questionnaires and interviews,
10) Revise the materials,
11) Use the materials,
12) Get feedback from students, teachers and sponsors during and after the course through e.g., questionnaires, interviews, classroom observations by peer teachers and managers, videotaping of lessons, lesson comment sheets,
13) Revise the materials if necessary (pp. 316-317).

The process of materials selection is guided by a set of criteria intended to assess the potential validity of the materials. Rubdy (2014) proposes a framework comprising three evaluation categories, each designed to address a specific overarching question:

1) **Psychological validity:** What are the learners' needs, goals and pedagogical requirements?
2) **Pedagogical validity:** What are the teacher's skills, abilities, theories and beliefs?
3) **Process and content validity:** What assumptions underlie the materials writer's presentation and selection of content?

Rubdy's model captures the complexity of materials selection and points to the active role that teachers and learners should play in co-generating engaging materials that aid the teaching- learning process inside and beyond the classroom. Effective materials have the potential to stimulate the teacher and students to explore topics and tasks beyond the pages of the textbook. In this regard, Rubdy (2014) comments:

> *"Since materials are powerful stimuli for generating learning, a more dynamic approach would be one which selects materials for their potential not only to engage the learners' and teacher's attention and effort, but also to draw substantial contributions from the teacher, the learners and the collective group as a whole that can be transformed into worthwhile learning experiences in the course of classroom interaction"* (p. 38).

6. Classroom Activities

Once instructional materials are in place, focus shifts to the operationalization of those materials in the form of tasks or activities. Designing 'communicative activities' should be the primary concern of the classroom teacher since "*the need to communicate lies at the heart of all language learning*" (Rubdy, 2014, p. 47). Clarke (1991) advocated for the negotiated syllabus and the use of tasks as vehicles to actualize the learning outcomes. Several findings in SLA suggest that structural approaches to language learning are ineffective as they provide insufficient conditions for second language acquisition (Cancino, Rosansky and Schumann, 1978). Furthermore, language acquisition is more

likely to take place when students make an effort to complete communicative tasks (Long, 1985).

Alongside empirical evidence, dissatisfaction with synthetic syllabi, which focus on discrete items, gave rise to task-based language teaching (TBLT) (Prabhu, 1987). Proponents of TBLT emphasize "*activities that focus learners' primary attention on meaning and caters to incidental acquisition*" (Ellis, *et al.*, 2020, p. 5). However, Nunan (1989) stressed the merits of form-focused activities. "*It now seems to be widely accepted that there is value in classroom tasks which require learners to focus on form. It is also accepted that grammar is an essential resource in using language communicatively*" (Nunan, 1989, p.13).

Opinions were divided with regard to the definition and classification of individual tasks (Ellis *et al.*, 2020). A task is broadly defined as resembling a real-world task, where participants cooperate to co-construct meaning through a negotiation process (Nunan, 1989; Long, 1985). Prabhu (2019) defined a task as an activity that "*involves a mental effort leading to an* outcome" (p. 3). Several task typologies were suggested, the most useful of which is Prabhu's. Prabhu noted that "*reasoning-gap activity proved to be the most satisfying in the classroom*". He also observed that "*there is an inherent appeal to young minds in problem-solving, offering the prospect and pleasure of success on the one hand and the risk of failure on the other*" (p. 3).

Table 1: Types of Tasks

Type of task	**Definition**
Information gap	This type involves "*a transfer of given information*".
Reasoning gap	This type involves "*deriving some new information from given information through the processes of inference, deduction, practical reasoning, or a perception of relationships or patterns*".
Opinion gap	This type involves "*identifying and articulating a personal preference, feeling, or attitude in response to a given situation*".

Note: Adapted from Second Language Pedagogy (p. 46) by N. S. Prabhu,1987. Oxford University Press.

Shavelson and Stern (1981) found that the main concern of most teachers is designing engaging activities. It is a valid concern since language is not only a cognitive, activity, but it also has social and physical manifestations. In this regard, van Lier (2004) comments that "the learning context, in ecological terms, is an activity space. When we are active in a learning context, affordances become available for further action" (62). The classroom is a learning space where students should be actively involved in meaning-making. Ur and Thornbury (2024) proposed a set of criteria to select effective learning activities.

1) **Plausibility / face-validity:** Do teachers perceive the activity as methodologically workable? Does the activity reflect the learning goals?
2) **Validation:** Is the activity a random constellation of language exercises or is it based on theoretically solid foundations? Is the activity validated by the community of practice?

3) **Likely learning value:** A good activity is measured based on the amount of language practice it generates?
4) **Interest:** Are learners likely to enjoy the activity? How much engagement does it generate?
5) **Versatility/adaptability:** Is the activity adaptable to different contexts, to different levels of proficiency and for different purposes?
6) **Simplicity:** How much preparation and effort involved in setting up the activity? Are the instructions easy to follow?
7) **Spin-off:** Does the activity promote other nonlinguistic learnings such as critical thinking, learner agency, confidence?

7. The ESP Practitioner

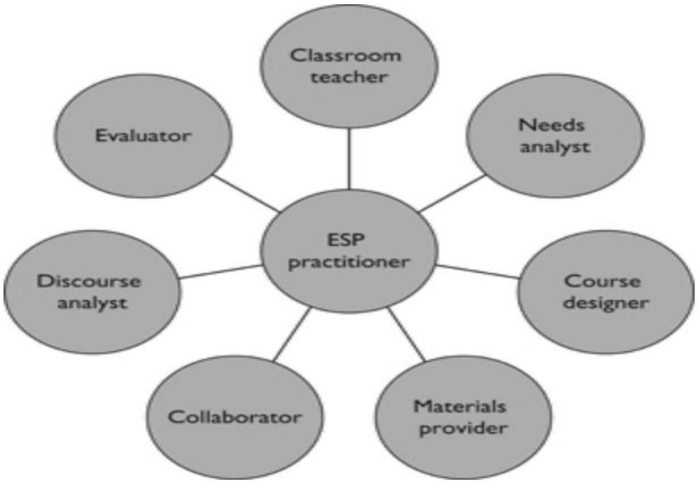
In ESP contexts, English teachers are often referred to as 'ESP practitioners' because "*the ESP work involves much more than teaching*" (Dudley-Evans & John, 1998, p. 53). ESP practitioners assume several roles that are deemed essential in facilitating learning. Woodrow (2018) illustrates some of the key roles of the ESP practitioner. As classroom instructors, ESP practitioners are responsible for teaching various language skills, including reading, writing, listening, and speaking. They design and deliver lessons that target different aspects of language proficiency (Celce-Murcia, Briton & Snow, 2014). This diversity of roles bestows upon ESP practitioners' greater status and responsibility compared to other general English instructors.

- An ESP practitioner can play the role of a course designer who selects and organizes the course content (Brown, 2007).
- As an evaluator, an ESP practitioner assesses students' language skills and progress through various forms of assessment, including quizzes, tests, homework assignments, and projects. They also provide constructive feedback to help students improve (Harmer, 2015).
- An ESP practitioner is also a needs analyst who adapts their teaching methods to accommodate different learning styles, abilities, and needs of individual students, ensuring inclusive and effective instruction (Tomlinson, 2014).
- An ESP practitioner is a materials provider who develops classroom materials suitable for their own particular teaching context. However, Dudley-Evans and St John (1998) argue that "*only a small proportion of good teachers are good designers of course materials. What all ESP practitioners have to be is good providers of materials*" (173). In essence, a good provider of materials does three things: select, adapt, or supplement existing materials (Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998).
- As an instructional designer, an ESP instructor integrates technology and digital tools into their teaching to enhance language learning experiences, such as using online resources, language learning apps, and multimedia materials (Warschauer & Meskill, 2000)
- As a collaborator, an ESP practitioner needs to collaborate with the content subject expert. Having a background in literature or linguistics, ESP practitioners are often

not adequately trained to deal with the content of an ESP course. In other words, many ESP practitioners with a background in the humanities lack discipline knowledge and the resourcefulness of the subject matter specialist. Collaboration with subject specialists is said to minimize the mental stress experienced by ESP practitioners and ensure better academic results (Johns & Dudley-Evans, 1980).

- An ESP practitioner can serve as a discourse analyst. ESP instruction is characterized by a focus on genre analysis (Bhatia, 2014). "*One of the concerns of new ESP practitioners is a lack of subject knowledge. Genre and discourse analysis can promote a deeper understanding of the terminology, structure and applications of ESP language*" (Woodrow, 2018, p.119). These roles highlight the comprehensive responsibilities of an ESP practitioner in facilitating effective language learning experiences for students.

Figure 2: Roles of ESP Practitioner



Note: Reprinted from Introducing course design (p. 54) by L. Woodrow, (2018). Routledge. Copyright 2018 by Routledge.

8. Conclusion

Language teaching has experienced dramatic shifts in both theory and practice over the years. Yet, the only constant remains the ever-changing needs of learners, driven largely by evolving demands in the workplace and professional contexts. To respond effectively to these demands, ESP practitioners must remain aware of developments across multiple disciplines, particularly cognitive psychology, which offers insights into learning strategies, motivation, and how learners process and retain information.

While training equips practitioners with practical skills to manage learning, it is periodic engagement with theoretical developments that can ignite innovation and expand the potential of teaching practice. By staying informed and reflective, ESP practitioners can not only adapt to learners' changing needs but also transform their pedagogical approach, fostering more effective, learner-centered, and forward-looking language programs.

Conflict of Interest Statement
The author(s) declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article. No financial, personal, or professional relationships could be construed to have influenced the work reported in this paper.

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