University of Tikrit

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Women

Department of English

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Name of Instructor: Assist. Prof. Elaf Subhi Abdullah(Ph.D.)

Title of Lecture : ESP curriculum design and cognitive skills formation

Email: elafsubhi1979@tu.edu.iq

Introduction

ESP essence, underlying features and objectives will be commented on in connection with cognition issues importance. The essence of knowledge in general and language knowledge, along with its formation and stimulation will be treated. Types of ELT curricula will be analyzed and statements will be formulated in relation to an ESP optimized cognitive programme. Cognitive skills teaching will be exemplified through some procedures we apply in terms of language learning strategies (LLS) in the ESP course .

ESP essence and goals

ESP, a relatively new branch of ELT and applied linguistics, aims at meeting specific learners' needs through the acquisition of communicative competence characteristic for a type of professional activity (Dudley-Evans 1997 in Anthony 1998 and Sešek 2005). ESP courses are usually designed for intermediate or advanced learners. It is vital in ESP characterization to take into account the fact that although ESP makes use of its typical vocabulary in different spheres of knowledge and shows preference for some skills, language functions, grammar items or structures.

ESP has been also related over the last decades to tendencies such as focus on the learners and investigation of learning attitudes and motivation (Hutchinson &Waters 1987 in Pradhan 2013); this way the *emphasis on motivation and cognition* is fully justified.

Knowledge and linguistic knowledge

There are four knowledge types, *factual* (knowledge concept basic components), *conceptual* (basic components interconnections), *procedural* (knowledge used in task fulfillment) and *meta-cognitive knowledge* (task accomplishment elaboration strategies). Knowledge acquisition, being a cognitive process, as it has been commented on many occasions, implies *active and conscious manipulation*, raising awareness procedures, such as providing definitions, explaining definitions, elucidating cause-effect relationships,

establishing comparisons, hypothesizing, making inductions and deductions, etc. Knowledge building consequently requires *individual constructs* (Kelly 1955 in Davidko 2011) or the creation of *personal mental representations*, being 'the basic units of human knowledge stored in the mind' (Davidko 2011: 83), allowing the individual to form logically and coherently organized interrelated cognitive structures used in the purpose of more complicated or elaborated knowledge edification. All above enumerated cognitive procedures contribute to mental constructs formation and, thence, to a better and more advanced competence.

Mental representations are 'information-bearing structures' (Paivio 1990: 18 in Davidko 2011: 83-84) implemented in 'recognition patterns' (ibid.) construction aimed at further knowledge creation. In cognitive linguists' view representations (concepts, constructs, or models) consist of non-linguistic information; though, when teaching we should be always aware of the fact that they are tightly related to vocabulary, periphrases, expressions, grammar categories and situational contexts.

When teaching, we should be trying to provide the most adequate connections between lexis, grammar structures, situations and cognitive models and use them in the numerous spheres of written or spoken communication. Learners' language and linguistic knowledge improvement largely depends on an adequately established set of personal mental representations of language categories subject to further complication and sophistication with regard to progress. To make it efficient, new knowledge formation and progress are to be founded on good-quality prior knowledge construction (or successfully built representations), *new information connection* with already existent constructs, through *comprehension* and new/present concept *relationship elaboration*, and complete new representations integration into previously built ones to the extent of achieving *new concepts usefulness* (Derry 1990 in Davidko 2011).

ELT and ESP curricula. The cognitive ESP curriculum

There have been many definitions of *curriculum* so far, its restricted acceptation overlapping with *syllabus*, content which has to be taught (Finney 2002), and the more comprehensive one, referring to 'the planning, implementation and evaluation of an educational program, the *why, how* and *how well* together with the *what* of the teaching-learning process' (Finney 2002: 70). We subscribe to Kelly's view on curricula (Kelly 1989 in Finney 2002) that they must involve planners' intentions, implemented procedures, learners' experiences in response to teachers' efforts, and to Richards et al.'s statement (Richards et al 1992 in Finney 2002) that a language learning programme involves course objectives, corresponding content teaching approaches and learners' appropriate needed experiences, and assessment of educational purposes achievement.

ESP programme must comply not only with educational curricula requirements in general, but also with accomplishments in linguistics in general, and more specifically, in various fields of applied linguistics dealing with communication process, communicative competence. *Aims* should be consistent with learners' specific needs (really crucial in ESP); *needs* have to be investigated through *needs analysis* (Songhori, 2008), taking into account a course participants' profile (source and target language (FL1, 2, n) competence, communication needs, settings of target language use, motivation for FL learning, learners' learning strategies, etc.); content and implemented approaches ought to be in line with the set objectives.

Research literature has delineated *three basic types of ELT curricula* so far, each of them applicable in ESP cognitive programme development to a varying extent, due to their underlying features:

1. *The forward design curriculum* starts from course *content determination*, moves through the
methodology implemented and arrives at *expected results*.

2. The central design curriculum implements as its point of departure 'the selection of teaching activities, techniques and methods' instead of 'a detailed language syllabus or specification of learning outcomes' (Richards 2013: 13).

3. The backward design curriculum has its starting point at a course outputs (or objectives) careful and motivated specification, content, methods and activities stemming from the expected results (Richards 2013).

4. Cognitive strategies involve analysis, summarizing, reorganizing information, knowledge schemes development, practicing structures, comprehension strategies (making predictions as to categories use and functioning, inferences drawing based on prior knowledge and analysis of key words,
word- formation, discourse markers, charts, illustrations (Oxford, 2003: 142).

5. Comprehension strategies (making predictions as to categories use and functioning, inferences drawing based on prior knowledge and analysis of key words, word-formation, discourse markers, charts, illustrations (Oxford 2003; FSL Guide 2008), target language – first language translation,
contrastive and comparative target language – first language examination of categories in terms of form, semantics and function, etc.

6. Metacognitive strategies are basically responsible for learners' needs of self-identification, task planning, materials organization, achievement evaluation, knowledge self-assessment about a specific topic, hardships identification, asking for assistance, setting learning goals, among others (ibid.).

7. Memory-related strategies promote information memorization through associative concepts and keywords, taught items repetition, personal records of taught items, associating new material with similar material in the first language, new knowledge practice and use, etc.

8. The central design curriculum implements as its point of departure 'the selection of teaching activities, techniques and methods' instead of 'a detailed language syllabus or specification of learning outcomes' (Richards 2013: 13).

9. *The backward design curriculum* has its starting point at a course *outputs* (or *objectives*) careful and motivated specification, content, methods and activities stemming from the expected results (Richards, 2013).

10- Affective strategies focus on learners' mood identification aimed at anxiety level reduction andpositive motivation boosting (Oxford, 2003).

11- *Social strategies* comprise asking for elucidation, verification, sociolinguistic conventions studying, collaboration with other students to reach problem solutions, etc. (Oxford 2003; FSL Guide 2008).

Conclusion

The commented on procedures within the examined LLS are really efficient in cognitive skills formation within the ESP course . Practice, not just theory, though, reveals there is a stable relationship of symbiosis between the *mutually promoting* LA and cognitive skills. Improved cognitive skills turn out to be *an essential prerequisite* for the achievement of better and more relevant language knowledge. Learners not only improve knowledge, but also become more motivated and independent in language acquisition activities, more successful at self-assessment due to their heightened cognitive skills enabling them to more adequately understand language mastering problems, achievements and possible reasons. Learner-teacher cooperation grows better and more fruitful.