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TENSIONS POSSIBLY APPEARING BETWEEN BELIEFS OF SYLLABUS DEVELOPERS

The author generalizes some data from the secondary research of world well-known syllabus designers as well as some information from his own teaching experience, then, suggests some recommendation on solving the dilemmas and difficulties which occur during culture related syllabus designing process. Thus, the article examines the importance of teachers' sociocultural beliefs and values and how they influence the development of a course. In the sphere of world higher education, it is noticed that there are different cultural values between teachers and students, as well as different values between teachers. It also looks into why there are sometimes discrepancies between the beliefs of teachers of the same profession, even the same teaching experience and almost the same age. This work examines what types of tension there can be, why they can exist and how they can be overcome. The focus of this paper is on the differences in the values and beliefs between teachers as course developers who are experienced in curriculum and syllabus developing for courses, mainly in the area of studying culture in the field of education.

Key words: culture, tension, beliefs, course design, course developer, ESP (English for Specific Purposes), CTC (Culture, Traditions and Customs).

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Возможные напряженности, возникающие между составителями syllabus

Автор обобщает некоторые данные из вторичного исследования трудов всемирно известных разработчиков учебных планов, а также некоторую информацию из своего собственного опыта преподавания, затем предлагает некоторые рекомендации по решению дилемм и трудностей, которые возникают в процессе разработки учебных планов, связанных с культурой. Таким образом, в этой статье рассматривается вопрос о важности социокультурных убеждений и ценностей преподавателей и о том, как они влияют на разработку курса. В сфере высшего образования мирового масштаба замечено, что между преподавателями и студентами существуют разные культурные ценности, так же как и разные ценности между преподавателями. Поэтому здесь рассматривается, почему иногда возникают расхождения между убеждениями преподавателей одной профессии, даже одного и того же опыта обучения и почти одного возраста. Данная работа изучает, какие виды напряженности могут быть, почему они могут существовать и как их можно преодолеть. Основное внимание в данной статье уделяется различиям между ценностями убеждениями преподавателей как разработчиков курсов, которые имеют опыт в составлении программ и syllabusов, в основном в области изучения культуры в сфере образования.

Ключевые слова: культура, напряжение, убеждения, дизайн курса, разработчик курса, АСЦ (английский язык для специальных целей), КТО (культура, традиции и обычаи).

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пайда болуы мүмкін қайшылықтар**

Автор танымал силлабус құрастырушылардың еңбектеріне жасаған өзінің екінші деңгейлі зерттеуінен алынған деректерді, сондай-ақ өзінің оқытушылық тәжірибесінен алынған кейбір мәліметтерді қорыта келе, мәдениетпен байланысты силлабустарды жасау кезіндегі пайда болуы мүмкін дилеммалар мен қиындықтарды шешу бойынша әлдебір жаңа ойларын ұсынады. Демек, бұл мақалада оқытушылардың әлеуметтік мәдени нанымдары мен құндылықтарының маңыздылығы және олардың курс бағдарламасын жасауға қалай әсер ететіні қарастырылады. Әлемдік жоғары білім беру саласында мұғалімдер мен оқушылар арасында, сондай-ақ, өзара мұғалімдер арасында әртүрлі мәдени құндылықтардың бар екені байқалады. Бір кәсіптегі мұғалімдердің көзқарасында, тіпті бірдей тәжірибелі және бірдей жастағы оқытушылардың нанымдары арасындағы айырмашылықтардың неліктен болатындығын анықтауға тырысқан. Осы мақала аталмыш қайшылықтардың қандай түрлері болатынын, неге болатынын және оларды қалай жеңуге болатынын қарастырады. Мақаланың басты көңіл бөліп отырғаны, ол – білім беру саласындағы, ең алдымен, мәдениетті зерттеп оқыту бағдарламасын, силлабусын әзірлеп дайындаушы ретіндегі тәжірибелі мұғалімдер арасындағы құндылықтар мен нанымдардың айырмашылықтары.

Түйін сөздер: мәдениет, қайшылықтар, нанымдар, курс дизайны, курсты әзірлеуші, АМАТ (арнайы мақсаттағы ағылшын тілі), МСД (мәдениет, салт-дәстүрлер).

Introduction

For a while, assume that you are assigned to design a course on English for Specific Purposes (ESP) on Culture, Traditions and Customs (CTC) of a local nation at a university with other two or three of your colleagues. The reason to design that kind of course may be different, for instance, the university may have foreign students including exchange students to be introduced to the national culture or there is a necessity for the local multinational students to get easier integrated into the world of business after graduation. The institution may require the course syllabus to have some types of approaches included in teaching, for example, a communicative approach. In the process, the course designers may experience tensions and challenges because of differences between their attitudes towards the culture of the local society, its values, and the needs of the students [1]. It may be beyond comprehension why there are discrepancies sometimes between opinions of teachers of one profession, even the same teaching experience and almost the same age. The author examines the importance of teachers' sociocultural beliefs and values and how they influence the development of a course. In the sphere of world higher education, it is noticed that there are different cultural values between teachers and students, as well as different values between teachers. It is not so clear yet why there are sometimes discrepancies between the beliefs

of teachers of the same profession, even the same teaching experience and almost the same age. This work examines what types of tension there can be, why they can exist and how they can be overcome. The focus of this paper is on the differences in the values and beliefs of teachers as course developers who are experienced in curriculum and syllabus developing for courses, mainly in the area of studying culture in the field of education. Notions of *culture*, *tension* and *beliefs*, *course design* and *development* will always be going along the example of *CTC ESP* (mentioned above) through the paper. Possible recommendations for syllabus designing will be offered as a conclusion.

Method: secondary research. General requirements for syllabus designing

«Any syllabus is primarily a plan of *what is to be achieved through teaching and learning*» so, according to Breen [2, 82), «it has to have six requirements which will influence designer decisions». If Breen's further thoughts are conveyed in details by paraphrasing, they will sound as follows. First, the plan should provide an accessible framework of the knowledge and skills on which teachers and learners will teach and study. Second, the plan should provide continuity for its users, that is, teachers and learners are possibly to know the orders of the materials to be covered within certain period of time. Third, it has to have a record of what has been achieved, that is, pre-requisites for another

level if it is a language course. In other words, if it is for a specific discipline the content of the syllabus must clearly show what other subject should be taken prior to this one. Fourth requirement is that it should have clear objectives through which a learner's progress could be evaluated. Fifth, it should be appropriate to the purposes of the users. The users of the syllabus are the teachers, usually the course developers themselves and the students. Sixth, it should be sensitive to the educational environment which means that it has to meet the requirements of the context where the language or the subject is going to be taught. By the context, it is meant to be the participants of the classroom where the language or the subject will take place, the students' needs and the purposes and ideologies deriving from the curriculum of the educational institution and the needs of the society.

When a designer plans the objectives and the content of a syllabus for a certain course of a discipline, they have to look for the alternatives among the influences of theory, classroom practice and demands of the local educational bodies. In order to meet these requirements, the designer will most probably create a syllabus on the basis of some particular principles. These principles could be a reflection of the views of the designer and the collaborators. The principles may reflect the view upon the language. The attitude to the content subject taught by the medium language may also be reflected in the syllabus designer's principles. These principles in the syllabus could also reflect how the teaching and the learning will work in the socio-cultural discourse or the educational context. While designing syllabuses, designers are supposed 'to take into account these views in the decision-making process' [3, 157] which usually happens before the course program is launched. Use of English as a medium in the content of a discipline to explore the culture of the learners in other countries, for example, Kazakhstan, might cause some misunderstandings, first of all, among course designers. Just going back to our ESP CTC example, the first disagreement may take place in relation to the vocabulary which is to be used in the students' discourse community in the classroom. The reason for that is quite explainable because the words of one language may not be able to express the exact meaning of the notion in the alien culture. It may lead to a clash of cultures, misunderstandings between people which may result in psychological tension about which is discussed in the next section.

Discussion: Dilemmas and difficulties appearing during syllabus designing process

Sometimes a syllabus designer might undergo some sorts of psychological tension, like difficulties while 'combining the learners' foreign language competence and their knowledge of their own culture' [4] cited in [5, 149]. It means that the learners are supposed to be communicating in English about the culture in their own context.

Rather than relying on expertise, methodology, and materials controlled and dispensed by Western ESL countries, EFL countries should strive to establish their own research contingents and encourage methods specialists and classroom teachers to develop language teaching methods that take into account the political, economic, social, and cultural factors and, most important of all, the EFL situations in their countries [6, 604].

There are many dilemmas and difficulties appearing in front of the teacher as a syllabus designer who tries to adjust the Western methodologies into the construction of the locally designed syllabus. Those dilemmas and other contradictions seem to entail some tensions between the teacher beliefs and the teaching practice. For example, the teacher who is to use the ready CTC ESP syllabus would have to balance between the communicative confidence of the fourth year student and the low language competence of a freshman. Saying about the learners' language competence, it is the case when there is no prerequisite to a course, i.e. any student from any year of study can be registered. It may be the demand of an institution which puts the course developers in front of a dilemma. On the one hand, in order to fit the institutional demand the syllabus should be adjusted to a student with average knowledge of English which is usually high intermediate level, on the other, it is to meet the needs of the last-year students whose English speaking skills are normally an advanced level. Again this contradiction during the course design has to be overcome by compromising with your beliefs.

As it is seen from the demands required of the syllabus, the syllabus designers have to work within a number of constraints. Curriculum designing or syllabus constructing for language learning or any other subject is as a challenging, tiring at the same time interesting process as the learning of a language itself. Syllabus designing is difficult because it requires many things to be considered, for example, the culture of a whole nation in the

broad understanding with its material heritage and traditions and culture in a narrower view, as Holliday [7] defines them in a smaller, more precise way. He identifies everyday habits and behavior of a teacher and student groups as cultures. Trying to avoid the stereotypical national definitions and lovingly describing the educational environment, he admits that

... Cultures of individual classrooms and of an individual teacher and student groups are entities which are close to us, in which we participate and about which we know a great deal. They are more tangible and definable than an 'Arab culture' or a Western culture'. In this micro-cultural landscape of teachers, students and classes, one can begin to see, too, dynamics of change and interaction in what amounts to a cultural market place, where new ideas or practices are traded between different groups according to their needs [7, 6].

If the above quotation is simplified, then one can see that the challenging feature of the syllabus designing job identifies the interesting and unknown side of the subject for the program developers. In the case of CTC ESP, one of the contradictions that may appear is the way how the course developers want to integrate the national culture that is the discipline itself into those micro-cultures of students. As my teaching practice shows that before the syllabus is implemented into practice in the classroom as an educational working program it goes through many interactions around the classroom. The curriculum developers have to compromise with their individual culture and conciliate their own teaching beliefs in order to meet the needs of the learners who are representatives of classroom cultures. In the case of CTC ESP, there may be an additional contradiction which is a difference between the designers' perception of cultural values depending on what area – urban or rural one – each of the participants was brought up. The designers also have to take into account the requirements of the institution in order to fit their syllabus into the whole socio-educational environment of a country by adjusting the syllabus to 'the culture of the classroom which is an amalgam and permutation of different and often conflicting social contexts for the different types of people involved'.

There is a tension between the 'internal world of the individual and the social world of the group' [8, 129].

Conflict of interests seems to be a recurring point between different professional groups, between curriculum developers and teachers, and between teacher and students, especially where there are

cultural differences. And, differences in syllabus designers' perception of cultural values which is the case of CTC ESP mentioned above. The curriculum developers might be insiders that is a collaborating group of teachers working in the same institution, and outsiders that is, for example, a group of researching scientists authorized by the Ministry of Education of a certain country. The group of outsiders even might come from another country, for example, in the case of Egypt where, as Holliday [9, 54-63] reports and warns about Western and Eastern cultural differences when in his experience a group of curriculum developers for English learning decided to implement the communicative approach in the local schools in the 1980s. At first their project did not go well because the adjustment of the program to the local teachers' beliefs and students' needs was not taken into account in full.

As CTC ESP is a syllabus for a pure course of culture and traditions, a similar situation may happen among the course developers. One of the difficulties in the process of creation of that course may appear if one of the course developers is brought up in a large city where the cultural and traditional values are not so highly esteemed as in the villages. Because of the ideology held during the person's childhood and adolescent time large cities may have used to be multinational consequently being more cosmopolitan. As a result, there may appear a tension between the teachers – course developers' understanding of the local culture as a whole. Nevertheless, as the job of an English language teacher is considered to be an international profession, Holliday appeals that conflicting interests are a fact of life which must be addressed if we are to come anywhere near solving important professional problems. Also, conflict does not have to be destructive. When a curriculum developer or a teacher is confronted by teachers, students or an institution which seem to go against the new, 'modern' methodology, it is *not* time for each side to close ranks and become more extreme in their defense against the other [7, 6].

If I dare to support this view by a teacher's general practice, I would say that firstly, even though the syllabus is not going to be designed as a new one, the program developers may have different professional and cultural views to the matter and they have to solve any existing conflicts of interests among themselves beforehand. Secondly, if the syllabus is not similar to those which have been designed in the old familiar canons, it can definitely raise quite a large number of questions among the users that is the teachers and the students. All the more, if

the syllabus is absolutely new one, it might raise a great deal of doubts among the teaching community of an institution and among the participants of the classroom. According to my teaching experience, sometimes designers might need a whole semester to defend their own «child». The first meeting of introducing a new course syllabus may become a theatre of a battle which may end in a fiasco for the course developers. So instead of immediately rejecting the newly created document, it is better to have a constructive dialogue and mutual learning which would be healthy and productive. This conflict might occur because of inconsistency of beliefs of the curriculum developers and the users.

Recommendations on local context syllabus designing and Culture

Beliefs are not necessarily something that teachers can easily articulate or are completely aware of [10] cited in [11, 26]. Some teachers may not be able to say about their own beliefs from their own teaching experience simply because of different reasons. For example, some teachers who have a well-paid job in private schools would not like to show their beliefs because of the danger of losing their jobs. Another example, some of the teachers working in Kazakhstan may belong to the group of people who may have been educated before 1991, during the Communist Era when nobody took account of teachers' beliefs. Owing to the fact that, most of the English language teachers are women who have had the Asian family education which, too, may restrict teachers from expressing their beliefs openly. I believe that every teacher has their own beliefs, either personal or professional.

Beliefs can arise from work experience and the discourses of the workplace, from your view of language, your view of the social context of language, your view of learning and learners and your view of teaching. Your ongoing professional development – readings, presentations, or courses can influence your beliefs. All of these influences – as a learner, as a teacher, as a colleague – provide the basis for your understanding of how languages are taught and learned and the beliefs that guide your choices [11, 26].

However, beliefs may change or undergo some alterations. For instance, before I have gained some experience as a teacher I used to have a belief that learners must only follow directions taken from a teacher. First, I was taught to think so myself at the secondary school even in some cases at the pedagogical university of initial training. Secondly,

I assume, it must, too, be something cultural which is peculiar to that part of the world where I come from. In spite of being an Asian country citizen, I have gradually reconsidered my views and beliefs according to the new needs of my students. A bright example for the differences in the world cultures of obtaining knowledge can be the following:

Over a thousand years ago in Al-Azhar, one of the oldest universities in the world, one learned man would sit under a pillar with a surrounding group of disciples eagerly hanging on every word he uttered, doing their best to understand his ideas and follow them [12, 55].

But there are some principles or habits, teaching ones as well as personal ones, which may stay with a teacher lifelong, which a teacher may try to incorporate into any micro – culture of a class he or she teaches. For example, starting always with a warming-up exercises; ending a lesson with a small game; finishing a class with a tricky question to make students think outside of the classroom; or finishing a lesson with producing a question in small groups to sum up the theme which has been taken in that class.

The role of culture in language learning and using a language in exploring one's own culture seems to be increasing. It is noticeable especially in those countries that have recently got independence and are going through self-identification process. Graves [13, 186] saying that 'culture may provide a broader and deeper context for how one knows or determines what is valued, appropriate, or even feasible and why', cites Damen [14] who calls culture « the fifth dimension of language teaching». Kramsch [15], cited in Graves [13, 186] asserts that 'culture is not just a fifth skill or even an aspect of communicative competence but the underlying dimension of all one knows and does'. It is seen that a teacher compiling a syllabus should view the culture, the local national culture as well as the target language culture, as the integral part of the program. Doing so, a program developer enables the syllabus users, other teachers and learners to be aware of the role of culture in everyday communication. Further, the users understanding the cultural aspects of the target language might in practice behave themselves in culturally proper ways additionally having had knowledge of their own culture. In this way, a learner becomes prepared to evaluate and respect the values of his or her own culture and probably will not have at their work place such constraints as the course designers have had during the development of the imaginary CTC ESP syllabus.

Conclusion

The difficulties do not seem to end with the implementation of the syllabus into the classroom. Syllabus construction may also raise pedagogical difficulties if the program developers do not consider the larger context around the classroom. As Nunan and Lamb [16, 33] identify that the context and environment of the learning process, including the curriculum plans that should drive the pedagogical action, are critically important. In other words, classroom decisions cannot be made without reference to structures operating outside of the classroom, at the level of the curriculum.

Above the needs of students and the institutional requirements, those 'structures operating outside of the classroom' might be looking over the ways how the teaching and learning currently are going on. These supervising views may be influenced by the changes in the educational area happening around

the world. In their turn, the changes may concern the differences in teaching and learning from the perspectives of the content of the syllabus, activities and materials or technologies as well as teaching approaches to be included into the teaching and learning environment. Thus, apart from minding the structures operating outside the classroom the course designers should first of all think of the context and environment of the learning process. The learning process involves the framework of the knowledge and skills to be taught and studied. Materials to be covered within a certain period and language learning levels of students are also to be included in the syllabus. Objectives of the course and evaluation of a learner's progress are to be considered. Finally, the syllabus should be designed taking into account the learners' needs, demands of the local society and peculiarities of the national culture as well as micro-cultures of the school.

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