

Research Article

CURRICULUM DESIGN IN ENGLISH FOR SPECIFIC PURPOSES: A SOCIODIDACTIC APPROACH

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to examine how the sociodidactic approach can improve the relevance and effectiveness of curricula in English for Specific Purposes (ESP). The analysis of the principles and tools of this approach showed that integrating the social, cultural, and professional contexts of learners into curriculum design allows for the adaptation of teaching to the specific needs of students. The study also demonstrated that the sociodidactic approach fosters a better alignment between pedagogical objectives and professional requirements, emphasizing learners' language practices. Thus, it contributes to making curricula more relevant and effective.

Keywords: sociodidactic, curriculum, English for Specific Purposes, relevance, effectiveness.

INTRODUCTION

The teaching of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) has become a crucial response to the specific linguistic needs arising from academic, professional, and technical contexts (T. Hutchinson & A. Waters, 1987, p. 19). Unlike general English, ESP relies on a thorough analysis of learners' needs and adapts content to meet these particular requirements (T. Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998, p. 2). However, designing ESP curricula remains a multidimensional challenge, as it must balance diverse educational objectives, complex sociocultural realities, and the specific expectations of the labor market.

A major issue identified in this field is the frequent mismatch between curricula and the real needs of learners. Curricula often lack relevance when they neglect the social, cultural, and professional dimensions of learners. D. Brown (2001, p. 47) emphasizes that this disconnection often results from the absence of a clear methodological framework to integrate these dimensions into curriculum design. Moreover, while teachers are competent in their disciplines, they do not always have the necessary tools to develop curricula tailored to specific contexts. These shortcomings call for a revision of the approaches used in designing ESP programs. In this context, the sociodidactic approach emerges as a relevant solution. This method focuses on the close interaction between social contexts and teaching-learning processes, integrating learners' cultural specificities into curriculum development. According to J. Dubois (2010, p. 89), it promotes the continuous adaptation of content, considering the lived realities, expectations, and aspirations of learners. As a result, the sociodidactic approach helps reduce the gap between theory and practice while enriching pedagogical methods in ESP. Despite the growing importance of ESP, curriculum design often remains inadequate due to insufficient integration of social and cultural dimensions. This issue raises a central question: how can the sociodidactic approach enhance the relevance and effectiveness of ESP curricula? By answering this question, the objective of this study is to examine and show how the sociodidactic approach can contribute to improving the relevance and effectiveness of curricula in English for Specific Purposes.

THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS OF ESP CURRICULUM DESIGN

Definition and Characteristics of English for Specific Purposes (ESP)

ESP is based on a clear distinction between professional and academic languages on one hand, and general English on the other hand. J. Swales (1990, p. 5) defines ESP by its primary objective: teaching English based on the specific needs of learners, whether in professional, technical, or academic settings. He emphasizes that ESP must adapt to the particular requirements of a given field, both lexically (technical vocabulary) and discursively (specific genres and communication strategies for the field). In this sense, ESP differs from general English not only in content but also in its goal, which is to enable the learner to communicate effectively in specialized contexts.

T. Dudley-Evans and St John (1998, p. 4) expanded this definition by stating that ESP should be designed around the linguistic competencies required to perform a specific professional or academic activity. These competencies include not only technical vocabulary but also discourse genres, language registers, and communication strategies specific to each field (e.g., a research report, a legal document, or a presentation in a professional context). These elements are integral to ESP learning, aiming to prepare learners for authentic, professional situations.

However, despite ESP's pragmatic orientation, this approach has not always considered the social and cultural dimensions of language learning. Indeed, the purely linguistic and technical focus of ESP has been criticized for overlooking the social contexts in which the language is used. Professional and academic practices are not limited to the use of specialized vocabulary; they are also influenced by social contexts, power hierarchies, and cultural practices that can affect how language is learned and used. H. Basturkmen (2006, p. 56) emphasizes that ESP should not only impart technical skills but also teach learners to understand the social stakes and interactions in their professional practices. In practice, the traditional approaches in the design ESP curricula did not take into account these important aspects raised by Basturkmen.

Limits of Traditional Approaches in ESP Curriculum Design

Traditional approaches in ESP, while effective in various contexts, present certain limitations that have led to criticism. These methods primarily emphasize technical and linguistic dimensions but tend to neglect equally essential aspects, such as the social and cultural realities of learners. K. Hyland (2006, p. 13) points out that this orientation can reduce the overall impact of learning by omitting key elements that are crucial for learners' success. Traditional methodologies often focus on learning specific grammatical or lexical structures within a particular field. However, this exclusive focus on linguistic content often ignores the social contexts in which learners operate. Such an approach can limit their engagement and reduce the effectiveness of the learning process (L. Anthony, 2018, p. 2). In fact, learning becomes a technical task disconnected from the practical realities of language users.

Another significant issue with traditional approaches is their lack of consideration for sociocultural dimensions. Cultural and social factors strongly influence how individuals learn and interact. For instance, learners from different backgrounds may have varied perspectives on communication, managing interactions, or solving problems. Ignoring these dimensions can create a disconnect between the proposed objectives and learners' expectations, which can negatively impact their motivation and involvement (D. Belcher, 2006, p. 136). Moreover, ESP curricula designed using traditional approaches are often rigid and linear, leaving little room for adaptation to emerging needs. Yet, professional and technological contexts evolve rapidly, requiring flexible and responsive programs. Traditional approaches struggle to meet these demands, limiting their relevance and impact in ever-changing environments (T. Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998, p. 145).

The disconnection between theory and practice is another limit. In fact, the pedagogical objectives set out in curricula do not always align with real-world practices. This gap may be due to a lack of thorough consultation with key stakeholders, such as teachers, learners, and professionals. As a result, the programs may not effectively address concrete needs, compromising their usefulness and applicability in professional contexts. Although ESP has led to significant advances in teaching English for specific purposes, its traditional approaches show flaws that require a redesign. An integrative perspective, such as the sociodidactic approach, could address these shortcomings by considering sociocultural dimensions and making curricula more contextual and flexible.

THE SOCIODIDACTIC APPROACH: AN ENRICHING PERSPECTIVE FOR ESP

Definition of Sociodidactics

Sociodidactics has been defined by several major authors. M. Rispaill (2003) defines sociodidactics as "an approach that takes into account both the social practices of language and the dynamics of power in language teaching and learning situations". It emphasizes the importance of the interaction between individuals, their social and cultural environment in language learning, which goes beyond a purely technical or linguistic approach. Rispaill links language learning to social practices, which are themselves marked by power relations. This theoretical framework suggests that language teaching, particularly for specific purposes, must integrate the social and cultural dimensions of learning contexts, not just focus on linguistic aspects.

M. Dabène (1997) approaches sociodidactics by anchoring it in the perspective of analyzing class and power relations in language teaching. He proposes that language teaching should not only be seen as an act of acquiring linguistic skills but also as a means through which social inequalities are reproduced. Dabène highlights the political dimension of language teaching, especially in specialized contexts like ESP, stressing that mastering a language is not only a means of communication but also a tool of social distinction. Furthermore, P. Blanchet (1998) defines sociodidactics as "the study of interactions between language practices and the social contexts in which they unfold". The author argues that language teaching, particularly in specialized settings, must consider social norms, power relations, and institutional expectations that influence language use. These definitions show how the works of these authors have contributed to shaping sociodidactics as an approach that considers not only linguistic skills but also the social, cultural, and identity dimensions of learners in specific teaching contexts.

The Key Principles of the Sociodidactic Approach

The sociodidactic approach is based on an understanding of the learning process that integrates the social and cultural dimensions of learners in curriculum design and pedagogical practices. This approach is distinguished by its attention to the contexts in which learners operate and how these contexts influence learning. Key principles of this approach include contextualizing learning, active participation of learners, program flexibility, and integration of sociocultural dimensions.

Contextualization of Learning

Contextualization is a fundamental principle of the sociodidactic approach. According to C. Puren (2002, p. 45), this approach emphasizes that learning should be rooted in real and relevant social situations for the learners. Therefore, pedagogical content should not be abstract but directly related to the social, cultural, and professional practices of the learners. This means that curricula must reflect the environments in which learners will apply their language skills. This principle is based on the idea that learning becomes more meaningful and effective when the content taught is aligned with the realities and needs of learners (L. Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86).

Active Participation of Learners

Another key principle of the sociodidactic approach is the active participation of learners in their own learning. According to J. Lave and E. Wenger (1991, p. 29), learning occurs within communities of practice, where learners are considered as actors and not as passive receivers of knowledge. In this approach, learners are encouraged to contribute to defining learning objectives, selecting pedagogical content, and assessing their own progress. This active participation helps to strengthen their motivation and engagement by involving them more in learning processes that are adapted to their social and professional realities.

Flexibility and Adaptability of Programs

One essential principle of the sociodidactic approach is flexibility. Curricula must be able to adapt to the changing needs of learners, the evolving nature of their social and professional environments, and the specificities of learning contexts. Pedagogical content must be modulable and responsive to learners' feedback, allowing for a more personalized approach to teaching. Furthermore, this flexibility allows the integration of innovative pedagogical practices, such as project-

based learning or the use of digital technologies, to meet the specific needs of learner groups (C. Puren, 2002, p. 50).

Integration of Sociocultural Dimensions

The sociodidactic approach also takes into account the sociocultural dimensions of learners. Pedagogical content is not only oriented toward linguistic skills but also toward the values, beliefs, and cultural norms that influence how learners use language in their daily and professional lives. As D. Belcher (2006, p. 145) points out, this approach considers that social and cultural contexts play a central role in the construction of knowledge and, therefore, in the way a language is taught and learned. This requires reflection on language practices specific to different groups and sectors, and an adjustment of curricula to make them more inclusive and relevant for a diversity of learners.

Methods and Tools for a Sociodidactic Approach

The sociodidactic approach, as an innovative and context-centered pedagogical approach, encourages the use of diverse methods and tools to meet the needs of learners in authentic communication situations. Among these methods, the use of case studies, simulations, collaborative projects, and the creation of flexible and modular content are particularly effective. These practices help integrate the social and cultural dimensions of learning contexts and encourage a participatory and inclusive approach.

Use of Case Studies Simulations, and Collaborative Projects

Case studies and simulations are powerful pedagogical tools in the sociodidactic approach. They allow the reproduction of authentic situations in which learners can interact using the target language in specific professional and social contexts. Case studies provide learners with the opportunity examining real-world, often complex, situations and reflecting on possible solutions while applying acquired linguistic and cultural knowledge. Simulations, on the other hand, place learners in concrete professional communication situations such as negotiations, meetings, or presentations. They encourage decision-making, problem-solving, and effective communication in specific contexts, thus fostering immersion into the realities of their future work environment. According to J. Willis (1996, p. 34), these techniques are particularly suitable for teaching English for Specific Purposes (ESP) as they allow learners to practice in a realistic, needs-focused setting.

As for Collaborative projects, they are also essential in this approach. They offer learners the opportunity to work together on authentic tasks, solve problems in groups, and communicate in a cooperative environment. These projects foster active learning, idea exchange, and the development of social and cultural skills crucial in a professional context. Additionally, collaboration enhances learner motivation by giving them a common goal and involving them in practical learning processes (D. Johnson & R. Johnson, 2009, p. 17).

3.3.2. Creation of Flexible and Modular Content

In a sociodidactic approach, teaching content must be sufficiently flexible and modular to adapt to the specific needs of learners, changing contexts, and professional objectives. This flexibility allows for addressing learner requirements while considering the social and cultural specifics of their learning environment.

Modular content allows for the construction of learning units that can be adjusted according to the needs of learner groups. For example, a

business English training program could include separate modules on negotiation, report writing, and intercultural communication. Each module can be adapted to the learners' specific characteristics (language level, professional sector, etc.). This approach allows for personalized learning, adjusting the pace and priorities to individual needs and maintaining the relevance of content throughout the learning process (C. Puren, 2002, p. 62).

Flexible content may also include digital resources, online simulations, or interactive case studies, which allow learners to access information and teaching materials at any time and from anywhere. This flexibility is a major asset in sociodidactic pedagogy, as it takes into account learners' time and space constraints while ensuring that the content remains relevant and tailored to their needs.

Stakeholder Participation (Teachers, Learners and Professionals)

Active participation of all stakeholders such as teachers, learners, and professionals are at the core of the sociodidactic approach. In this model, learners are not merely passive receivers of knowledge, but are actively involved in designing their learning pathway. They participate in setting objectives, choosing teaching content, and evaluating their own progress (J. Lave & E. Wenger, 1991, p. 29). Teachers are not simply knowledge transmitters but act as facilitators, guiding learners through their projects, directing them to relevant resources, and creating a collaborative learning environment.

Collaboration with professionals in the field is also crucial. Involving experts and practitioners in the design and implementation of ESP curricula ensures that the content aligns with real-world job requirements. For instance, professionals may be invited as guest speakers or to design real-world tasks that learners must complete as part of their training (K. Hyland, 2006, p. 134). This tripartite participation (teachers, learners, professionals) ensures that ESP curricula are not only aligned with current learner needs but also meet labor market demands, making them more relevant and effective.

Principles for Designing ESP Curricula According to the Sociodidactic Approach

In a sociodidactic perspective, the design of ESP curricula is based on several fundamental principles. First, analyzing the social and professional needs of learners is an essential step. Developing an ESP curriculum should begin with a thorough study of learners' social and professional practices. This requires understanding not only the technical requirements specific to each field but also the social norms, power dynamics, cultural values, and communication codes within the relevant professional environment. For example, H. Basturkmen (2006, p. 58) highlights that medical English is not limited to technical vocabulary but also includes social conventions, power dynamics, and cultural expectations typical of the medical field.

Next, the contextualization of teaching is essential. Teaching English for Specific Purposes (ESP) should not be universal or abstract. On the contrary, it must adapt to the social, cultural, and professional realities of learners, while considering their particularities. According to J. Lantolf (2000, p. 77), "language learning is intrinsically contextual, and language skills must be developed in direct relation to the social and cultural practices in which they will be used. Such contextualization enables learners to more effectively acquire the necessary skills while integrating authentic social and professional practices".

Finally, the intercultural dimension must also be taken into account. In a globalized world, ESP is often used in contexts where different

cultures meet. L. Vygotsky (1978, p. 99) and P. Bourdieu (1991, p. 86) emphasize the crucial role of intercultural interactions in the construction of knowledge and mastery of social practices. The sociodidactic approach encourages examining how cultural differences influence communication in English in a professional context. Mastery of the language here requires not only linguistic skills but also intercultural competence. This allows learners to interact effectively in multicultural environments, taking into account the cultural specifics of their interlocutors.

SUGGESTIONS FOR AN ADAPTED CURRICULUM DESIGN IN ESP

To meet the needs of learners in English for Specific Purposes (ESP), an adapted curriculum design must take into account several key factors, including the contextualization of content, the integration of social and cultural dimensions, and the adoption of interactive and inclusive methods and tools. The following recommendations aim to make the curriculum more relevant, flexible, and effective, based on the principles of the sociodidactic approach.

Taking into account the specific needs of learners and professional contexts

One of the first steps in designing an adapted curriculum is to conduct a thorough needs analysis, considering the professional contexts in which learners will operate. Identifying the specific skills required in each field of ESP (business, medicine, engineering, etc.) is essential for ensuring that the program meets labor market expectations. This analysis should include not only linguistic needs (specialized vocabulary, grammatical structures) but also the sociocultural and communication skills necessary in professional interactions (C. Puren, 2002, p. 62). It is also crucial to adopt a flexible approach that allows for adjustments in content and teaching methods based on the changing needs of learners. For example, in a business English training program, modules on intercultural negotiations, conflict management, or report writing could be included, depending on the priorities defined by learners and their trainers (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987, p. 120).

Adopting an active and participatory pedagogy

An active and participatory pedagogy is at the heart of an adapted curriculum design. This approach involves learners taking charge of their learning by interacting with the content, collaborating with their peers, and applying their knowledge in practical situations. Using teaching methods such as Task-Based Learning (TBL) and collaborative projects encourages learner engagement and enables them to work on authentic situations, while developing social and intercultural skills essential in professional environments (J. Willis, 1996, p. 45). Learners should also be involved in evaluating their own learning, to develop their autonomy and critical thinking. Assessments can be based on real projects, case studies, or simulations that reflect the professional tasks learners will face in their future careers (K. Hyland, 2006, p. 134).

Integrating sociocultural dimensions into educational content

An adapted ESP curriculum must necessarily integrate the sociocultural dimensions that influence professional practices in ESP contexts. By considering cultural specifics and differences in professional practices across countries, ESP curricula enable learners to better understand and interact effectively in multicultural

contexts. Integrating intercultural communication situations in fields such as business, health, or engineering, prepares learners to navigate different social and professional practices, taking into account cultural variations in language use (M. Bennett, 2012, p. 83). Additionally, teachers must be trained to recognize and value the cultural diversity of learners, to ensure inclusive teaching that respects differences (J. Lave & E. Wenger, 1991, p. 75).

Using innovative technological tools and resources

Technological tools and resources should play a central role in ESP curriculum design. By using online learning platforms, interactive simulations, and multimedia resources, immersive learning environments can be created that promote a more dynamic and engaging approach. These technologies allow learners not only to access varied content but also to practice in authentic, contextualized communication settings. Digital technologies also offer the opportunity to make learning more flexible and personalized, allowing learners to progress at their own pace and according to their specific needs. For example, adaptive learning platforms can adjust exercises based on learners' performance, offering challenges suited to their level (Puren, 2002, p. 63).

Encouraging collaboration with industry professionals

Another key suggestion for an adapted curriculum design is to foster collaboration with professionals and field experts. Involving professionals in the design and implementation of the curriculum ensures that the skills taught are truly aligned with labor market requirements. This can include practitioners as guest speakers, internships, or partnerships with professional organizations (Johnson and Johnson, 2009, p. 23). Professionals can also contribute to defining learning objectives, creating educational resources, and evaluating learners' progress. This collaboration strengthens the relevance and quality of ESP programs while promoting teaching that is more focused on learners' real needs in their professional environment.

CONCLUSION

The design of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) curricula benefits from being reconsidered through a sociodidactic approach, which offers innovative perspectives tailored to the complex needs of learners. Unlike traditional approaches, often centered on linguistic and technical content, the sociodidactic approach emphasizes the integration of social, cultural, and professional dimensions into program development. By conducting a detailed analysis of learners' practices and contextualizing teaching within their realities, this approach ensures a better alignment between pedagogical objectives and labor market expectations. Moreover, the inclusion of cultural specifics and intercultural interactions fosters a more comprehensive mastery of the language, going beyond linguistic skills to develop the ability to navigate multicultural environments. By reducing the gap between theory and practice, the sociodidactic approach not only enriches teaching-learning processes but also contributes to enhancing the relevance and effectiveness of ESP curricula. Thus, it emerges as a viable alternative to meet the growing demands of an ever-evolving professional world.

Competing interests

"Author has declared that no competing interests exist."

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