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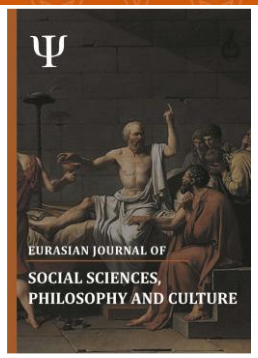

BEYOND THE COURSEBOOK: ESP PRACTITIONERS AS CURRICULUM-DECISION MAKERS IN THE OIL AND GAS INDUSTRY

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine the role of materials development as a curriculum decision in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) course design for oil and gas industry professionals. The research is based on an action research study conducted with six B1-level professionals working at UzbekNefteGaz (UNG), Uzbekistan, whose roles required effective communication in technical, legal, and compliance-related contexts. Data was collected from classroom practice, materials implementation, and observation of learner engagement across four categories of materials: a published ESP coursebook, unpublished authentic workplace documents, in-house scaffolding materials, and digital tools. The findings suggest that adapting published materials, integrating authentic workplace documents, and developing purpose-built scaffolding materials significantly enhanced learners' professional communication skills and genre awareness. The study highlights that functioning as a curriculum developer rather than following prescribed materials uncritically - is essential for designing ESP courses that meaningfully address the specific professional needs and discourse communities of adult learners in specialized fields.

INTRODUCTION

Materials development is fundamental to English for Specific Purposes (ESP) course design, yet its role as a curriculum decision has been largely overlooked in the literature. While existing literature addresses materials selection and adaptation in general terms, comparatively little attention has been paid to the deeper curriculum significance of these decisions in ESP contexts - that is, how what practitioners choose to use, adapt, or create directly reflects their understanding of learners' professional needs and discourse communities.

This is particularly relevant in specialized fields such as the oil and gas industry, where learners have well-defined communicative purposes that

published resources alone cannot always fully address. In such contexts, the practitioner's role extends beyond that of a materials user to one of active curriculum decision-making.

This article reports on an action research study conducted at UzbekNefteGaz (UNG), Uzbekistan, in which the researcher designed and delivered an ESP course for six oil and gas professionals at B1 level. The study was guided by Tomlinson's (2011, as cited in Woodrow, 2018) SLA-informed principles of materials development and Shawer's (as cited in Woodrow, 2018) typology of practitioner curriculum identity, which together informed both the selection of materials and the practitioner role adopted throughout the course.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Despite the central role that materials play in language teaching, their function as curriculum decisions in English for specific purposes (ESP) course design has received comparatively limited attention in the literature. Much existing scholarship treats materials development as a process of selection and adaptation, yet in ESP contexts, materials choices carry deeper curriculum significance which they reflect the practitioner's understanding of learner needs, professional discourse communities, and syllabus priorities.

Tomlinson (2011, as cited in Woodrow, 2018) highlighted that "materials are anything used by teachers or learners to facilitate the learning of a language", which suggests that many resources are available to ESP practitioners (p. 152). Furthermore, Woodrow (2018) emphasized that there are published, such as academic journals, subject textbooks, and unpublished authentic materials including dissertations and company reports are available for ESP practitioners. Together, these perspectives suggest that, I believe, ESP materials is never about what is available, it is about what the practitioner chooses, why, and how those choices design the course.

Tomlinson (2011, as cited in Woodrow, 2018) proposed eight SLA-informed principles that should guide materials development, emphasizing that while his framework was originally developed in an EGP context, it provides valuable considerations for evaluating ESP materials. Among the most significant for ESP course design are the requirements that materials expose learners to authentic language use, draw attention to linguistic features, promote positive affect, and be perceived as professionally relevant by learners. Ellis (2009) further supported this by highlighting the value of consciousness-raising tasks, through which learners are guided to explicitly notice target language forms and develop their own linguistic understanding. Together, these principles suggest that effective ESP materials must not only deliver professional content but actively create conditions for language acquisition.

Woodrow (2018) mentioned that "ESP practitioners are responsible for the syllabus and the selection, adaptation and production of materials, along with student assessment" (p.156) and clearly explained the level of freedom among ESP practitioners on using "prescribed syllabus" with "prescribed coursebook".

He suggests that this is good for novice practitioners.

While SLA principles establish what effective ESP materials should achieve, it is the practitioner's curriculum identity that determines how those principles are realized in course design. Shawer (as cited in Woodrow, 2018) identified three practitioner types in terms of use of ESP coursebooks: "curriculum transmitters" who follows the coursebook without adaptation, "curriculum developers" who modify existing materials based on learners' needs, and "curriculum makers" who create the materials. I believe that curriculum developer role offers the most effective approach to ESP course design. McGrath (2016) supported this view and mentioned that modifying coursebook content to better suit learners' purposes directly enhances the quality of the learning experience (p. 69).

METHODS

This study adopted an action research design, in which the researcher functioned simultaneously as course designer and practitioner. This approach was chosen as it allowed for systematic reflection on materials development decisions and their impact on learners' professional communication development.

A total of six adults who have been working in various departments at the UNG (UzbekNefteGaz) company, including risk service project monitoring, oil products production, ESG (Environmental, Social and Governance) implementation, technical regulation, and law, participated in this part of the research. Their ages range from 30 to 40. They have been enrolling in General English courses since October, and their level is now B1, intermediate according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). Their main aim in learning the language is to be able to communicate effectively with their foreign business partners, take part in international conferences and training related to their field, and understand the protocols and contracts in technical contexts. Some of them also mentioned that good proficiency in English enables them to pursue careers abroad and enhance their career prospects.

Considering principles of SLA in materials development, four categories of materials were selected to address learners' communicative needs. The published ESP coursebook *Oil and Gas* by Lansford and Vallance (2011) served as the main structural resource, providing speaking and writing activities focused on professional communication tasks such as giving instructions, writing reports, explaining processes, and producing environmental incident reports, alongside industry-specific reading texts including "Upstream and Downstream," "How to Find Oil Traps," and "Who Are the People in a Typical Drilling Crew?", and technical vocabulary tasks covering collocations such as "Tools and Hardware" and "Gas Production and Distribution."

Unpublished authentic UNG materials were integrated to reflect learners' actual workplace context, including extracts from internal risk reports, technical regulations, ESG policies, legal and compliance case studies used for textual analysis and role-play, and authentic visual aids such as oil

refining flowcharts, safety posters, and ESG infographics.

In-house scaffolding materials were developed specifically for this group, including genre model templates for compliance summaries, request letters, and emails, and speaking checklists for problem-solution presentations and meetings. Finally, digital tools including COCA for exploring field-specific collocations, YouTube for authentic listening input, Google Docs and Google Classroom for collaborative writing tasks, and Padlet and Wordwall for group project work within problem-based learning activities were incorporated throughout the course.

Table 1.1 presents a sample timetable for week one of the course, illustrating how the selected materials were organized into a coherent weekly structure.

Table 1.1 English for Oil and Gas industry professionals – week one, sample timetable

Session	Monday	Wednesday	Friday
Session A 17.00- 18.30	Assessment and individual interviews	Vocabulary development: "Tools and hardware", discussion and reading: "Employers in the UK"	Discussion: "Upstream and downstream", reading: "The upstream process", and vocabulary development
Session B 19.00- 20.30	Discussion – Main oil producers, listening "It's my job" and vocabulary development	Project: "Oil and gas employers in my country" and writing: "Completing a form"	Listening: "Measuring oil and gas" and writing: "Writing a process of oil exploration stages"

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The published ESP coursebook *Oil and Gas* by Lansford and Vallance (2011) served as the main material of the course which provided units with field-specific content across speaking, writing, reading, and vocabulary skills development. Reading texts related to oil and gas industry such as "Upstream and Downstream," "How to Find Oil Traps," and "Who Are the People in a Typical Drilling Crew?" generated consistent learner engagement, as participants were able to connect the content directly to their own professional roles. Speaking and writing activities, including giving instructions, explaining processes, writing reports, and producing environmental incident reports provided a communicative foundation that was systematically adapted to better reflect the specific professional context of UNG learners. Vocabulary and glossary tasks covering technical terms and collocations such as "Tools and Hardware," "Understanding Instructions," and "Gas Production and Distribution" further supported learners in building the field-specific lexical resource required for professional communication.

These outcomes reflect the curriculum developer role described by Shawer (as cited in Woodrow, 2018) in which the practitioner adapts existing coursebook materials to address perceived shortcomings in relation to learners' needs rather than transmitting them unchanged. Woodrow (2018) emphasized that it is hard to find a book that can address certain ESP students' needs. McGrath (2016) supported this approach, arguing that modifying coursebook content to better suit learners' purposes directly enhances the quality of the learning experience (p. 69). The consistent engagement observed across adapted coursebook tasks suggests that this had a meaningful impact on how learners related to the course material, supporting the view that the ESP practitioner functions as an active curriculum decision-maker rather than simply a deliverer of "prescriptive" content.

Unpublished authentic materials from UNG proved to be among the most contextually meaningful resources used during the course. Extracts from internal risk reports, technical regulations, and ESG policies gave learners direct exposure to the genre conventions, technical register, and discourse patterns of their own professional field. Legal and compliance case studies, used as the basis for textual analysis and role-play activities, generated substantive and professionally grounded spoken interaction. Authentic visual aids, including oil refining process flowcharts, safety posters, and ESG infographics supported reading comprehension and served as effective springboards for process description and explanation tasks.

These findings are consistent with Woodrow's (2018) observation that authentic ESP materials frequently need to extend beyond published sources to include real workplace documents such as company reports and industry-specific texts (p. 154). While the coursebook provided a useful structural foundation, the UNG documents allowed learners to engage with the precise language, genres, and communicative conventions of their actual workplace. This supports the broader argument that in ESP course design, authentic unpublished materials are not merely supplementary but are often central to addressing learners' specific communicative needs.

In-house scaffolding materials addressed a clear gap between the coursebook tasks and the professional genres learners needed to produce in their workplace. Genre model templates for compliance summaries, request letters, and emails provided explicit structural guidance, which was reflected in the increased clarity and formality observed in learners' written outputs over time. Speaking checklists for problem-solution presentations and meetings similarly supported learners in organising their spoken contributions more coherently.

These outcomes reflect Tomlinson's (2011, as cited in Woodrow, 2018) principle that materials must actively create conditions for language acquisition rather than simply delivering content. By providing explicit genre models, the in-house materials guided learners to internalise professional

communication conventions, supporting McGrath's (2016) argument that materials adapted to learners' specific purposes enhance the overall effectiveness of the learning experience (p. 69).

Digital tools extended learning beyond the classroom and supported both vocabulary development and collaborative communication. COCA was used to help learners explore field-specific collocations and technical language in context, while YouTube TED Talks and podcasts provided additional authentic listening input. Google Docs and Google Classroom facilitated collaborative writing tasks, and Padlet and Wordwall supported group project work within problem-based learning activities.

The approach reflects Ellis's (2009) emphasis on consciousness-raising tasks that guide learners to notice target language forms in context rather than receiving decontextualised vocabulary lists. Collaborative platforms further reflect Tomlinson's (2011, as cited in Woodrow, 2018) principle that materials should promote active learner engagement through professionally relevant tasks.

CONCLUSION

This study showed that no single material was enough on its own to meet the communicative needs of oil and gas professionals. It was the combination of an adapted coursebook, authentic UNG documents, in-house scaffolding materials, and digital tools that made the course relevant and effective for this particular group of learners.

Among all the materials used, those that reflected learners' actual professional environment had the greatest impact. When learners could see a direct connection between the course content and their daily work, they engaged more meaningfully and grew more confident in using English for professional purposes.

These findings suggest that effective ESP course design requires practitioners to function as active curriculum decision-makers rather than simply deliverers of ready-made content. Although this study is limited by its small participant group and single institutional context, it offers a practical and theoretically grounded account of materials development in a specialized professional ESP setting, with implications for practitioners working in similar contexts.

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