

TEACHING SURVIVAL ENGLISH TO STUDENTS

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***ABSTRACT:** SURVIVAL ENGLISH IS THE TERM USED TO REFER TO THE ESSENTIAL ENGLISH PEOPLE NEED TO KNOW IN ORDER TO SURVIVE, NAMELY LIVE AND WORK, IN AN ENGLISH SPEAKING ENVIRONMENT. THE FOLLOWING ARTICLE FOCUSES ON ISSUES RELATED TO THAT TYPE OF ENGLISH: CATEGORIES OF LEARNERS OF SURVIVAL ENGLISH, THEIR LANGUAGE LEVEL, WHAT TO TEACH IN SURVIVAL ENGLISH, TOGETHER WITH SOME ASPECTS OF CULTURE (DEALING WITH EVERYDAY LIFE IN A NEW COUNTRY OR SOME CULTURAL TIPS).*

***KEY WORDS:** COURSE DESIGN, NEED ANALYSIS, SURVIVAL ENGLISH, TEACH*

Introduction

Survival English is a term used to talk about the essential English someone needs to know in order to survive – live or work – in an English speaking environment. Thus, teachers will need to cover essential English to deal with everyday life in the new country. This could be: asking directions; identifying food in the supermarket; working with numbers and the local currency; going to the dentist's or to the doctor's; dealing with officials at the town hall or at the post office, etc.

Survival English Students

Typical students of Survival English fall into several categories. They might be going to an English-speaking country on holidays. Then, they might be taking an English course in a foreign country, where they will live for a stated amount of time with some host families. Or they might take part in a conference where the language of communication is English. Or they might simply be attending a certain event (a wedding, an anniversary, a house-warming party, etc.) in an English-speaking country.

In fact, those students might be in any other environment or situation. The main point is that wherever they are or whatever their purpose of being there might be, they have to use the English language in order to perform basic functions such as booking a room in a hotel and finding an address, asking for directions to find a toilet, ordering a meal, addressing a taxi driver, buying a ticket, expressing likes and dislikes, and so on.

Students' English Level

Analyses performed on the level of English the Survival English students possess revealed the fact that most of them are beginners. This means teachers will need to keep

things very simple. Thus, there is no point in putting emphasis on grammar or grammar complex rules. Teachers need to make their students confident enough to use some simple phrases in order to be able to perform a specific task, whether it is buying a bottle of water or asking the time.

Teaching Survival English

The experience of planning and designing an appropriate course that suits adult learners (students in this case) can be very challenging, as teachers are often faced with various complexities and problems. The solution is to perform an appropriate analysis of the learners' needs. If a group of learners' language needs can be accurately specified, then this identification can be used to determine the content of a language programme that will meet these needs.

Although there are various ways of interpreting 'needs', the concept of 'learner needs' is often interpreted in two ways:

- as what the learner *wants* to do with the language. This is the goal-oriented definition of a needs analysis and relates to terminal objectives or the end of learning;
- and what the learner *needs* to do to actually acquire the language. This is the process-oriented definition of the needs analysis and relates to the transitional, to the means of learning.

Traditionally, the first interpretation was widely used and accepted. However, in today's globalised teaching and learning contexts, courses for adult learners tend to relate to both at the same time, focusing on the process-oriented approach in aligning learners' needs with their present working scenarios.

In view of these concerns, researchers have discussed criteria for student courses design in terms of: length, assessment, goals, teacher's role, focus, course-content, course materials, and learner characteristics.

Concerns surrounding Survival English course design could be listed in the form of question such as:

- Should the course be intensive or extensive?
- Should the students' performance be assessed or non-assessed?
- Should the course deal with immediate needs or with delayed needs?
- Should the role of the teacher be that of the provider of knowledge and activities, or as facilitator of activities arising from learners' expressed wants?
- Should the course have a broad focus or a narrow one?
- Should the course be pre-study or pre-experience or run parallel with the study or experience?
- Should the materials be common-core or specific to students' study?
- Should the group taking the course be homogenous or heterogeneous?

By asking these questions prior to planning course design, the teacher can be better prepared.

In the literature of needs analysis, some of the following aspects are often recommended by experts:

- *placement testing*, that is administering tests designed to assess general English ability and ability to perform adequately in work contexts, might help determine the starting level of the course;

- *linguistic needs analysis* helps to identify skill development, linguistic structures, lexical items, language functions and levels of formality;
- *learning needs analysis* helps identify learners' attitudes towards different kinds of methodology, learning tasks and activities;
- *learner perceptions analysis* discovers learners' perceptions of themselves and others as part of their university culture, and their relationships with people from other cultures.

In analysing course design issues in any teaching and learning context, it is generally an accepted fact that the process of matching aim and method is not simply a mechanistic one, of finding out what is the aim and then finding an appropriate method to achieve it. In the process of performing a needs analysis a vast amount of information is usually collected. It is a difficult task to decide what may or may not prove to be relevant clues towards the choice of methods and materials to be used.

A need analysis will tell teachers exactly what kind of English his/her students are going to need to know. This varies a lot so teachers must get it right, as there is no point in spending a lesson on how to read a public transport timetable if the students take part in a three days' conference during which period they are not supposed to leave the hotel; or there will be of no use to have a lesson about how to order room service when the students are guests in host families' houses!

Once the teachers have worked out what they have to teach they must then give their students a hundred percent practical information.

In most cases it will not make much difference if students use the wrong preposition or perhaps use the present tense simple instead of the present tense continuous. It will be much more useful for them if they have the right vocabulary to hand and then have practice using it in context.

The best method to achieve this goal is using role plays, which are an incredibly useful resource in teaching Survival English. To practise role plays, students should be gathered into small groups in order to practise different scenarios such as: how to introduce themselves to each other; how to ask for and give personal information, how to talk about the weather, how to use a menu or order a meal, how to explain what they do not understand, how to congratulate speakers, how to explain what they want to do, etc.

Role plays are useful oral activities because the students are asked to speak in the first and second person. They learn to ask as well as answer and to use short complete bits of language, to respond properly. Additionally, they do not just use words, but also other parts of speaking a language, such as tone of voice, stress, intonation, facial expressions, etc.

Finally, teachers might also want to include some cultural tips for their students, explaining highly practical differences between what they are used to and what they need to do in the new situation. This could be as simple as the rules on jaywalking or crossing the road, maybe the usual etiquette on arriving at a business meeting and so on. All of these will come from what teachers have learnt with the initial needs analysis.

A framework for designing a Survival English course

The task of developing a course with a specific purpose (Survival English in our case) can be daunting, especially if the instructor has little or no prior knowledge of that subject matter. That is why teachers who want to be successful in their task should take the following steps:

a. Perform a Needs Analysis

A needs analysis can give instructors two kinds of information. On one hand, there is the students' current level in their second language, motivation, methods of learning they have experienced, etc. On the other hand, there is valuable information on what learners want to achieve.

Finding information about students' needs and previous experience can be done through various questionnaires, surveys, group discussions, individual talks, etc., where students may be asked to list areas in which everyone foresees using Survival English. However, such data should not be overused. Finding out this information does not mean that instructors should teach only what their learners want. In developing a new course, the needs analysis will help instructors bring together the required and desired in formulating goals and objectives, conceptualizing the content of the course, selecting teaching materials, and course assessment.

b. Establish the Survival English Course Aims

Formulating goals and objectives for a particular course allows the teacher to create a clear picture of what the course is going to be about. Clear understanding of goals and objectives will help instructors to make sure what material to teach, and when and how this material should be taught. Depending on what is desired, objectives may sound like the following: *learners will learn that ...*, *learners will be aware of ...*, *learners will develop ...*, etc.

Another important aspect of this stage in designing a Survival English course is to state *realistic* and *achievable* goals and objectives.

c. Design the Course Content

When taking into account information about the learners, goals, and objectives, instructors need to determine which aspects of Survival English learning will be included, emphasized, integrated, and used as a core of the course to address students' needs and expectations.

There may be different ways of conceptualizing the course content. Instructors can focus on developing basic skills, communicative competence, intercultural competence, vocabulary awareness, etc.

d. Select and Develop Survival English Materials

It is a well-known fact that many teachers are dependent on the available materials and thus are required to use the same textbook over and over again. Potentially there is nothing bad in using the same teaching materials, if everything is conceptualized through a learner-centred approach. The same article or audio story can be used for developing reading or listening comprehension skills, cultural awareness, expanding vocabulary, etc.

Experience showed that all teaching materials, be they prescribed or self-generated have advantages and disadvantages. For instance, an advantage of using self-generated materials is that language in the text can always be tailored so that it is comprehensible, interesting and also up to date.

A major disadvantage of utilizing self-developed materials for the Survival English course is that it leads to a dearth in activities focusing or utilizing listening. Commercially produced textbooks often come with a video or audio component that can help provide practice for listening or serve to be a model for a dialogue in a particular situation.

In self-generated materials it would be possible for the instructor to compensate for the lack of an audio CD or tape by modelling a dialogue with another student, during class.

However, in doing so it becomes difficult to present students with a more natural and fluid form of interaction, especially if the dialogue is presented for the first time.

The modelling of the dialogue becomes more of a process of reading from a script and this makes it difficult for the teacher to simultaneously monitor students in whether they understand or need repetition. Moreover, the process of modelling a dialogue ‘live’ during class poses the challenge of replaying or repeating a portion of the dialogue for further practice or emphasis.

In order to overcome this lack of authentic materials for listening, the teacher could pre-record some of the dialogues with the help of someone else. This would be much a preferable approach than simply modelling dialogues ‘live’ during each class. If possible, the instructor should make a conscious effort to include wider variety of English speakers due to the need of students to manage in different situations and environments.

e. Plan the Survival English Course

After formulating the major objectives of the Survival English course and choosing the right teaching material, teachers should start planning the course. There may be different ways of organizing activities. The most common approach is the one traditionally used by the Communicative Language Teaching: pre-activity, activity, follow up. Teachers start with what students already know or with a fairly simple task, and then pass to more complex activities.

f. Assess the Survival English course

Course evaluation is the last, but not the least, important stage. Teachers should evaluate their courses to improve and promote their effectiveness. Evaluation can be done in two different ways: *implicitly* and *explicitly*.

Implicit evaluation takes place during the course, when students, by their grades, participation, and motivation, give clues to the teacher on how their learning is going on.

Explicit evaluation may take place at the end of the course or after the students have experienced it. Using questionnaires, surveys, talks, etc., teachers ask the students to express their attitude towards the subject matter, instructional methods, activities, the teacher’s role and so on.

Evaluation of the course is a brave step for teachers, as they should be open-minded in hearing and implementing learners' comments.

g. Develop the Course

Developing a new course is not just planning a course. In teaching, instructors are constant learners. With professional experience, their views, teaching concepts, and methodological knowledge are continuously changing. From year to year, they have different learners with different needs and background. That will inevitably make it necessary and important to modify every course and adjust it to a particular group of learners.

Furthermore, quite often in the classroom things take place in an unexpected or unplanned way. Flexible teachers are open to making necessary changes while teaching. They can see what can or should be modified, added, or changed to make the course reflect learners' interests and needs. Therefore, course development can be seen as an on-going process.

Conclusion

Once the teachers have made the needs analysis, they can prepare useful and accurate lessons for the class. This may be as simple as choosing the right level and kind of

Survival English course book, or it might mean creating a whole syllabus for the year and each lesson within that.

Taking good note of the needs analysis will mean that a teacher's lessons will teach the students the language they need to know and the content of the lesson will be of the right level. The content of the lessons will also be interesting to the students.

In other words, in order to be successful in teaching Survival English, teachers must make sure that what they teach is of the right level, is useful to the students, and is of interest to them.

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