

# AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE APPLICATION OF FORMAT AND PRESENTATION PRINCIPLES IN ENGLISH SPEAKING SKILLS 5

NGHIÊN CỨU VIỆC ÁP DỤNG CÁC NGUYÊN TẮC VỀ HÌNH THỨC VÀ TRÌNH BÀY NỘI DUNG TRONG CHƯƠNG TRÌNH HỌC PHẦN KỸ NĂNG NÓI TIẾNG ANH 5

Bui Thi Thu Giang<sup>1,\*</sup>

## ABSTRACT

Designing and developing syllabi for four macro-language skills have been the focus of the curriculum for English-majored students at Hanoi University of Industry (HaUI) to achieve the required language proficiency for English majors. The syllabi, particularly speaking skills, therefore, have been constantly updated to meet those requirements and social changes. The design and development of a language syllabus should align with the principles of curriculum design to ensure the suitability with social needs and students' level. This paper examines how the principles of format and presentation as part of language curriculum design process have been complied in the design of the speaking course for third-year English-majored students at HaUI. The results from document analysis, observations and teacher interviews indicate the compliance of principles of "motivation, output, deliberate learning, time on task, depth of processing, integrative motivation, learning style" while three others - "four strands, comprehensible input, fluency" - have not been fully addressed. These findings provide significant implications for the update and adjustment of the course for future use.

**Keywords:** Principles, curriculum design, speaking skills, presentation, english-majored.

## TÓM TẮT

Xây dựng và phát triển chương trình giảng dạy các kỹ năng thực hành tiếng cho sinh viên ngành Ngôn ngữ Anh tại trường Đại học Công nghiệp Hà Nội luôn là một trong những vấn đề được chú trọng nhằm đáp ứng đầu ra về năng lực tiếng cho sinh viên chuyên ngành ngôn ngữ. Chương trình giảng dạy các kỹ năng thực hành tiếng do đó thường xuyên được cập nhật, đổi mới để phù hợp hơn với sự phát triển của xã hội trong giai đoạn mới, đặc biệt với các kỹ năng sản sinh ngôn ngữ, trong đó có kỹ năng nói. Việc xây dựng và phát triển chương trình cần đảm bảo sự tuân thủ theo các nguyên tắc thiết kế chương trình giảng dạy ngoại ngữ đồng thời phù hợp với bối cảnh xã hội và năng lực của sinh viên. Bài báo nhằm mục tiêu tìm hiểu việc áp dụng 10 nguyên tắc về hình thức và trình bày nội dung khi thiết kế chương trình giảng dạy ngoại ngữ trong môn Kỹ năng nói tiếng Anh 5 cho sinh viên năm thứ 3 ngành Ngôn ngữ Anh tại trường Đại học Công nghiệp Hà Nội. Kết quả phân tích tài liệu, quan sát và phỏng vấn giáo viên cho thấy việc thiết kế chương trình Kỹ năng nói tiếng Anh 5 đã đảm bảo các nguyên tắc "motivation, output, deliberate learning, time on task, depth of processing, integrative motivation, learning style". Các nguyên tắc "four strands, comprehensible input, fluency" mặc dù đã được tiếp cận trong chương trình nhưng chưa được chú trọng. Kết quả nghiên cứu này sẽ là cơ sở để tiếp tục chỉnh sửa và hoàn thiện chương trình giảng dạy học phần Kỹ năng nói tiếng Anh 5 cho khóa học tiếp theo.

**Từ khóa:** Nguyên tắc, thiết kế chương trình, kỹ năng nói, trình bày nội dung, ngôn ngữ Anh.

<sup>1</sup>Faculty of Foreign Languages, Hanoi University of Industry

\*Email: buithithugiang@hau.edu.vn

Received: 20/01/2021

Revised: 25/6/2021

Accepted: 15/11/2021

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Curriculum design, not limited to the ideas for what will be taught in the curriculum, but is an ongoing process starting from gathering ideas for the objectives or the outcomes of the curriculum, to what will be taught and how it will be taught and assessed to reach the outcomes, and to the evaluation of the designed curriculum [1] for further decisions on the improvement or the use of the curriculum. Although the design of a curriculum depends on the educational context, it needs to follow stages established in curriculum design literature. The design of a curriculum, including language one, can be done from different approaches such as forward, central, and backward [2]. For each approach, the stages are clear to follow; however, the principles underlying each stage of the process are not commonly emphasized in language curriculum design literature.

The design of the speaking course for English-majored students at Hanoi University of Industry has followed backward CDIO approach. At the time of designing the course, teachers had followed the process issued by the university that is suitable with CDIO approach combined with the stages for designing a language course. Nevertheless, the principles for each stage of the design had not been fully aware by the designers at that time. Therefore, the aim of this paper is to

examine the extent to which principles of format and presentation are followed in the design of the speaking course for third-year English majors. The results of the study bring about implications for more effective design of speaking course in particular and language courses in general.

## 2. PRINCIPLES IN DESIGNING A LANGUAGE CURRICULUM

### 2.1. Twenty principles of language teaching

According to Nation and Macalister [1], there are 20 principles to follow in the design of a language curriculum. These principles fall into three categories of Content and Sequencing, Format and Presentation, and Monitoring and Assessment. The first group of principles provide an insight about what content to be selected and in which order they will appear in the course. The second group deals with how learning happens in the classroom. In other words, these principles focus on the kinds of classroom activities and the way students process learning materials. The last group provides guidance on what to take into consideration in monitoring and assessment of the course. The principles in each category is ranked in the order of importance, from the most to the least important one.

Following are the twenty principles of language teaching:

#### \* Content and sequencing

**1 Frequency:** A language course should provide the best possible coverage of language in use through the inclusion of items that occur frequently in the language, so that learners get the best return for their learning effort.

**2 Strategies and autonomy:** A language course should train learners in how to learn a language and how to monitor and be aware of their learning, so that they can become effective and independent language learners.

**3 Spaced retrieval:** Learners should have increasingly spaced, repeated opportunities to retrieve and give attention to wanted items in a variety of contexts.

**4 Language system:** The language focus of a course needs to be on the generalisable features of the language.

**5 Keep moving forward:** A language course should progressively cover useful language items, skills and strategies.

**6 Teachability:** The teaching of language items should take account of the most favorable sequencing of these items and should take account of when the learners are most ready to learn them.

**7 Learning burden:** The course should help learners make the most effective use of previous knowledge.

**8 Interference:** The items in a language course should be sequenced so that items which are learned together have a positive effect on each other for learning and so that interference effects are avoided.

#### Format and Presentation

**1 Motivation:** As much as possible, the learners should be interested and excited about learning the language and they should come to value this learning.

**2 Four strands:** A course should include a roughly even balance of meaning-focused input, language-focused learning, meaning-focused output and fluency activities.

**3 Comprehensible input:** There should be substantial quantities of interesting comprehensible receptive activity in both listening and reading.

**4 Fluency:** A language course should provide activities aimed at increasing the fluency with which learners can use the language they already know, both receptively and productively.

**5 Output:** The learners should be pushed to produce the language in both speaking and writing over a range of discourse types.

**6 Deliberate learning:** The course should include language-focused learning on the sound system, spelling, vocabulary, grammar and discourse areas.

**7 Time on task:** As much time as possible should be spent using and focusing on the second language.

**8 Depth of processing:** Learners should process the items to be learned as deeply and as thoughtfully as possible.

**9 Integrative motivation:** A course should be presented so that the learners have the most favorable attitudes to the language, to users of the language, to the teacher's skill in teaching the language, and to the chance of success in learning the language.

**10 Learning style:** There should be opportunity for learners to work with the learning material in ways that most suit their individual learning style.

#### \* Monitoring and Assessment

**1 Ongoing needs and environment analysis:** The selection, ordering, presentation, and assessment of the material in a language course should be based on a continuing careful consideration of the learners and their needs, the teaching conditions, and the time and resources available.

**2 Feedback:** Learners should receive helpful feedback which will allow them to improve the quality of their language use.

### 2.2. Principles of format and presentation

**Motivation:** As much as possible, the learners should be interested and excited about learning the language and they should come to value this learning.

There are two types of motivation, that is, intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, among which intrinsic motivation is of more importance. This, however, can be gained from extrinsic motivation which comes from outside factors rather than from within learners. It is suggested by Nation and Macalister [1] that teachers should make the subject matter of the lessons relevant and interesting to learners. Tasks should be set with clear outcomes and give learners chances to complete them successfully. They can also help learners become autonomous by explaining the goals of particular classroom activities, or use tasks

containing built-in challenges such as competition, time pressure, and memory.

**Four strands:** A course should include a roughly even balance of meaning-focused input, language-focused learning, meaning-focused output and fluency activities.

According to Nation and Macalister (2010) [1], on average, each of four strands should be given relatively equal time in the total language experience of the learner. This time can include both in class and out of class. The time distribution to each strand should also change depending on the different stages of the course. At early stages, more time can be spent on meaning-focused input and language-focused learning. As the course comes to the end, more time can be distributed to meaning-focused output and fluency development activities. More importantly, it's better to make sure no strand is dominant in the course.

**Comprehensible input:** There should be substantial quantities of interesting comprehensible receptive activity in both listening and reading.

Nord [3] stated that learners need to build up and are capable of building up an understanding of the language system before they have to produce language. Therefore, they should have access to a large amount of input which is listening and reading material at relatively suitable level and for pleasure. It is suggested by Nation and Macalister [1] that at least 25% of class time should be spent on this receptive activity unless sufficient time is spent on it outside classrooms.

**Fluency:** A language course should provide activities aimed at increasing the fluency with which learners can use the language they already know, both receptively and productively.

As part of the skill goal of language learning, fluency activities focus on giving learners ready access to what is already known. Fluency is important in both receptive and productive skills. Brumfit [4] suggested that about a third of the total time could be spent on fluency activities and the proportion will increase over time. For speaking skills, 4/3/2 technique is considered effective as it proves not only an increase in speed but also in quality of speaking.

**Output:** The learners should be pushed to produce the language in both speaking and writing over a range of discourse types. In an integrated course, according to Nation and Macalister [1], 25 per cent of the total learning time should be given to productive activities in both formal and informal settings for transactional and interactional purposes.

**Deliberate learning:** The course should include language-focused learning on the sound system, spelling, vocabulary, grammar and discourse areas. There are certain conditions for language-focused learning to have good results, including the reasonable simplicity, not being influenced by developmental sequences, and raising learners' awareness of the item and its use [5]. The time

spent on deliberate learning should account for 25 per cent of the course time [1].

**Time on task:** As much time as possible should be spent using and focusing on the second language. This principle is important at all levels. The use of second language in class helps learners to view language as a means of communication rather than an object of study [1].

**Depth of processing:** Learners should process the items to be learned as deeply and as thoughtfully as possible.

According to Nation and Macalister [1], students will learn and retain the content more quickly and longer if it is more related to their past experience as it requires deeper mental processing. In other words, if teachers can connect the items to be learnt with students' experience and reality, there will be more thought given to those items which consequently leads to some meaning-directed effort and greater quantity of learning. It is recommended that teachers explain the new words, language items, or language tasks using the target language in association with real situations or experiences. They can also guide students to do the task with step-by-step scaffolding like teacher modelling or eliciting and encouraging students to make the best use of their memory in completing the task. Some of the examples can be recalling or guessing activities. Therefore, one way to examine the level of processing principle applied in a course is to look at the variety of exercise types used in that course.

**Integrative motivation:** A course should be presented so that the learners have the most favorable attitudes to the language, to users of the language, to the teacher's skill in teaching the language, and to the chance of success in learning the language. In order to motivate learners, teachers should follow the motivational teaching practice as follows:

- Creating basic motivational conditions
- Generating initial student motivation
- Maintaining and promoting motivation
- Encouraging positive retrospective self-evaluation [6]

**Learning style:** There should be opportunity for learners to work with the learning material in ways that most suit their individual learning style. This can be done in two ways: by providing opportunities for learners to work to their strengths, and by providing opportunity and training for them to try other ways of learning. These opportunities can be created through providing choices and flexibility in the way learning activities are done. Some aspects that can be considered are group size, speed and intensity of learning, learning medium, representation of information, mental process of learning, understanding, use of first language, and source of control.

### 3. METHODS

The study employed qualitative method by which the data were obtained from document analysis, class observations and interviews with teachers.

### 3.1. Setting

Speaking skills 5 is the last in the five-course series for speaking skills for third-year English-majored students. The course aims at B2 level with the ability to communicate and present effectively, and produce clear and persuasive arguments about issues related to unfamiliar topics such as technology, psychology, culture, arts, sciences, beauty, health and environment. Each of 15 weeks in class, there is one lesson of 90 minutes.

### 3.2. Data collection instruments

#### 3.2.1. Documents analysis

The subject syllabus, lesson plans and lesson slides were examined to investigate the extent to which ten principles of format and presentation are complied based on the descriptions of these principles by Nation and Macalister [1] in the curriculum design process.

#### 3.2.2. Observations

Class observations were conducted with four subject teachers during the semesters when they taught different lessons with different classes. The data were collected using the observation checklist designed basing on the principles of format and presentation [1].

#### 3.2.3. Interviews

The interviews were conducted with each teacher at the convenience by the end of the course. Each interview lasted 30 - 50 minutes. The data were obtained from semi-structured interview questions aligned with the principles of format and presentation [1].

## 4. THE COMPLIANCE OF FORMAT AND PRESENTATION PRINCIPLES IN SPEAKING SKILLS 5 COURSE

### 4.1. Complied principles

#### Motivation

The analysis of the subject documents including the syllabus and the lesson plans indicates a variety of topics addressing different aspects such as technology, psychology, culture, arts, sciences, beauty, health and environment. These topics are relevant to the target level B2 of the course and show a relative diversity which are likely to motivate students and encourage them to talk during the course. For each lesson, the topic is narrowed down and approached in a particular way to ensure the suitability with students' current language level and interests. The descriptions of lesson plans show clear and achievable objectives of each lesson and the specific steps to achieve them. The tasks in each lesson address current and context-specific issues which may get students engaged in and activate not only their background knowledge but also their language knowledge (particular vocabulary) related to the topics currently prevalent in media. Therefore, the diverse and up-to-date course topics are factors that probably encourage students' motivation in learning.

The results from class observations back up the compliance of motivation principle. Although the observations were not conducted constantly, the reaction

and involvement of students in the activities reveal their interest to the lesson. Students show their active engagement in the topics of Games (Technology), Beauty and Appearance (Beauty), Food Legacy (Culture), Hydroelectric Power (Environment) as they have personal experiences, background knowledge related to these topics. This compliance is also confirmed by teachers in the interviews. All teachers agree that the course topics and the way the lessons are design significantly contribute to students' motivation in speaking.

#### Output

As the principle indicated, students should be pushed to produce the language productively in different discourse types. In the course, students have chances to communicate their ideas in pairs, groups and individually in class activities. They are asked to share, discuss and present their ideas in class and make videos at home. The tasks range from individual talks, group presentations to group debates.

#### Deliberate learning

As this is a speaking course, the language-focused learning is mainly on vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation and speaking skills. Each lesson provides a list of topic vocabulary, a grammar point, and sometimes pronunciation and speaking skills. The activities in each lesson are scaffolded so that students can apply the target language knowledge to achieve the lesson objectives.

#### Time on task

The class observations show that almost all the time is spent on using English. Teachers hardly use Vietnamese to explain or communicate with students. As this speaking course is at B2 level, students must be able to use English in getting their ideas across in any activity. Therefore, most of the time in class is dedicated to the use of English. Although students occasionally let Vietnamese interfere in their discussion due to difficulty in expressing their ideas, teachers come to support and remind them not to abuse their mother tongue when they have trouble using English. All four teachers confirm that they have tried hard to encourage their students to speak and speak in English in any part of an activity.

#### Depth of processing

In this speaking course, the analysis of lesson plans and lesson slides shows that the activities requires students' mental processing, from guessing vocabulary activities to brainstorming ideas in speaking activities. More importantly, the vocabulary provided in speaking activities to support students' processing are mainly related to current issues in reality for each topic. From class observations, it is shown that teachers also elicit and help students understand the target vocabulary in connection with their experience and real situations. They also guide students in clarifying their ideas and model the task, especially when the activity involves discussion or debate.

### **Integrative motivation**

Integrative motivation is seen in this course through teachers' classroom practice, especially when it comes to speaking practice activities. Teachers created basic motivational conditions by dividing students into different pairs or groups, clarify the objectives of the activity, giving them the instructions and specific roles especially in a discussion or a debate. Sometimes, teachers asked students to work in different groups to brainstorm their ideas about one aspect of the topic, then form new groups to share or discuss different aspects. This technique received positive reactions from students. The class observations show that students were eager, engaged and spoke more in that activity. During the time students carried out the activities, teachers went around the class to supervise, support students towards the goal. These reflect the aspects of maintaining and protecting motivation, and encouraging positive retrospective self-evaluation.

### **Learning style**

The descriptions of activities in the lesson plans show a flexibility in the way students can carry out the activities. The design of activities allows students to work in different ways either individually, in pairs, or in groups. From the class observations, teachers sometimes let students work individually for brainstorming their ideas for the questions or work in pairs or in groups to discuss the ideas or prepare arguments for the debates. Students can work in pairs or groups of their interest or are arranged by teachers to have opportunities to work with others. For activities that are not challenging, the time allowed is shorter and less intense than those require more reasoning and discussion. Therefore, the flexibility and group size, speed and intensity of learning can create opportunities for learners to work in a way that most suit their learning style.

## **4.2. Non-complied principles**

### **Four strands**

It is indicated from documents analysis that this course include the strands of meaning-focus input, language-focused learning, meaning-focused output. However, the strand of fluency has not been focused. Before each lesson, students are required to complete preparation tasks which require them to do some research on the target language that will be focused in the lesson and the necessary background knowledge related to the topic of the lesson. These tasks are done at home and allow students to gain appropriate language knowledge and common knowledge in need to achieve the objectives of the lesson. Thereby, more time in class will be given to language-focused learning and meaning-focused output. The class activities, accordingly, focus on practice speaking from language-focused learning to meaning-focused production. Nonetheless, the strand of fluency has not received sufficient focus in the course.

### **Comprehensible input**

It is shown in the preparation tasks that apart from self-study of target language points that will be used in the lesson, students are required to do some research on the background knowledge related to the topic of that lesson. They are free to find the information from sources accessible to them, comprehensible, and of their interest. However, the input is mainly from reading, not much from listening. Sometimes, students are provided with videos to watch, but this is not substantial enough.

### **Fluency**

In the interviews, all teachers stated that there was no time for fluency development activities in their class. The most obvious reason is that the class time is too short for them to carry out fluency activities like 4/3/2 as there is only 90 minutes each lesson. According to them, this is a high-level speaking course (B2 level), the target language points are not easy to be applied in speaking as those at lower level, and the topics are more unfamiliar. Therefore, more time will be taken for students to process the information and carry out the speaking activities, especially those require greater production such as discussions or debates. That's why if fluency activities are carried out in every lesson, time for other productive speaking activities will be shortened and the objectives of the lesson may not be achieved.

## **5. RECOMMENDATIONS**

The results indicate the necessity for the improvement of four strands, especially the strand of fluency and the increase in the comprehensible input for the course.

Due to the limited time bound of the course, fluency activities can be done in class to warm up at the beginning of each lesson. The topic of the talk should not be difficult and not take time to prepare so that class time can be saved. Therefore, the topic should be closely related to the topic of the previous lesson, easy to process, motivating and time bound. Students then will be forced to speak in a limited amount of time for better fluency. Another way to improve fluency is to ask students to make a talk with limited time allowance (1-2 minute talks) as their weekly homework.

In order to increase the comprehensible input, students should be encouraged to search for the information required from different sources like authentic videos apart from articles. They then will provide the links they found for the information needed to make sure they get access to the appropriate sources.

## **6. CONCLUSION**

The study employed qualitative method using document analysis, teacher interviews and class observations to investigate the extent to which principles of format and presentation are applied into the design of the speaking course for third-year English majored students. The results show that seven out of ten principles

are complied in the course while the other three principles of four strands, fluency, and comprehensible input haven't given sufficient focus in the course. These findings provide implications to improve the course for further delivery.

---

#### REFERENCES

- [1]. Nation I.S.P., Macalister J., 2010. *Language Curriculum Design*. ESL & Applied Linguistics Professional Series. Routledge.
- [2]. Richards J. C., 2013. *Curriculum approaches in language teaching: Forward, central, and backward design*. *Relc Journal*, 44(1), 5-33.
- [3]. Nord J. R., 1980. *Developing listening fluency before speaking: An alternative paradigm*. *System*, 8(1), 1-22.
- [4]. Brumfit C.J., 1985. *Accuracy and fluency: A fundamental distinction for communicative teaching methodology*. In C.J. Brumfit, *Language and Literature Teaching: From Practice to Principle*. Oxford: Pengamon.
- [5]. Ellis R. 1995. *Interpretation tasks for grammar teaching*. *TESOL Quarterly*, 29(1), 87-105.
- [6]. Dornyei Z., 2001. *Motivational Strategies in the Language Classroom*. Cambridge University Press.

---

#### THÔNG TIN TÁC GIẢ

**Bùi Thị Thu Giang**

Khoa Ngoại ngữ, Trường Đại học Công nghiệp Hà Nội