BACKWARD EFL AND ESP CURRICULUM DESIGN: THE CASE OF THE NEW EFL AND ESP CURRICULUM FOR PHD STUDENTS AT THE TODOR KABLESHKOV UNIVERSITY OF TRANSPORT

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Abstract: The current study objective is to present the newly designed by the author backward EFL and ESP curriculum for PhD students in terms of its essential characteristics. The paper is written within the framework of FL (EL) curriculum types theory with reference to researchers' views, along with the author's ones. Each curriculum type is treated with respect to components it lays emphasis on.

The author's opinion about backward curriculum design comprising features of forward and central design is justified in the perspective of her understanding of the cognitive curriculum development leading to learners' communicative competence improvement. Backward EFL and ESP curriculum design preconditions the most favourable learning outcomes due to the opportunities it provides for optimal cognitive teaching procedures (cognitive language learning strategies) implementation.

The EFL and ESP curriculum for PhD students is delineated in terms of its objectives, methodological framework, selection of materials in dependence on PhD students' general and specific English language needs stemming from these learners' corresponding scientific specialties. The curriculum, which consists of three modules, the first and the second ones (General English) supporting the third one (ESP) in terms of vocabulary, grammar, language functions, focuses on the construction of learner language awareness, motivation and autonomy.

1. INTRODUCTION

The current paper objective is twofold - to present, on the one hand, the features of the newly designed by the author EFL and ESP curriculum for PhD students at the Todor Kableshkov University of Transport, and, on the other, to situate this curriculum characteristics within the framework of curriculum types theory. Thus, the advantages of backward EFL and ESP curriculum development (BCD)[1], with respect to learners' communicative competence improvement based on their language awareness (LA)

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[1] The current paper author treats terms *forward*, *central* and *backward curriculum design* as synonymous to *forward*, *central* and *backward curriculum development*. BCD stands for both terms.

enhancement are put forward, in the perspective of the author's views and insights as to cognitively oriented EL (FL) teaching. The new curriculum positive features are lain emphasis on, in comparison to the old one, and BCD characteristics are concisely exemplified.

The paper will stick to the following layout. First, curriculum types will be displayed in terms of their essential peculiarities; second, EFL and ESP BCD positives will be justified in line with researchers' views as to deriving teaching and learning benefits from this design as well as in compliance with the author's ideas related to cognitive procedures implementation in teaching process; next, the new EFL and ESP BCD for PhD students will be outlined within the framework of its objectives, methodological principles and their conceptual application. At the end, conclusion will be made as to the examined BCD advantages.

2. FL (EFL, ESP) CURRICULUM TYPES

What is a curriculum? What does it represent and which components does it have? These issues will be briefly treated before proceeding with curriculum types presentation and elucidation, prerequisite not only for justifying EFL and ESP BCD type relevance in terms of learners' competence improvement, but also for displaying the features of the new EFL and ESP curriculum for PhD students.

In Finney's view [1][2] curriculum definitions can be subdivided into two acceptation types, the more limited one coinciding with syllabus, or taught content, and the broad one, designating "the planning, implementation and evaluation of an educational program, the why, how and how well together with the what of the teaching-learning process" ([1: 70]). This paper[3] author subscribes to Kelly's understanding ([2] in [1]) in terms of curriculum encompassing developers' goals, applied techniques, learners' reactions to teachers' work along with the view ([3] in [1]) according to which a language curriculum includes the components of course specific objectives, taught material adequate teaching procedures, students' desirable reactions and teaching goals accomplishment evaluation.

In accordance with [4], ELT programmes are classified into forward, central and backward design (FCD, CCD and BCD) curricula, each type emphasizing differently on language curriculum components relevance. Curriculum types are delineated below mainly in compliance with this researcher's insights.

Thus, FCD first stipulates taught content specification, then pays attention to the methods applied, and, is finally interested in anticipated outcomes. Linguistic information is crucial and teaching procedures implemented, which are not specifically required, depend on course language material features.

CCD lays stress first and foremost on choosing methodology, procedures and activities, designed to suit specific groups of students, and not on educational objectives formulation. This programme type is consequently predominantly learner-centered (rf. [5] in [4]).

BCD type, which was created by [8][4], departs in its development from course objectives detailed description, other programme components, such as material to be taught, applied methodology and activities being determined based on anticipated educational outcomes. Outcomes are viewed in the perspective of the obtained student capacity of completing tasks, through acquired language competence, by means of simulation or real communication (rf. [8]). The examined curriculum development encompasses learners' needs analysis followed by objectives determination, selection of material to be taught, sequence of

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[2] [1], [2], [3], [4], [5] and [6] were referred to in [7].
[3] In line with [7]
[4] [8] was quoted in [9].

its presentation, choice of learner reactions, learner reactions sequence, choice of acquired competence to be evaluated, ways of knowledge assessment (rf. [6] in [4]).

3. BCD TYPE ADVANTAGES IN EFL AND ESP PROGRAMME DESIGN

BCD advantages over FCD and CCD relate to the considered programme type abilities to suit to the highest possible extent cognitive language teaching procedures or cognitive language learning strategies (LLS) implementation, prerequisite to learners' LA formation and enhancement. LA relates to consciousness and understanding improvement in all language activity spheres, this way LA enhancement leading to the formation of mental representations (MR), constructs referring to language units at all levels of language description; these concepts correct creation and continuous perfection in terms of their adequate interconnection and interaction precondition language and linguistic knowledge advancement and, thus result in higher learner competence[5].

BCD is more efficient than FCD and CCD in terms of LLS implementation opportunities as this is the only type of programme the development of which builds upon conducted needs analysis and exploration determining objectives setting not only in EFL, but also in ESP. This way, overall teaching process, including methodology applied, teaching materials creation and LLS implementation, aimed at MR building through LA, is deliberately directed at specific goals and, thus, better organized, desired learning experiences can be anticipated and, even predicted to a significant extent. More successful educational process arrangement, a feature which lacks in CCD, emphasizing on techniques only, greatly preconditions not only learners' adequate and purposeful LA development, but also corresponding learner motivation (LM) and autonomy (LrA) (rf. [14] as to LA, LrA and LM interconnection). It needs to be mentioned, though, that some FCD and CCD features do not contradict BCD preparation process, and, what is more, they derive, in current paper author's view, from efficient objectives accomplishment BCD foundation; amongst these are: direct material advance, lack of ambiguity in rules explanation, content division into main components (FCD) and active communication, learner focus (CCD)[6], etc.

Some researchers' insights referred to below support this paper author's view as to BCD appropriateness in terms of cognitive teaching procedures beneficial application and learners' LA (consequently, communicative competence) enhancement as well as of receptive and productive skills successful teaching.

Thus, for instance, in Brown's view [16], BCD efficient use is a prerequisite to enhancing learners' understanding of material; in compliance with conducted so far research BCD exerts positive influence on students' skills perfecting, e.g., writing [17], reading comprehension [18], listening comprehension [19] and speaking [20]. Studies have likewise proved enhanced LM stemming from BCD offered options for teaching process exceeding coursebook boundaries [20][7].

4. THE NEW BACKWARD EFL AND ESP CURRICULUM DESIGN FOR PHD STUDENTS

This paper section dwells on presenting the new EFL and ESP curriculum for PhD students, in compliance with BCD above outlined principles and based on this programme type put forward advantages.

The new PhD students' curriculum was built in agreement with BCD fundamentals and the author's theoretical and practical insights as to its implementation, objectives

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[5]Rf. [10], [11], [12], [7], [13] as to LA and MR.

[6] Rf. [4] (cited in [7]) as to curriculum types features enumeration; rf. [15] as to the need of BCD introduction of student-focused approaches and various types of autonomous learning.

[7] [16], [17], [18], [19] and [20] were referred to by [9].

prioritizing and planning, in conformity with them, of study materials, tasks and approaches aimed at goals attainment, namely, learners' ESP and EFL competence improvement.

The programme [21] is directed at building and perfecting specialized PhD students' communicative competence mainly, along with general English knowledge, in various professional spheres, such as IT, mechanical engineering, electrical engineering, material properties, renewable energy sources, civil engineering and economics, most spheres being related to PhD students' scientific fields at the Todor Kableshkov University of Transport. Required competence learners need to master is within the framework of adequate oral and written communication in international specialized contacts building and preserving as well as in the area of professional English-language literature use; to achieve that, there are essential skills to be acquired and practiced in terms of searching for relevant information, tables and diagrams interpretation, books, articles, projects summarizing and annotating, specialized materials commenting on and opinion formulating with respect to read texts, specialized translation. Such competences are considered valuable in stimulating PhD students' practical and scientific work.

The above objectives are based on studied learners' needs related to acquiring relevant ESP knowledge in all scientific specialties taught at the Todor Kableshkov University of Transport, regarding not only respective terminology, but also required language functions and corresponding grammar categories specifics to convey desired message [22][8]. For that purpose, the new backward PhD students' EFL and ESP curriculum comprises three modules, the first and second ones aiming at EFL competence improvement, both modules assisting the third one (ESP), the focus of the programme. To suit doctoral students' ESP needs, study materials, based on various specific sources are implemented, treating different subtopics within main subjects of IT and electronic communication; mechanical engineering, maintenance and repair; electrical engineering and new technologies; civil engineering and civil engineering branches; economics and accountancy, among others. Study materials derive not only from coursebooks, but also from authentic texts extracted from specialized in respective fields websites sources, which can be easily updated on a regular basis.

Applied teaching approaches are in compliance with the above-mentioned objectives attainment, cognitive LLS (rf. [13]) being widely taught to promote LA and, thus, MR adequate formation and elaboration. LM and LrA are stimulated through LA enhancement procedures[9], depending on taught material specifics, along with created opportunities for learners' individual study and exploration.

To better serve learners' needs, the new BCD for PhD students can be implemented in face-to-face, online and hybrid format.

5.   CONCLUSION
The new BCD programme for PhD students at the Todor Kableshkov University of Transport is supposed to be much more beneficial to all aspects of learners' EFL and ESP competence formation and perfecting than the old one, bearing the features mainly of FCD, not taking account to such extent of learners' needs, depending on scientific specialties the university comprises, and not including such a variety of authentic easily updatable materials to be examined and researched by students. The new BCD programme is also expected to trigger additional interest, and, thus LM, in considered topics and subtopics along with improved LrA, not only based on LA development, but also on deliberately oriented LA and MR towards specific goals attainment.

In line with shared in literature views by researchers, a BCD programme must prove to be more beneficial than FCD and CCD ones to learners' competence improvement as well

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[8] Rf. likewise to cited researchers in this source.
[9] Rf. as to LA, LrA and LM interdependence in [23] and [14].

as to lecturers' teaching organization due to this type of design goal-orientedness preconditioning much more consistent study materials planning and development, activities more coherent arrangement along with better learner experiences preparation and prediction, stemming from more appropriate teaching approaches implementation.

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РАЗРАБОТВАНЕ НА УЧЕБНА ПРОГРАМА ПО АЧЕ И АСЦ В ОБРАТНА ПОСОКА: ПРИМЕРЪТ С НОВАТА УЧЕБНА ПРОГРАМА ПО АЧЕ И АСЦ ЗА ДОКТОРАНТИ ВЪВ ВТУ „ТОДОР КАБЛЕШКОВ"

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Ключови думи: видове учебни програми, разработване на учебна програма по АЧЕ и АСЦ в обратна посока, когнитивно преподаване, езикова осъзнатост, потребности на обучаемите

Резюме: Целта на настоящето изследване е да представи основните характеристики на наскоро разработената от автора в обратна посока учебна програма по АЧЕ и АСЦ за докторанти. Докладът, написан в рамките на теорията за видовете учебни програми по ЧЕ (АЕ), се позовава на изследователи в областта, както и на авторовите виждания. Разглеждат се видовете учебни програми, като се споменават основните им компоненти.

Позицията за разработената в обратна посока учебна програма, включваща характеристики на предно и централно проектираните програми, се мотивира от становището на автора, че когнитивната учебна програма води до подобряване на комуникативната компетентност на обучаемите. Разработената в обратна посока учебна програма по АЧЕ и АСЦ е предпоставка за най-благоприятни резултати от обучението поради предоставените възможности за оптимално прилагане на когнитивните подходи на преподаване (когнитивни стратегии за езиково изучаване).

Учебната програма по АЧЕ и АСЦ за докторанти е охарактеризирана от гледна точка на целите ѝ, методологическата рамка, подбора на материали, обусловен от потребностите на обучаемите по общ и специализиран английски език, произтичащи от научните им специалности. Учебната програма се състои от три модула, като първият и вторият, посветени на обучението по общ английски език, подготвят работата по третия (АСЦ) в рамките на лексика, граматика и езикови функции. Програмата цели изграждането у обучаемите на езикова осъзнатост, мотивация и автономия.