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### THE VALUE OF THE COURSE FROM THE LEARNERS' POINT OF VIEW

*The progress in the educational field started to take into consideration learner's interest, needs, beliefs and expectations in syllabus design. Awareness of these factors drives the teachers to use course feedback and the information gained from it plays an important role in course improvement. It means that not only teachers but learners also can make a contribution to the syllabus design.*

**Key words:** *contribution, individualism, course, program, values.*

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### ЦЕННОСТЬ УЧЕБНОГО КУРСА С ТОЧКИ ЗРЕНИЯ УЧАЩИХСЯ

*Прогресс в области образования начал учитывать интересы, потребности, убеждения и ожидания учащихся при разработке учебных программ. Осведомленность об этих факторах побуждает учителей использовать обратную связь по курсу, и информация, полученная из нее, играет важную роль в улучшении курса. Это значит, что не только учителя, но и учащиеся могут внести свой вклад в разработку учебной программы.*

**Ключевые слова:** *вклад, индивидуализм, курс, программа, ценности.*

**Introduction.** As a highly motivated instructor, our instructor implemented this idea into practice; therefore an idea to review the course was suggested to the learners. We, the participants of it, felt that it was real implementation of the theory. And since it is about research work, everyone enthusiastically agreed to take up this mini project. The participants were then divided into groups of two or three and they were given guidelines to follow. However, they were given the freedom to choose research tools, select any themes and analyze the data themselves but within a given deadline. A course being offered in CIEFL (Central Institute of English and Foreign Languages) is a complex process. It goes through 3 levels of approval; at the initial stage teachers

of the department approves the course and passes it on to the next level which is the Department of materials production. In a meeting they give their consent and pass it to the School of ELE. The course at any stage can get disapproval where the course instructor is recommended to redefine the course description or make it more suitable to the policy of the institute.

The process of offering this course “Introduction to ESL research” had to go through the same process and it faced the problem with the level of students to be offered and got disapproval at one of the levels. However the prospectus of the institute mentioned this course which was never offered as a credit course for MA participants. Therefore with this consideration it got its approval from all the 3 levels and was offered for the first time in 2006-2007 academic year.

**A. Participants.** For the purpose of this course review, we only considered participants of this course and the administration who gave the permission to offer this course. The research participants consisted of students who took ‘Introduction to ESL research’ course and teachers of ELE School. As for the teachers due to limited time we could involve only 4 teachers of ELE School, including the course instructor. 6 questionnaires were administered and all of them were returned (100%). The questionnaires were received from MA participants and PGDTE participants. Among the participants, 3 were female and 3 were male, and as for the teachers, out of 4 teachers 3 were female and 1 male.

**B. Instrument.** We have designed a questionnaire of 12 questions, which included both open-ended as well as close-ended questions. The questions were both quantitative and qualitative in nature, and were carefully selected for our specific objective as we review the course. We kept the questionnaire anonymous in the hope that the honest responses to the questions will remain confidential. We did not feel the need to interview the participants because we felt that we got enough information from the questionnaire itself and in fact, we did get a good response from the questionnaire, which was relevant to our research.

As for the interviews we designed a list of questions but since we conducted a semi-structured interview the discussions on the questions were quite flexible. We focused on the history of this course; so that we could do a comparative study and how it has changed over the years. We asked about which semester participants are most appropriate to take this course and asked for their justifications for their answers.

**C. Procedure.** The first step was to design the questionnaire of the course keeping in mind the themes. Secondly, we gathered a list of teachers from ELE School, and categorized them according to their ranks. Then we met the teachers of ELE School to make an appointment for an

interview, for our luck all of them could give us time to interview them without any prior appointment. It took us around 15 minutes for each interview. Since this course review was done by three of us, one of us conducted the interview and the two other made notes of it. Thirdly, student participants were requested to fill in the questionnaire and return it. Finally we compared our notes and analyzed the data of the interviews and questionnaires.

**D. Data Analysis.** Quantitative data were compiled and percentages were calculated to present the result. Qualitative data was also added where relevant. For certain questions, which had strictly qualitative responses, the results were categorized such that the most common responses were grouped together and percentages were once again derived.

Results of the questionnaires and interviews are presented in this section. Each question or statement, taken directly from the survey.

**Analysis of the questionnaire:** The first two questions deals with the method of teaching. The purpose of these questions was to clarify the way of giving the outline of the course. We found out that the participants except one could remember the aims and objectives of the course which were given orally in the class. Question 3 and 9 deal with the learners' expectations and the results showed that they are all quite satisfied with this course. In question 4, participants were given a list of topics for classroom discussions and they were to rate them according to their importance for discussions. We found out that majority of the participants felt that 'research questions' are the most important topic for discussions, followed by 'rationale', 'action research', 'research methods', 'review case studies'. According to the results of question 6 the participants are able to identify topics relevant to their area of interest but majority of them are unable or not sure to actually research topics relevant to their area of interest and write their research proposal in preparation for their thesis. In question 7, 11 and 12 the participants evaluated the course. Given a choice the participants would like to change method of teaching – e.g. give the topics of the course so students can be aware of the course route, assignments, presentation of case study review and reading list (question 7). When they were asked about how they would like to change in the course syllabus, they suggested for more written assignments, handouts during presentations – it is based on "what I hear I forget, what I see I remember", graded reading list starting with journals and ending with available books – because some of the books mentioned in the reading list were not available at the library, compulsory reading of theory related to the topic of the class discussions – should be given as an assignment and in the next class discussed or be checked for its comprehension, and teacher guided case study review and research analysis – everybody should

read one case study and critically analyze it in the class, it gives an opportunity to do it in detail as just beginners might miss some points which should be discussed. In question 11, they listed the reasons for liking this course. They are as follows: stress-free learning environment, adaptability of the course to suit the learners' level, the participants' enthusiasm and involvement, cultivating interest to read new things, teacher guidance and encouragement, teacher-student interaction. In question 12, they listed the reasons for disliking this course and possible solutions. They are as follows: lack of insistence in doing homework – may be the instructor could give more written assignments so learners could feel more responsibility, lack of proper division of syllabus – as it was mentioned before the instructor should give the syllabus of the course in the written form, unavailability of the books in the reading list. They all felt that this course was important to them and they all agreed that the course instructor's teaching was effective. (Question 8-10).

**Analysis of the Interview:** During the interview, when asked about if they remember when this course on research was offered and if yes, whether there are any changes or improvement over the years, out of the three interviewed, two of them don't know but one recalls that it was offered as a non-credit course for Mphil participants in 1985/86 and the change over the years was on the degree of importance attached to it as it now a credit course. However, as for the content of the course, each instructor brings in new inputs and thus it constantly keeps on changing. In the next question they were asked if they remember when they wrote their first term paper and whether they had any prior preparation or course on research before they started their first research work. They were also asked if they recall any difficulty they had faced doing their research work for the first time. In answering these questions only one of them remembers her first term paper which it was in 1996. Two of them said that they did not face much problems in their first research work because one of them had come with preliminary preparation before she started her research work and the other one had rich academic background before she started her research work. The other one who did not have any prior preparation for research work faced some difficulty because it was a new kind of activity. Thus we conclude that some preliminary preparation or course on research is essential before carrying out any research work.

The next question deals with which semester participants they think, from the teachers' perspective, should take up this kind of course on research work. Two of them agreed that the 4<sup>th</sup> semester students should take this course because they need to write their MA projects and it is the right time to start practicing for research works because at this stage most students decide to go for research studies. The third teacher did not specify which semester students should take this course

because according to her, it depends on the nature of their course since not all MA courses need a term paper that requires a research methodology. Then they were asked if they were given a chance to conduct such research course at an MA level which area(s) they would focus on, one replied by saying that she would focus on “How to get about getting information and also how best to present it, in other words, critical reading and ability to best assess it.” The other teacher said that she would focus on “how to construct research project – task designing a research, analysis.

**Conclusion.** We felt that it was a really good idea for beginner researchers to start their research works in groups. Even though this was a mini project and most of the guidelines were instructed by the teacher, it was a great opportunity for us to implement the theory of the course and to reflect upon what we have learned from this course. The suggestions given by our fellow peer participants and ELE school teachers are very valuable and should not be taken for granted because we feel that this will bring a qualitative change to the course. It was great learning opportunity.

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