Spanish as a Foreign Language course design according to learning needs

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ABSTRACT

The teaching of Spanish to foreigners for specific purposes is a relatively new discipline and has some characteristics that differentiate it from the teaching of Spanish in general. In this sense, this type of teaching is gaining more and more importance for socioeconomic and social reasons because more and more people are interested in learning a language focused on a specific purpose, as in the case discussed in this systematization in which attention was given to students with specific purposes. Hence, the

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main objective of this work is to describe the learning process and research on the learning needs of the target group to learn Spanish, who as a whole had clearly defined needs, focused on economic and social issues, since they are a group dedicated to the construction of horizontal works. The research was conducted using a qualitative approach. This methodology allowed the application of instruments and techniques with which it was possible to have a significant and direct impact on the target group (trainees). For the collection of information, an in-depth interview questionnaire was used to characterize the target group. To process the information obtained, the actions were divided into three fundamental phases, and interpretative analysis and characterization of elements were also used, for which a double-entry matrix was prepared, as well as analysis of the discourses. Theoretical and empirical methods made it possible to carry out an integral analysis (radiography) of the target group. The information triangulation technique was also applied and the relationship between the group's objectives and the contents to be developed was considered. The results of this research led to the proposal of a new line of research: a proposal or design of a course with specific purposes, especially for the personnel of the requesting institution.

1. INTRODUCTION

The organization of a course of Spanish as a Foreign Language at level B1 oriented to adults who are dedicated to their profession must be organized in a logical way starting from the needs analysis, considering the objectives, contents, methodology, and evaluation in which there must be a close relationship with their field of action. In this way, the acquisition of linguistic, grammatical, and functional competencies is achieved meaningfully and allows them to communicate in all areas of life. To carry out this systematization, empirical theoretical methods were used, which allowed for an integral analysis (radiography) of the target group and a qualitative approach. Thus, this option, seen from the methodological point of view, made it possible to use instruments and techniques that allowed it to have a significant impact on the target group.

Hence, this systematization presents as a result of a process or phases, the design of a course of Spanish as a Foreign Language, directed to a target group of fifty people, with similar interests, ages, professions, and different, but with work relationships that linked them independently of their areas of training. This initiative or need arose at the request of this group of learners and, to satisfy their needs or interests, it was necessary to contemplate three phases: the first, to know their interests, age, ways of learning, profession, and interests. The second consisted of the construction of the course design based on the needs, personal and professional characteristics of the target group, as well as the activities, forms of evaluation, and course work, taking into account the daily activities of the learners, and the last one, the execution of

the course and, at the end, to know, indirectly, the degree of satisfaction of the students through the application of a questionnaire with closed and open questions.

2. CONTEXTUALIZATION

The educational institution is located in an urban context in the city of Juigalpa, Chontales, Nicaragua, which enjoys great tourist development due to its geographical position, in addition to its benevolent climate, natural and cosmopolitan environment, as well as its festive culture. This has caused a great attraction of tourists from different European, Asian, and American countries, highlighting those who have settled in the city for work purposes and who have had the need to learn the Spanish language.

In this environment is inserted the ELE teaching center (for ethical reasons of research and at the request of the center's director the name is not mentioned) of reference in the city. It should be noted that this center has an excellent infrastructure and technology adapted to the new tools that are vital for learning Spanish. In addition, its rooms have a computer for each student, a conventional library equipped with interesting and selected literature, a virtual library, an interactive whiteboard a language laboratory, and physical spaces for recreation.

3. DESIGN AND DEVELOPMENT

This systematization was carried out using a qualitative approach. Hence, this methodology allowed the application of instruments and techniques with which it was possible to have a significant and direct impact on the target group (trainees). For the collection of information, a questionnaire was constructed for an in-depth interview and thus achieved the characterization of the target group. To process the information obtained, the actions were divided into three fundamental phases, and use was also made of interpretative analysis and characterization of elements such as age, profession, or trade and training interests, for this purpose, a double-entry matrix was prepared, as well as analysis of the discourses. Through theoretical and empirical methods, an integral analysis (radiography) of the target group and a qualitative approach was carried out. The information triangulation technique was also applied and the relationship between the objectives of the group and the contents to be developed was taken into account.

The work was designed for 50 students (23 men and 27 women) and their ages ranged from 20 to 30 years old. The particularity of these learners is that all of them had taken Spanish classes in their countries and had a command of the language at the

level A2. These students can communicate and understand 60% of certain situations of everyday life; for example, shopping at the market, ordering transportation, and ordering food

in a restaurant, among others, in the target language (Spanish). However, taking into account that they came to do professional work and hence the interest in learning to speak Spanish to apply it in their professional field (construction and sewage project) and, another interesting aspect is that they have a high cultural level and training in their area.

To carry out the design of the ELE course according to the needs of the learners, it was necessary to consider three phases, which are detailed below:

PHASE 1. Entry to the field

This phase was designed to learn about the general characteristics of the learners, so a questionnaire was designed for an in-depth interview to learn about the real particularities of the group and thus make decisions about the topics to be taken into account in the curricular design. This included general data such as name, age, sex, profession, ideas, opinions, interests, objectives, and an effective variant. This was intended to indirectly break down certain teacher-student barriers. This considering what Ellis (1995) stated:

(…) students will succeed in learning if they are motivated to learn (…) As long as those students who have been disinclined during the learning process and the activities respond to their learning interests and are age-appropriate, they feel encouraged to increase their effort to learn the target language (p. 47).

Hence, age provided us with relevant data and thus inferred how students would like to learn when choosing teaching activities. This variable is technically an internal factor when it comes to language learning in general, and the differences between L1 or LM and L2 or LE learning in particular (Alcaraz Andreu, s. a), in this case, women are predominant.

Table 1

Systematization of the personal data of the group of apprentices.

Age	Female	Male
20-30 years old	24	5
30-40 years old	2	15
40 or more years old	1	3

Total 27 23

The age factor can be treated, at least, from two very different approaches: from a biological point of view and a sociological one, since it is often considered that the way of learning is genetic. This factor is a psychological and cultural variable that can be easily manipulated in

such a way that it significantly increases the performance of adults and levels out with that of children. Likewise, the data related to the students' professions or trades were systematized. This made it possible to infer their technical voices and their relationship with the people who would be under their responsibility during the execution of the project in the city. The following data was obtained from this part:

Table 2

Systematization of data related to the profession of the target group

Profession or trade	Female	Male
Civil Engineer	3	4
Environmental Engineer	7	6
Architect	3	4
Builder	1	4
Economic Sciences	4	2
Other	10	3

With the information obtained from this part of the work, it was possible to have a clear vision of the topics to be chosen for the design of the course, the activities to be considered, and the forms of evaluation. This part was carried out considering what was proposed by Lozano and Plácido (1996):

Course adaptation can only be carried out effectively if it starts from an understanding of the possible characteristics and this goes in two directions. The first is centered on the curricular design of the general programs and the other on knowing the communicative competencies of the learners according to their basic training (p. 96).

Similarly, it was necessary to know the learners' interests in the acquisition of the target language (Spanish). For this purpose, one of the interview questions made it possible to know them.

Table 3

Systematization of the data related to ELE learning interests

ELE learning interest	Number of opinions
Communicating effectively and affectively with my subordinates	38
Carrying out and guiding activities together with my subordinates subordinates from the position I am in.	**8**

ELE learning interest	Number of opinions
Communicating in a general way, expressing my wishes, and creating circles of friendships	2
Other interests	2

Motivation is a very important starting point for the effective learning of a foreign language (LE). We can define motivation as an internal state of the individual influenced by certain needs and refers, fundamentally, to those forces, determinants, or factors that incite the student to listen to the teacher's explanations, to have an interest in asking questions and clarifying doubts and/or beliefs that generate favorable attitudes and interests towards a goal, and a desire that leads him/her to achieve it with dedication and continued effort because he/she likes it and feels satisfied every time he/she obtains good results in his/her academic activities (Zasón, 1990).

PHASE 2. Course design

Considering the aforementioned elements, the course was designed. The course design is presented below. It is important to point out that there are different ways of design, but in this case, it was conceived taking into account very particular elements.

1. General Data

Type of course: Standard Spanish. **Number of students:** 50

Level: B1. Time: 15 hours. **Teacher:** XXXX Duration: 60 hours.

2. Interests:

Effective and affective communication in the workplace and social environment. To carry out and guide joint activities in an effective and affective way.

3. Objectives

a) Understand expressions and frequent vocabulary related to close situations that concern him/herself, the family, and his/her environment.

b) Use simple syntactic structures correctly in short expressions to communicate information related to everyday life situations.

 c) Talk about past events and anticipate actions.

4.   Content

Contents	Topics to develop
Functionals	**Asking about plans or intentions:** You intend + infinitive in interrogative form. For intentions; Tu intención es + infinitive in interrogative form. **Expressing plans or intentions:** I think + infinitive. **Expressing ignorance:** It is constructed with the adverb No + (lo)+ sé /+ sabía or adverb No + sé / sabía… or + nada / demasiado / mucho de + SN. **Expressing knowledge:** Adverb (Ya) + lo sé /+ sabía or verb in the present indicative tense Sé… o + algo de + SN. **Asking for a favor:** Verb Poder + verb hacer + complement. **To ask for objects:** Trae (me) +SN. Verb tener + que + infinitive + complements / Préstame +SN + attenuator. **Ask for permission:** Can you + infinitive? Do you care… + Would you let me + infinitive? **Give permission:** Claro (que sí) **Prohibit:** It is forbidden + SN / infinitive / que… **To advise:** Podrías + inf. Tendrías que + inf. **Warn:** (Be) careful with + SN. Declarative statement + consequent. **Address someone:** Excuse me/e/ No treatment / Pardon me. **Give an order or instruction:** Imperative + attenuator.
Grammatical	**Grammatical Verb conjugations:** present, past and its modalities, future and its modalities. Mood, Voice, aspect, tense, and person. **Past imperfect**: Values/meaning. **Simple conditional:** **Form:** The simple conditional by adding to the infinitive the endings would be: Values/meaning. **Suggestive value with modal verbs**

Contents	Topics to develop
Léxicon	**Most common communicative situations:** **Greetings**: greeting and saying goodbye, giving and asking for personal information, calling attention, informing, introducing someone to someone, describing a person, giving an opinion about something, using public transport service, expressing pain and emotional state, situating something or someone in space **Linguistic structures to express orally and in writing the most usual communicative functions in everyday life.** **Syntactic elements:** sentence structure, sentence elements, and order, simple and compound sentences. and order, simple, and compound sentences. **Morphological elements:** nouns, pronouns, adjectives (forms, tonic atonic, and reflexive), demonstratives, possessives, quantifiers, interrogatives, indefinite, and use of the verb ser and estar in their correct conjugations. correct conjugations

Course design table adapted from the interests of the learners and considering the guidelines of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages.

5. Evaluation

The teacher can evaluate the progress of the students, but it is also important that the students themselves evaluate their progress and answer questions such as: Have you noticed improvements in listening/reading/use of the target language?

- Have you noticed improvements in listening/reading/use of the target language? Do you use vocabulary more appropriately, do you make specific mistakes after finishing the course? Do you feel more confident to perform your work, to carry it out, and to evaluate it? Do you feel more autonomous?

Note: The evaluation instruments are elaborated by the teacher based on his/her pedagogical experience. However, the use of observation guides, rubrics, and play activities is suggested.

PHASE 3. Course development and execution results

The practice or execution of the course was carried out during a period of 60 hours and was adjusted to the disposition of the trainees, considering that it was aimed at people carrying out a project in the city. Therefore, the teacher needed to carry out the oral and writing practices through various forms; review of logs of the work that the students carried out during the work

(project) and motivational activities related to the language in groups or pairs, to allow the students to have a good development of communicative skills. The course went according to plan. However, there was a need for students to plan extracurricular activities to improve their learning process and be involved in real situations to reinforce their language skills.

As for the results of the course execution and to know the degree of satisfaction on the part of the students, a guide was prepared with two questions with dichotomous answers and one open question:

1. Did the development of the contents meet your expectations? To this question, 100% answered yes.

2. Were the strategies used by the teacher appropriate for your age, time, and profession? To this question, 95% answered yes, and the rest said that due to work situations (support to operators), they were not able to perform the activities with certainty.

3. What topics or contents would you like to reinforce? In this one, 98% suggested grammatical content, specifically verb conjugation. One percent suggested lexical topics and the remaining one, functional contents, specifically asking for permission and favors.

4. CONCLUSIONS

After this work, we can state that to design a course based on the needs of the learners or target group, it is necessary to get in direct contact with them and know their interests, ages, learning rhythms, linguistic diversity, culture, and ways of learning.

In the same way, it is important to know their profession, because it allows the teacher to select with a minimum of error the contents and the time needed to satisfy the needs of the learners, as well as the activities to be performed and the forms of evaluation and products of each activity performed, which must be in function of the autonomous development. In addition, the integrating resources, as well as the plans and programs depend very much and to a great extent on the needs of the learners. The best way to impart knowledge is to favor the needs of those who wish to learn.

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