**Designing and implementing an e-General English course: Practical Steps, Challenges and Opportunities**

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## Introduction

Using technology in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context is not a choice anymore, but a necessity. This is especially crucial, when learning involves participants in the work place. At one point, they need to develop themselves: their knowledge, their skills and attitudes in their journey to improve their professional quality. On the other hand, pressure from the workplace and demand for career development require them not to leave their work. One way to accommodate the learning needs of people in the workplace and their needs for career advancement is pursuing e-education, either full program or blended learning model. Nurses at various hospitals in Indonesia also face this issue of balancing work demands and professional development needs. To help these nurses, the faculty of nursing of Universitas Pelita Harapan, collaborating with the international hospitals employing the nurses, designed a distance learning program. The first phase of this educational program is offered full on-line, with five courses, including the e-General English for the nurses. This paper focuses on the design and implementation stage of e-General English, from a lecturer’s point of view as the co-designer of the course.

## Theoretical Framework

The journey to design and implement e-General English course employs the following learning and instructional design theories.

1. **Gagne’s nine events of instruction** were used as guidelines to scaffold the learning activities on the learning management system (Gagné, et al, 1992).

Table 2. Gagne’s Nine Events of Instruction

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Segment of Learning** | **Events of Instructions** | **Type of learning activities** |
| Opening | 1. Gain attention | Warming up activities |
|  | 1. Inform learning objectives | Learning scope |
|  | 1. Stimulate recall of prior learning | Review of the previous lesson |
| Presentation | 1. Present the content | From easy to more complex |
|  | 1. Provide learning guides | Examples and guided practice |
| Practice | 1. Elicit performance | Skills Practice |
|  | 1. Provide feedback | Automatic grading |
| Closing | 1. Assess performance | Daily quiz |
|  | 1. Enhance retention | Assignments |

1. **People-Focused Instructional Design Principles**

In designing e-General English course, the designer applied “People-focused” instructional design principles adapted from human-centric organization (Winograd & Woods, 1997)

**People**. The focus of the design is heavily put on people. This means that each design decision is triggered by people and aimed for people as the target and the user of the course. People involved are the course designer who is also the lecturer, the course coordinator, the participants, and the decision makers in the hospital (the Director of Nursing and the Training and Development Coordinator in the hospital as policy maker. The expectations of the people involved are identified and accommodated in the learning design.

**Content**. Expectations of the people involved are taken into consideration in the selection of contents for learning.

**Process**. The contents are then organized in a learning architecture, which is then translated into learning process that facilitates learning.

**Technology**. Finally, technology available is identified and optimized to be integrated into the learning process.

Content

People

Technology

Process

**Figure 1.** People-Focused Instructional Design Principles (Adapted from: Winograd & Woods, 1997)

## Methods

The e-learning design and implementation effort adopted a research and development method. This method is implemented using the most-frequently used model in e-learning development: the ADDIE model. (Grafinger, D.J., 1988)

Development

Design

Analysis

Implementation

Evaluation

**Figure2.** ADDIE Instructional Design System Model (Source: Grafinger, D.J., 1988)

**Analysis**. Analysis was done on people, content, process and technology. Vertical (competency levels: basic, intermediate, advanced) and horizontal dimensions (variety of skills and topics) of contents are carefully taken into careful consideration.

**Design**. The results of the analysis were put into careful consideration in the design process. Decisions included the course format, technology platforms, tools and materials, and time table of learning activities.

* **The course format.** The course title is General English. This course is designed to provide basic academic English, with reading as the primary skill supported by listening, speaking and writing skills. The participants are diploma degree nurses who hold a full-time job at their respective hospitals in five sites (Kupang, Manado, Cikarang, Bekasi, Bogor and Jakarta). It is a one-semester-16-session course, offered full on-line.
* **The technology platforms.** The course is offered via moodle platform with facebook and whatsapp as supporting platforms for bridging communication with participants.
* **Tools and materials.** Learning resources that are made available to participants include online dictionary, youtube links, powerpoints, quizzes, video conferencing, and discussion forum.
* **Learning activities.** Learning activities include live video conferences, discussion forum, main learning materials, quizzes, assignments, tests and language skills practice. (See Table 1. Learning Activities time table).
* **Syllabus.** The syllabus covers 16 learning sessions around “Academic English” (e.g. Skimming/scanning, making inferences, paraphrasing, summarizing, synthesizing)/

**Table 1. Learning Activities time table**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **No** | **Learning activities** | **Frequency** | **@ hours** | **Total learning hours** |
| **1** | **Video Conferences** | **2** | **1** | **2** |
| **2** | **Discussion Forum** | **6** | **1** | **6** |
| **3** | **Independent learning (video, powerpoint, e-reading)** | **14** | **1** | **12** |
| **4** | **Daily assignments** | **10** | **0.5** | **5** |
| **5** | **Quizzes** | **2** | **0.5** | **1** |
| **6** | **Speaking tasks (from outline to speech recording)** | **6** | **0.5** | **3** |
| **7** | **Evaluation tests (mid and final)** | **2** | **1** | **2** |
| **8** | **Consulting** | **10** | **0.5** | **5** |
|  |  |  | **Total** | **26** |

**Development.** After key decisions in the design phase had been agreed on, the process continued to the course development phase. The designer, who is also the facilitator/lecturer, then, selected and developed course materials, videos, e-reading materials, quizzes, discussion topics (discussion rules and regulations), and assignments.

**Implementation.** The program was rolled out on January 21, 2018 with a video conference. The lecturer and the participants ‘met’ face-to-face using video conference technology. The purpose of the conference was to provide study guidelines to participants as they were all new to e-learning mode. The subsequent weeks were the e-learning sessions.

## Discussion

As the title indicates, the discussion in this paper is presented in three parts: Practical Steps, Challenges and Opportunities.

**Practical Steps.** When designing the e-General English course, the lecturer as the course designer, used a scaffolded structure. The designer started with big decisions in course level (learning needs and expectations both from the employer’s part and the participants’ part, course descriptions, and course format). The output of this level is course outline. Then, the process rolled out to practical decisions in the content design (learning materials, learning outline and activities). The output in this level is Design Document, which was converted to Course syllabus. Finally, the process narrowed down into session level (lesson outline linked with technology). The output is a session plan (very much similar to a lesson plan – a plan on how the learning activities are scaffolded to facilitate learning).

**Challenges.** At the time this paper was written, the process has been unfolded one thirds of the way. Up to this moment, some challenges have been identified. First is the challenge concerning the **people** as the focus of the e-learning venture. The greatest challenge comes from the participants’ part: their low level of technology literacy and their lack of self-regulating skills. Another challenge concerning people comes from the institutional support. The challenge is how to communicate the need to allocate ‘agreed’ learning time at work for the participants, who are full-time nurses. Another challenge originates from **content development**. This is related to the lack of knowledge and skills to use e-learning instructional design strategies to convert classroom materials to e-learning-ready module. The next challenge comes from the **process** side, especially when dealing with missed deadlines for the activities, quizzes and assignments. Finally, is the challenge concerning digital **technology**: Technology literacy, bandwidth and stable internet connection.

**Opportunities.** Wherever there are challenges, there are opportunities. Nowadays, use of technology in EFL is not a matter of likes or dislikes anymore. It has become an inseparable part of EFL. E-learning initiates opportunities for new ‘normals’ in EFL teaching and learning. E-learning opens up opportunity to extend learning beyond the classroom (from single source of information to multiple source of information. E-learning also provides opportunity for learners to make learning more suitable to their interest and pace of learning (from fully guided learning to more flexible and independent learning). E-learning also provides opportunity to move from learning to researching information. Finally, e-learning provides opportunity to publish the result of their learning not just for the consumption of the teacher or facilitator, but also for interaction with the world.

**Conclusion**

Designing and implementing an EFL e-learning course involves several key issues. The practical steps deal with critical decisions in analysis, design, development, implementation and evaluation. There are also issues concerning challenges faced by the people, process, content and technology. The good news is that e-learning opens up new windows of opportunity to make learning ‘real’, more meaningful, interesting and impactful to support the present and future needs for professional development in the 21st century while still enabling participants to continue doing their work.

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