

A COMPARATIVE REVIEW OF COURSE DESIGN MODELS: IMPLICATIONS FOR LANGUAGE CLASSROOMS IN BANGLADESH

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ABSTRACT

In modern day education, poorly designed courses are a major concern. This narrative review explores the foundational course development models and their implications for Bangladeshi tertiary classrooms. The review draws on influential frameworks highlighting their theoretical orientations, which range from structured, objective-driven models to flexible, learner-centered approaches. It highlights how these models critically address various aspects of course design, including needs analysis, content organization, assessment, and student engagement. Different empirical studies are reviewed to demonstrate the integration of these frameworks in various educational contexts and their distinctive structures. The paper concludes with pedagogical implications and future research directions aimed at improving localized instruction and supporting students' academic language development.

Keywords: Course, Course Development, Higher Education Curriculum

INTRODUCTION

In English language teaching context, course development is an important aspect. Despite the growing demand for academic English in Bangladeshi universities, little emphasis is provided to creating context based, needs-focused courses and modules grounded in a deep understanding of students' actual needs.

Bangladeshi public and private universities are offering foundational English courses to help students overcome academic language barriers, recognizing the importance of English for academic purposes (Chowdhury & Kabir, 2014; Rubel, 2019). However, research demonstrate that in the tertiary level, English courses often lack systematic planning, disconnected from contextual realities and students' academic needs never get priority. According to Haque (2017), curriculum planning often follows a top-down approach that overlooks students' needs and the specific context in which they study. Akter and Khanum (2023) state that both the teaching materials and the assessment procedures are not aligned with the course objectives. The existing courses are often generic and fail to address students' academic, linguistic, and disciplinary needs (Mallik & Alam, 2018). As a result,

there remains a considerable gap between classroom instruction and the academic literacy needs of the students. Several studies (e.g., Akteruzzaman & Sattar, 2020; Dutta, 2019) highlight that students continue to face challenges to master EAP skills. There are limited oral presentation skills (Harun et al., 2016), vocabulary and fluency challenges (Hossain, 2017), reading comprehension problems and difficulty in interpreting complex texts (Sultana, 2016). All these findings portray a serious mismatch between the objectives of existing English courses and the actual academic language needs of the Bangladeshi tertiary students.

Foundational courses are available, but still students still struggle with essential EAP skills (Muniruzzaman & Afrin, 2024), suggesting that these courses may not be adequately aligned with the demands of academic tasks at the tertiary level. This demonstrates the necessity of a needs-focused contextual course development approach for tertiary students, which will facilitate them in overcoming their EAP-related challenges. Thus, a focused narrative review is necessary to explore dominant course development frameworks and determine how they can provide directions in designing and developing a context-sensitive, needs-focused EAP course for the Bangladeshi higher education context. The review of the theoretical models proposed by Fink (2013), Diamond (2008), Tyler (1949), Taba (1962), and Graves (2000) provides valuable insight into curriculum and course design, ranging from structured and linear to flexible and cyclical approaches.

CONCEPTUALIZING COURSE DEVELOPMENT

In language education course development is very important. Reflection is involved in course development process that involves the learners, their contexts, the teaching culture, and pedagogical goals. Yalden (1987) describes course development as "a skillful blending of what is already known about language teaching and learning with the new elements that a group of learners inevitably bring to the classroom, their own needs, wants, attitudes, knowledge of the world, and so on" (p. 3). Graves (1996) further states that "course development includes planning a course, teaching it, and modifying the plan, both while the course is in progress and after the course is over" (p. 3). This reflects the cyclical nature of course development. Similarly, Fink (2003) offers a broader perspective by identifying the key characteristics of good courses: i) challenging the learners, ii) promotion of active learning, iii) reflecting educators' genuine interest in the subject and students, iv) support of meaningful interactions, and v) systematic assessment integration. These principles collectively highlight the importance of aligning curriculum goals with meaningful student engagement.

REVIEW OF COURSE DEVELOPMENT MODELS

This following section is going to review the dominant course development models.

Integrated Course Design Model (Fink, 2013)

It is a learner centered approach. The key strength of this approach lies in the logical integration of core components—factors related to situations, learning goals, assessment strategies, and learning activities—in three phases which include Initial, Intermediate, and Final Design. This model focuses both on designing course contents and on fostering meaningful interaction between teachers and students.

Initial Design Phase: Building Primary Components

The first phase establishes the foundation by identifying essential situational factors, such as student demographics, previous knowledge, institutional reality, and logistical constraints. Significant learning goals are determined by the instructors which will focus on what the students should know, value, or be able to do by the end of the course. After that assessment and feedback strategies will be developed. For

facilitating deep learning, Fink emphasizes the significance of making sure that all elements—goals, assessments, and activities—are properly integrated.

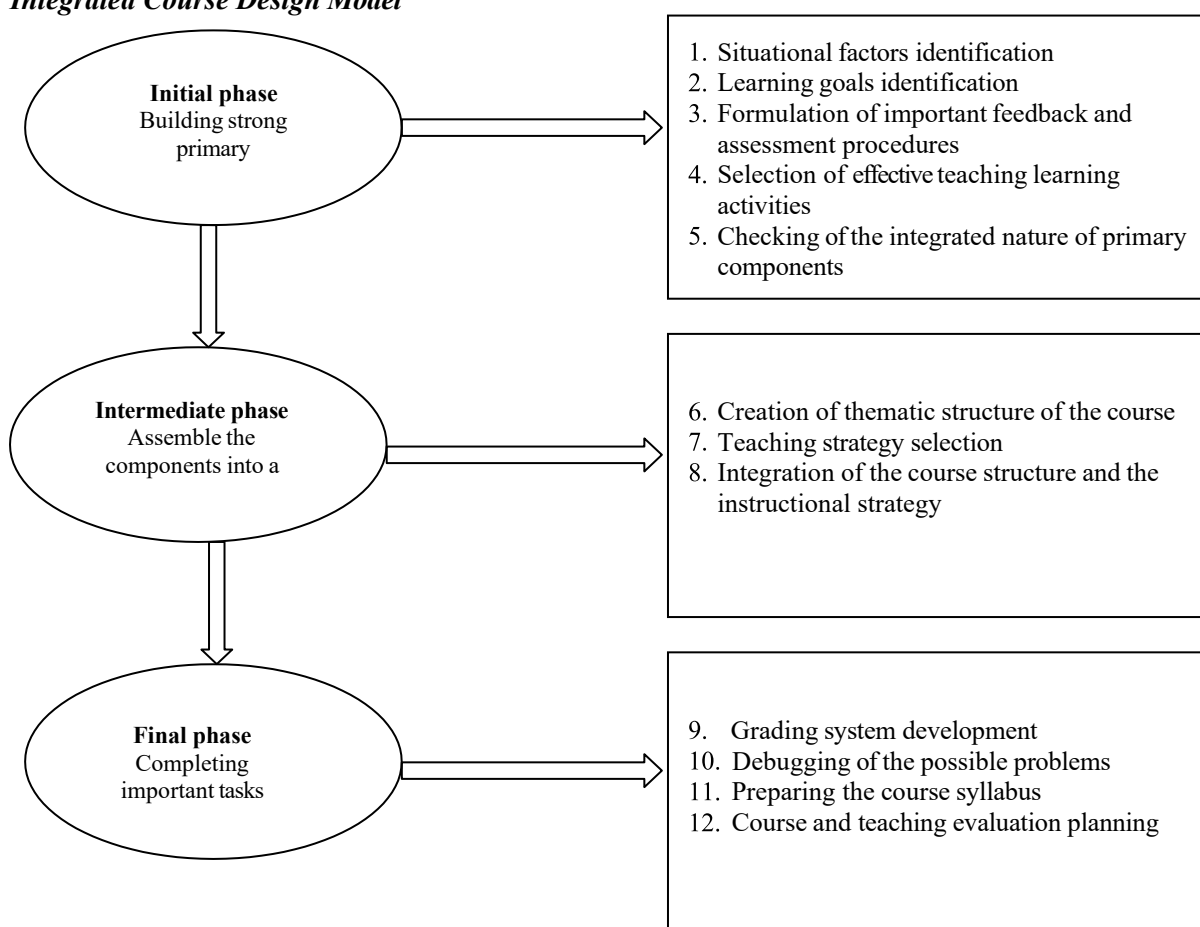
Intermediate Design Phase: Creating Coherence

In this phase, course structure and instructional strategies are assembled into a coherent whole. Contents are organized according to the themes and learning experiences are meaningfully sequenced. The teaching strategy is developed to support the achievement of learning goals, ensuring that structure and strategy interact synergistically. This integration makes Fink’s model different from more linear approaches, as it facilitates active and reflective learning environments that integrates a range of student needs and contexts.

Final Design Phase: Refining and Planning

The final design phase consists of important logistical and pedagogical tasks: design of the grading system, potential problem identification, preparing the course syllabus. In this phase, planning for course delivery and evaluation is also done, ensuring that implementation is smooth and adaptable. Ongoing reflection is emphasized in this phase.

Figure 1
Integrated Course Design Model



Learner centeredness is the major feature of this model approach. Previous studies (Sulaiman, 2019; Tay, 2021; Zhang et al., 2012) have used Fink’s integrated course design approach in their research. Sulaiman (2019) points out that “Making better teachers, is not the focus of this model, rather it focuses on creating better learning environments for students” (p. 1). The basic components of the three phases are well connected (Ghafri, 2015), and together they constitute a well-organized,

contextualized course.

Katyal et al. (2024) posit that the integrated course design model is an effective framework for enhancing the student learning environment. However, Fink (2003) argues that faculty members usually do not choose to make changes without institutional support. They need assurance that their institutions value high-quality teaching and learning and will provide the necessary resources such as time, motivation, professional support centers, and rewards, to help them adopt new teaching methods. Thus, implementing an integrated course design model requires institutional support which is crucial but often difficult to secure in different educational settings.

Systemic Course Design Model (Diamond, 2008)

Diamond's (2008) model of systemic course design is a learner centered approach. This comprehensive model was first developed at the University of Miami in the early 1960s and has since undergone several significant modifications.

It is a flexible model. No curriculum or course design will be effective without proper focus on the teaching procedure and how students learn. Diamond (2008) suggests that, before designing a course, two questions should be asked: 1) Is there a need for the project? 2) If there is a genuine need for the project, are there necessary resources available? There are two important phases in Diamond's model: a) selection and design of the project, and b) production, implementation and evaluation of the project.

STRUCTURE OF THE MODEL

There are two major sequential phases in Diamond's model, each addressing a specific aspect of course development (Ghafri, 2015). The phases are:

Phase One: Project Selection and Design

According to Diamond (2008), it starts with two core questions:

1. Is project needed?
2. Are the necessary resources available to meet this need?

These are crucial preliminary questions which are essential for feasibility. Preliminary factors in this phase are highlighted in Table 1.

Table 1
First Phase

Factors	Description
Needs analysis	Educational gaps identification based on field knowledge, societal demands, characteristics of students, research and institutional priorities
Learning goals	Developing goals that reflect both disciplinary expectations and learner capabilities
Curricular consideration	Credit requirements, resource and fiscal constraints, accreditation issues, staff availability, effectiveness of current program
Planning inputs	Time, grading, scheduling flexibility

Constructed from Diamond (2008)

Phase Two: Project Production, Implementation, and Evaluation

Once a course is deemed viable, the second phase focuses the operationalization. Table 2 portrays the major tasks involved in phase two.

Table 2
Second Phase

Tasks	Description
Evaluation	Development of evaluation instruments and procedures
Learning outcome	Stating specific learning outcomes
Format selection	Selecting different instructional formats
Materials	Evaluation and adaptation of existing materials
New materials	Production, testing and revision of new materials
Coordination of logistics	Scheduling, resources
Revision	Implementing, assessing and continuous revision of the course

Constructed from Diamond (2008)

Important features of this model are demonstrated by Diamond:

- **Thinking in ideal terms:** Encouraging aspirational goals while staying grounded in feasibility.
- **Use of diagrams:** Demonstrating the structure and flow of design elements.
- **Data-driven approach:** Based on empirical needs analysis and evaluation.
- **Team collaboration:** Facilitates a shared vision and responsibility among stakeholders.
- **Political sensitivity:** Recognizes the institutional dynamics and constraints that may affect implementation.

Learning process of the learner is the crux of this model. Boyd et al. (2012) states that, “One of the salient features of this model is its phase-specific design, which emphasizes the importance of teaching staff devoting adequate time and resources to project selection and design in advance of production, implementation and evaluation” (p. 54).

Tyler's Curriculum Model (1949)

The Tyler Rationale (1949) is a modern curriculum approach. With the publication of *Basic Principles of Curriculum and Instruction* in 1949, Tyler portrayed a unique model of curriculum design, emphasizing the connection between objectives, experience, and evaluation. The steps of this model are organized logically, with purpose at the center of the approach. Tyler (1949) explains that figuring out the objectives is crucial as “they are the most critical criteria for guiding all the other activities of the curriculum maker” (p. 62).

There are four fundamental questions which are central in Tyler’s model:

1. What educational purposes should the school seek to attain?
2. What educational experiences can be provided that are likely to achieve these purposes?
3. How to effectively organize these educational experiences?
4. How we can determine whether these purposes are being attained?

Identification of objectives is at the center of this model, which Tyler (1949) famously described as “the most critical criteria for guiding all the other activities of the curriculum maker” (p. 62). According to Tyler, the curriculum is a means to bring about desired changes in learners’ behavior, and these changes must be intentional, measurable, and aligned with broader societal and educational goals.

Primary sources for deriving educational objectives are highlighted in Table 3.

Table 3
Sources of Educational objectives

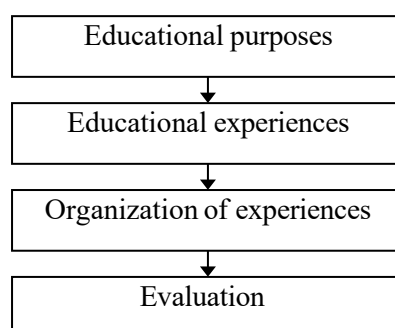
Educational objective source	Description
Learner	Needs, developmental stages and behavioral patterns
Practical setting	Alignment between education with real-world
Subject expert	Use of disciplinary knowledge to maintain academic rigor and coherence

Adapted from Wraga (2017)

Tyler further elaborates on the concept of “learning experiences”, defining them as interactions “between the learner and the external conditions in the environment to which he can react” (p. 41). These are not passive experiences; they are deliberately designed and purposefully organized for achieving intended learning outcomes. Hence, the organization of content and experiences becomes central to the implementation of the curriculum.

Figure 2

Tyler’s Curriculum Model



Tyler’s framework is a practical approach in both the US and international contexts (Wraga, 2017). It is an overall blueprint for curriculum design, that connects objectives, experiences, and evaluation (Tyler, 1949). Cruickshank (2018) further explains, “The model provided a clear direction for the entire curriculum development process through its clear and precise objectives; and this in turn gave the teacher a clear outline of what they hope their students to achieve” (p. 208). However, Hlebowitsh (2005) describes the model as a management device designed to reduce teachers’ creativity.

Taba Model (1962)

Taba’s (1962) curriculum design is recognized as one of the most influential curriculum frameworks of the 1960s, featured by its bottom-up nature and strong emphasis on teacher agency, as she believed that teachers who work directly with the curriculum should be the ones to develop it (Almadani et al., 2024). Taba argues that teachers stay closest to the learners are best placed to develop the curriculum. Her model is firmly rooted in progressivist ideals, particularly the importance of critical thinking and responsiveness to learners' needs.

According to Taba curriculum should be designed inductively, that will begin with the diagnosis of learners' needs, rather than imposed from above. There is a seven-step process in this curriculum:

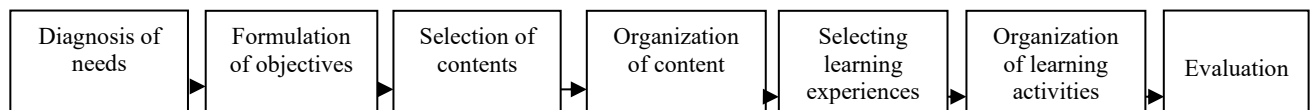
1. Learners’ needs diagnosis– It is the starting point for any curriculum which emphasizes a clear understanding of students' needs.

2. Objective formulation– Derived from the needs, which ensures alignment between what is intended and what is actually taught.
3. Content selection – Content is chosen based on its relevance to the objectives and learners' interests, enhancing learner engagement and motivation.
4. Organization of content – Content must be logically sequenced. Students' age, cognitive maturity, and prior knowledge should be taken into account.
5. Selection of learning experiences – Teachers design experiences that make content relatable and meaningful, encouraging active participation of students.
6. Organization of learning activities – Structured to ensure coherence and continuity, facilitating learners build connections across concepts and skills.
7. Evaluation – Evaluation serves both formative and summative purposes, that helps to assess the extent to which objectives have been achieved and guiding necessary revisions.

(Taba, 1962)

Figure 3

Taba Model



Adapted from Taba (1962)

The ground analysis or assessment of students' needs is where Taba's curriculum model starts. Taba's curriculum model is widely accepted for its bottom-up approach and its focus on both teachers and learners (Aydin et al., 2017). Taba (1962) holds that teachers understand it well about how to assess students' needs and, therefore, should be responsible for developing and implementing the curriculum (Laanemets & Ruubel, 2013). In the Taba approach (1962), Portillo et al. (2020) state that, "instructors are positioned to drive curriculum decisions with the needs of the students at the forefront" (p. 2), making it a context-based, needs-focused curriculum model.

Graves' Course Development Framework (2000)

Graves' (2000) course development framework is a dynamic and cyclical model. Graves proposes eight interrelated components in her course development framework: defining the context, articulating beliefs, conceptualizing content, formulating goals and objectives, assessing needs, organizing the course, developing materials, and designing assessment. In her framework, the course designer can begin at any stage, depending on the designer's judgment, their perception of key challenges, and the institutional and cultural contexts (Ghafri, 2015). Graves highlights the importance of educational context.

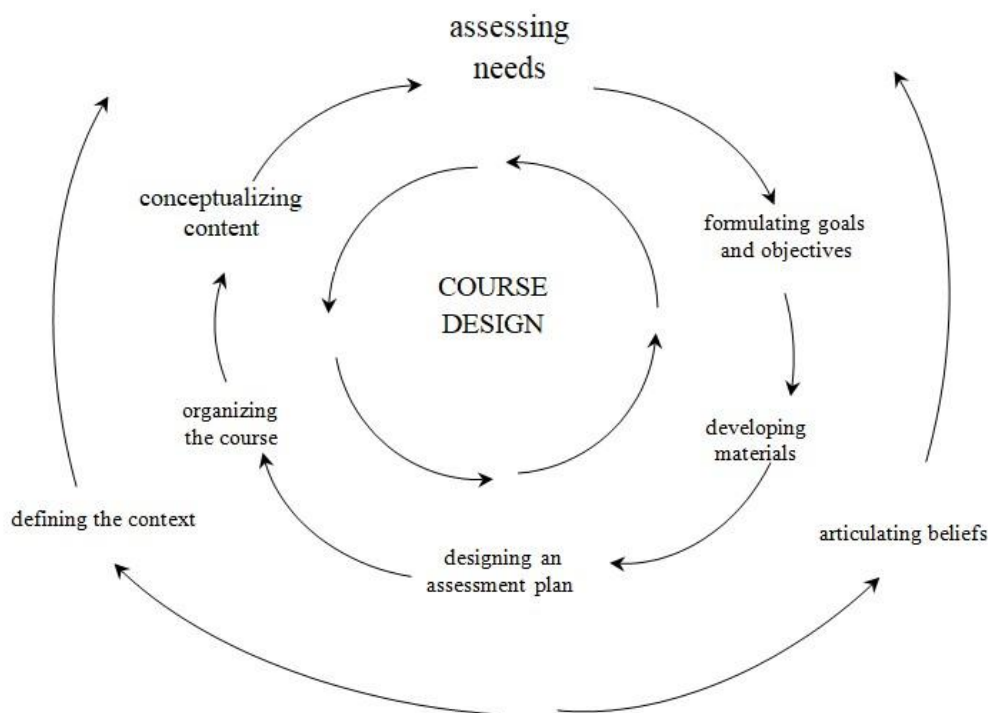
Articulation of beliefs is crucial in Graves' framework. Teaching is not merely a mechanical activity but a reflective practice which is shaped by educators' values, prior experiences, and philosophies of learning. These provide directions in decision-making at every stage of the course development, including selection of content and pedagogy. Graves (2000) points out that "Goals provide guidelines and should be flexible enough to change, if they are not appropriate" (p. 74), which highlights the flexible feature of her framework.

Graves (2000) proposes a reflective set of guiding questions for this stage that shifts the focus from prescriptive syllabi to informed, teacher-driven decision-making. This is connected with

assessing needs, which is treated as a dialogic and ongoing process. Needs analysis in this model is not a one-time diagnostic tool but a recursive procedure that shapes and reshapes the course. As Graves notes, it “establishes learning as a dialogue between the teacher and the learner and among the learners” (p. 98), positioning learners as co-constructors of their learning paths.

Furthermore, the model posits that the organization of the course and materials development should not follow a pre-programmed format. Instead, they should be molded through the interplay between teacher intuition, learner needs, and contextual realities. Graves' emphasizes that materials need to be adapted or developed by teachers underscores the creative and responsive nature of the design process. In this regard, assessment is also multifaceted—serving not only to measure learning outcomes but also to evaluate the relevance of course content and instructional methods. The framework incorporates both formative and summative assessment approaches to ensure that teaching remains responsive and learner-centered.

Figure 4
Systems Course Development Framework



Adopted from Graves (2000), p. 3

The framework of Graves (2000) is similar with the curriculum model of Hilda Taba (1962) and the course design approach of Dubin and Olshtain (1980). While Taba 's and Dubin and Olshtain's models follow a hierarchical sequence of stages, Graves 'framework is cyclical and comparatively more flexible. Adipat and Chankasorn (2019) claim that “Graves’ (2000) framework —can be applied to a variety of educational settings, grade levels, and academic disciplines” (p. 6). Generoso and Arbon (2020) explain that, the model's components are presented in a flowchart format, enabling flexibility and avoiding hierarchical constraints. Importantly, the model gives prominence to the choice of the teacher. Graves (2000) notes that “teachers —can convert what they know about teaching and learning languages into a coherent course plan” (p. 5). This approach is creative and at the same time reflective, that encourages teachers to act as course developers through an intentional thinking process.

Overall, the framework of Graves' (2000) acknowledges the contextual and dialogic elements of course design and also elevates the role of teachers as critical thinkers and curriculum innovators. This makes it particularly suitable for resource-constrained or context-sensitive environments like Bangladesh, where teacher insight and adaptability are essential in designing relevant, meaningful language learning experiences.

Table 4 portrays the major features, strengths and weaknesses of the reviewed models.

Table 4
Major features, strengths and weaknesses of the reviewed models

Model	Key features	Strength	Weakness	Useful for present context
Fink's Integrated Course Design model (2003)	Integrated, learner focused, three phase model	Holistic approach	Time consuming, teacher expertise and institutional support is required	Going to prove helpful in designing student engaging tasks, well aligned course components
Diamond's Systemic Course Design (2008) model	Two phase model	Structured planning; realistic for institutions.	Requires institutional support, funding, skilled teachers and other academic staff	Useful for improving academic conditions of different higher education institutions
Tyler's Model (1949)	Linear, objective focused	Convenient to apply	Inflexible	Helpful direction for setting clear learning outcomes, alignment between different course components
Taba' model (1962)	Bottom-up approach	grounded in learner needs	Time-consuming; requires skilled teachers; not applicable in all types of educational institutions	Proper direction for designing needs-based course and curriculum for the research contexts
Graves' course development framework (2000)	Flexible, cyclical structure	Can be implemented in different educational settings	Less structured, to much emphasis on teacher autonomy	Suitable for present context as Graves' model emphasize context sensitivity and flexibility.

REVIEW OF EMPIRICAL STUDIES ON COURSE DEVELOPMENT

Numerous empirical studies on course development mirror foundational principles proposed by key curriculum theorists such as Tyler (1949), Taba (1962), Diamond (1989), and Graves (2000). Sharmin (2018) conducted a context-sensitive needs analysis for medical students and developed a skills-based English course, embodying Tyler's emphasis on defining educational purposes and Graves' focus on establishing learning as a dialogue. Angelina (2018) designs a language teaching media, reflecting Diamond's practical, design-based framework that emphasizes systematic planning which is aligned with institutional goals and resource constraints.

Raymond and Brisay (2000) design a six-module EAP course for MBA students that represents a hierarchical structuring of content and objectives, reminiscent of Taba's model which advocates for inductive development from teacher observations. Floris (2008) develops an EGAP course using authentic, student-relevant materials, integrating both Taba's principle of content selection based on learner relevance and Graves' notion of conceptualizing content around learner context.

An ESP speaking course is developed by Rahman et al. (2008). They followed the framework

proposed by Dudley-Evans and John's (1998). Salazar (2017) uses Richards' (2001) model and Koc's (2020) application of the ADDIE framework, which reflect the influence of Diamond's emphasis on instructional design and continuous evaluation in course development process.

Blended learning is introduced by Du and Wang (2019) while ESP course development, integrating learner autonomy and contextual flexibility which are consistent with Graves' cyclical model. Tomak and Atas (2019) combined Nation and Macalister's (2010) systematic framework with Hyland's (2003) genre-based pedagogy for developing an improved version of instruction.

These studies demonstrate the use of dominant course development models in different educational contexts for better instruction and fruitful teaching learning.

IMPLICATIONS FOR BANGLADESHI LANGUAGE TEACHING CLASSROOMS

The dominant course development models reviewed by the present research and empirical studies conducted in different contexts have important implications for Bangladeshi language classrooms. Current instructional practices in Bangladesh are characterized by the use of traditional approaches while overlooking the needs of the learners. For bringing about a major shift and helping students overcome different academic challenges, needs-based and learner-centered approaches are crucial. The flexible course development frameworks offer practical approaches that foster learner engagement, and improvements in academic skills.

Needs analysis is a fundamental step in language program development, whether for EAP, ESP or Basic English courses (Shahid, 2025, p. 287). A context-oriented needs assessment must be integrated in course development process which will ensure proper alignment between instructions and learners' academic needs. Role of the teachers are crucial for conducting a systematic needs analysis and implementation of a proper course design that will facilitate relevant and fruitful teaching. To deal with these responsibilities skillfully, teachers should be given proper training on pedagogy. Professional development programs designed for the teachers should emphasize curriculum design, pedagogical strategies, and the use of digital tools to support flexible and interactive learning environments. Policymakers and higher education authorities, such as the University Grants Commission, should actively provide support along with funding for teacher training programs (Rahman et al., 2020).

Integrating digital technologies and blended learning strategies in teaching learning can further enrich instruction and support diverse learners' needs. Proper collaboration is necessary among researchers, teachers, policy makers and educational institutes to systematically plan, design and implement fruitful language programs and courses for students which are needs based and context related.

DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research should focus on designing and developing context specific courses tailored to specific faculties, such as Arts and Social Sciences. Moreover, research should examine institutional barriers to implementing learner-centered models and find solutions by exploring the global contexts and propose potential solutions by collaborating with different stakeholders including teachers, researchers, curriculum developers and policy makers.

CONCLUSION

This narrative review portrays different course development theories and models. It traces how these models have evolved and emphasizes their real-world practicality for designing context-sensitive EAP

courses. By drawing on these dominant models proposed by Fink, Diamond, Tyler, Taba and Graves, educators and policymakers can develop student-centred and context-relevant curricula that will help tertiary students of Bangladesh overcome their EAP related challenges.

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