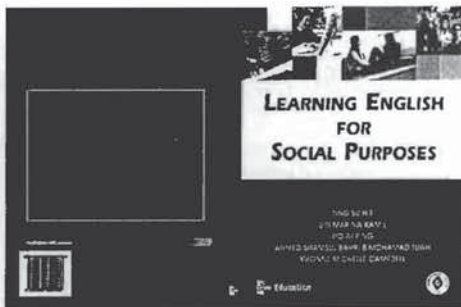


USING THE GENRE-BASED APPROACH TO SCAFFOLD LANGUAGE LEARNING OF LOW ENGLISH PROFICIENCY



For many language learners, instructors and institutional decision-makers, the bottom-line in language teaching is improvement in the proficiency of learners. With this in mind, an action research project was conducted to investigate the use of the genre-based approach in scaffolding the less proficient learners in learning social interaction skills in English. Feedback was obtained from instructors and students on the commercially-produced materials that were in use then. The needs analysis pointed to the necessity of designing language learning materials tailored to tertiary students and the specific contexts in which they use English. The theoretical principles underlying the design of the materials are the genre-based approach and the concept of scaffolding. Built into the materials are bridges with the students' background knowledge, provision of adequate input in the form of knowledge of the topic and samples of typical interactions for the communicative purpose focussed on, explicit teaching of relevant expressions and language structures in context, followed by guided practice leading towards independent practice. The materials have been trialled two times and undergone three revisions. Research on the use of the materials in class showed that the level and social context are appropriate. The results revealed two unanticipated problems which prevented the materials from being used as intended, that is, the instructors' lack of ability to elaborate on the social context of given situations to build an effective bridge to students' background knowledge, and their unfamiliarity with the pedagogy. The findings point to the importance of instructor training.

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