

UDC 378.147

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WAYS TO ENHANCE STUDENTS' COMMUNICATIVE SKILLS IN ESP TEACHING AND LEARNING

The ultimate goal of English for Specific Purposes teaching and learning is to develop students' essential communicative competence within their professional field, enhance their speaking proficiency through different speech practices and drills simulating future workplace situations as well as to enable them acquire up-to-date professional information via foreign sources. Learners' speaking proficiency is viewed as one of the most crucial skills by both teachers and learners and is measured in terms of the ability to carry out target language conversation. The author of the present article tries to analyze modern innovative technologies aimed at the formation and improvement of students' foreign language speaking proficiency for professional purposes, determine efficient methods for learners' communicative competence enhancement in the field of ESP studying, as well as adapt most popular ESL speaking activities to ESP classes. Research shows that communicative language teaching, based on true-to-life situations that require communication and collaborative approach serve best to promote speaking activities, specifying pair work and groupwork as the most efficient methods focused on improving students' communicative competences. The author distinguishes class research, linear dialogue, pyramid discussion, information gap, unfilled crossword and role-play as some of the fruitful activities stimulating speaking practices in an ESP class, provides general recommendations for ESP teachers to promote students' target language communication. Possible suggestions to encourage students' interaction include organization of ESP class desks in a way that fosters learners' cooperation; allocating a percentage of the final grade to speaking skill as well as continuous assessing of students' speaking endeavours; creating a rich learning environment with authentic materials, implementing collaborative learning and shared knowledge strategies; teaching sentence starters and communicative scripts for common language functions and professional situations; reducing teacher speaking time and increasing students' speaking time; always giving positive feedback to learners' speaking endeavours; diagnosing difficulties that students encounter and providing additional practice to overcome them.

Key words: English for Specific Purposes (ESP), communicative competence, communicative language teaching, collaborative approach, pair work, groupwork.

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ШЛЯХИ ПІДВИЩЕННЯ КОМУНІКАТИВНИХ НАВИЧОК СТУДЕНТІВ ПРИ ВИКЛАДАННІ ТА ВИВЧЕННІ ІНОЗЕМНОЇ МОВИ ПРОФЕСІЙНОГО СПРЯМУВАННЯ

Кінцевою метою викладання та вивчення англійської мови за професійним спрямування (АМПС) є розвиток базових комунікативних навичок студентів у сфері професійної діяльності, покращення їх навичок говоріння іноземною мовою за допомогою різних мовленнєвих практик та тренінгів, націлених на моделювання майбутніх ділових ситуацій, а також надання їм можливості отримувати сучасну професійну інформацію через іноземні джерела. Розмовна майстерність здобувачів вищої освіти розглядається як одна з найважливіших навичок як викладачами, так і студентами та вимірюється з точки зору здатності вести розмову цільовою мовою. Автор статті намагається проаналізувати сучасні інноваційні технології, спрямовані на формування та вдосконалення іншомовної комунікативної компетентності студентів у сферах професійної діяльності, визначити ефективні методи підвищення комунікативних навичок у галузі вивчення англійської мови за професійним спрямуванням, а також адаптувати більшість популярних розмовних вправ, які використовуються для вивчення загальної англійської мови до занять з АМПС. Дослідження показує, що комунікативний підхід до навчання АМПС,

заснований на реальних життєвих ситуаціях, які вимагають спілкування, та навчання у співробітництві найкраще сприяють розвитку мовленнєвої діяльності, вказуючи роботу в парах і групах як найефективніші методи, спрямовані на вдосконалення комунікативних компетенцій здобувачів вищої освіти. Автор виокремлює дослідження в класі, лінійний діалог, пірамідальну дискусію, заповнення інформаційних прогалів, незаповнений кросворд і рольову гру як деякі продуктивні види діяльності, що стимулюють практику мовлення на заняттях з АМПС, надає загальні рекомендації викладачам даної дисципліни щодо стимулювання комунікації студентів цільовою мовою. Можливі пропозиції щодо заохочення комунікативної практики включають організацію парт в аудиторії таким чином, щоб сприяти взаємодії учасників навчального процесу; виділення певного відсотка підсумкової оцінки саме на визначення рівня мовленнєвої майстерності, а також систематичне оцінювання комунікативних здібностей студентів; створення насиченого навчального середовища з автентичними матеріалами, впровадження стратегій спільного навчання та взаєморозподілу знань; навчання сталих виразів і комунікативних сценаріїв для вирішення поширених мовних завдань у професійних ситуаціях; скорочення часу мовлення вчителя та збільшення часу мовлення студентів; постійне акцентування позитивного відношення до мовленнєвих зусиль учасників навчального процесу; діагностика труднощів, з якими стикаються студенти та надання додаткової практики для їх подолання.

Ключові слова: англійська мова за професійним спрямуванням (АМПС), комунікативна компетенція, комунікативний підхід, навчання у співробітництві, робота в парах, групова робота.

Problem statement. One of the main concerns of most foreign language teachers is the search of helpful means, ways, methods and techniques, which would enable their language learners develop satisfying foreign language proficiency. In this regard, learners' speaking proficiency is viewed as one of the most crucial skills, since the ability to communicate one's thoughts and organize ideas into a verbal structure is considered the ultimate goal of the whole language learning process.

Communicative efficiency is measured in terms of the ability to carry out a conversation in the (target) language. Many language learners assess their foreign language progress in terms of their communicative accomplishments because they view their speaking achievements as the measure of knowing a language. These learners consider their fluency and the ability to interact with others as a far more important skill than their reading, writing or listening comprehension abilities. That is why it is imperative for foreign language teachers and instructors to provide for the most suitable means and assist their language learners develop and enhance their communicative proficiency thus preparing them for real-life communicative situations.

All the above mentioned is especially true in terms of teaching and learning English for Specific Purposes, as this subject aims at addressing students' needs within a specific discipline or occupation and serves the functions of their professional communication. Thus, the ultimate goal of ESP studying is to develop students' essential communicative competence within their professional field, enhance their speaking proficiency through different speech practices and drills simulating future workplace situations as well as to enable them acquire up-to-date professional information via foreign sources. In other words, the ESP objective is to develop students' for-

eign language communicative and professional competences as an integrated whole.

Research analysis. Nowadays many linguists and EFL teachers consent that students acquire their second language speaking skill by "interacting". A communicative approach to foreign language teaching including English for Specific Purposes serves best this aim. The term communicative language teaching arose in the UK in the 60-70s of the 20th century, influenced by the works of N. Chomsky and S. Krashen, and was aimed at the formation and development of learners' communicative competence. M. Canale and M. Swain described the term "communicative competence" as the ability to use a language that is studied in a specific social context. According to them, communicative competence consists of speech, linguistic, socio-cultural, educational, cognitive and other competences (Canale, Swain, 1980). The notion communicative competence became connected not only with linguistics and sociolinguistic, but particularly with language teaching whereas the term communicative language teaching was viewed as teaching language for communication (Richards, 2006). Nowadays communicative approach to FLT helps learners to develop four types of speech activity: speaking, listening, reading and writing. Furthermore, students develop correct pronunciation skills, enlarge their vocabulary, acquire grammatical units as well as get acquainted with the culture, traditions and realities of the language studied (Adronova, 2020).

Communicative approach to FLT is closely connected with the so-called learner-centered education (see works by V. V. Verbytskyi, V. V. Machusky, L. O. Potenko, G. I. Pustovit, A. Y. Syrotenko, T. I. Sushchenko), in which the traditional "subject-to-object" teaching model, where the teacher is the main agent and central factor of the educational process as s/he determines the content, methods and

style of relations, is transformed into the “subject-to-subject” teaching scheme, where the teacher only initiates the process and stimulates the alteration of students into active communication participants. Here the information is assimilated and generated not only from the teacher, but from various sources, hence the level of students’ creative involvement grows, motivation for performing various assigned tasks increases, which in turn contributes to the formation of learners’ communicative, intellectual, sociocultural, language and speech competences (Hildebrant, 2019).

The investigation of most effective methods and techniques application to boost students’ speaking practice has been the research subject of miscellaneous scientists and EFL teachers (Brown J. D., Crocetti G., Deines L., Folse K. S., Harsch K., Magrath D. R., Marshall K. E., Plaister T., Schneider P., Vo G., Welch R. A. and others) and is still a topical question if we analyze the latest EFL methodology findings. In this respect, Heini-Marja Pakula focuses on teaching fluency with the help of formulaic language, that is language stored in pre-fabricated formulas, such as collocations; phrasal verbs; idioms; figures of speech as well as lexical bundles (Pakula, 2019). Taher Bahrani investigates the strategy “Language input and communicative output” to help students develop communicative efficiency, where the language input comes in the form of teacher talk, listening activities, reading passages, and the language heard and read outside of class that gives learners the material they need to begin producing language themselves – the language output (Bahrani, 2012). Hayriye Kayi characterizes activities which help develop communicative competences such as class discussion, role-play, simulation, information gap, brainstorming, storytelling, interview and others (Kayi, 2006).

In the sphere of English for Specific Purposes, the most popular teaching methods focused on improving students’ communicative competences include pair work and groupwork. Thus, Xulkar Murodjonovna dwells on the Think-Pair-Share technique as a cooperative learning strategy that encourages individual participation and is appropriate to all grade levels and class sizes in ESP teaching and learning (Murodjonovna, 2021). Ishchuk N. Yu. specifies debates as a valuable learning activity for teaching analytical and critical thinking, as well as providing students with a unique practice of using the language to solve job-related tasks (Ishchuk, 2019). Mo’minova Go’zalxon Muxtorjon and Sayilova Muxabbat Yangibayevna investigate recent technological developments and electronic applications that can be used in teaching students to speak like speech recognition software,

online discussion forums, online blogs, videos and games (Mo’minova, Sayilova, 2023).

Meanwhile the use of communicative teaching methods in ESP classes at non-linguistic higher education institutions and the selection of the most effective technologies for the development of students’ communicative competences in the field of professional communication require more thorough research and investigation. **The purpose of this article** is to analyze modern innovative technologies aimed at the formation and improvement of students’ foreign language speaking proficiency for professional purposes, determine efficient methods for learners’ communicative competence enhancement in the field of ESP studying, as well as adapt most popular ESL speaking activities to ESP classes. These tasks are particularly topical under the conditions of constantly increasing requirements for the future specialists’ foreign language training in combination with students’ low motivation to master a non-major subject and a continuous reduction in contact hours allotted to ESP studying in Ukrainian universities.

Presenting main material. Contemporary lifestyle and usual everyday activities presuppose more speaking than reading or writing. However, many ESP teachers still devote most of their class time to practicing reading, translating and writing, especially if we talk about working with authentic junks of information, like target language scientific articles, documents, forms, etc., considered essential in ESP methodology. Consequently, communicative practices and drills get far less attention resulting to almost complete ignoring of students’ speaking skills. However, if the goal of the language course lies in enabling the learners communicate in English, then speaking practices and communicative activities should be prioritized in the ESP classroom.

The tendency to reduce the traditional approach to learning, which is mainly based on memorization and passive reproduction of information, gives way to the development of students’ productive thinking, strengthening their creativity, putting emphasis on communicative competences improvement in the process of interpersonal communication training for professional purposes. Communicative language teaching is based on true-to-life situations that require communication. With the help of this approach application, students acquire the opportunity to interact with each other in the target language, thus getting ready to meet future challenges in professional setting. Consequently, ESP instructors should create a friendly classroom environment where students might experience real-life communication, practice authentic activities, and solve meaningful tasks that

promote speaking. This can occur when students collaborate in pairs or groups for problem solving or task completing.

Collaborative learning is an educational approach that puts the burden on students to assume active roles in their learning and “do the work” themselves. Collaborative learning strategies present individuals with an opportunity to benefit from shared accountability, as well as the knowledge and strengths demonstrated by others (Riel, 2022). This type of learning process organization is defined as the most successful alternative to “subject-to-object” teaching model specified above, because it perceives both the subject of study and the process of personality formation as equally important elements. Working in a pair or group stimulates the formation of abilities and skills necessary for the development of communication and cooperation. Team and pair work enable all participants be useful and involved, because performing these activities students feel free to express opinions, generate ideas, propose solutions to problems, as well as evaluate the knowledge and contribution of each participant independently. It is especially appropriate to use group/pair work if there are students with different levels of language proficiency, because in this case the mutual exchange of knowledge increases, students with a lower proficiency level, being among their peers, are not afraid to make their significant contribution to the ultimate task performance.

An interesting type of group/pair work is *class research*. This type of activity is not difficult and is particularly effective at the beginning of the lesson as a warming-up, or as means of activating attention and guaranteed involvement of everybody and everyone. It allows to transform the usual idea of a traditional class, where the participants of the educational process only sit and reproduce the teacher's words, and also enables the participants of the educational process to find out more about each other. In an ESP class, for example, students can be offered to conduct research on why their groupmates chose this or that major; which part of Economics (micro or macro) is of deep interest to them and why; what advertisement types they consider the most effective and why; which consumer basket products students buy daily/ weekly/ monthly/ annually; how often purchases are made online/ traditionally in a store, etc. For this activity some vocabulary might be pretaught and/ or revised, like specified by the topic terms and notions, question words, grammatical structure of question formation, etc. Besides, an important prerequisite for this task is the received information targeted use; the teacher needs to specify the research purpose and reflect where the collected data could be applied.

Instead of a traditional dialogue, a “*linear dialogue*” as a type of group activity can be offered. This type of work will turn all students into active participants, create a lively and relaxed atmosphere, minimize the teacher's influence and facilitate friendly conversation. During the task, students line up in two lines: A and B. The participants of line A receive probable questions that they will ask the participants of the opposite line (or come up with their own on the topic), and standing in the same place ask the same question to the participants of the line B, who, having answered the question, move to the right to the next member of line A and answer another question. Such interaction continues until all the participants of line B have answered all the questions of the A line participants. The teacher is asked not to interfere into the conversation course, if necessary, s/he can take notes and express comments/ recommendations after the task has been completed. As a follow-up, A line students might report their fellow students answers to the class.

Another fruitful activity for an ESP problem-solving task is a *pyramid discussion*, which begins with a think-pair-share and then turns into a class discussion. The students first undertake a speaking task in pairs or small groups where they have to agree on certain items. Then they join another group and have to reach an agreement again. Such organization gives students time to practice speaking in smaller groups before facing the whole class. As a less controlled fluency activity, it can help the learners to practice a broad range of language that they have both been formally taught in the classroom or acquired from elsewhere. Pyramid discussions help students to build up confidence by rehearsing and repeating arguments that they have already used on others. Though learners are involved in one discussion, the idea behind a pyramid is that they should come to an agreement when they reach the top of the pyramid (Buhari, 2019: 109–110). In an ESP class some topics for a pyramid discussion might be “Pros and Cons of Starting a Business”, “Benefits and Complications of Conducting Business Abroad”, “My Motivation for Becoming a Professional”, “Advantages and Disadvantages of My Future Profession”, etc.

An interesting type of group or pair work aimed at promoting speaking in an ESP class is “*information gaps*”, which can be one-way (one group has only gaps, the other – all answers) or two-way (both groups have their gaps and their answers to them). Students receive informative blocks (textual or dialogic) in which there are gaps and an important part of information is missing for understanding the whole, which they can learn from their group mates, who were given the answers. In this activity students learn

to build correct questions, require necessary information as well as provide answers to a query.

A variation of this activity, especially productive in an ESP class, can be organized in the form of *unfilled crosswords*, in which each of the groups has half of the entered concepts and half of the gaps to be filled. The groups should take turns to explain, using the descriptive method, the concepts that the opposite party lacks, which must be guessed basing on the given definition, number of letters in the word and possible known letters.

And, of course, *role-plays* are indispensable and of integral importance if we speak about teaching English for Specific Purposes, which presupposes modelling real-life professional situations and solving professional tasks. A role-play or a *simulation* (a more elaborate role-play, where students may use different objects to create a realistic environment) significantly bring the learning process closer to real conditions, simulating probable communicative situations for the practical use of acquired knowledge and skills. Interesting and involving ESP activities in this context can be conducting various interviews, including job interviews, acting out various office life situations, checking the guests in and out of a hotel, going through customs checks, filling in blanks, etc. An important condition for the successful completion of these situational tasks is the mastery of the necessary lexical minimum and consideration of probable options for the development of events, which is carried out by the teacher in cooperation with students at the preparatory stage.

For a role-play to be successful and efficient, especially with low foreign language proficiency students, the teacher should prescribe the roles and provide as many details concerning the situation as possible. For instance, to practice ordering goods and solving delivery problems, students might be given the following scenarios/ role cards:

Student A: *You are Mr/ Ms Davidson, a customer. Connect (call) Mr/ Ms Brown to find out whether the goods you have ordered have been dispatched yet. The order number was FLP8467. The date you placed the order was February 15. If they haven't been sent yet, try to hurry them up. Ask him/her to call you back (+380508897654) to inform you when to expect the goods to arrive.*

Student B: *You are Mr/ Ms Brown, in charge of shipping customers' orders and answering queries about delayed shipments. The order FLP8467 was delayed due to staff sickness in production department. Revised shipment date is some time next week. Airfreight at no extra charge. Don't forget to apologize for all the inconveniences.*

Among general recommendations and possible suggestions for ESP teachers to stimulate speaking activity in class, the first one is to arrange the desks differently e.g., in circles (groups) instead of lines. This might help students understand, that this is not a traditional class, where they can just sit, listen and note what the teacher is saying, but that the learning process requires their active participation.

A good method to promote students' target language communication is to allocate a percentage of the final grade to speaking skill and let the students know they are being assessed continually on their speaking throughout the term. In this way they will double their endeavors as mostly students understand the importance of learning foreign languages for their future needs, however, if their active participation is not assessed right away, their motivation gradually decreases.

It is important to continuously involve each student into every speaking activity. For students with low foreign language proficiency and those who lack confidence for successful participation an efficient practice is to build up a stock of expressions that they can use as minimal responses or sentence starters for different interactions. Those are often idiomatic phrases that could be used to express one's opinion/ doubt/ hesitation; convey understanding/ misunderstanding; agreement/ disagreement; giving counterargument/ refusal, etc. Having a stock of such expressions helps to break the ice and enables shy students overcome their fear of speaking in class. Besides, if the learner already has a sentence starter, s/he can react immediately having more time to plan the continuation. Very often everyday business communications follow predictable patterns as there is a set of expressions used for selling/ buying/ making an order/ receiving and making a call/ making a reservation, etc. Thus, instructors can help students develop speaking ability by making them aware of the scripts for different professional situations so that they can anticipate what they are told and what they will need to respond with.

In order to stimulate as much target language speaking as possible, ESP teachers should:

- organize a rich learning environment with authentic materials, implementing collaborative learning and shared knowledge strategies;
- reduce teacher speaking time and increase the students' speaking time;
- ensure that students are on the right track by observing students' performance in group or pair work and assisting them only when it is indispensable;
- react positively to students' endeavours, neglecting their mistakes while speaking. Some

remarks might be done after the students finish, but never during the discourse as continuous distraction from speech delivery by mistakes correction leads to students' intimidation and discourages them from further active participation.

– diagnose difficulties that students encounter and provide more specific practice to overcome them.

Conclusions. Speaking is widely considered a crucial skill in the English for Specific Purposes teaching and learning as the goal of ESP presupposes that students master the foreign language communicative competence at a high level and are ready to apply it in the spheres of professional communication at their future workplace. Thus, ESP aims at the formation of learners' practical foreign language communicative skills in various types of speech activities in the scope of situations determined by professional needs. Communicative language teaching helps to reach the ESP goals. It is the task of ESP instructors to create a friendly classroom environment where students

might experience real-life communication, practice authentic activities, solve meaningful tasks that promote speaking.

The forms and methods of educational process organization considered in this article simulate professional real-life situations, stimulate students' target language interaction, prepare them to meet future professional challenges, create a special educational environment in which each participant plays an important role in achieving a common goal, feels himself/herself a necessary and indispensable element of the team. Meanwhile, not all possible technologies and means aimed at learners' speaking skills enhancement have been comprehensively and thoroughly covered in this article. Further research on the topic is especially important nowadays, since there is a constant need for well-trained and competent specialists with high professional qualifications and a good command of foreign languages to serve modernization and globalization processes of the contemporary world.

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