EFFECTIVE TEACHING METHODS IN THE ACQUISITION OF VOCABULARY FOR SPECIFIC PURPOSES FOR STUDENTS AT NON-PHILOLOGICAL UNIVERSITIES

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Abstract

The importance of a foreign language as a means of day to day and professional communication has increased considerably in the last years. The level and quality of foreign language teaching at universities reflects the requirements of society and respects the needs of particular study programs as well as the needs of Slovak professionals in international environment. From year to year, the demands to master foreign languages are increasing not only in Slovakia but also in other European countries and the rest of the world. This relates especially to the acquisition of vocabulary for specific purposes. The importance and need for its acquisition is proved by the continuous development in almost all the fields of human activity. Therefore a special attention to the acquisition of vocabulary for specific purposes is required in education at non-philological universities, which prepare specialists in different fields of science, technology and industry. One of the main advantages of mastering vocabulary for specific purposes in a particular foreign language (e.g. English, Spanish etc.) is the possibility to share the experience and exchange the knowledge with experts and professionals from different countries as well as better possibilities to find the job. The paper deals with the importance and methods of foreign language teaching and learning at university with the focus on vocabulary for specific purposes. The main research tool is a questionnaire, which was distributed among 2nd year students studying at the Faculty of Economics and Management of the Slovak University of Agriculture in Nitra, Slovakia. One of their compulsory subjects is English. They attend lectures on English for Specific Purposes and Business Presentations. The questions in a questionnaire were aimed at determining students’ needs and preferences concerning the acquisition of Business English. Based on the results of the questionnaire we chose the teaching methods which would motivate students and facilitate them the acquisition of Business English (e.g. Superlearning, Farmulti method, Oral presentations, Communicative approach, using media to express vocabulary knowledge, etc.). When processing the data and results of the questionnaire, comparative and statistical methods are used as well. We believe the results we obtained may contribute to the improvement of foreign language teaching and learning process at non-philological universities.

Keywords: foreign language teaching and learning, vocabulary for specific purposes, non-philological universities.

1 INTRODUCTION

One of the policies of the European Union (EU) is the language policy which is based on respect for linguistic diversity in all Member States and on the creation of an intercultural dialogue throughout the EU. In order to put mutual respect into practice, the EU promotes the teaching and learning of foreign languages and the mobility of every citizen through dedicated programs for education and vocational training. Foreign language competence is regarded as one of the basic skills that all EU citizens need to acquire in order to improve their educational and employment opportunities. The EU therefore supports the idea that every citizen should master two foreign languages in addition to his or her mother tongue” [5] Active knowledge of foreign languages is crucial not only for individuals but also for enterprises because those ones operating in the international environment very often face problems which are directly connected with the lack of language skills. Mainly small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are familiar with the fact that poor command of foreign languages, e.g. inaccurate translation of business deals, can lead to financial losses. According to the ELAN study: “the survey of SMEs found that a significant amount of business is being lost as a result of lack of language skills. Across the sample of 2000 businesses, 11% of respondents (195 SMEs) had lost a contract as a result of lack of language skills. […] 37 businesses had lost actual contracts which together were valued at between € 8 million and € 13.5 million. A further 54 businesses had lost potential contracts worth in total between € 16.5 million and € 25.3 million. At least 10 businesses had lost contracts
worth over € 1 million.” [3]. Therefore, enterprises should pay more attention to language skills of their employees and support them not to learn only English but also other world languages as well as regional and minority languages because the staff’s language competence can often influence the choice of future markets. Thus, with good language skills, multilingual companies can expand their business to international markets and become more competitive.

Nowadays, English is considered to be a lingua franca in the international business world. The results of the ELAN study confirm this fact. The participants of the survey (SMEs): “indicated that they viewed English as a key language for gaining access to export markets and frequent reference was made to its use as a lingua franca. [3] As for large companies, English “appeared to be more extensively used as an intermediary language than was the case with SMEs, possibly reflecting its use as an intermediary language in many multinationals” [3]. Also the findings of the PIMLICO case studies indicate that English “is, and continues to be, the dominant language of global trade” [4].

But on the other hand, the same studies and surveys [3], [4] revealed the importance of other languages which are commonly used for different markets. For example, the PIMLICO study [4] highlights the fact that other languages are often used for business communication because there are many markets where English does not suffice, e.g. Latin America where some Spanish is required. Regional languages are more often used for everyday business communication as well, for example Catalan, Welsh and Basque. The findings of the ELAN study [3] also point out that apart from English, other languages are employed by companies especially when they want to establish long-term business partnerships with new clients, for example Russian is used in Eastern Europe as a lingua franca, French is used to trade with enterprises from some areas of Africa and Spanish is used in Latin America.

The attention of the member states of the European Union is also paid to the language policy. Promoting language learning is considered to be a must because of the growing mobility of citizens of the European Union within Europe. The key attention is paid to lifelong learning as well. One of the main goals of foreign language teaching and learning is to use such methods and approaches which support independent thinking, opinions and performance of individuals and which are based on motivation, needs and wants of learners. As a result, learners and their individual needs should be in the centre of teachers’ attention [7].

The above mentioned change has also resulted from the critical approach of teachers to traditional methods which fail to involve learners in the teaching and learning process. The teachers have gradually come into conclusion that if they want their students to learn more effectively, they have to know them better because only then they will be able to adapt the conditions of the educational process to the students’ individual needs [8]. Therefore, individual approaches to learners have been introduced into the context of foreign language teaching and learning.

The individual approaches are reflected in self-directed learning, self-instruction or learner autonomy. These approaches are focused on individuals who are taught to take responsibility for their own learning in order to become more independent of teachers and thus, to be prepared for lifelong learning [6], [10].

The article presents the results of the experimental research conducted at the non-philological university – the Slovak University of Agriculture in Nitra. Within the research, the students of the selected ESP classes were acquainted with the principles of learner autonomy through learner training and activities based on authentic texts. The main aim was to teach them how to learn the English language more effectively in order to take more responsibility for their own learning and thus become independent of their teachers.

2 METHODOLOGY

In December 2018, a survey was conducted at the Slovak University of Agriculture in Nitra (SUA in Nitra) by the authors of the article. The survey was undertaken in order to complement the findings of the survey on the needs of students concerning foreign language acquisition. The main tool used for collecting information about students’ needs for learning an English language was an anonymous questionnaire. The questionnaire was sent online to 60 students of the Slovak University of Agriculture in Nitra in December 2018. All students participating in the survey studied English at the Department of Languages. 51 students (85% of the total sample) completed its 8 close-ended questions. Questions 1-6 were aimed at respondents’ background and the analysis of the target group and
Questions 7-8 were focused on determining the students’ opinion on their own method(s) to learn foreign language. We were interested in the following pieces of information:

- length and reason of learning English;
- 2 business areas they will most likely use English;
- situations in which they will communicate in English;
- the most favorite method of learning English;
- preferred activities when learning English.

The obtained data were further processed quantitatively and qualitatively.

3 RESULTS

The respondents of the questionnaire were 51 (36 female/15 male) students of the Slovak University of Agriculture in Nitra. The Slovak language was a mother tongue for 90.19% (46) of respondents and Hungarian language for 9.8% (5) of respondents. Question 3 was aimed at finding out the period of studying English.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>%</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&lt; 4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>13.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt; 8</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>82.35</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All participants have been studying English for more than 4 years, so it can be assumed that they master English at least on intermediate level.

Question 4 was aimed at the purpose of studying English. Students could mark 2 answers out of 6 possibilities they were offered (Table 2).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Exam at University</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>33.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study abroad</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work abroad</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>25.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Better assumptions for future job</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>88.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listening to music, watching films</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>39.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As we can see, the main reason for studying English are better assumptions for future job, which was chosen by 45 students (88.2%). Other reasons for studying English are related to activities such as listening to music and watching films (20 students – 39.2%). 17 students (33.3%) are motivated to study English because of passing successfully the exams at University. 5 respondents (9.8%) were interested in communication in English in their leisure time. Based on obtained results we may assume that students are concerned about the importance of mastering foreign language for their future professional career.

Question 5 shows possible professional areas of using English. There were also 2 possibilities to mark and the most frequent professional areas chosen by students were marketing – 20 (39%), tourism 19 (37.2%), accounting 13 (25.4%), financial management 10 (19.6%), banking 9 (17.6%) export 8
media 7(13.7%) and others (agriculture, stock exchange, import). The respondents present their interest to work in the various sectors of economy.

Question 6 was aimed at using language in communication (2 possibilities): 35 (68.62%) respondents stated that they will use English language in communication with their colleagues abroad, 24 (47.05%) with business partners native speakers and non-native speakers, 15 (29.4%) business partners native speakers, 10 (19.6%) in communication with school-mates and teachers during their mobility abroad. The findings show the students’ interest, effort and their awareness of necessity to master English language.

Last two questions (7, 8) were oriented at their own way of learning English. The most preferred way 32 (62.7%) respondents mentioned learning alone outside the class, 11(21.5%) resp. stated learning in small groups (3-5 pers.) in the class, 5 (9.8%) resp. in bigger groups (6-10 pers.), 2(3.9%) resp. prefer to learn alone and 1(1.96%) respondent marked to learn in pairs in the classroom. As the most preferred activity at learning English was stated reading and speaking at 42 (82.35%) students. Fewer students marked listening and writing.

4 CONCLUSIONS

Based on the results of the questionnaire we suggest the following teaching methods that can help students in acquisition of vocabulary for specific purposes:

The communicative approach is the most widely used and most widely accepted approach to classroom-based foreign language teaching, and in many ways, is a culmination of those approaches and methodologies that appeared before. It emphasizes the learner’s ability to communicate various functions, such as asking and answering questions, making requests, describing, narrating and comparing. Task assignment and problem solving, two key components of critical thinking, are the means through which the communicative approach operates.

Task-based learning, a refinement of the communicative approach, focuses on the completion of specific tasks through which language is taught and learned. Language learners use the language that they know to complete a variety of assignments, acquiring new structures, forms and vocabulary as necessary. Little error correction is provided. In this type of learning environment, three- to four-week segments are devoted to a specific topic: ecology, security, medicine, religion, youth culture, etc. Students learn about a specific topic, step-by-step, using a variety of resources, with each unit culminating in a final project such as a written report or presentation.

Making oral presentations is one of the important components of a English course as it develops students' oral presentation and public speaking skills. Asking students to give presentations gives the following benefits: – it gives the presenting student a good opportunity to practise unaided speaking; – it gives the other students good listening practice; – it increases the presenting student's confidence when using English language; – it can be a good diagnostic and assessment device; – it can be good practice for the real situation when students may actually need to give presentations in English in their professional lives; – it is an excellent generator of spontaneous discussion and/or essay topics. Students of a university will need the skills of presenting information and conducting briefings in their future work; therefore they should be taught to give instructive and demonstration speeches and presentations followed by discussions. Besides these are the basic types of presentations to teach to non-linguistic students, since they are simple and their more immediate structures lend themselves for use even to the students with the language knowledge of pre-intermediate or intermediate levels.

Far multi method potentiates efficiency of lectures, trainings and mastering of any know-how. If a complicated or extensive problem in area of personal growth or interpersonal communication makes you get stuck, the teacher transfers the problem just by farmulti method into many (=multi) remote (=far) science disciplines.

The 'Superlearning' techniques activate and focus both hemispheres of the brain. This opens up vast potential to learn and remember. It also helps to restore fun in the learning process. The key here is quality, not quantity! Learning much more in less time, and locking the learning into your long-term memory. Based on decades of scientific research and real-world application, 'Superlearning' assures optimal learning, understanding, and recall.

The use of mass media to teach language in authentic context represents a double challenge for language teachers. Media give learners access to authentic language utilizing in real life. Media can connect students to an authentic audience. If students never get to actually use their language skills,
they can quickly lose their motivation to learn. Language media like authentic videos or audio apps can open up an audience of native speakers with whom they can communicate [1], [2].

This experience gives much more credibility to the value of language learning than relying solely on the somewhat artificial conversations that take place in a classroom.

REFERENCES


