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ИЗПОЛЗВАНЕ НА КАЗУСИ, СВЪРЗАНИ С ЕС И ПОЛИТИКАТА, ЗА МАКСИМИЗИРАНЕ ЕФЕКТИВНОСТТА НА АКАДЕМИЧНИТЕ КУРСОВЕ ПО АНГЛИЙСКИ ЕЗИК ЗА СПЕЦИАЛНИ ЦЕЛИ

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Анотация. Академичните курсове по английски език за специални цели за студенти по икономика и общество-но-политически науки са насочени към подготовката на специалисти, които да могат да функционират успешно в мултикултурен и многоезичен професионален контекст. Традиционните курсове по английски език за специални цели (АСЦ) не отчитат специфичните особености на новите поколения обучаеми. Тези нови обучаеми имат различни потребности и в сравнение с предишните поколения усвояват знания и умения по различен начин. Следователно, за да се постигне ефективност на курса по АСЦ, трябва да се прилагат нови техники за обучение, които да включват съвременните постижения на науката и технологиите. Използването на информационни и комуникационни технологии в академичните курсове наред с въвеждането на специфичната терминология и тематика по по-интерактивен начин могат да улеснят развиването на функционалната комуникативна компетентност по английски език за специални цели на студентите. Това е онагледено с разглеждането на казуси, свързани в Брекзит и други актуални проблеми, касаещи Европейския съюз.

Ключови думи: английски за специални цели, академични курсове по АСЦ, казуси в обучението по английски за специални цели, английски за икономисти, английски за политически науки

USING CASE STUDIES RELATED TO EU AND POLITICS TO MAXIMISE THE EFFECTIVENESS OF ACADEMIC ESP COURSES

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Abstract. The academic courses in English for students of economics and socio-political studies are aimed at preparing experts who will be able to function successfully in a multicultural and multilingual professional environment. However, traditional courses in English for specific purposes (ESP) do not take into account the specific features of the new generations of learners. These new learners have different needs and acquire knowledge and skills differently compared to previous generations. Therefore, to achieve ESP course effectiveness, new teaching techniques should be introduced involving the modern developments in science and technology. Employing ICT in the university courses along with the introduction of specific terminology and subject matter in a more interactive way can facilitate the development of student functional communicative competence in ESP. This is illustrated with case studies based on Brexit and other EU-related topical issues.

Keywords: ESP, academic ESP courses, case studies in ESP, ESP for political studies, ESP for economics

ИСПОЛЗОВАНИЕ КАЗУСОВ, СВЪЗАННЫХ С ЕС И ПОЛИТИКОЙ, ДЛЯ МАКСИМАЛЬНОЙ ЭФФЕКТИВНОСТИ АКАДЕМИЧЕСКИХ КУРСОВ АНГЛИЙСКОГО ЯЗЫКА ДЛЯ СПЕЦИАЛЬНЫХ ЦЕЛЕЙ

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Аннотация: Академические курсы английского языка для студентов, изучающих экономику и социально-политических наук, нацелены на подготовку экспертов, которые смогут успешно работать в мультикультурной и многоязычной профессиональной среде. Однако традиционные курсы английского языка для специальных целей (АСЦ) не учитывают специфические особенности новых поколений учащихся. У этих новых учеников другие потребности, и они приобретают знания и навыки иначе, чем предыдущие поколения. Поэтому для достижения эффективности курса АСЦ необходимо внедрять новые методы обучения с учетом современных достижений науки и технологий. Использование ИКТ в университетских курсах наряду с введением конкретной терминологии и предметов в более интерактивном виде может способствовать развитию функциональной коммуникативной компетентности студентов по АСЦ. Это иллюстрируется тематическими казусами, основанными на Brexit и других актуальных проблемах, связанных с ЕС.

Ключевые слова: английский для специальных целей, академические курсы английского для специальных целей, казусы в обучении по английскому для специальных целей, английский для экономистов, английский для политических наук

INTRODUCTION

Achieving effectiveness in academic courses has been the goal of each and every higher education institution over the years. However, its importance has increased recently due to the stronger competition between universities, on the one hand, and due to the contemporary reality related to the possibility for distance and online learning, on the other. Education is less often seen as a means of personal improvement and development, but rather as a product helping a customer satisfy a particular need, for example obtaining a job position leading to a better social status.

In addition, there are new ways of personal and business communication and the modern generations of learners get accustomed to using them at a very early age which reflects on their perceptions and interests. It is against the backdrop of these processes that ESP practitioners have started considering the introduction of novel and interdisciplinary techniques to enhance student engagement and thus to maximise the effectiveness of the specialised courses in English.

MAXIMISING ESP COURSE EFFECTIVENESS

According to the definition proposed by Strevens in 1988

[1] and reviewed by Dudley-Evans and St John in 1998 [2], English for specific purposes has absolute and variable parameters:

- absolute parameters: ESP is intended to fulfil the specific needs of the learner, applies the basic methodology and uses the main activities of the discipline served; and puts emphasis on the language, discourse, genres and skills which are appropriate for these activities.

- variable parameters: ESP can be focused on specific disciplines; can apply a methodology different from that of General English in specific situations in the learning process; is generally intended for adult learners from an academic or professional organisation, but can be taught to high school students; is taught to advanced or intermediate learners, but it is possible to teach it to beginners [2, pp.4-5].

A wider definition suggested by Hutchinson and Waters presented ESP as an approach to language teaching in which all decisions related to content and method are based on the learner's reason to study the language [3, p. 19].

ESP courses

The characteristic features of ESP determine the peculiarities of its courses. In 1983, Carter [4] defined the key parameters of an ESP course:

- authentic materials: if we refer to Bacon and Finnemann's definition, these are the materials created by native speakers for non-pedagogical purposes [5]. With regard to the specific disciplines ESP serves, the quality and variety of authentic materials used in the specialised courses is of central importance for they provide the specific context, terminology and situations contributing to course effectiveness.

- specific purpose: even though there is a lot of specificity related to ESP, including the term itself, the specific purpose determines course parameters in terms of content, duration, method, techniques;

- self-direction adds to ESP course specificity by highlighting the importance of the transition of the language learner into an experienced language user who can make decisions about their linguistic improvement and direct their learning in accordance with their needs. For instance, they can focus on preparing and giving presentations in English or writing reports related to their professional or occupational subject matter.

Student engagement

Student engagement is a construct closely related to learning because it involves motivation and interest. If there is no motivation for learning or interest in a course, a learner will not be successful. Greater motivation results in greater engagement because as Martin put it "motivation and engagement provide the energy, direction, and skill set required to effectively tackle academic subject matter" [6]. Engagement, as Wellborn suggested, equals the active student involvement in a learning activity [7], whereas, according to Reeve [8] and based on Wellborn's definition, motivation is the force energizing and directing behaviour. Energy makes an activity strenuous and persistent, while direction provides the purpose of the activity. Feeling the need to satisfy particular learning needs and having the energy and direction, a student is ready to make the efforts required for the knowledge and skills acquisition and shows greater interest and participation in the learning process thus achieving effective and optimised results. This is why Bender defined engagement as "students' cognitive investment, participation with, and emotional commitment to learning particular content" [9, p. 2].

Without engagement, learning results are discouraging. Researchers report that between 25 and over 66 % of students do not feel engaged [10]; [11]; [12]; [13]. In order to increase engagement and taking into account the peculiarities of the new generations, Windham proposed that meaningful learning process should include relevancy, interaction, exploration, multimedia and instruction [14]. In 2011, Parsons and Taylor added authentic assessment to these [15]. This means that students are interested

in interacting with their peers, teachers, communities, institutions and appreciate discussions and negotiations. When they are offered interaction, they feel genuinely engaged in the learning process and achieve higher results. Exploration, relevancy and multimedia enhance engagement further by providing students with the opportunity to learn the way they have been accustomed to and see the relation between learning content and real-life situations from their professional context along with the freedom to choose the information, sources and media for learning. When they find and suggest topics and materials, process information and actively contribute to materials selection and design or curriculum improvement, they also become empowered to change and optimise learning. Feeling in control of their learning, students show greater engagement and motivation for they realise how the learning material can be used in the future when they start their careers. In addition, multimedia and engaging instruction help students build up autonomy and acquire linguistic knowledge and skills more effectively. And, finally, by co-creating assessment criteria and being involved in assessment, learners are given one more chance to boost their learning motivation and engagement.

Authentic materials

The vital importance of authentic materials to the success of ESP courses is the reason why this article focuses on them and on case studies, in particular. As Vasileva stated in an article on teaching students of economics:

"Nowadays the ultimate goals for economics students who learn a foreign language are to use it as a means of achieving professional targets by accessing foreign language sources in order to gain specialised information and realise communication among professionals" [16, p.39].

As a rule, ESP courses rely on content-based instruction and are tailored to the needs of each particular learner or group of learners which means that a textbook is insufficient to cover the particular topics and activities or to cater for each group's or learner's specific purposes. Moreover, the tasks in the textbooks do not provide for interaction and exploration to the extent lecturer-selected materials do, hence the emphasis on authentic materials. It should be noted that textbooks are based on authentic materials, but they can be adapted or adjusted and what is meant here is the additional materials selected and designed by a lecturer for their everyday work with learners and intended to fulfil learners' needs.

The issue of authenticity can be approached in terms of design and intent. A material is authentic if it was designed for real communication of native speakers and was not for learners [17] or any text that was produced for real communication with a real purpose and not for the purpose of language teaching [18]; [19]. Kilickaya summarised materials authenticity as the: "exposure to real language and its use in its own community" [20]. Berardo noted that authentic text must be selected depending on their exploitability, readability and content [21]. To him, content is appropriate if it suits the specific needs and interests of the learners and corresponds to their abilities.

Case studies in ESP

Case studies were first introduced as a method of teaching in the business courses of the Harvard Business School back in 1908. The reason for this was the practical experience it provided for students with regard to specific subject matter. In ESP, case studies were introduced and started gaining popularity in the 1990s because a lot of experts saw in this method a potential for teaching the authentic specific language in a professional context by presenting course content from various aspects related to subject matter. Based on qualitative and quantitative data about a specific issue, students have to make decisions in order to solve a problem. Thus their active participation is required which results in greater involvement and motivation. Students hone their functional communicative competence by taking part in each stage of the case study:

- reading the case

- identifying the problem
- defining priorities and limitations
- looking for alternative solutions
- choosing the best alternative
- preparing an action plan [22]

Thus, by doing their research on the case study, students acquire the linguistic knowledge and skills needed to function successfully in an occupational environment along with the ability to process, analyse and synthesise information providing exposure to language and subject matter. Depending on the needs of their students and the course syllabus, teachers can choose case studies using the classification proposed by Heath and based on the perspective they are viewed from:

- from a temporal perspective – retrospective and decision-making
- from a media perspective – paper-based and Internet-based
- from a structural perspective – closed (giving all information learners need) and open (giving limited information and instigating learners to search for information in order to offer a solution or make a decision) [23, pp. 4-5].

According to Davis, a case study is effective if it presents a real and engaging story, raises a thought-provoking issue, has elements of conflict, lacks an obvious correct answer, encourages students to think and take a position, and provides a lot of data about character, location, context and actions [24].

The advantages of the case-study method are related to its didactic qualities and include the opportunity for students to participate actively in ESP acquisition. They are empowered to develop their own approach and framework to tackling issues of professional interest. In addition, the use of this method enables them to improve and use their linguistic knowledge and skills by discussing and presenting cases typical of their occupational context. Along with discussions and presentations, students perform task-based activities that prepare them for their future career.

Basta highlights four disadvantages of case studies which, however, can easily be dealt with if a teacher is willing to apply this method. The first disadvantage is that teacher preparation at the pre-teaching stage is time- and energy-consuming. The second one is related to the teacher's fear that students can shift the emphasis from language acquisition to subject matter. The third one is related to the fear that the teacher will not be able to correct student mistakes. The last disadvantage focuses on teacher uncertainty related to assessment [25].

Case studies related to EU and politics

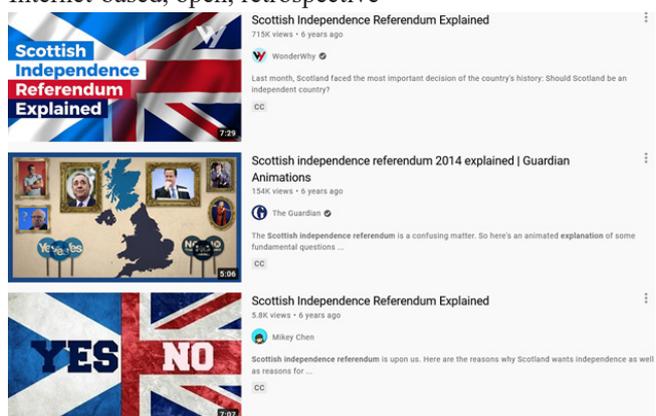
ESP course effectiveness can be maximised by using case studies of widespread concern provoking student interest and engagement. When students, their families, friends and communities are affected by a problem, they show increased motivation to get involved in learning and engage in preparing, discussing and working towards a viable solution. Hence, choosing cases that have somehow impacted student lives ensures enhanced effectiveness of the learning process and improved learner performance.

After the changes of 1989, Bulgaria started its transition into a market economy and some years later became a member of the European Union. This entailed migration, emigration, free movement of people and goods, the possibility to study in foreign universities, more job opportunities to work abroad or for multinational organisations, intense contacts with people from all corners of the world. The ensuing local and world changes affected global population and provoked heated discussions. This is the reason why selecting cases related to political issues with economic and social consequences was seen as an opportunity to develop and improve the ESP knowledge and skills of the students of economics and political studies.

Three cases were introduced to the students at the University of National and World Economy in this regard and with a focus on their social and economic implications:

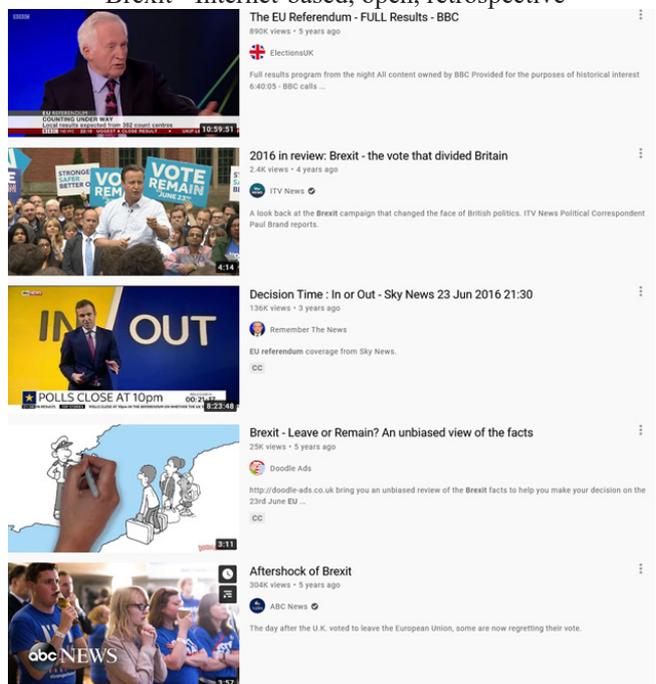
the Scottish referendum of independence of 2014, Brexit and the COVID-19 vaccine passports. Referring to Heath (Heath, 2004), they can be classified as follows:

- Scottish independence referendum of 2014 – Internet-based, open, retrospective



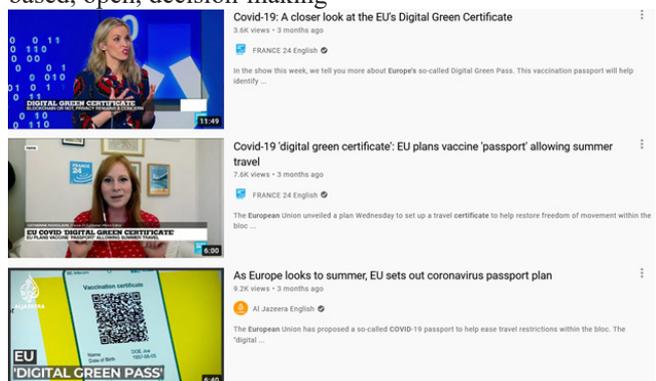
Source: Youtube, www.youtube.com

- Brexit - Internet-based, open, retrospective



Source: Youtube, www.youtube.com

- COVID-19 vaccine passports/certificates - Internet-based, open, decision-making



Source: Youtube, www.youtube.com

For each of the cases the students were given initial information and guidelines along with individual and small group assignments. Every student had to familiarise with the case. Then, small groups were formed by the teacher in order to focus on an aspect of the issue. The groups were expected to elaborate and, finally, take a position and explore the circumstances that brought to the actual development of

the problem in real life. To present their research, students prepared and gave presentations. Then they role-played the positions and an in-depth discussion followed.

The first two cases provided students with the opportunity to explore the Internet, search different databases, find reliable and comprehensive information on these topical issues and note the developments that led to their final conclusions and comments. They were encouraged not only to analyse these problems of concern to the UK citizens, but to EU and Bulgarian ones as well. Thus they could approach Brexit and the Scottish referendum from a more engaged perspective and find out how the consequences from these two events affected our lives and how their own personal (in terms of educational opportunities) and professional (in terms of employment opportunities) development has been impacted. Furthermore, they could consider the other options and the possible outcomes. The students could interpret from the perspective of their particular professional area because economics comprises a number of disciplines. For instance, students profiled in international economic relations focused on international trade, students profiled in tourism focused on tourism, those profiled in human resources focused on labour market trends etc.

The third case was more challenging because unlike the previous ones, it involved decision-making and students were not limited to the interpretation of the solution that had been reached. This gave greater freedom to approaching the case and interpreting it resulting in a more active and creative participation as well as in fostering peer competition in a positive way. Incorporating the personal and local perspective to the case along with the exposure to authentic specialised information facilitated language acquisition and motivated learners to master their communicative competence.

In each of the three cases, there were elements of conflict, the issue considered was thought-provoking and lacked an obvious right answer. Each group member and small group provided the whole group with information from their perspective and according to their tasks assigned, which revealed the multi-faceted nature of the problems that economists and politicians face in real situations. For the first two cases the students were invited to discuss the possible developments if another decision had been made with the possible outcomes for the different groups and communities involved, while for the third one they were encouraged to present their possible solutions and then the whole group was invited to discuss and reach agreement on and adopt the solution that suits all parties concerned and involved. Role-playing the respective position the students presented added value by giving psychological insights and involving engagement in its different forms. In this process, the students developed the skills for negotiating, making concessions, agreeing or disagreeing, offering compromises, coming to a consensus, imposing conditions, summarising, asking for clarification in English. This meant using the specialised terminology, phraseology and collocations, applying communication strategies to cope with linguistic challenges, structuring statements in accordance with the discourse specifics of the discipline served.

CONCLUSION

Using case studies in academic ESP courses can be a valuable contribution to the maximisation of course effectiveness by encouraging greater engagement and more active participation in the learning process. Applying an interactive approach to specialised texts makes the acquisition of the specialised vocabulary, skills, discourse and strategies more attractive and motivating by empowering students to take active part in constructing and consolidating the material learned. Adding a personal perspective and stimulating learners to obtain and reveal their insights into the case studies and the course content respectively leads to improved performance and optimised ESP course effectiveness. The disadvantages of the method can be overcome by creating and maintaining materials banks, availing of teacher materials exchange, developing clear assessment

criteria, taking notes during student presentations and analysing mistakes after each presentation and statement.

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