



Teaching communication skills in collaborative environments

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Abstract: *The acquisition of soft skills, such as interpersonal relationships and collaborative communication in a foreign language, are key aspects which should be taken into consideration in any career guidance project. English for Specific Purposes within the Life Sciences (in this case, English for Agricultural Engineers, English for Horticultural Engineers, English for Biotechnology / Genetic Engineering and English for Food Engineering) requires consistent interdisciplinary partnership seeking knowledge transfer and the creation of professional networks across various socio-humanistic disciplines. Therefore, our transdisciplinary cooperation ranges on an institutional level within the ULS "King Mihai I" from Timisoara, including the contribution of members from the languages and teacher training/counselling department for the purpose of enhancing higher quality educational practices and learning attitudes. The major aim of our on-going interdisciplinary project promotes opportunities for students in natural science engineering and related areas, where communication remains an important issue. For this purpose, the specific aims which are targeted in the educational and English courses consist in the design of a set of didactic strategies informed by shared practices and the development of communicational learning materials. The course English for Life Sciences employs content-based resources from specialty disciplines, providing accessibility to recent research in English.*

• Introduction

The undergraduate students at our university may opt for courses in foreign languages and pedagogical training, both of which focus on learning how to learn and on optimizing communicative abilities. Researchers generally regard Language for Specific Purposes as a pedagogical concern, which entails different choice of teaching materials rather than special teaching methods. Having this framework in view, our course of English for Specific Purposes takes into consideration pedagogical principles which are more practice-oriented. From the point of view of didactics, teaching is knowledge-oriented, while being more practice-oriented from a pedagogical point of view, which also covers a wider scope – actors, content, curricula, objectives, and, essentially, the context or environment of learning.

Material and method

The ecolinguistic approach is the method employed in our research, which is a contribution to the development of holistic models of communication – sustainable / ecological communication.

• Results and discussions

The study raises several questions with regards to English for Specific Purposes and Content-based learning:

- Correlation of context-specific foreign language learning with Language for Specific Purposes;
- integrating content-based learning, where educators tend to the specific needs of learners in their basic area of interest; ESP "more cost-effective than General English";
- balancing content and language aspects, with learning strategies;
- integrating all relevant aspects: linguistic, cognitive, didactic, pedagogical, and affective factors in context.

Conclusions

Communication competencies lead to larger career prospects. We enhance human capital to contribute to the greater societal relevance of our university's educational programmes. Ultimately, our joint perspective of the educational and foreign language programmes provided for our undergraduates highlight education on a life-long basis.