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Teaching Language for Specific Purposes -project description

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Abstract: The lack of knowledge of a foreign language for specific purposes, as well as the increasing internationalisation of domestic markets, are the causes of many communicative difficulties at the corporate level. Inefficient communication leads to a slowing down of decision-making processes and a deterioration of the quality of the services offered. In this respect, soft-skills oriented LSP teaching can close the existing gap in employee training and enhance employees' chances for success in the international environment. The following report aims to present a project that integrates soft skills into an LSP course. Additionally, examples of the experimental instruments used to develop soft skills within the Business German classroom are discussed. The students taking part in the project are students of Adam Mickiewicz University who have chosen a business specialisation and are willing to work in an international company in the future.

Project described in this report took place in October and November 2017 in the Institute of Applied Linguistics at Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań. Its aim was to integrate soft-skills oriented tasks into an LSP (Language for Specific Purposes) teaching programme, with the main focus on oral communication. It was the first project of its kind introduced in the Business German course that is an obligatory part of the curriculum for philology students. The decision to integrate the LSP class into the programme was driven by increasing interest in learning LSP, which again implies the need to train well-prepared employees who will in the future be ready to implement elements of their soft-skills training into their professional work. The methodology used in the research was based on observations, documentation (IC), and discourse analysis. The research was focused on highlighting the potential possibilities resulting from the integration of soft-skills training into the LSP course, which was the result of the preliminary character of the project. Observations made by the teacher were especially valuable in the context of the behaviours and reactions that cannot be evaluated through very rigorous scientific methodology.

The project included the following steps:

1. Introducing special individual cards to monitor individual progress and to develop the ability of self-reflection amongst the participants.
2. Planning advertising campaign from scratch, in every detail.
3. Negotiating the best solution.
4. Preparing a presentation of the discussed solution.
5. Project evaluation.

The project was planned for six meetings (1 meeting a week) and also foresaw additional individual workloads at home, as each student was supposed to complete this work; after the project, participants were asked to provide an evaluation in the form of a survey.

Step 1. Introducing individual cards (IC) for self-reflection and progress monitoring

To simulate the reflexive character of the project, participants received ICs – individual cards – at the beginning of the project and were instructed on how to complete them. The cards were, on the one hand, a tool for the students to individually plan their work for separate tasks (time management), while on the other hand they were meant to help monitor individual progress and define the main difficulties students face when learning a foreign language in a professional context (reflection on the learning process). The systematic filling in of the IC, as well as the building up of awareness and responsibility for the learning process, was one of the aims of the activity.

The IC consists of the following parts:

- Individual task planner;
- Task fulfilment;
- Difficulties in task realisation;
- Successes in task realisation;
- New expressions learned.

Step 2. Building up fundamental knowledge on marketing strategies

The second step refers to the task consisting of preparing the theoretical background for an advertising campaign for a fictional product. During this step, students were supposed to collect information (literature, specialist interviews) about the planning and functioning of advertising campaigns, as well as preparing a list of the potential products on the basis of a group brainstorming. The students' discussions concerning their choice of strategy and campaign preparation were recorded and analysed in the final part of the project, especially in the context of the vocabulary used and strategies discussed. This step of the project enhanced:

- Students' autonomy in finding and selecting information;
- Brainstorming and shortlisting of ideas.

Step 3. Negotiating and finding solution

In the third step, students analysed the best solutions by introducing a SWOT analysis of the options presented to them. Students were supposed to negotiate and choose the most accurate option and justify their choice. At this stage, students developed their skills in:

- Making strategic decisions;
- Conducting a SWOT analysis of the given options and choosing the best one;
- Developing negotiating strategies.

Step 4. Presentation

In the fourth step, students prepared multimedia presentations and conducted (oral) presentations for separate parts of the project, in the process:

- Enhancing rhetorical skills;
- Preparing presentations;
- Conducting oral presentations.

Step 5. Evaluation of the project

The final stage consisted of an evaluation of the project, both from the perspective of the students' individual work and the project as a whole. At this stage, a reflexive and critical approach towards one's own achievements and the project structure are assessed. The realisation of the project was preceded by exercises introducing negotiating skills and making students aware of the structures often used in presentations and negotiations.

Conclusions

The conclusions formulated in this part of the report are the result of observations made by the teacher conducting the classes, as well as by the reflective thoughts of the students participating in the project. It is vital to emphasise that the project was introduced as a series of exercises for preparing separate skills, for example developing discussion and negotiation strategies or the rules for preparing a presentation. A more complex analysis of the separate parts of the projects will be put forth in a separate paper. The implementation of the soft skills training in the LSP course allows students to:

- Use specific terminology in a natural work-like context;
- Increase their sense of involvement;
- Increase their ability to implement non-stereotypical solutions to a given problem;
- Develop creativity;
- Develop negotiation skills;
- Reinforce self-confidence and interactions with a group;
- Encourage self-reflection strategies.

The project intensified students' engagement in solving problems and dealing with task-oriented situations. Typically shy and taciturn students took an active part in discussions concerning the choice of advertised products and the tools of the advertising campaign. Participants used characteristic structures of the LSP programme when discussing their own ideas and presenting the benefits of the chosen options. Even simulated situations in the classroom lead to some simultaneous conflicts between students, who tried to resolve them by applying soft-skills development strategies. From the statements collected after finishing the project and from reflections offered during the course of the project, participants were generally satisfied with this kind of exercise; they mostly highlighted task-orientation, improvement in time management skills, as well as the use of specific, targeted language. The participants admitted they learned more through this course than they would have in a more traditional offering.

Outlook and perspectives on soft-skills oriented foreign language teaching

Soft skills, understood as individual skills making communication and cooperation in a professional environment much easier through the application of assertiveness, creativity, understanding, stress resistance, and so on, are very dynamic and their development is highly individually driven. The presented project and literature review point to the possibility of incorporating soft-skills training into LSP teaching. Interdisciplinary projects surely build up opportunities for developing soft skills in a company-like environment, with emphasis placed on individual needs. However, the application of soft skills in the LSP course causes the need to develop specific methods and instruments supporting cooperation within both fields – LSP teaching and soft skills training, respectively.

The analysed project led to an intensifying of the students' involvement and engagement in classroom tasks, as well as improvements in teamwork and cooperation. The students also achieved higher levels in their natural use of specific language.

The acquisition of the skills described above at the university level – before commencing their real professional careers – can make students more aware of the potential problems they may face and help them deal with them in

the future, which is why it is worthy to develop the discussed directions for the specialisation of LSP teaching at the university level.