THE IMPORTANCE OF TEACHING FOREIGN LANGUAGES FOR SPECIFIC PURPOSES AT NON-PHILOLOGICAL UNIVERSITIES

DÔLEŽITOSŤ VÝUČBY ODBORNÉHO CUDZIEHO JAZYKA NA VYSOKÝCH ŠKOLÁCH NEFILOLOGICKÉHO ZAMERANIA

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Abstract

In the context of globalization and the constantly changing business environment, the Slovak labour market is experiencing not only the growth of international business and increase in number of foreign investors, but also the consequent expansion of occupational mobility. Currently, employers tend to perceive the ability to communicate in at least one foreign language not as an added bonus but rather a genuine necessity. The present paper focuses on the importance of specifically oriented language training for students at non-philological universities in order to achieve one of the most important language learning goals, namely ability to communicate in a foreign language. Mastering professional communication in foreign languages eventually enhances the chances of students at non-philological universities to gain a certain competitive advantage in the global labour market.

Keywords: non-philological university, foreign language for specific purposes, ESP, communication skills, labour market.

Abstrakt

Vzhľadom na globalizáciu a neustále sa meniace podnikateľské prostredie dochádza na slovenskom pracovnom trhu nielen k stúpajúcemu trendu medzinárodného obchodu, medzinárodných investícií, ale aj z toho vyplývajúcej pracovnej mobilite. Schopnosť komunikácie v minimálne jednom cudzom jazyku už nie je zamestnávateľmi vnímaná ako pridaná hodnota zamestnanca, ale ako očakávaná samozrejmosť. Príspevok prezentuje dôležitosť odborne zameranej jazykovej prípravy študentov vysokých škôl nefilologického zamerania s cieľom dosiahnutia jednej z najdôležitejších úloh učenia sa jazyka, t.j. schopnosti komunikovať, v tomto prípade v odbornom cudzom jazyku, čím v konečnom dôsledku napomáha absolventovi nefilologických vysokých škôl získať istú konkurenčnú výhodu na globálnom trhu práce.

Kľúčové slová: vysoká škola nefilologického zamerania, odborný cudzí jazyk, komunikačné schopnosti, trh práce.

Introduction

Currently, the knowledge of foreign languages is taken for granted both in the academic environment and the dynamic labour market settings of the 21st century. Non-philological universities are no exception in this respect. Foreign language learning has become an integral part of the tertiary education curricula, and it makes up the overall profile of graduates completing particular non-philological studies. ESP teaching takes place at various levels. And while its content and specific focus vary, a particular emphasis is placed on the readiness of non-philological university graduates to communicate effectively in tasks defined by their field of study, possible work-related situations and future job positions. It follows from the above that ESP teaching at non-philological universities should reflect the need to speak foreign languages in order to increase graduates' employability in the global labour market while drawing on the European frameworks and recognizing the importance of knowledge of English as follows:

- The need of English in the academic environment, where it is perceived as a tool to fulfil academic requirements (e.g., up-to-date information, research and specialized knowledge related to the field of study, academic works, final theses, tutorials, guides, etc.)
- The need of English as a common medium of communication in the global market.

In the context of ESP, the similarities and differences between ESP and General English are determined. Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998) presented the list of absolute and variable characteristics that reflect specific characteristics of ESP courses. The following are stated as absolute characteristics:

- ESP is defined to meet specific needs of the learner;
- ESP makes use of the underlying methodology and activities of the disciplines it serves;
- ESP is centred on the language (grammar, lexis), skills, and discourse appropriate to these activities.
- The variable characteristics are defined as follows:
- ESP may be related to, or designed for, specific disciplines;
- ESP may use, in specific teaching situations, a different methodology from that of General English;
- ESP is likely to be designed for adult learners, either at tertiary level institutions or in professional work situations;
- ESP is generally designed for intermediate or advanced students;
- ESP course assumes that learners have some basic knowledge of the language system, but it can be used for beginners (Dudley-Evans, St. John, 1998, p. 4 5).

Regardless of whether a greater emphasis is put on absolute or variable ESP features, it is understood to be about providing students with knowledge of English focusing on specific needs of students related to their field of study in order to enable them to acquire other knowledge and skills and allow them to perform their careers. According to Hutchinson and Waters (1987), it is not the existence of a need, but rather an awareness of the need that sets ESP apart from General. The awareness of the specific needs is crucial for ESP teachers in order to help students to use English within different environments where the English language is expected to be used. The different environments (academic, professional, and workplace) can be simulated through various real-life tasks performed within ESP courses. In ESP, it should be highlighted that English is "learnt not for its own sake or for the sake of gaining a general education but to smooth the path to entry or greater linguistic efficiency in particular environments" (Basturkmen, 2006, p. 18). It is essential for ESP courses to aim teachers' attention at meeting ESP learners' specific needs and using the real-life tasks which focus on the professional language appropriate to these activities and the ESP learners' field of study. Therefore, as stated by Chien and Hsu (2010), teaching ESP courses seem to be challenging for teachers because "the ideal ESP teachers must not only be skilful in English language, but also acquire the knowledge of a specific profession in order to provide an effective ESP course for learners" (Chien, Hsu, 2010, p. 1886).

21st century skills

All developed countries in the world strive to discover and develop a set of competencies of individuals applicable in the majority of professions that would:

- · help them occupy various positions and exercise various functions,
- be suitable for facing many diverse challenges,
- provide individuals with tools to successfully tackle the issues related to the modernization of our society (Hrmo, Turek, 2003).

The education system should prepare students for life and work in order to help them adapt and succeed in the dynamically changing labour market. As long as 2006, the European reference

framework on these key competences was launched in accordance with the Recommendations of the European Parliament and the Council of Europe on key competences for lifelong learning. It defines competencies as 'knowledge, skills and attitudes' and points out they embrace more than the notion of academic 'knowledge' (Európska komisia, 2018). The European Parliament and the Council of Europe recommended the Member States of the European Union to focus on the development of the key competences which all individuals need for personal fulfilment and development, active citizenship, social inclusion and employment at schools of all types as well as within lifelong learning (Európska komisia, 2018). The European Reference Framework of key competences for lifelong learning specifies the following eight key competences:

- Communication in the mother tongue,
- · Communication in foreign languages,
- · Mathematical competence and basic competences in science and technology,
- · Digital competence,
- Learning to learn,
- · Social and civic competences,
- Initiative and entrepreneurship,
- · Cultural awareness and expression (Európska komisia, 2018).

Moreover, various frameworks have been developed for skills to modify the education system in order to support the development of these key skills presented not only by organizations supporting development and assessment of the skills needed for the 21st century (such as Partnership for 21st Century Learning (P21), enGauge 21st Century Skills, Project Assessment and Teaching of 21st Century Skills (ATCS)), but also recommendations of international organisations promoting the development of education, economic growth and technologies, including the European Union (EU), Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). Based on the overview of frameworks encompassing the 21st century competencies presented by Voogt and Roblin (2010) it can be stated that the common denominator of all the frameworks developed for the 21st century skills is the enhancement of the human's capability to adapt to the complexity and constant changes of today's society. It should be borne in mind that our society and our economy depend to a large extent on people who are not only well educated, but also skilled. The skills known as "the 4 C's", including critical thinking, problem solving, creativity, innovation, communication and collaboration are believed to be the key to future success in the 21st century job market. Therefore, as stated by Kaščáková (2019), "since language is present in a certain form as the common denominator in most of the 21^{st} century skills, there is indeed a reason for including the skills in the ESP (English for Specific Purposes) curriculum or even using them as scaffolding in the course design" (Kaščáková, 2019, p. 77).

For the sake of illustration, we shall focus mainly on the introduction of the Partnership for 21st Century Learning (P21). The Partnership for 21st Century Learning is a national organization founded in 2002 with the support of the US government, business leaders and consultants from several private sector organizations as well as educators (including Apple Computer, Cisco Systems, Dell Computer Corporation, Microsoft Corporation, National Education Association, etc.). The P21 mission is to serve as a "catalyst" for the 21st century learning, promote collaboration between educational institutions, business, social and government representatives and help all students gain knowledge, skills and expertise they need in today's ever changing world, where learning takes place constantly. (The Partnership for the 21st Century) The Partnership for the 21st Century Learning agenda (The Partnership for the 21st Century) comprises eleven competencies which can be classified into three sets of skills, including:

- Learning and innovations skills,
- Information, media and technology skills,

• Life and career skills.

In addition, the support system of the framework is created by standards, assessments, curricula, instructions, professional development and learning environments, as illustrated:



Image 1 Rainbow illustration of the Partnership for 21st Century Skills framework (Chu et al., 2017, p. 20)

The first set of skills, Learning and Innovation, includes four major components covering learning related knowledge and skills. The core subjects essential for all learners in the 21^{st} century are summarized by three "Rs", namely **R**eading, w**R**iting and a**R**ithmetic. In addition, there are soft skills believed to be crucial for the future success of learners. The skills known as "the 4 C's", namely critical thinking and problem solving, communication, collaboration, creativity and innovation are "pivotal for learners to cope with the rapidly changing society in which human connection around the globe and the amount and availability of information are maximized by technological advancement" (Chu et al., 2017, p. 22).

The second set of skills, Digital literacies, consists of three components, namely information literacy, information and communication technology skills and media literacy. It covers several abilities, such as the ability to use digital technologies, select, analyse, access, evaluate, and create information in order to gain, apply, and share knowledge and communicate messages. We have become highly dependent on digital technologies (and our recent experience with Covid 19 confirms this fact). Therefore, learners should increase their digital literacies to widen their opportunities for learning, communication, collaboration and knowledge creation (Trilling and Fadel, 2009). It is essential to support students' digital literacies and implement latest digital technology to the ESP course curriculum. This can be supported by findings of Simonova and Poulova (2017), who conducted research on learning foreign languages of ESP students at Faculty of Informatics and Management (FIM) at University of Hradec Kralove. Such implementation *"is highly appreciated by nearly all FIM students in all university subjects, including ESP"* (Simonova, Poulova, 2017, p. 367).

The third set of skills, Life and career, helps learners adapt to the constantly changing life and work environments. As noted by Chu et all (2017) "on the top of content knowledge and thinking skills, learners are expected to develop adequate soft skills that equip them with the readiness to adapt to more challenging working environments, manage heavy workload, meet stringent deadlines, as well as interact and work with their counterparts in achieving a mutually agreed goal" (Chu et all, 2017, p. 23).

To facilitate remembering them, Trilling and Fadel (2009, p. 176 - 177) rearranged them and outlined a formula of the 21^{st} century learning, as follows:

3Rs	Х	7Cs	=	21st Century Learning		
Reading 'Riting 'Rithmetic	x	Critical thinking and pro Creativity and innovation Collaboration, teamwork Cross-cultural understand Communication, informa Computing, and ICT liter	blem solving n , and leadershi ding ttion, and medi	p		
		Career and learning self-reliance				

Language competencies of university graduates

As mentioned above, since language is an integral component of most of the 21st century skills, communication and language competencies of university students play a significant role in the employability of university graduates in the highly competitive labour market. In general, communicative competence refers to ability to use language to communicate successfully. Language competencies reflect the ability to effectively communicate in foreign languages, and along with communication competencies they constitute essential and crucial requirements determining the graduates' success or failure at job interviews.

Within the "Analysis of the transversal competence acquisition at Slovak Universities" study presented by the Slovak Centre of Scientific and Technical Information in 2016, an employer survey was carried out at the end of 2013/beginning of 2014, in which employers evaluated selected essential attributes (competencies) of work-readiness of university graduates, which employers consider important when deciding whether or not to recruit university graduates (Vančo, 2016). The employer survey was a part of the national project "Employability of graduates in the labour market", which was also carried out by the Slovak Centre of Scientific and Technical Information in 2008 and 2013-2014, while the last survey was conducted at the end of 2019/beginning of 2020, and its results were not available at the time of writing the present paper. 2,411 employers participated in the survey. Respondents used an ascending rating scale from 1 to 7 for the evaluation, where 1 = minimally and 7 = maximally prepared (Vančo, 2016). The survey results demonstrated that in addition to professional and practical training, employers place great importance on the preparedness of graduates in the area of general competencies, as follows:

	Average score
Professional competencies	3.99
Implementation competencies	3.44
Communicative competencies	3.59
Management competencies	2.72

Table 1 The level of preparedness of university graduates for practice in individual competences. Source: Analysis of the transversal competence acquisition at Slovak Universities (Vančo, 2016, p.16).

Overall, based on the findings acquired from the present survey (Table 1) it can be stated that an average satisfaction score prevails among employers in most of the surveyed competencies. The most favourable score was given to the preparedness of university graduates in the area of professional competencies, theoretical mastery of the field of study (average: 3.99) followed by the communication competence (average: 3.59) manifested by the ability to effectively communicate with their colleagues, conduct meetings and negotiate with business partners. The situation was slightly worse in the perception of implementation competencies of graduates in the practical application of theoretical knowledge, ability to work independently,

knowledgeability about workplace issues and ability to discuss (average: 3.44). The worst preparedness was reported in the area of graduates' management skills, decision making and taking on accountability and strategic thinking (average: 2.72) (Vančo, 2016).

Preparedness level	2008	2013	Difference in p. p.
Excellent	13.2	2.2	-11
Good	40.6	28.7	-11.9
Average	36.3	20.8	-15.5
Poor	9.6	39.3	+29.7
Minimal	0.3	9.1	+8.8

Table 2 The comparison of graduates' communication competences in 2008 and 2013 (%).
Source: Analysis of the transversal competence acquisition at Slovak Universities (Vančo, 2016,
p.18)

However, a more detailed view on the evaluation of the graduates' communication skills points rather to the dissatisfaction among employers (Table 2). As much as 39.3 % employers reported that communication competencies of university graduates are poor; around one in five (20.8 %) consider them average, while 28.7 % assess them as good. Few companies perceive communication competencies of university graduates as very good (2.2 %), while others assess them as insufficient (9.1 %). Moreover, the comparison of these data with the data from the 2008 survey reveals that the employers' evaluation of communication skills of university graduates has downgraded. Compared with 2008, the number of respondents who perceive them as poorly or minimally prepared increased by 38.5 p. p. At the same time, the share of respondents who confirmed good or excellent preparedness in this area dropped by 22.9 p. p. (Vančo, 2016).

	Average score
Field of study	5.6
Educational attainment	5.25
IT skills	5.22
Experience acquired during studies	4.49
Foreign language knowledge	4.96
Study results	3.33
Cross-border traineeships	3.09
Studying abroad	2.75

Table 3 The degree of importance of individual characteristics of graduates in the recruitment process. Source: Analysis of the transversal competence acquisition at Slovak Universities (Vančo, 2016, p.19)

The employer survey monitored also how much importance employers attach to the knowledge of foreign languages within individual characteristics of the university graduates during the hiring process (Table 3). These included namely a field of study, education attainment, study results, practicing at home or abroad, studying abroad and IT skills. Respondents - employers also used a rating scale from 1 to 7 for the evaluation, where 1 = not important at all and 7 = very important). (Vančo, 2016) From the above table it results that employers consider foreign language knowledge (average: 4.96) one of the key factors in the recruitment process. In addition, the survey indicates that approximately 60% of the participating employers perceived foreign language knowledge as a very important criterion for hiring a university graduate. (Vančo, 2016) We would like to state that the ability to communicate in English is perceived as a true necessity by the employers due to the globalization process and the rising trend of foreign

investors' presence. However, we assume that especially the ability to communicate in a foreign language for specific purposes may be regarded as an added bonus and a certain competitive advantage for non-philological university graduates in the labour market.

However, in practice we are often confronted with the employers' opinion that the language competencies of university graduates are not sufficient, as shown by the results of the survey "Absolvent 2014" conducted by Slovak Centre of Scientific and Technical Information within the national project "Universities as engines of the growth for knowledge-based society" (Vančo, 2016). The research covered 289 employers, managers and HR specialists who indicated that the least developed competencies of university graduates included the ability to communicate in a foreign language and the ability to identify and solve problems. Interestingly, the above competencies were included among those identified by the graduates themselves as the ones showing the biggest gap between acquired and required competencies. Moreover, the survey demonstrates significant differences between language competencies obtained at schools and language competencies required at work and during university studies. Based on the survey results, the smallest differences in terms of foreign language competencies were reported in arts and humanities, while the biggest ones in the areas of engineering, manufacturing and building (Vančo, 2016).

Communication competencies of university graduates in the context of ESP

Since the aforementioned survey conducted in the employer organizations points out the deteriorating trends in the development of implementation, communication and management competencies of university graduates, we take the view that the greatest emphasis in the ESP courses should be placed on the development of communicative competences and "the 4 C's" in ESP teaching at non-philological universities to meet the demands of a job market. The English language is seen to be a specific "tool" which could help ESP learners reach their career goals. Therefore, when teaching foreign languages at non-philological universities, students should be provided as much space as possible for specific communication in a foreign language while emphasising compliance with practice needs. This approach could motivate students not only to pass a foreign language exam, but also to understand the need to master a foreign language for specific purposes in order to increase their chances in the labour market and enhance their willingness to participate in a long-term learning process of foreign language acquisition.

Because we cannot predict the future of our students after graduating from universities, the ESP teaching should focus also on the development of skills related to management positions within organizations. Consequently, we presume that for the purpose of enhancing the level of language competencies of students learning a foreign language for specific purposes, the ESP course curriculum could be underpinned by the need to develop managerial communication skills. It is widely recognized that managers must make the most effective use of their communication skills not only in their mother tongue, but also in at least one foreign language. Each manager within an organization communicates, leads and motivates his/her subordinates. None of these processes is possible unless managers possess required communication skills. Griffin (1999) states that communication skills can be understood as the ability of managers to effectively transfer ideas and information to others and receive ideas and information effectively from others. Generally speaking, success of any manager primarily depends on his/her ability to communicate any necessary information as clearly and efficiently as possible. Building upon the general managerial communication skills stated by DeVito (2008), we have considered the following key employers' requirements:

- Presentation skills assisting in presenting oneself in addition to presenting a company, products, specific topics and issues.
- Relationship skills helping to establish and maintain relationships and foster the ability to cooperate not only with colleagues or management, but also with suppliers, clients and business partners.

- Skills to conduct interviews and discussions enabling to communicate with others in order to gain information, successfully present oneself, effectively participate in various types of interviews and discussions and overcome communication barriers.
- Group communication skills and leadership skills helping to become an effective member or leader of various groups (informative, problem solving, idea hunting etc.) and formulate clear objectives and appropriate questions.
- Media literacy and administrative skills providing an opportunity to become a critical user of various mass media encountered on a daily basis and enhancing the ability to prepare written documents required by a company.
- Critical and analytical thinking allowing to assess new information from various viewpoints, analyse, choose the essence and evaluate the quality of information, and subsequently formulate, present and defend own conclusions.
- Problem solving skills helping to identify and define problems, analyse and discuss possible solutions, foster the ability to accept advice and cooperate, suggest solutions, assess them and learn from them.
- Creativity and innovation skills representing abilities to discover new possibilities, search for innovative and creative ways of solving problems and implement new processes into practice.

On the basis of the above managerial skill characteristics we believe that teaching foreign languages for specific purposes at non-philological universities should focus in particular on the development of managerial communication skills while emphasising actual requirements of practice ("the 4 C's") with regard to teaching of foreign languages for specific purposes and their practical use. From the above it results that teaching of foreign languages for specific purposes should focus mainly on:

- Presentations skills in a foreign language for specific purposes, e. g., self-presentation in a job interview with a potential employer, presentation of a company, product, specific topic or addressed issues. The development of these skills is crucial as students often feel unconfident in delivering public presentations.
- Working with authentic materials which simulate the working environment and bring the reality of a foreign language closer to the learner through various manuals, user guides, authentic videos, etc.
- Preparation of professional texts with the emphasis on the use of passive voice in academic writing, as foreign language sources with dominating English-written publications included in databases and professional journals or freely accessible on the internet represent a unique source of information for university students who are expected to cite them in their term projects and final theses.
- Working with professional texts in a foreign language with the aim to acquire, expand and consolidate specific vocabulary, e.g. identification of the text main ideas, their summarization and subsequent presentation, etc.
- The ability to communicate in a foreign language for specific purposes while using model situations from practice in the form of various case studies, e.g., language of negotiations, conducting business meetings, overcoming communication barriers, handling complaints, maintaining relationships, networking, etc.
- The ability to both identify and apply possible solutions to case studies from practice interdisciplinary, e.g., interdisciplinary connected project tasks.
- The ability of teamwork with natural (or unnatural) role distribution within a group, the improvement of active listening skills and the ability to adapt, take a leading role and cooperate effectively within a group to achieve set goals.

- The ability to use electronic communication and learn its etiquette to distinguish between formal and informal texts on the basis of model situations, e.g., orders, complaints or communication with customers, management, suppliers or business partners).
- The ability to use compensation learning strategies to overbridge gaps in learners' linguistic knowledge of the language due to which ESP learners can find alternative ways to overcome the limitations and get their message conveyed.

Conclusion

The European language policy promotes a concept of multilingualism. This concept encourages all people to master at least two foreign languages in addition to their mother tongue. Mastering at least one foreign language at the "working" level (for study and employment purposes) is no longer considered extraordinary in today's global world. Nevertheless, employers constantly point out a shortage of graduates from non-philological universities with knowledge of at least one foreign language and the ability to communicate at the expected working knowledge. Knowledge of foreign languages is rightly considered a key competence of university graduates and affects, to a significant extent, their success in tough competition in the labour market. However, it is important to determine what language competencies should be mastered and what language competencies can be acquired during a specified amount of time allocated for courses of foreign language for specific purposes at non-philological universities. It is also reasonable to raise awareness of students at non-philological universities about the importance of learning ESP for their future employability. We, therefore, take the view that the focus on the development of managerial communication skills resulting from the analyses of the needs of the target professional environment at ESP courses at non-philological universities is likely to raise learners' awareness about the importance and necessity of ESP during their university studies and to help them become autonomous in learning a foreign language in the context of lifelong language learning.

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