

A differentiated approach to teaching English for specific purposes

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Дифференцированный подход к обучению английскому языку для специальных целей

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Abstract. We discuss the use of differentiated methods in teaching English for specific purposes to students of non-linguistic specialities. Admittedly, within the framework of the Bologna process, foreign language proficiency is regarded as one of the main cross-cultural competences to ensure competitiveness on the global labor market. At the same time, the Bologna system has brought with it a number of challenges with shortage of academic hours being amongst them. On the other hand, university professors have to deal with numerous long-standing school problems, such as lack of academic motivation in learners, their target language knowledge gaps, short-term approach found in learners and their parents, and so on. The teachers in ESP face the necessity of setting priority areas for the development of linguistic competence in students in order to prepare them for professional communication in the chosen field. Although the language classroom is to cover various aspects of the target language, in the meantime, however, teachers need to choose effective activities for developing specific skills in students, the skills which will be successfully put into practice by the young professionals. We teach students of musical, economic, medical and pedagogical specialities. We describe our teaching experience focusing on some specific methods applied to promote linguistic competence in students of other than linguistic fields. They maintain the significance of carefully chosen teaching resources for successful development of professionally related competences in learners; emphasize the vital importance attached to thoughtful arrangement of self-studies for the trainees and insist on developing a well-balanced structure of supervised and independent learner studies. We consider applying information technologies with the aim of shaping and raising the level of students' linguistic, cross-cultural and communicative competences as one of optimal solutions in the modern academic process. At the same time, the learners' major will often determine and enhance the choice of activities that develop the particular skills relevant for the students' future careers. Therefore, this study will consider the types of tasks methodologically relevant for different specialities.

Keywords: English for specific purposes; intercultural communication; methods of teaching foreign languages; language skills; online educational platforms; language competence

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Аннотация. Рассмотрено использование дифференцированных методов в преподавании английского языка для специальных целей студентам неязыковых специальностей. Следует признать, что в рамках Болонского процесса владение иностранным языком рассматривается как одна из основных межкультурных компетенций, обеспечивающих конкурентоспособность на мировом рынке труда. В то же время Болонская система принесла с собой ряд проблем, среди которых – нехватка академических часов. С другой стороны, профессорам университетов приходится сталкиваться с многочисленными давними школьными проблемами, такими как отсутствие учебной мотивации у учащихся, пробелы в знаниях изучаемого языка, краткосрочный подход, который наблюдается у учащихся и их родителей, и т. д. Преподаватели английского языка для специальных целей сталкиваются с необходимостью определения приоритетных направлений развития языковой компетенции у студентов, чтобы подготовить их к профессиональному общению в выбранной области. Хотя языковые занятия охватывают различные аспекты изучаемого языка, в то же время учителям необходимо выбрать эффективные мероприятия для развития у учащихся определенных навыков, которые будут успешно применены молодыми специалистами. Нами обучаются студенты музыкальных, экономических, медицинских и педагогических специальностей. Описан опыт преподавания, основанный на применении конкретных методов, применяемых для продвижения языковой компетенции у студентов нелингвистического направления. Сохранена значимость тщательно подобранных педагогических ресурсов для успешного развития профессионально значимых компетенций обучающихся, подчеркнуто жизненно важное значение продуманной организации самостоятельной работы обучающихся и предложена разработка сбалансированной структуры контролируемых и самостоятельных занятий обучающихся. Рассмотрено применение информационных технологий с целью формирования и повышения уровня языковых, межкультурных и коммуникативных компетенций студентов как одно из оптимальных решений в современном учебном процессе. В то же время специальность обучающихся часто определяет и расширяет выбор видов деятельности, которые развивают конкретные навыки, необходимые для будущей карьеры учащихся. Поэтому в данной работе рассмотрены виды задач, методологически актуальные для разных специальностей.

Ключевые слова: английский язык для специальных целей; межкультурная коммуникация; методика преподавания иностранных языков; языковые навыки; образовательные онлайн-платформы; языковая компетенция

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The intensity of globalization in the modern world accounts for the fact that in order to keep up with the times and get opportunities for continuous career growth, young professionals have to be proficient in at least one foreign language. The days when the study of foreign languages was exclusively the lot of students in linguistic departments are gone for good. Nowadays, having a good command of foreign languages, English in particular, is a must.

Regrettably, foreign language instruction in Russian schools until recently left much to be desired, which explains the poor language proficiency of graduates entering colleges and universities. A number of factors have been contributing to the academic failures with low motivation of students and teachers, unsuitable teaching materials, outdated methods of language training, and the short-term approach of

schoolchildren being among them. The reasons for the low school performance in foreign languages are many, and university professors have to look for ways to improve the language training of students enrolled in non-linguistic fields.

It should be noted that, in addition, university professors are confronted with the question of how to organize and control the educational process. Within the framework of the Bologna process, foreign language proficiency is one of the main cross-cultural competences to ensure competitiveness on the global labor market. However, many teachers have already seen in practice one of the drawbacks of the Bologna system. Namely, that the duration of university studies to receive a bachelor's degree was significantly reduced compared to the traditional university training term. Consequently, the hours students spend in a foreign language classroom

have drastically decreased. In this connection, a dilemma arises: on the one hand, in the modern world, a good command of at least one foreign language is indispensable; on the other hand, the academic conditions are not so favourable for meeting the modern needs from the point of view of language training.

In other words, university professors are faced with a difficult task: it is necessary not only to eliminate knowledge gaps and promote students' language achievements, but it is also important to be able to effectively organize the learning process in the context of classroom hours shortage.

Under the circumstances, foreign language teachers have lately put more emphasis on the importance of creating an environment for the effective students' self-study. Special attention has been paid to monitoring students' language skills.

Since the new educational standards and requirements were introduced, teachers have been trying to work out an efficient pattern of combining supervised studies in the classroom with students' independent work.

Classroom work is aimed mainly at students mastering the target language principles in communication training. Therefore, the ESP level in learners can be improved with the help of the teaching materials employed in class. The correct selection of study resources will boost development of professionally related competences in students, preparing them for intercultural communication in the chosen field.

The authors of this article train university students of different non-linguistic specialties: medical students, students of economic specialties, students of music department and students of pedagogical department. Despite the fact that the professional training programs do not have much common ground, the basic techniques of studying a foreign language for beginners at the university will be similar.

As mentioned above, for the time being, an overwhelming majority of first-year university students in other than linguistic fields reveal poor foreign language competence. Consequently, the teachers in higher education establishments find it necessary to promptly and effectively eliminate gaps in students' knowledge and prepare them for achieving a more advanced language level by developing a well-balanced

structure of supervised and independent learner studies.

The contributors of the given article stick to the opinion that under current conditions one of the priorities in teaching ESP is the use of study materials developed by native speakers and relevant publishers, since they are initially designed for a multilingual and multinational classroom, while the communicative approach to language teaching raises students' motivation to learn, thus preparing them for the process of intercultural communication.

However, there is an essential aspect to be taken into account: the explosive growth of social networking technologies, general advances in technology and rapid social changes bring about fast obsolescence of study materials. As a result, constant updating of teaching resources becomes a must as well as a good use of modern multimedia achievements in the language classroom. The up-to-date ways of teaching foreign languages are difficult to imagine without the Internet and multimedia providing students with numerous opportunities to improve their language skills independently outside the classroom by communicating with native speakers of the target language, sharing information, watching movies and broadcasts in a foreign language. Moreover there is a wide range of online educational platforms which provide students with access to digital classes in different subjects in foreign languages, making lectures, video tutorials, discussions, e-books, online quizzes and even exams available. Experts in education (e.g. T. Chernigovskaya)¹ say these platforms are not going to fully substitute offline learning process but their popularity among students is rapidly increasing.

Discussing the primary importance assigned to the students' self-study, which is realized through distance learning, we would particularly like to highlight the digital set of teaching materials called "Q: Skills for Success" by OUP publishing house which is very helpful in training our students. These training supplies are addressed to adult learners of English. Combining the traditional methods of teaching foreign languages with the digital textbook ensures that the

¹ Философия онлайн-образования. Практики цифровой трансформации университетов // Научно-практ. конф. СПб.: Санкт-Петербургский гос. ун-т, 2020. 20 февр. URL: <https://youtu.be/A1yLN3y0JHo> (дата обращения: 01.03.2020).

students make good progress in a short period of time. Learners work with the activities presented in the multimedia workbook, and can obtain further practice via online resources. The effectiveness of the academic process is achieved by motivating students, which allows teachers to skillfully plan education. In other words, within the framework of the two-leveled structure leading from bachelor to master's degree, successful language training of students largely depends on the quality of the beginner stage of language teaching at university.

In the English classes taught to students of non-linguistic universities, the optimal solution, in our opinion, is to apply information technologies with the aim of shaping and raising the level of students' linguistic, cross-cultural and communicative competences. It is essential to introduce digital progress check tools to effectively manage the time spent on evaluating students' performance and current language proficiency.

With some experience of training students majoring in non-linguistic fields, the authors of the article are attempting to adopt self-designed teaching supplies in the language classroom. We strongly believe that a well-structured digital language tool should integrate training and testing systems that help control and further improve the language acquisition.

While teaching, it is also crucial to monitor the progress of learner knowledge and skills development. In this regard, an advisable practice would be to implement digital testing materials, which are updated at a regular basis. For several years now we have been using the time-proven multi-level teaching course New Total English by Pearson Longman, which can be inherently intertwined and mutually reinforcing with those highly specialized English textbooks recommended for the students in the given department. A vital advantage of this resource is that it can be applied both in a traditional English class and for training based on modern multimedia technologies². In our classroom, we draw extensively on the digital components of the course to practice pronunciation and vocabulary, to arrange online studies, which enables students to get the most of their English classes. Students have an excellent opportunity to practice listen-

ing skills with the help of encouraging authentic video recordings, which can go with or without subtitles [1, p. 122].

Besides, the digital course New Total English has the advantage of building up a solid grammar base alongside with practicing core communication skills. A well-organized and systematic approach makes the course attractive and suitable for students of various specialities.

However, the goals of foreign language training cannot be reduced to teaching the basics of grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation. The teacher should be clearly aware that the university graduates will have to build a career in the chosen profession and with that aim they must be able to speak a foreign language in different contexts, including highly specialized ones. Therefore, students are to master profession-related vocabulary and commonly used structures of the target language, and to be ready to involve in discussions on professional topics.

The task of the teacher is to skillfully combine universal teaching materials with the textbooks designed for a particular speciality, so that students are ready to learn English for special purposes.

As mentioned previously, the authors of the article have been engaged in language training of students in other than linguistic departments: medical students, future professional economists and musicians. It must be noted that a regular syllabus provides for these students to take a foreign language exam after the second year of studies. Subsequently, the academic curricula in different specialities are more specialized and profession-oriented.

Nevertheless, the principles of foreign language training for senior students of different majors will have a lot in common with the main focus placed on professional vocabulary and various types of speciality-related texts, training reading, speaking and listening skills. A great attention is normally paid to practising reading strategies, text comprehension, written and oral translation, participation in dialogues, discussions and exchange of opinions about professional issues.

At the same time, the major will often determine and enhance the choice of activities that develop the particular skills relevant for the students' future careers.

² New Total English. Pearson Longman. URL: <https://pearsonlongman.com/newtotalenglish/resources/resources.html> (accessed: 01.03.2020).

Further in this article we will consider the types of tasks methodologically relevant for different specialities.

Creating a student-friendly environment in the classroom and keeping students interested and motivated in learning a foreign language are significant aspects of the teacher's work. A good way to achieve the goals is to adapt the training methodology to the professional interests of the students. As far as musical specialities are concerned, students can be motivated by linking the topics for their English classes with their creative interests. The choice of textbooks appears to be of primary importance. From our point of view, the *English for Music Students: Basics* by Amir Ghorbanpour published by Lambert Academic Publishing is a prime example of a profession-oriented resource. This manual is designed for learners coming from different national backgrounds. The textbook presents 10 topics with the appropriate vocabulary, which is introduced in portions and accompanied by the English definitions of the words and expressions. Each topic has follow-up exercises, a progress test and a glossary of musical terms [2].

Another resource to recommend can be *English in Music* by A. Nikolayko which has long acquitted itself well. This textbook is intended for students of musical educational institutions learning English and professionals working in the sphere of music. With a clear structure and the sets of active vocabulary on music topics, it is a helpful manual with time-proven methodology [3].

The choice of study materials to use in the classroom is important, but the teaching methods are crucial. Linking the relevance of proficiency in the target language with the sphere of professional interests of students is the first step. From the very beginning, learners should be prepared to participate in cross-cultural communication. Role plays and simulation games can become an effective vehicle for involving students in communication in a foreign language. For example, one of the students can act as a famous composer or a musical figure. To do this, they need to familiarize themselves with the biography of the character as part of the homework in advance. The other students of the group can act as interviewers questioning the celebrity. This activity can take the form of work in small groups providing each student with the opportunity to speak.

An important aspect in ESP training in the musical department is to teach learners how to make a presentation in English in front of an audience. In this case, students will be asking and answering questions in the target language as part of the task.

Teaching to speak fluent English is the primary task of an English teacher. Therefore, university professors gradually prepare students for spontaneous discussions in class. The panel discussion activity can be a very effective tool to promote spontaneous speech in learners. To lead the activity the teacher appoints a discussion leader, the student who directs the discussion, while the other students will form two groups supporting opposing views on the same subject. The task for the discussion participants is to sway the leader's opinion to their point of view by presenting arguments and counterarguments. The discussion draws to an end by the leader siding with one of the parties and substantiating the decision.

Speaking skills, undoubtedly, constitute a fundamental point in language training objectives, although they could not be developed without persistent work on improving the learner listening skills. A motivating technique to enhance the proficiency in understanding authentic spoken language in students of musical departments is based on employing songs performed in the target language as a study tool. It is universally admitted that understanding the foreign lyrics of the songs takes more effort than comprehension of conversational speech. Therefore, proceeding from simple to more complex tasks will be reasonable. To begin with, students can be offered to listen to a famous piece of music while having the printed lyrics of it at their disposal. In the next class, the learners will receive the gapped text of the same piece with the assignment to fill in the gaps while listening. As students improve on such tasks, the teacher will complicate the activity offering more challenging pieces. The study objective with this type of work is to improve students' listening skills and to overcome the psychological barriers in the target language communication.

Obviously, the importance of developing the learner skills in reading, listening, speaking, and writing equally is unquestionable. But, unfortunately, due to the lack of classroom hours, teachers often have to give preference to certain

types of exercises to develop students' foreign language competence.

When it comes to discussing training the students of economics, we take it for granted that these learners should be aware of current global market situation. Proceeding from that key point we use a short exchange of news and opinions as a warming-up activity in our classes aiming at raising the students' awareness of the importance of English for their professional competitiveness in the labour market. Students must be prepared to speak in each and every class, so it is up to the teacher to encourage communication.

In economic specialities, alongside with syllabi advised textbooks, we often resort to such multi-level courses as *The Business, Market Leader and Insights*. Our students find it very interesting and rewarding to work with *Market Leader* set, which puts special emphasis on teaching business negotiations skills and expressing opinions. Each section of the textbook is clearly structured and divided into several parts, logically following one another. In *Starting Up*, *Vocabulary* and *Discussion* parts, students have their first insights into the main topic of the unit and its active vocabulary. Learners can also exchange opinions on the subject using their background professional knowledge of it. The texts offered for reading are authentic articles from economic journals and newspapers raising students' awareness about the current economic issues. After reading, learners do follow-up exercises to improve their expertise in various reading strategies (deciding on true or false statements, finding suitable titles, etc.) In listening section, students reinforce the active vocabulary by filling in the gaps with suitable words and phrases, while *Language Review* helps learners to revise grammar. The *Skills* and *Case Study* sections appear to be particularly valuable for promoting the students' communicative and professional competences including business communication skills such as making presentations, taking part in business meetings and negotiations, making phone calls, etc. The activities simulate real life situations assisting students in preventing the language difficulties and psychological tension in future communication with English-speaking partners. *Case Studies* provide opportunities to solve problems similar to those faced by economists on a daily basis. The *Writing File* section is aimed at im-

proving learners' writing skills: composing business letters, e-mails, a fax, a report, an application or resignation letter, etc [4].

Studying a foreign language extends beyond the textbooks used in the classroom. As part of their self-study, learners make good use of Internet resources, particularly those found on YouTube. The *Business English* course, consisting of 15 episodes³ is worth special attention in terms of improving listening skills and expanding the economics active vocabulary. At home, students watch the videos and make scripts of some dialogues, while in the classroom the teacher helps the trainees to work through the challenges and offers the tasks to master the active vocabulary of the series. As a follow-up activity, students are encouraged to employ the new words in making up dialogues of their own.

Teaching English to future specialists in the medical fields should equally develop students' speaking, writing and listening skills. As long as the medical science is inextricably linked with other branches of knowledge, sharing the findings on a global basis has become a common practice. Participation of health professionals in international conferences, meetings and symposia is impossible without proficiency in a foreign language. Therefore, in the classroom, students practise speaking and listening skills making up dialogues and presenting projects on medical problems. At the same time, composing academic articles and pursuing scientific research requires a high expertise in written translation of medical discourse. Accordingly, analysis of professional texts makes an integral part of a language classroom. Students must be made aware of their personal responsibility for correct and adequate medical discourse as the patients' lives and health will be immediately dependent on that.

Despite the fact that, unlike works of fiction or belles-lettres, medical texts are devoid of a variety of stylistic devices, the abundant professional terminology, including concepts related to pathological and physiological states and processes in the human body, diseases and symptoms, methods of diagnostics and treatment, nominations for drugs and specialized equipment create notable difficulties in understanding and translation.

³ Business English course. URL: <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLUn5SogUjmR3zxWUnEYZMz624yQi5W3> 4 (accessed: 23.10.2019).

The complexity of medical translation largely proceeds from the fact that modern science is characterized by the rapid expansion of clinical terms interpreted differently by various scientific schools. In this regard, it can be advisable, and not infrequently, to avoid translating specific terms, leaving them worded in the original language – the fact that can also account for the relevance of ESP studies. In English classes, medical students learn, *inter alia*, how to translate professional terminology by applying such techniques as transcription, transliteration, loan translation, descriptive translation, translation by equivalent, etc.

When teaching students how to work with medical terminology, special attention should be paid to concepts related to the so-called “false friends” – easily confused words from different languages with similar spelling and pronunciation but unlike meaning. In those cases, transliteration and loan translation are unacceptable since they can fundamentally distort the meaning of the medical text and cause fatal errors.

Therefore, it is essential for medical students not only to have a good command of ESP for oral and written cross-cultural communication, but also to acquire the skills for adequate translation of professional texts.

Nowadays special attention is paid to pedagogical students' training. There is a high demand of specialists in this field beginning from the sphere of pre-school teaching and comprehensive school up to higher education teaching. There are at least three modern tendencies in pedagogical education which are closely connected with the necessity of having a good command of a foreign language: early development trend, spreading of linguistic camps or educational trips abroad, and a growing demand for higher education in our country among foreign students. Speaking about pre-school teaching students they are mostly taught to deal with methodology of teaching little children, their preparation to school, adaptation and socialization. Early development has become important in our society. On the one hand, this is due to the fact that early age (3–6 years) is considered to be the most favorable for the beginning of various skills formation and development. On the other hand, this is facilitated by the growing need for a good command of school subjects, the introduction of end-of term tests which include unified standardized tasks and are intended to

control students' knowledge on the subject⁴. As it was mentioned above one of the most problematic school subject is a foreign language and there is a need in improving and developing educational courses on it. In this regard, pedagogical education with a double specialization (e.g. pre-school training and a foreign language) is becoming more and more popular at universities. The courses include the theory of education and development of preschool children, the study of modern problems of speech, cognitive, moral, social and emotional, artistic and creative, patriotic and intercultural development, methods of teaching a foreign language to pre-school children. Future teachers learn to develop work programs. Special attention is paid to the study and practical application of the most common techniques used in teaching English in kindergarten, such as songs, chants, pantomime, role-playing games with puppets or masks (headbands), games with flashcards, table and mobile games, etc. for pre-school children. In addition to theoretical courses, students acquire professional skills in early age groups, kindergartens, camps and linguistic centers [5]. Since classes with pre-school children involve full language immersion, this requires the teacher's own language competence development. Therefore, students attend electives; study hard on their own, receiving instruction from the teacher and using various recourses.

Another tendency is organization of educational process based on linguistic camps or educational trips abroad, which suggests intensive foreign language courses combined with various skills development, entertainment and possibilities to broaden one's outlook. Therefore there is a great demand for creative teachers who are able to design non-traditional educational programmes and products.

A growing demand for higher education in our country among foreign students is evident. The spheres foreign students are mostly interested in include medicine, engineering, information technologies and other. For example, TSU named after Derzhavin are providing courses for foreign students from 64 countries and each year the number of students is increasing⁵. Therefore

⁴ Обсуждение всероссийских проверочных работ. URL: <https://fioco.ru/ru/osoko/vpr> (дата обращения: 01.02.2020).

⁵ Обучение иностранных студентов. URL: tsu.ru/international_students_in_tsu (дата обращения: 10.02.2020).

a higher school teacher should be prepared to carry out teaching their subject partially or fully in English and also communicate with foreign students on different issues. Besides it is impossible to imagine research work without reference to the world progress and experience in science which needs a good language acquisition.

In conclusion, the teachers in ESP face the necessity of setting priority areas for the development of linguistic competence in students in order to prepare them for intercultural communication and assist them in applying their language skills in the chosen field.

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