

# **Pedagogical mastery of specific purpose teachers in the context of leadership in education**

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**Abstract** This paper focuses on the discussion of the necessity in changing of some requirements to a higher school English teacher's qualification under the influence of changing approaches to teaching/learning English for specific purposes. In the context of leadership in education some urgent problems of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) teaching of agrarian universities students are under the authors' consideration as agrarian universities stand apart from humanitarian or technical universities and have their own peculiarities.

Having reviewed some modern approaches to ESP teaching the authors concentrate on competence approach which is now actively spreading at secondary school. With implementation of competence approach certain aspects of ESP teaching process are to be changed and more attention should be paid to student's needs. To gain leadership positions in teaching pedagogical mastery of an ESP teacher lies now in her or his ability to constantly motivate students to learn English independently, look for necessary materials without teacher's assistance, be able to critically evaluate the new information, work out her or his own viewpoint on the content. ESP teacher's duty is to help each student find his own algorithm of learning English and work out a personal strategy of mastering knowledge of the target language.

We propose to pay more attention to independent reading of professional texts forming and developing in such a way student's reading competence. In addition, it is necessary to teach students written communication via the Internet and in this way to form and develop competence in writing. More attention should be paid to social and cultural aspects of ESP teaching as it helps keep students' interest to learning English. Knowledge of the potential partners' customs and manners of communicative behaviour facilitates development of joint business mutual understanding and effective cooperation in future.

## **1 Introduction**

Leadership positions in education are regarded here as a means of improvement of higher agrarian education around the world in general and in Ukraine in particular. On the road to joining the European Union (EU) and its agrarian community it is necessary to provide university graduates for qualitative knowledge and skills in order to make them competitive on the labour market (Nikolaeva 2003). In the period of rapid development of educational technologies under the influence of constantly changing environment the role of a foreign language teacher changes as well. Having access to practically unlimited Internet resources students can get any necessary information independently if they need or want it. The other thing is when non-philological students (in our case students of agrarian universities) do not want to learn foreign languages for many reasons. Some of them do not have enough knowledge to learn professional English, the others consider English as a standard obligatory university discipline which will not influence their future life and work. Many of students studying agrarian sciences are leavers of village schools, their parents are successfully engaged in agriculture without knowledge of

any foreign language. On the examples of their parents they can see it is quite possible to build a professional carrier without any English. More over when agricultural firms publish advertisements looking for their potential employees - graduates of agrarian universities – among the requirements for the candidate's competences knowledge of the English language is never mentioned. Private farmers and rare state employers as a rule give preference to candidate's knowledge of different computer programs, accounting or managerial skills. They want their workers not only to know what to do and how but to have practical skills in the chosen profession. Students understand that for obtaining a prestigious and well-paid job it is necessary to develop their professional competences and pay more attention to learning corresponding disciplines. Thence, the task of an English for specific purposes teacher is first of all to motivate students to learn English and explain to them how learning English can help them in future to widen their knowledge of the target disciplines, find new partners, develop their own business. As an academic discipline "English for specific purposes" differs from general English and has its own peculiarities: professionally oriented lexicon, passive grammar constructions characteristic of academic style, presence of many specific abbreviations etc. That is why the role and functions of a foreign language teacher is under our consideration in this article.

In order to conduct our research on the ways an English for Specific Purposes (ESP) teacher can influence agrarian students and motivate them to learn professional English different pedagogical and psychological methods were used. In the research concerning the assessment of professional activity of a foreign language teacher Zvarych outlines that "*the process of assessment of teachers' professional activity supposes taking into consideration all aspects of their pedagogical work – macro- and micro indexes*" (Zvarych 2014, p. 293). To macro indexes this scientist included students' final results in learning, credits and exams; teacher's creative achievements and qualification enhancement. Micro indexes were defined by current students' academic results, their attitude to learning, individual personal characteristics. Special attention was paid to the teacher–student relationships as they greatly influence the teaching process in general and teaching ESP to future agrarians as well. All these indexes were basic for our methods of researching pedagogical mastery of an ESP teacher.

Modern approaches to teaching general and professional English were analysed and practically implemented for making a right decision concerning the most appropriate approach to teaching ESP to future agrarians. Students' needs were researched and generalized in order to know for certain what students are really interested in. Contents of English text books and manuals for various agricultural specialties were under the researchers' consideration for better understanding how they correspond to modern approaches and students' needs. On the part of ESP teachers' qualification, they were asked when and where each of them got qualification enhancement, what scientific conferences and seminars participated in, how often takes part in international webinars, which of their researches' results were published and where etc.

Our research in which students and ESP teachers from Mykolaiv national agrarian university, Odesa State agrarian university, Kherson State agrarian university participated, showed that most their graduates do not have a possibility to orally communicate with the English language native speakers. They would like to, but the reality does not give them a chance to do so. Working in the fields or on farms in the rural area they can hardly have a possibility to use their oral speech habits in practice. In most cases they read new materials concerning their chosen specialty in professional journals. They also use the Internet to find answers to the questions they face in the process of their professional activity.

Taking into account learners' needs corresponds to the requirements of A Common European Framework on language education: learning, teaching, assessment in which it is proposed to consider learners' needs, motivation, personal characteristics and abilities of students. In Ukrainian agrarian universities students' needs are not regarded as a necessary condition for developing curricula, they are mostly neglected. Ignoring the level of students' knowledge of general English, the program of ESP is the same for all faculties. It differs only in professional lexicon which depends on the future specialty. In many cases the first-year students have serious problems with reading saying nothing about speaking. What they can do is to learn some parts of professional texts by heart, but it is far from communication as it should be. That is why we decided to concentrate our efforts on developing reading skills and teaching students to get necessary information from the text.

In the course of our experiment devoted to searching optimal ways of gaining students interest and motivation to ESP learning we tried to analyse students' needs in order to understand if all students are ready for learning professional English and communication in a foreign language. The analysis of students' needs at agrarian universities showed that 59% of students are not ready to orally communicate in English. Of all topics they learn in the course of ESP they prefer "Food" as their professional interests are connected with the sphere of raw materials for producing food. They would also like to read more about new technologies in food industry. The topic "Job hunting" is also among the most popular with students. They demonstrate great interest in writing resume, application letters, filling in different personal documents. Many students' questions are connected with the procedure of an interview: psychological aspects, manner of communicative behaviour, and level of professional competence. Most students want to know more about English football, famous British football teams and about sports in general. Bearing in mind that 80% of agrarian students are boys it is quite clear. 78% of all specialty's students (except economic faculty) are not ready to discuss professional topics at English classes not

because they have nothing to say but because their level of knowledge English does not allow them to express their ideas. In order not to feel uncomfortable or awkward in class such students give preference to reading professional texts.

Content analysis of English text books for various agricultural specialties showed that most of them contain very long professional texts (2000-2300 signs) which are rather difficult for comprehension as they bear a descriptive character and are overloaded with new words. They are not abstracting from famous periodicals or original text books but mostly articles from scientific journals. No one of the above-mentioned agrarian universities uses original text books published in European or American editorial houses. They mostly use text books written by Ukrainian ESP teachers and edited at our universities. At the agrarian universities which were engaged in the research ESP is taught only for students of the first and second years of study (students of the fifth and sixth years of study are taught other courses: business English, English for commercial communication etc.), and it is rather difficult for them to understand the scientific materials from journals. Very often students of the first and second years of study are not ready to understand English texts as they have not learned the materials such texts contain in their native language. In this case we think it is necessary to unite the efforts of corresponding special departments and the English language department and synchronize the materials in order to give students a possibility to first comprehend the new notions in their native language and then in a foreign language. There should be inter-disciplined coordination between the English language department and professionally oriented departments. We are sure it is not the task of an ESP teacher to explain the meaning of professional terms to students before they cover the necessary materials in their native language. If students do not understand the material it is difficult to make them learn it in English. Inter-disciplined coordination gives broad possibilities for deeper understanding of the learned materials and makes students be more interested in their professional lexicon, English functional grammar, and standard language structures.

The analysis of the ESP teachers' qualification showed that all of them have profile higher education, experience of practical ESP teaching varies from 5 to 29 years, 31% of them have Ph.D. degree. All of them participated in scientific and practical conferences at the universities they work, published their articles and results of the researches in Ukrainian and some foreign scientific journals (Czech Republic, Hungary, Israel, and Poland) but only 4% of all ESP teachers at three agrarian universities (Mykolaiv, Odesa, Kherson) improved their qualification at foreign universities. Many young ESP teachers do not understand how important it is to have positive atmosphere in class and not to bring there the methods of teaching they were taught being students themselves. Very often they overload their students with the tasks agrarian students cannot cope with because the lack of knowledge. As a result, students have gaps in understanding the material, and they lose interest to learning ESP. They no longer believe in their ability to learn English and successfully cope with necessary tasks. In order to avoid such cases, we propose to organize special methodological seminars for young ESP teachers and demonstrate them the differences in teaching a foreign language to future philologists and agrarians.

Therefore, we reached a conclusion it would be more useful to teach students reading and understanding professional literature as well as normative writing in English. In our experimental groups we no longer spend so much time trying to discuss professional questions but read, translate specially selected texts, learn new words, do exercises. In general, our work is based on one of the central methodical principles – the principle of the dominant role of exercises. Because of this we prefer competence approach to ESP teaching as it allows develop students' competences in English reading and writing and also combines gained skills with their implementation in practical activity.

## 2 Review of modern approaches to ESP teaching

Nowadays, there exist several approaches to ESP teaching at Ukrainian universities. Cultural, contextual, constructivist, person-centred, experience-reflective, competence and some other approaches go along with the widely spread communicative approach. All of them have equal rights for being used but for different specific purposes. Their choice depends on the type of the universities and the main tasks of the ESP course. It also depends on students' personal motivation and inclinations which are to be taken into consideration. At humanitarian faculties the communicative and cultural approaches are the most appropriate while for technical specialties some other approaches should be chosen. Among various modern approaches to ESP teaching we give preference to competence one as we are sure it better corresponds to the tasks of teaching professional English at neither humanitarian nor technical university. We are going to discuss some peculiarities of teaching ESP at agrarian universities.

Here, we can quote the conclusion of prof. Tarnopolsky concerning approaches to ESP teaching: *“in teaching English for professional purposes at universities it is quite possible to organize the teaching/learning process on the basis of the principled pragmatic approach. This approach... is necessarily eclectic being formed out of five constituent methods: content-based instruction, interculturalism, constructivism, blended language learning and balanced combination of communicative learning activities and non-communicative language exercises. All these methods belong to different approaches: content-based instruction belongs to the approach*

*whose essence is in trying and merging language studies and professional studies in higher education; interculturalism represents the culture-oriented approach to language studies; constructivism embodies the approach aimed at attaining students' autonomy in language acquisition; blended learning implements the approach based on applying information technologies for improving language learning. A balanced combination of communicative learning activities and non-communicative language exercises unites two opposing approaches: communicative language instruction and traditional form-focused language teaching*" (Tarnopolsky 2018). We share Tarnopolsky's point of view in this case, but we do not agree with him when he says that "*there are no grounds for speaking about the post-communicative era*" (Tarnopolsky 2018.). But changes are coming.

"The post-communicative era" has already come into being at secondary school according to the concept of "New Ukrainian School" adopted on 2016 and reflected in the Law of Ukraine "On Education" (2017). Existing contradictions between the priority of oral communication at the English lessons and necessity of written tests and writing a short composition during the final examination for school leavers caused the search of more practical approaches to teaching. School leavers' competence in English is not tested orally – they perform all tasks in a written form that is why school teachers started to pay more attention to developing students' skills in reading, doing different kinds of tests and writing. Little by little the "specific gravity" (italics by authors) of oral communication at the English lessons shortens for the benefit of the development of reading, writing and listening comprehension (Godovanjuk and Tjagaj 2014).

Changes in approaches to teaching foreign languages at secondary school cannot but influence the educational process at higher school. Theoretically we understand how important it is to teach future agrarians to communicate in English but in real practice there are lots of reasons for which it has become almost impossible. First students themselves are becoming more pragmatic thinking over their professional carrier after graduating from the university. Having returned to the native village with a university diploma most of them would hardly have a chance to orally communicate with other people in English. Second - agrarian university authorities support the idea of teaching their students communication in English but do not give additional academic hours for learning it. They often explain this by the process of optimization of educational process at higher school according to which the number of auditorium hours decreases for the benefit of students' independent work. That is the normal European practice, standard requirement at European universities. But learning English independently at home or in the library students can hardly develop their skills of dialogue speech or communication as there is nobody to speak to. Instead they can read and translate professional and other texts, learn new words or write necessary exercises in order to develop necessary skills for gaining new information in future.

Competence approach to teaching supposes combining of students' knowledge and skills with their own experience of using them in practical activity. It means that now it is not enough to know the theoretical materials or rules; it is necessary to be able to use gained knowledge and skills in life situations solving practical problems.

Competence approach to teaching school subjects is the bases of modern changes in secondary education. According to the new Law of Ukraine "On Education" adopted in 2017 the whole system of teaching schoolchildren should be based on the principles of forming and further development of different competences. Developed life and professional competences will help university graduates find appropriate well-paid work and realize their potential in practical activity. University education cannot stand aside the changes in secondary education. There should be certain succession in these two levels of studying. University ESP teachers cannot neglect the competences and skills their students got at school.

### **3 Pedagogical mastery of an English teacher as a professional problem**

Traditionally up to the beginning of this century "pedagogical mastery" was taught at pedagogical institutes as a separate academic discipline. But in the course of time when almost all pedagogical institutes in Ukraine became universities this discipline started to be a part of pedagogy and then disappeared. Pedagogical mastery of a university educator was considered by many scholars as the highest stage of pedagogical activity. It is personified in the developed professional competence, creative approach to teaching, constant improvement of teaching methods and ways of positive influence university students. It is also very important to have his/her individual style of work thanks to which every teacher's creative potential can be completely realized. According to the statement of Godovanjuk and Tjagaj (2014): "*nowadays there is no single understanding of the notion 'pedagogical mastery'*" (Godovanjuk and Tiagai 2014, p.62). In Ukrainian Pedagogical Dictionary "pedagogical mastery" is defined as "*the characteristic of the high level of pedagogic activity. Criteria of pedagogical mastery are: humanistic direction, scientific approach, pedagogical necessity, results, and creativity*" (Goncharenko 1997, p. 187). Pedagogical mastery consists of combination of a teacher's professional knowledge, pedagogical technique and humanistic direction of his/her personality. Pedagogical mastery presupposes combination of different necessary professional abilities, skills of pedagogical management, willingness to cooperate with students, colleagues, and other people. Student's desire to study, his/her confidence in the ability to gain

knowledge, deepen and broaden professional skills depend on positive relationships between a teacher and students, their mutual trust and success oriented will.

The problems of professional competence and pedagogical mastery of an English teacher were researched by several Ukrainian scientists from different points of view. Zabolotska (2010) in her book "Methods of teaching foreign languages at higher educational establishments" paid attention to teaching foreign languages for non-philological specialties and concentrated on professional and methodical competences of future foreign language teachers (Zabolotska 2010, p. 47-54; 81; 169). Malikhin et al. (2014) outline the importance of professional competence of an educator in the system of professional education (Malikhin et al. 2014, pp. 28-35). Grishkova in the book "Methods of teaching professional English to students of non-philological specialties" (Grishkova 2015) describes requirements for methodical competence of a teacher of professional English. Zaskaleta in the monograph "Tendencies of professional training of agrarian specialists in the countries of European Union" pays attention to different algorithms of training future agrarians at European universities. (Zaskaleta 2013) But in none of these books, pedagogical mastery of an English teacher is researched as a separate aspect of an ESP teacher's qualification. We consider the pedagogical mastery of an English teacher one of the most important issues in the process of gaining higher education as it helps motivate students to learning foreign languages, broadens their outlook upon the world, gives access to other cultures, teaches students to understand their foreign partners and cooperate with them. It is the personality of an English teacher and his/her pedagogical mastery that helps keep students' motivation and interest to learning foreign languages.

#### **4 Pedagogical mastery of an ESP teacher**

During almost twenty or so last years the main task of an ESP teacher was to teach non-philological students to communicate in English combining their knowledge of the language norms with their professional interests. They learned professional lexicon according to the chosen specialty and tried to simulate real situations. Pedagogical mastery of an ESP teacher meant that he/she knew not only the lexicon of a certain specialty but was ready to discuss professional problems. If those problems dealt with not very complicated issues (political science, environmental protection, ABC of economics etc.) the teacher could really demonstrate understanding of the subjects. But to organize a fruitful discussion on more complicated questions it was necessary to reproduce dialogues from corresponding textbooks or learn the whole dialogues by heart. In the case when an ESP teacher taught not only students of one certain specialty but some specialties (e.g. would-be agronomists, stock-breeding specialists, agricultural mechanics, economists etc.) he/she had to spend too much time and efforts to be ready for professional disputes. Educational practice shows that in most cases ESP teachers have perfunctory knowledge in such specific fields and do not feel confident enough in class of future agrarians for example.

Pedagogical mastery of an ESP teacher is considered here from the viewpoint of the competence approach to teaching which is now rather popular at some universities in Ukraine. Competence approach to teaching supposes combining of students' knowledge and skills with their own experience of using them in practical activity.

Thence, there are the requirements for improving pedagogical mastery of an ESP teacher. Teaching professional English to non-philological students is a very specific process with many peculiarities. First of all, it is necessary for an ESP teacher to understand the difference in teaching English to philologists and students of non-philological specialties. They have different motivation, level of general knowledge and abilities for language learning. The fact is that as a rule most young ESP teachers working at different agrarian faculties transfer pedagogical methods, they were taught at the universities being future philologists to the classes of would-be agronomists, stock-breeding specialists, agricultural mechanics, economists etc. They do not take into consideration that students of agrarian university came to learn their professional disciplines first of all and then other subjects. For most of them English is one of these "other subjects" as well as for example philosophy, ethics, or history. They are concentrated on gaining professional knowledge and skills, and only 34% (according to our research) of them understand that English is necessary for their future self-development and increasing professional knowledge. As a rule, these are graduates of urban (not rural) schools and their level of general English allows them to learn ESP. Most students regard English as a discipline which they can "pass an exam and forget". That is why it is very important for an ESP teacher not to overload students with complicated English grammar in order not to "kill" their belief in the ability to learn the foreign language. We also recommend ESP teachers to divide long professional texts into smaller parts in order to give students more time for understanding the material.

Pedagogical mastery of an experienced ESP teacher should help students with good English work in a team and cooperate with those who have problems in ESP. Students' attitude towards learning ESP often depends on the pedagogical mastery of their ESP teacher. The teacher should constantly encourage students in their efforts to improve the results of learning English. More attention should be paid to independent reading and understanding of professional texts and writing of not only personal letters but different kinds of professional mail. ESP teachers should more actively use the possibilities of the Internet to involve students in exchanging opinions on the read

information. If for example the group of future agronomists consists of only boys, it is not necessary to pay much attention to the subject like “do you care what you wear” because most of them are not interested in the fact how they look like. It is better to pay more to development of social networking sites and their further perspectives. And if the group of would-be economists consists of mostly girls it would be rather interesting for them to read about the latest trends in hair styles or modern clothes. ESP teachers should better know the learners’ needs in order to choose the didactic materials appropriate for the students of every group depending on the real students’ interests and inclinations.

The other way of keeping students’ interest to ESP learning is using socio-cultural component of the discipline. It means, as professor Passov, formulated: “*teaching language through culture and culture through language*” (Passov 2000). Learning social and cultural peculiarities of the English people help motivate students to know more about their life styles, food, ways of dressing, business behaviour, family life, values and beliefs etc. Special attention should be paid to the manners of communicative behaviour in different English-speaking countries. It would be interesting for students to know the specific features of organizing and running business in Great Britain, the USA, Canada, China, India etc. as national customs and traditions greatly influence commercial partnership and cooperation. It is almost impossible to organize international cooperation without taking into consideration national peculiarities of different business partners. Combining teaching ESP with social and cultural components opens new horizons for motivating students and gives them a chance to improve their knowledge and reading competence. Pedagogical mastery of an ESP teacher lies in the desire and ability to combine teaching language material with socio-cultural aspects of the discipline.

## 5 Conclusions

Overall, in order to conclude, we should summarize by saying that pedagogical mastery of an ESP teacher is of paramount importance under the conditions of gaining leadership positions in European agrarian sector. Quality of educational process at agrarian universities which stand apart from humanitarian or technical universities and have their own peculiarities should be equal to the European level. Most agrarian students are rural schools-leavers and in many cases their level of general English knowledge does not allow them to adequately comprehend professional English. Besides, as a rule they have only two hours of ESP a week and it is not enough for real comprehension of the material.

Currently, it seems that nobody is going to increase the number of hours for learning English, and students’ attitude towards learning ESP and the level of their knowledge depends completely on the ESP teacher’s qualification and pedagogical mastery. It is proved in the article that among all popular approaches to ESP teaching the competence approach corresponds to satisfaction of agrarian students’ needs in the highest degree. Developed competence in English reading and writing helps agrarian students search for new information, understand professional texts, communicate via the Internet.

All in all, it appears that in order to be respected and trusted by their students, ESP teachers should constantly improve their professional qualification, using modern technologies, applying new approaches to education, being aware of the peculiarities their students have. Motivation and confidence in every student’s ability to master ESP should be in the centre of any professional English teacher on the way to gaining leadership positions in agrarian education.

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