TEACHING ENGLISH TO STUDENTS IN ECONOMICS

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Abstract
The increasing importance of English as an international language has resulted in the expansion of one particular aspect of English Language Teaching, namely the teaching of English for Specific Purposes. This relatively new aspect of English Language Teaching has its basis in an investigation of the purposes of the learners and the set of communicative needs arising from those purposes. These particular needs will guide teachers in designing different course materials, in choosing the kind of English to be taught, the topics and themes through which it will be taught, the skills and activities they will make use of. All these aspects could be perceived as a real challenge for both teachers and learners. Consequently, the aim of this study is to offer some immediately accessible guidelines into teaching English to students in Economics.

Keywords: learning styles, needs analysis, teaching English.

Clasificare JEL: M40, M41

1. Introduction
The acquisition of specific vocabulary in a foreign language by students is often slow, discouraging and even frustrating. All learners want to use the foreign language with confidence and spontaneity, in the same way they use their mother tongue.

The teacher who works with students in economics has to perform a thorough analysis of his/her students in order to get to know them better. The way to success is a maize full of traps through which teachers pass when and if they pick the right clue. That is why gathering information on students’ characteristics, on their motivation to study the specific vocabulary of another language or on their learning styles is a must in the attempt to find the right approach and then design the appropriate course.

2. Students in Economics and their needs
Students can be defined through a number of special characteristics: ‘They can engage with abstract thought, have a range of life experiences, definite expectations about the learning process, their own set patterns of learning, and are more disciplined than children. On the other hand, students have a number of characteristics which can make learning and teaching problematic: can be critical of teaching methods, anxious and under-confident because of previous failure and worry about diminishing learning power with age’ (Harmer, 2000). They also face certain linguistic problems (e.g. ‘fossilized’ errors such as persistent deviations from the second language norm or language transfer), which have a negative influence on the productive skills when dealing with economics in English.

Students may also have different reasons for learning economics in English, different personalities and ways of relating to and working with other people, different skills, aptitudes and abilities, different topics they find interesting, different learning styles, different previous learning experiences, different speeds of working and learning.

Contrary to young learners who enjoy variety in the field of activities performed in class, students are far more selective. For instance, they generally dislike role-plays and made-up stories, probably because of their practicality and life experience. Although they claim they would like to drill and do grammar exercises, they do not enjoy these activities.

Another important aspect of their way of studying is that they generally avoid doing homework or any other additional tasks that might help them to consolidate economics structures and vocabulary. They keep complaining about shortage of time, work load and family commitments. Nevertheless, activities of listening and speaking spontaneously are among their preferences.
Learning styles are ‘specific actions taken by the learner to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, and more transferable to new situations’ (Oxford, 1990). According to Richards and Lockhart (1996), the common learning styles for each type of learners are:

- *concrete learners*, who use active means of processing information;
- *analytical learners*, who prefer logical and systematic presentation of new material. Other researchers also name them *logical* or *mathematical learners* as they prefer using logic, reasoning and systems;
- *communicative learners*, who prefer a social approach. They may be also referred to as *social*/*interpersonal learners* (they prefer to learn in groups or with other people) or *verbal*/*linguistic learners* (they prefer using words, both in speech and writing);
- *authority-oriented learners*, who prefer the teacher’s authority.

Other researchers describe learning styles in a more detailed manner and add to the list above *solitary* or *intrapersonal learners*, who prefer to work alone and use self-study.

Most of the studies investigating learning styles accept the following main categories: visual, aural and kinaesthetic learners.

**Visual or spatial learners** learn through seeing, so they prefer using pictures, images, and spatial understanding. They need to see the teacher’s body language and facial expression to fully understand the content of a lesson. They tend to prefer to sit at the front of the classroom in order to avoid visual obstructions such as other people’s heads. They may think in pictures and learn best from visual displays (e.g. diagrams, illustrated text books, overhead transparencies, videos, flipcharts, hand-outs, etc). During a lecture they often prefer to take detailed notes to absorb the information.

The strategies that could be applied for visual learners are: creating visual analogies, visualising facts, relating key concepts to visual images such as symbols, writing a skeletal summary when reading, listening to lectures, doing pair-work or using colour to highlight main ideas.

**Aural or auditory-musical learners** learn through listening. They prefer using sound and music, so they learn best through verbal lectures, discussions, talking things through and listening to what others have to say. Auditory learners interpret the underlying meanings of speech through listening to the tone of voice, the pitch, the speed and other nuances. Written information may have little meaning until it is heard. These learners often benefit from reading text aloud and using a tape recorder.

Some strategies for auditory learners are: sharing notes and asking peers for feedback, making audio-recording notes and listening to them, verbalizing answers first in one’s head before writing them down, orally summarizing and discussing short fragments of a reading passage, reading to oneself aloud or having someone else do it.

**Physical/tactile or kinaesthetic learners** learn through moving, doing and touching, so they prefer using their body, hands and sense of touch. They learn best through a hands-on approach, actively exploring the physical world around them. They may find it hard to sit still for long periods and may become distracted by their need for activity and exploration.

Learning a series of facts while doing some form of exercise, engaging in activity-based role-plays, linking language to learning through processes involving physical activity, physically highlighting key language and pieces of information are only a few of the strategies that might be applied when working with this type of learners.

Learning styles group common ways that people learn. Everyone has a mix of learning styles. Some people may have one dominant style of learning, with far less use of the other styles. Others might use different styles, according to the circumstance they find themselves in. The truth is that nobody can talk about some right mix of learning styles. Moreover, someone’s learning styles are not fixed. For instance, one can develop ability in less dominant styles, as well as further develops styles that somebody else already uses well.

By recognizing and understanding their students’ learning styles, teachers can use techniques better suited to them. This improves the speed and quality of learning.
4. Designing an appropriate course of Economics in English

The experience of planning and designing an appropriate course in English that suits students in Economics can be very challenging, as teachers are often faced with various complexities and problems. The solution is to perform an appropriate analysis of the students’ needs. If a group of students’ language needs can be accurately specified, then this identification can be used to determine the content of a language programme that will meet these needs.

Although there are various ways of interpreting ‘needs’, the concept of ‘learner needs’ is often interpreted in two ways:

- as what the learner wants to do with the specific English vocabulary acquired. This is the goal-oriented definition of a needs analysis and relates to terminal objectives or the end of learning;
- and what the learner needs to do to actually acquire the economics terms and expressions. This is the process-oriented definition of the needs analysis and relates to the transitional, to the means of learning.

Traditionally, the first interpretation was widely used and accepted. However, in today’s globalised teaching and learning contexts, courses for students tend to relate to both at the same time, focusing on the process-oriented approach in aligning students’ needs with their future working scenarios.

In view of these concerns, researchers have discussed criteria for lectures design in terms of: length, assessment, goals, teacher’s role, focus, course-content, course materials, and student characteristics. Concerns surrounding course design could be listed in the form of question such as:

- Should the English course in economics be intensive or extensive?
- Should the learners’ performance be assessed or non-assessed?
- Should the course deal with immediate needs or with delayed needs?
- Should the role of the teacher be that of the provider of knowledge and activities, or as facilitator of activities arising from students’ expressed wants?
- Should the course have a broad focus or a narrow one?
- Should the course be pre-study or pre-experience or run parallel with the study or experience?
- Should the materials be common-core or specific to learners’ study or work?
- Should the group taking the course be homogenous or heterogeneous?

By asking these questions prior to planning course design, the teacher can be better prepared.

In the literature of needs analysis, some of the following aspects are often recommended by experts:

- placement testing, that is administering tests designed to assess general English ability and ability to perform adequately in work contexts, might help determine the starting level of the course;
- linguistic needs analysis helps to identify skill development, linguistic structures, lexical items, language functions and levels of formality;
- learning needs analysis helps identify students’ attitudes towards different kinds of methodology, learning tasks and activities;
- analysis of perceptions discovers students’ perceptions of themselves and others as part of their university culture, and their relationships with people from other countries university cultures.

In analysing course design issues in any teaching and learning context, it is generally an accepted fact that the process of matching aim and method is not simply a mechanistic one, of finding out what is the aim and then finding an appropriate method to achieve it. In the process of performing a needs analysis a vast amount of information is usually collected. It is a difficult task to decide what may or may not prove to be relevant clues towards the choice of methods and materials to be used.

5. Training strategies in teaching English to students in Economics

One of the important goals in learning a foreign language is to develop the skill of listening comprehension. Listening activities often prove to be time-consuming. After listening to some passage, most of the students usually make complaints about all being too fast. Or different students recall the passage differently. Moreover, they often misinterpret the recorded information and claim that they have definitely heard it.

The best approach in this case is to lengthen pauses during the listening activity, according to the scheme listening – pause – listening – pause etc. These pauses give students the ‘thinking time’ they need to process information. At first students might need longer pauses after a brief listening, but gradually they will develop the ability to process longer passages without any pauses and get the information right.

The issue of developing speaking skills in English for students in Economics is particularly difficult. The major reason is that oral and listening skills are interrelated: the better listening comprehension, the better speaking skills. That is why they should be developed simultaneously.

Competence in speaking skills is also hard to develop as factors like emotions, self-esteem, empathy, anxiety, attitude, motivation, uneasiness, self-doubt or frustration come into play, making the teachers’ task even more difficult.
Teachers dealing with students must remember that all adults are always concerned with how they might be judged by their peers. ‘They are very cautious about making errors in what they say, for making errors would be a public display of ignorance, which would be an obvious occasion of ‘losing face’…’ (Shumin, 1997). This sensitivity to making mistakes is the explanation for their inability to speak without hesitation.

Consequently, the teachers’ efforts should be directed towards encouraging students to speak out their minds on all aspects of covered materials and persuading them that making mistakes is a natural process of learning Economics in a foreign language.

Reading an economics text in an English might be challenging too. Many students easily give up doing it, as they feel they do not know all the words and need the dictionary all the time. They usually classify the activity of reading as time-consuming and boring.

Teachers might find useful to make their students enjoy this activity by providing them with the following tips: decide on why the students have to read the text; find the right place to read; survey the text in order to find out how long it is, if there is a table of contents or a conclusion; if there are any unfamiliar words look them up in a good online dictionary; read headings and diagrams; during reading, try to summarize the main idea of each paragraph and if there are no subheadings, create their own; make some bullet point notes as they proceed through the text; if there is a conclusion of the end of one chapter, read it first.

Students may be assessed through writing, speaking or observing. In writing, the students might be asked to fill in a questionnaire (e.g. about their work, interests, previous study, etc.): take a language test, write a paragraph about topics set by the teacher, write a letter/e-mail to the teacher.

Before taking up any of these activities, the teacher should indicate his/her students the main steps to follow when writing in English: write a short outline, write an introductory paragraph, write a topic sentence for each paragraph, follow the topic sentence with supporting details, and write a conclusion.

In speaking, the students might be interviewed individually or in pairs, asking them informally for advice about what would be useful to work on during the future lessons or showing the intended course-book or materials for the lecture and discuss them together in order to select the most appropriate ones. Or teachers might collect oral feedback comments about the course at the end of the lessons.

Through observing, the teacher sets the students tasks to do in class. This will allow him/her to observe them working, speaking, and using the language. The teacher will be able to diagnose the students’ language or skills problems and discover more about what they need.

6. Conclusion

A method is a way of teaching. The choice of a method is dependent on the teacher’s approach, namely what he/she believes about how people learn or how teaching helps people learn. Any teacher then has to make methodological decisions about the course aims, the teaching techniques, the type of activities, the methods of assessment.

Despite the various methods that could be approached by language teachers, many of them nowadays do not follow one single method. Over the years, they develop a personal methodology, built from their own selection of what they consider to be the best and most appropriate of what they have learnt about.

There are individual preferences regarding how students like to communicate and learn.

A complete repertoire of teaching and learning approaches improves learning. Students who approach the learning process with a wide range of strategies have more options available for meeting expectations. Increased student awareness of different learning styles builds multiple perspectives, which help students to better understand others and to be prepared to work within their learning community.

Every individual student has his or her own specific purpose for learning Economics in English. A needs analysis is an essential starting point in teaching students, as teachers cannot really address a student’s specific needs unless they are absolutely clear about what they are.

A successful English course for students in Economics is one that is learner-centred and helps to meet the foreign language needs of the learners.

7. Bibliography