



Interdisciplinary approach in teaching English for specific purposes

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Abstract

Combining different areas of study has always been a useful approach and a necessary tool in modern teaching. When teaching language for specific purposes, it is one of the most productive ways to modernise the learning process and implement the theory into practice. One example of interdisciplinary approach in teaching language for specific purposes is combining the courses Sociology of Sport together with Business English course in terms of organising field class which is aiming to expose students to real English in use environment and giving them an opportunity to explore sociological aspects relevant to their studies. Students of sports management conduct a semi-structured interview about perception of Split as a city of sports among foreign tourists in local area and thus learn how to research the relevant topic in real life surrounding, report back about the results of the interview and use English language throughout all activities.

Keywords: *English language, interdisciplinary approach, interview, sociology of sport*

1. The importance of an interdisciplinary approach in the process of learning and education

Taking into account the increasing importance of achieving measurable outcomes in the process of education and the importance of acquiring practical, concrete, applicable skills that are the best preparation for professional and personal life, it is difficult to imagine teaching that could truly meet all the quality criteria without an interdisciplinary approach. By combining different professions, fields or scientific disciplines, different perspectives and methods, it is possible to achieve layering, gain a clearer insight into the issue, holistic approach, more possibilities of solving tasks and greater creativity, both in creating and adopting teaching content.

Interdisciplinary approach is particularly important in the process of higher education, where teachers are expected to understand several areas, and students are strengthened by intrinsic motivation to learn in new ways. “The use of an interdisciplinary approach in the learning process in higher educational institutions allows the formation and development of both scientific and professional thinking of students, and contributes to the formation of interdisciplinary knowledge that is necessary to solve complex scientific and technical problems.” (Salnaia et al., 2021, p. 1337). It is also important to add social problems to this definition, given that students are an important part of society that polytechnics and faculties, among other things, educate for social engagement, i.e., social contribution.

Many innovative learning methods, such as for example, neurolinguistic programming, have shown that students have significantly increased motivation to learn, they have improved memory and greater ability to reproduce material if they use multiple senses in the learning process (e.g., in addition to visual and auditory uses and kinesthetic, olfactory or gustatory representation systems).

Interdisciplinary learning, as well as learning through field work, with a specific task related to the area of interest of students, does just that – it offers students more opportunities to engage in the learning process, offers them experience, activates more senses, and the result is efficiency – in understanding, acquiring new skills and applying what has been learned.

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American sociologist Randall Collins has divided education throughout history into three different types: education for practical skills, education for belonging to a status group and education under the control of bureaucracy. Education for practical skills, as Fanuko says (Fanuko, 2013) took place in the process of work, without major formalization, in a way that students observed, noticed, listened and repeated in order to master the skills that an experienced master demonstrates. Throughout history, such education was acquired at work, in practice, during the performance of various jobs, but the school, or some other formal institution such as a higher education institution, was not a place for the acquisition of practical skills. Nevertheless, education is changing, developing according to the needs of users, but also the labor market.

Some educational institutions continue to foster a "classical" *ex cathedra* approach to students and one-way learning method in which the lecturer speaks and the audience listens, without questioning and without interaction. However, there are fewer and fewer of them. In addition, our interdisciplinary learning that takes place in the field is far from this *ex cathedra* approach.

When combining different areas of study in interdisciplinary manner, the learning process becomes a cooperation between students and teachers and students among themselves. It encourages creativity, teamwork and also forces students to take a more active role in the learning process. In terms of learning foreign language for specific purposes, this type of approach is crucial in order to show students how they will apply language skills in their future jobs.

2. Field work as a method of socialization

Modern teaching should take into consideration that teaching is not a mere transfer of data. "In the broadest sense, education is simply an aspect of socialization: it involves acquiring knowledge and learning skills. Intentionally or unintentionally, education often affects the creation of beliefs and moral values." (Haralambos et al., 2002, p. 774). According to Ivan Illich, (Haralambos et al., 2002, p.781) "education should be a liberating experience in which individuals explore, create, take initiative, judge and reason, and fully develop their abilities and talents."

Although Illich's idea is already quite old, and his approach in which he advocates the abolition of formal education because it "only harms" is radical, it is still an educational reality today in many cultures, but also in many educational institutions. This is far from the priority that he even then put forward, and this is very concrete - learning skills useful for life. To the question of who should teach Illich's answer is logical – teachers of skills.

American sociologist Talcott Parsons (according to Haralambos, 2002, p. 779) proved in the 1950s that school, after primary socialization in the family, is a focal means of socialization, an institution that acts as a bridge that prepares for the transition from the role of a student to the role of an adult. An educational institution such as polytechnics or faculty, for many is another transition, another bridge that also has the function of a socialization agent, only the focus is more on preparing the student for the world of work, for the professional roles they will have.

Apart from the importance of interdisciplinary approach for students individually, the importance of real-life interaction and communication in which there is no screen, no distance between the speaker and the interlocutor, is not negligible at all. The pandemic situation has seriously put face-to-face communication aside, one in which you have a multitude of opportunities to navigate, but also a multitude of potential mistakes and false impressions. Therefore, classes that involve real interaction are certainly important, and for many students accustomed to the ease of studying and communicating in front of a screen, this is a real-life exercise.

Learning a language in the classroom, among fellow students, is not a particular challenge for many, and the level of motivation depends mostly on their own, intrinsic motivation, and the rest on the skills of the lecturer. The field work, therefore, is a challenge in itself. Achieving real communication, in a foreign language, with strangers, requires more concentration, stronger motivation, better resourcefulness and a dose of courage.

Zygmunt Bauman, a Polish sociologist in Eric Gandini's "The Swedish Theory of Love" (2015) makes it clear how much socialization is desperately needed by people, how important it is to get out of one's safe zone and start a conversation. Given the growing need and inclination of Western societies for individualism, autonomy and independence, in addition to socialization, interaction skills, people lose their collective identity, the sense of belonging to a certain social group, the sense of "We". "It is untrue that happiness means trouble free life, happy life means overcoming troubles...you confront challenges, you try your best...and then you get the moment of happiness. This thing can't be provided by the state... you have to be among other people" – says Bauman and then concludes that "at the end of independence there is emptiness in life, meaningless of life and unimaginable boredom."

There are many advantages of interdisciplinary approach and field teaching, but in the process of agreeing among teachers and merging areas, it is necessary to pay extra attention to choosing the best method of learning, especially when it comes to language learning, and learning a language for specific purpose.

3. Teaching language for specific purpose

When teaching English for Specific Purposes one must focus on the reason why the teaching process is taking place. It is not just to master the structures of language and achieve general communication, but to prepare the students for their work and their careers. Classrooms can offer a certain framework for practicing skills and gaining vocabulary necessary for understanding and communicating, but it lacks real life experience and conditions which students will encounter in their work. For that reason, one of the best methods for achieving such conditions is the CLIL method.

3.1. CLIL Method

One of the most effective methods of the learning process which includes interdisciplinary approach is the method of content-language integrated learning. “This method allows you to effectively design the process of learning a foreign language, using an interdisciplinary integrative framework, especially in the framework of the ESP academic discipline (Arnó-Macià & Mancho-Barés, 2015; Dalton-Puffer et al., 2011; Llinares et al., 2012; Temirova, & Westall, 2015; Tokareva, 2018; Tsimerman, 2018). There are several main characteristics of the method of content and language integrated learning: mutual integration of the content of the academic discipline and a foreign language; the target language is only a vehicle for the study of professional disciplines (vehicular language); professional communication is an environment for natural learning of a foreign language; professional communication is primary, and grammar is secondary (if grammatical errors do not impede communication) (Salnaia Leia, et al. 2021, p 1339). When teaching ESP, one must be aware that students learn a foreign language in order to gain a tool to communicate non-language related subjects. Furthermore, the ability to actively use the English language in a certain area of study is a crucial requirement in labour market today. That is why CLIL method provides one of the best ways to expose students to reality of using the English language in business environment.

The field work carried out at University of Applied Sciences Aspira among students of Sports Management included this method and since students were involved both in Sociology of Sport and Business English course, interdisciplinary approach was organized in a way that includes the content – reasearching about the role of sport in the local community and the language – English.

4. Foreign language speaking anxiety and field work

The field work concerned included some challenges. When presented to the students, some had questions which revealed uncomfot about having a task which includes speaking English to real people in real life. The fear of leaving the comfort of classroom and starting a communication in a foreign language with other than peers is real. The phenomenon called foreign language speaking anxiety is something that foreign language teachers encounter very often. Since learning a foreign language includes communication, it is often the case that some students can communicate freely in their mother tongue, but cannot achieve a proper communication in a foreign language. However, it is important to stress that the focus is on students who do not lack the basic language skills to achieve communication, but their anxiety prevents them from starting communication. The reason for this anxiety is mostly the fear of making mistakes and the embarassement that arises from it. Mohamad & Wahid (2009, p. 74) mentioned in their study that “most of the students were concerned about various kinds of evaluative situations in which their knowledge and performance of English will be monitored by people around them.” And with this fear in mind, many students seem reluctant to participate in any activity that involves speaking. However, the activity conducted among students of Aspira included team work which helped them disperse responsibility and not feel such discomfort about the task.

5. Sociology of sport and business English field work example

Sociology of Sport is a course in which the focus is on understanding the relationship between society (social institutions, organizations, groups) and sports (sports organizations, groups). One of the important topics in the field of sociology of sport is certainly the mutual influence between sports and tourism. Since tourism is one of the most important industries in Croatia, increasing popularity of Split as a tourist destination and the rich history of Split as a sports' city, merging these two branches is an actual, sustainable and logical step that has enabled students to acquire practical and applicable knowledge in areas of their interests and studies. During field work, students have the opportunity to realize qualitative research and thus, acquire concrete skills, get a deeper insight into the topic that they will professionally deal with in the future, understand the wider context in which the relationship between sports and tourism takes place, and get guidance for further development of research. Given the topic and tourists as a target group, this task would not have been possible without business English. Thus, by learning about sociology of sport students are practicing vocabulary and grammar structures in real life surrounding. Instead of organising role-play in the classroom, students are not role-playing, they are actually communicating with real people about specific topic related to their studies.

In our example of interdisciplinary approach, the language – Business English was combined with Sociology of Sport. Students were from the Departments of Sport and Tourism, so we have put the management of these two areas in the subject of research. The task students received was to examine the perception of tourists about Split as a sports city. The task involved first preparing questions for a semi-structured interview, agreeing on roles and division of tasks, and finally creating questions in English in accordance with the goal. It is also important to note that students were both Croatian and international, which made the use of English crucial in cooperating within the team, as well as in performing the task itself.

Students were instructed to find tourists who are willing to participate in the task, talk to them, meet them, ask them few questions. In other words, they had to make a meaningful conversation in English with people outside classroom about specific topic related to their field of studies and return with answers which can give them insight about important aspects related to Sociology of Sport.

The semi-structured interview method was chosen in order for students to have the opportunity to be more informal in the conversation, follow the course of the conversation and change the direction of the conversation, following the respondents' replies, and to have enough space for informal communication with the aim of better getting to know the respondents, their views, their origin and culture. Additionally, English is not the native language of any of the students, which is certainly a better option for group homogeneity and equality of roles.

Students were divided into smaller teams, into groups of three or four, and the groups are usually composed of a combination of Croatian and international students. In this way, by combining language areas, smaller groups and combining language areas reduces the risk of diffusion of responsibility. The group has a significant positive contribution to the behavior and motivation of the individual, but there are also negative effects. In a group, there is more often a decrease in the motivation of members and non-execution of tasks, and there is a rare occurrence and diffusion of responsibility. "The diffusion of responsibility is manifested in a way that each individual, due to the presence of others, may feel a lesser obligation to, for example, come to the rescue. The larger the number of people in one place and the more distant the relationship between them, the less the sense of responsibility" (Reić, et al. 2020). In real communication, in which each of the students had a specific task to fulfill, the students had to speak, they had to practice discussing the topic/issue they were studying and also how to discuss it in English.

In teams, they went around the city performing semi-structured interviews with tourists in the city researching their opinion about Split as a sports city. The activity was done in English language.

6. Results of field work

Fieldwork itself is, for the vast majority of students, interesting. Getting out of the classroom, changing the environment is certainly an advantage in the process of mastering new tasks. In our case, field classes are in the city center, the most beautiful part of the city, which is also the place visited by tourists the most – the target group of our examiners. The vibrancy and diversity of the city center is certainly an environment in which learning and acquiring new skills is fun, but also memorable. Such an informal atmosphere also contributed to lowering the anxiety of speaking in a foreign language.

"Schools exist to serve students and to expand their skills and knowledge. Still, there are many dynamics within a school that may undermine that primary objective. The role expectations of anyone in the status of student can be complicated by variables such as ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic standing" (Ballantine et al., 2018, p. 337)

The inclusion of international students in a group of Croatian students within the framework of the institution, the classroom, is always challenging. If it is a larger group of students, there is often a diffusion of responsibility in which those students who are reluctant to speak English or who are simply lazier, leave this "obligation" to their colleagues. Also, after classes, students disperse and there is no further interaction. The result is most often - international students are on the sidelines, in their own groups.

Such contexts, in which they are put in the same situation, where they are now one group, one collective in which the feeling of "we" is created, and the tourists they examine are "they" is definitely a much more efficient way of integrating international students and homogenizing the group in general. The task they get connects them, creates a sense of closeness, they have at that moment the same goal, the same interests and equal roles. Furthermore, everyone must speak a non-native language.

Moreover, when students finished the task, many approached and reported that they did not expect to be so successful in communication and many of them who previously expressed anxiety about the task returned vividly impressed by their own achievement. It is important to note that students were not forced to communicate because other team members could

conduct an interview if one felt discomfort. Thus, the idea of allowing them to start conversation when they feel ready actually made them more willing to participate.

7. Conclusion

This kind of teaching has many more advantages and results than one might assume at first. There are clear, visible goals of an interdisciplinary approach and combining Business English and Sociology. In ESP context this field work provides an example how language can be intentionally put outside the focus but it still remains a crucial part of the task, a tool without which the task cannot be done. However, there are also those advantages that are not, perhaps, obvious at first, but are not less important. The outcomes of this kind of class are using business English in real situations with real people in an international context, learning how to set up research drafts, how to perform a semi-structured interview and understanding research thinking. It also contributes to practicing social skills, both with people who were interviewed and among the members of the team.

This type of interdisciplinary approach strengthens individual motivation, it brings students into real interaction and communication and contributes to homogenization of the group and integration of foreign students. While establishing contact with new people students also get the opportunity to meet other cultures, practice cultural relativism, and thus connect sports and tourism as two extremely important branches and learn how to deal with foreign language speaking anxiety.

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