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STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF TEACHING METHODS USED IN BUSINESS ENGLISH CLASSES IN ECONOMIC UNIVERSITY

Анотація. Досліджено як сучасні студенти економічного університету сприймають запропоновані їм інноваційні інтерактивні методики викладання ділової англійської мови. Здійснено аналіз особливостей сприйняття традиційних та інноваційних методик викладання ділової англійської мови студентами та кількісний аналіз використання викладачами конкретних методів викладання на заняттях. В дослідженні взяли участь 250 студентів та 12 викладачів Тернопільського національного економічного університету. Тестування студентів та аналіз даних показав, що студенти надають перевагу інтерактивним методам викладання, проте традиційні методи використовуються частіше на заняттях.

Ключові слова: *інтерактивні методи викладання, традиційні методи викладання, групові дискусії, учбові ситуації, проблемне навчання, мозкова атака.*

Abstract. Batryn Natalia Volodymyrivna, Shylinska Inna Feodosiivna.
Students' Perceptions of Teaching Methods used in Business Classes in Economic University.

Introduction. Nowadays many teaching methods and strategies are available in higher education offering instructors various alternatives to achieve their teaching goals. A new age of learners requires proactive approaches to integrate innovative teaching into classroom. However, students respond differently to a variety of teaching methods having their personal preferences. Students' evaluation of teaching strategies is an effective tool that can provide valuable feedback on what they perceive to be more appropriate for them in the process of learning.

Purpose. The purpose of this study is to determine students' perceptions of selected methods used for teaching Business English course in economic university and identify the teaching methods that lead to quality teaching and learning.

Methods. Mixed methodology was applied for the study. A total of 250 undergraduates in Ternopil National Economic University, Ukraine completed a questionnaire about the teaching methods used by their instructors in Business English classes representing their perceptions of the most effective ones. 12 instructors of Business English were interviewed during the second stage of the study providing wider responses in regard to what methods they use in the classroom and why they consider the selected methods to be effective in terms of quality teaching.

Results. The findings revealed that the interactive methods and problem based learning were identified by students as preferable; however, traditional teacher-centered methods were determined as the most often used. Aligning the teaching strategies with preferences of the students improves learning; however, it is important to consider the educational environment in Ukraine and to align the teaching strategies with both students' perceptions (based on their preferences and learning styles) and educational environment (including instructors' workload, student/teacher ratio, number of contact hours per week, etc).

Originality. Most research studies investigating the application of innovative interactive teaching methods focus on the advantages of their use. Students' evaluation of teaching methods and strategies is a valuable feedback on what they perceive to be more effective for them. Besides, instructors' choice of teaching methods can be directed by several arguments including the conditions that universities provide in Ukraine today. Therefore, the significance of the study and the implications of the potential results are based on effective solving the dilemmas that many instructors face today when integrating innovative teaching methods into the classroom experience.

Conclusion. Aligning the teaching strategies with preferences of the students is important. However, in unfavorable environment that does not support the learning process due to several circumstances, it is necessary to investigate what teaching strategies are applied and why the instructors consider the selected teaching methods to be effective under the particular conditions. Then it is critical to find out the ways to implement innovative teaching methods that fit students' preferences.

Key Words: *traditional teaching methods, interactive teaching methods, group discussion, case-study, problem based learning, brainstorming.*

Introduction

Nowadays many teaching methods and strategies are available in higher education offering instructors various alternatives to achieve their teaching goals. A new age of learners requires proactive approaches to integrate innovative teaching into classroom. However, students respond differently to different teaching methods having their personal preferences. Students' evaluation of teaching methods and strategies is an effective tool that can provide valuable feedback on what they perceive to be more appropriate for them in the process of learning.

Problem statement. The instructors in Ukraine have flexibility to employ the methods they find to be effective, but due to the long-term difficult economic and political situation in the country that negatively influences the professional development of educators, it is not exactly clear what methodologies and strategies are being applied in the university classes and how the students perceive the selected teaching methods for learning different disciplines.

The Government of Ukraine approved a plan aimed at enhancing learning English for the period until 2020. According to the materials represented in the Government Portal, this plan “takes into account the requirements of the modern globalized, information-technological society and focused on the modernization of training teaching staff, improvement of postgraduate education of teachers, introduction of international standards for evaluating students, teachers and staff” [2]. Education plays a vital role in the development of any country, and educational system in Ukraine is continuously changing in order to provide a quality education to the ambitious young people in modern globalized world. Good knowledge of foreign languages became of great significance, and many research studies explored the effective innovative methodologies to improve the learning/teaching process. However, less research focus was on the students' perceptions of appropriate teaching methods and their preferences in regard to the teaching strategies applied in the Business English classes.

Analysis of recent researches. Applicability of a wide range of innovative methods has become a subject of investigation of many scientists both in Ukraine

and abroad. The problems of teaching methods have been investigated by Karayeva T.V., Danylenko L. I., Koneshchuk V.V., Borysko N.F., Yakovleva, N. O and others. However, the researchers were focused mostly on the effective use of innovative methods of teaching to justify that application of interactive teaching methods is more productive in the learning process. Foreign researchers highlight the importance of English language teachers' awareness of the innovative teaching methodologies in language learning and the ways to use effectively these methodologies in regard to learners' reactions to them. It is significant to receive positive feedback about the implementations of these methodologies from language learners [5, p. 309].

Purpose statement. The purpose of the study is to evaluate students' perceptions of various teaching methods and strategies used in Business English classes and identify the teaching methods that lead to quality teaching and learning.

The objectives of the study are to explore how often the selected teaching methods are used by instructors; to analyze the opinion of students about the teaching methods they perceived as the most interesting (least interesting) and the most effective (least effective); and to develop recommendations for improving the teaching process by taking students' perceptions into account.

The sample population for this study is 250 students of Ternopil National Economic University, Ukraine (148 females and 102 males), and their perceptions of appropriate and preferable teaching methods provide valuable ideas for scholarly investigation. The research questions are the following: (1) What teaching methods are the most frequently used by the instructors in Business English classes in the university? (2) What teaching methods are the most (least) interesting and appropriate for learning Business English? (3) What teaching methods are the most effective in Business English classes? Mixed methodology was applied to conduct the research study. During the second stage 12 instructors were interviewed providing their responses in regard to what methods and why they apply in their classrooms.

Research study description. The language learning process is highly individual and complicated. In traditional classroom teaching in Ukraine, a teacher lectures content while students listen, take notes and participate in class activities. Traditional methods have both advantages and disadvantages; however, the use of traditional methodologies in Ukraine is caused rather by the external circumstances (e.g. huge content amount in one class per week) than educational objectives to provide high quality education in the classroom.

Business English is taught to a wide range of students in full-time education preparing them for business careers. Traditional teaching in Business English makes students learn long lists of phrases which are supposed to help them to develop skills through learning by heart the appropriate vocabulary. However, there are students that prefer the traditional learning style that enables them to passively participate in classroom with the instructor clearly presenting teaching material and solving all the problems that will be a part of their final exam. There are students, as well as teachers, who are used to the traditional learning and do not want to adapt to new learning environment.

At the same time, institutions of higher learning across the country are responding to political, economic, and technological pressures to become more responsive to the students' needs and more concerned about high quality education. Educators feel the pressure to lecture less, to create more interactive learning environments, to integrate technology into the learning experience, and to use student-centered methods in the classroom. Active learning involves students working on their own or in groups and teachers promoting active learning focus less on transmitting information to students and more on developing students' skills. Students are encouraged to pursue higher-order thinking, such as analysis, synthesis, and evaluation of information [2]. Learning is enhanced when students become actively involved in the learning process. Students' engagement in the learning process stimulates their critical thinking. Although there are times when lecturing is the most appropriate method for disseminating information, current thinking in university teaching and learning suggests that the use of a variety of instructional

strategies can positively enhance student learning. It is critical that teaching strategies are carefully matched to the teaching objectives of a particular lesson [2].

According to Kutbiddinova , Eromasova , and Romanova (2016), ‘the active and interactive methods allow sharing information, receiving feedback, solving together the arising problems, simulating the educational situations, evaluating one’s own behavior and the actions of other participants, diving into the real atmosphere of business cooperation in solving problematic issues’ [4, p. 6557]. The researchers emphasize the use of cooperative learning methods, group discussions, debates, business simulation games, case situation analysis, project method, social-psychological training, moderation, computer simulations, and others. The main advantage of interactive methods is that “the students form the professional competences, develop analytical thinking, mobilize the cognitive powers, an interest in new knowledge is awakened, and the creativity of personality is revealed’ [4, p. 6557].

Obviously, there is no single best method for everyone in all contexts, and that no one teaching method is inherently superior to the others. Besides, it is not always possible to apply the same methodology to all learners, who have different learning styles and needs. However, applying the most appropriate method for that learner’s specific objectives, learning style and context is extremely important for instructors.

The study was conducted at the Ternopil National Economic University, Ukraine. 200 students completed a questionnaire designed to determine their perceptions of the various teaching methods used for teaching Business English in the university. The questions were developed to find out their opinion about how often the selected teaching methods were used by their instructors. A four-point Likert scale was applied suggesting the answers ‘always’, ‘regularly’, ‘sometimes’ or ‘never’ (4, 3, 2, 1). Before completing the questionnaires, the students were provided with a description for each method and had a short conversation with an instructor to ensure that they have no questions in regard to terms’ definitions. Besides, the students were asked to rate the selected teaching methods using a five-point rating scale and clarify reasons for their choices.

Finding of the study. The analysis of findings was reflected in a tabular form.

Table 1

Students' reports regarding the use of selected teaching methods

Selected teaching method	Always	Often	Sometimes	Never
Traditional methods	55	154	41	-
Interactive methods	33	75	110	32
Group discussion	54	156	40	
Individual presentation	-	168	56	26
Individual assignments	24	45	164	17
Group assignments	43	179	21	7
Brainstorming	28	145	56	21
Role play	-	14	107	129
Workshops	-	46	143	61
Seminars	-	-	61	189
Case study	-	84	147	19
Problem learning	-	52	148	50
Lecture	51	34	165	

As it is shown in Table 1, both traditional and interactive methods were used in Business English classes. 60 % of students reported that traditional methods were *often* used, 24 % reported them as *sometimes* used, and only 22 % reported them as *always* used. Interactive methods were reported by 13 % of students as *always* used, by 30 % as *often* used, and by 44 % as those that were *sometimes* used. According to the findings, 21 % stated that group discussions were *always* applied in the classes, 62 % stated that group discussions were *often* applied, and 16% noted them

as those that were *sometimes* applied. Individual presentations had been *often* used (as reported by 32 % of students), however, 10 % noted that individual presentations were *never* used in the classes. High proportions of the students also reported a certain amount of use of the brainstorming: 58 % reported its use *often*; 11 % reported its use as *always*. Case-study method was reported as *often* used by 59 % of students, and as *sometimes* used by 33 %. By contrast, nearly the half (51 %) reported that role play had *never* been used in the classes.

The implication is that the undergraduates have been exposed to wide available variety of teaching methods, and that instructors used both traditional and interactive methods in their classes. The reasons may be in the larger numbers of students enrolled in the classes, the shortage of suitable venues for other teaching methods, and the relatively small number of hours for one semester. The traditional methods (lecture) can be relatively effective with large classes and useful where there is insufficient equipment or resources to allow learners to work individually or in small groups. However, recent technological advances have made it possible to bring active learning into large classes. Blended learning can provide a platform for dealing with big classes and at the same time maintaining active students' involvement.

Table 2

**Students' ratings of and reflections on selected teaching methods used
from less to most interesting**

Selected teaching method	1 less interesting	2	3	4	5 most interesting
Traditional methods		34	90	76	50
Interactive methods			16	50	184
Group discussion			167	52	31
Individual presentation	83	28	94		
Individual assignments	47	56	71	76	
Group assignments	39	36	58	99	18

Brainstorming	87	71	38	40	14
Role play	56	44	20	82	48
Problem learning		35	43	40	132
Case study	12	44	46	73	75

Table 3

Students' ratings of and reflections on selected teaching methods used from less to most effective

Selected teaching method	1 less effective	2	3	4	5 most effective
Traditional methods		19	90	65	76
Interactive methods		41	16	50	143
Group discussion			150	101	49
Individual presentation	52	28	132	38	
Individual assignments	28	60	63	65	34
Group assignments	19	27	78	99	27
Brainstorming	104	64	25	32	25
Role play	10	51	77	75	37
Case study	10	38	46	70	86
Problem learning			72	76	102
Lecture	28	45	60	48	69

As shown in Table 2, students prefer interactive methods (as reported by 74 %) to traditional methods. 33 % of students do not like individual presentations, and 35 % of students surprisingly do not find brainstorming to be interesting. The preferable methods are problem learning, case study, role play and group assignments. However, 54 % still consider lecturing to be interesting. These findings imply that students found the lecture method, group discussion and group assignments relatively interesting. Some of the students were interviewed and asked to explain their answers. They perceived the lecture method as still interesting because ‘the instructor explains all the necessary material to us, it is suitable for the large classes, and it saves time as the instructor is doing more during the class’. From the reasons provided by students, it appeared that much emphasis had been

placed on teacher-centered strategies. However, when teacher-centered strategies dominate they promote passive learning and limited students' engagement. The reasons that students preferred group discussion as interesting were the following: "we find it to be interesting because we can share our ideas and learn from each other, we can have a good opportunity to voice our opinions and improve our communication skills, it is not easy to attentively listen to the instructor for a long time". The reason for perceiving the role play method as *interesting* was the following: "we actively participate in our learning showing our skills and talents and deepening into the situation, therefore, we have a better understanding of what we are learning".

During the second stage 12 instructors were interviewed. Data analysis showed that instructors were aware of the advantages of modern innovative teaching methods and they agreed that innovative interactive methods of teaching are more effective than traditional methods. However, there were some changes in the university that influenced them to return to traditional teaching methods. Eight from twelve instructors named the student/teaching ratio in the class (approximately 25-30 students in the class in comparison to 15 students five years ago) and decreased number of hours per week for Business English (two hours per week) as the most critical in their decision in regard to teaching method choice. Therefore, lecturing seems to be more appropriate in the overcrowded class which is delivered out once per week. Also, instructors mentioned they feel overloaded and experience lack of time, while use of interactive teaching methods requires more time for preparation.

Conclusion. In Ukraine the instructors of Business English apply traditional methods of teaching because they are impacted by the educational environment that does not support the application of innovative methods. However, there is need to change to the modern methods because it makes students become active learners and it fits the students' perceptions of effective (interesting) teaching methods. Therefore, it is necessary to investigate what teaching strategies are applied and why the instructors consider the selected teaching methods to be effective under the particular

conditions. Then it is critical to find out the ways to implement innovative teaching methods that fit students' preferences.

Future areas of research. The findings of this study would be relevant to teachers, students, university administrations, and Ministry of Education. Effective innovative teaching methods improve the performance and learning of university students. The future areas of research should be focused on the ways of improvement the dialogue between instructors and university administrations in regard to application the effective teaching methods to achieve quality teaching under the challenging conditions in Ukraine.

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