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Teaching students writing employment documents in English

Social and economic transformations in the world and changes in educational paradigm open an opportunity for future specialists to academic mobility and possible integration into the world labor market. Consequently, the problem of teaching students how to write such employment documents as a cover letter and a resume in English is the focus of this article. The need for acquiring writing skills by students of economic specialties enhances the teachers of ESP to find and elaborate effective tasks and approaches to teaching writing. The overview of the pedagogical literature and practice analyzed in the article helps to define theoretical prerequisites of writing and suggest ways for mastering writing skills by students in accordance with the latest trends in the methodology of teaching ESP.

Key words: professional writing, cover letter, resume, theoretical background, methodology of teaching ESP.

Introduction

The opportunity to travel and work abroad gives a chance for Ukrainian students to be a part of the world labor market, so they need to learn the standards of foreign companies in employment process, to acquire the knowledge of the work search procedure. Thus university students need to master their writing skills when preparing employment documents as the first step in building their career. In that context it is significant for ESP teachers to put forward effective means of teaching writing as a meaningful communication for satisfying essential needs of students and assist them in realizing their objectives. One of such means is interactive techniques of teaching, when students work in small groups, in pairs to collaborate their linguistic, cognitive, social and creative efforts in order to present a final product of their activity.

This study examines theoretical research works and findings of prominent scholars devoted to facilitating the teaching/learning writing, which can create a basis for elaborating effective writing exercises for students. Also, the task of this article is to find ways for enhancing motivation to write employment documents, raising students' awareness of the writing process, develop their writing styles as a part of their communicative competence formation. Learning different concepts about academic writing and handling written tasks is aimed at mastering English as a powerful means of international communication nowadays.

Having defined the tasks of the research, we can determine the ***purpose of this paper*** which is condensed to the analysis of the relevant literature, description of the modern trends in teaching writing with the emphasis on interactive methods, establishing peculiarities of designing and writing cover letters and resumes, elaborating recommendations for developing effective exercises aimed at handling writing problems while creating employment documents. So we can formulate the following ***thesis statement***: the need to build a successful career motivates the students to learn how to prepare and present effective employment documents, in particular, a cover letter and a resume, so the teachers' task is to organize a proper educational environment for interactive teaching/learning activities with the help of elaborated exercises for enhancing students' willingness to write, to assess and evaluate critically their pieces of writing.

Review of Relevant Literature

The problem of teaching students writing different texts, such as essays, reports, business letters, memos, abstracts and so on, has always been in the center of scholars' attention. The ability to write according to conventions adopted in the Western culture will permit future specialists to cope with the tasks at work, especially when they do business and develop mutual economic relations with foreign business partners. Researchers (C.L. Bovee, M. Doherty, M. Guffey, L. Lougheed, S. Ober, J.F. Trimmer, M. Wilson and others) studied psycho-linguistic and didactic preconditions, necessary for substantiating their theories aimed at improving students' writing skills and mastering their communicative competence. Numerous methods how to organize the writing process and motivate students to create their pieces of writing, which reflect different genres, have been proposed. In particular, specialists in academic writing pay much attention to teaching

writing essays [1; 137, 2; 145]. Researchers state that writing as a «productive skill in which students are expected to communicate their ideas with others in a written form» is one of the most challenging tasks for English language learners because it is «an accuracy focused activity as well as an act of communication where one can practice their skills of using grammar, vocabulary and also put their ideas in a coherent fashion» [3; 9].

Besides researchers' works devoted to the methodology of teaching students writing essays, there are a lot of studies focused on the problem of teaching writing abstracts. Students need to know certain rules of writing such texts if they want to publish their articles in scientific journals or conference proceedings. Sometimes abstract as a part of a scientific publication is confused with resume, which in Western culture is meant to be used in employment practice, so students need to know the difference between these two genres. Some researchers (T. Korzh, N. Glazko, L. Gavrilov, I. Sannikova, E. Timofeeva and others) pay much attention to the problem of teaching students writing abstracts, which is «a 'lighthouse' in the world with overcrowded and saturated information systems» [4; 38]. Professor P. Sysoev in one of his articles also dwells upon that issue as students need to be taught how to describe briefly their research project when applying for a grant or when publishing the results of their research activity [5].

So we can witness a great number of works which highlight the peculiarities of teaching students writing, describe the methodology and offer relevant exercises. At the same time despite numerous works of researchers and considerable contribution to the methodology of teaching writing, the problem of teaching students writing employment documents in the course of ESP remains actual. That is why this problem requires further research to provide teachers/students with a sustainable theoretical foundation of the effective teaching/learning method, with elaborated practical recommendations, which will enhance the quality of training. Hence, we move to the discussion and presenting the main part of our research.

Discussion

In the paradigm of competence approach to teaching ESP it is necessary to prepare students for performing future professional activity with the help of acquired skills, including writing ones, which future specialists will use both within their own country and abroad. An important skill is the one connected with handling employment procedure, when would-be employees will have to fill in application forms, compose cover letters and compile resumes in the first part of their job search activity. Teaching students with the purpose of acquiring such skills requires also providing them with the knowledge of socio-cultural peculiarities of application procedure, because in the majority of post-Soviet countries, including Ukraine, abovementioned employment documents are still rarely used by companies. Hence, it is necessary to teach students not only writing employment documents, but also take into account socio-cultural context of using such documents in real situations, whether in Ukrainian or Western companies [6]. Also teaching process should reflect recent and most effective methods and technologies, which can provide up-to-date organization of class activities aimed at developing writing skills. Having undertaken a special research [7], we proved that interactive teaching can be an appropriate way for forming communicative competence, a part of which is developing writing skills with learning socio-cultural peculiarities of business discourse. Therefore we will further describe the main features of employment documents with the overview of writing process and consider some interactive techniques, which we recommend using in order to enhance writing activity of students.

First of all we would like to consider such a document as a resume, which is known to be widely used by different companies in the recruitment process. A resume is a brief account of one's educational and professional experience and qualifications, neatly written and submitted to the chosen company's human resource department. There are different types of resume: chronological, functional, combination. Each company may put forward its own requirements as to the content, structure and layout of this document, but in general it has some common features and sections. The most important information, in our opinion, is the information about the applicant, namely, his/her first and last names, address, and also a profile, which is a short statement about what the applicant's objectives are. In other words, the writer must say what he/she is looking for, using positive language, for example, *«A dynamic Competitive Intelligence (CI) professional seeking challenges in sales and marketing»*. The profile may be written in italics or it is possible to put a box around it. Some companies want the applicant's photo to be put in the either corner of a one-page resume. The remaining parts of the resume contain information about the applicant's education and qualifications gained at different courses (starting with the most recent dates), work experience (if any) with the indication of the company's name, performed duties (responsibilities), and also there must be a list of relevant for the applied position competencies the applicant has acquired. When writing their resume, students as future ap-

plicants should include any volunteer or unpaid activities because this information can characterize them as responsible and reliable persons ready to help others. It is worth mentioning that job hunters need resumes with so called 'action' words: *participated in, assisted, filed, sold, promoted, etc.* An example of accomplishments list may be as follows: *Increased company revenue by 30% through a new marketing plan; Secured $2 million in capital funding; Directed $500 million purchase of a natural gas company; Created intelligence systems to monitor competitors; Increased energy sales by $1 million through weather analysis.* Mentioning computer skills (Microsoft Office — Word, Excel, Access and PowerPoint; Microsoft Project 98; HTML, Website Creation, Internet Search Engines and Directory Listings) is favorable for the job seeker. Also it is necessary to be precise and short when writing about such competencies, as team player, communicator, etc. For example, it is not enough to say/write that the applicant is good at languages. Instead, the job seeker must specify his/her mother tongue and assess his/her level in understanding, speaking, and writing in the indicated foreign language according to the descriptions of Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. Giving references in the resume is optional.

Furthermore, job application procedure requires writing a cover letter, which is usually attached to the resume. As S. Ober defines it, a job application letter (a cover letter) is a «sales letter» [8; 264] and its writer should apply the following approaches when writing:

• Selecting a central selling theme;
• Gaining the reader's attention;
• Creating interest and building desire;
• Motivating action.

When learning how to write a cover letter, the students must know that it is necessary to follow the requirements common for writing any business letter. Typically a cover letter contains information about the addressee and the date, greeting, three or four paragraphs, formal ending, and signing off. Such a letter must be clear and concise, correct and courteous to create a positive and favorable impression. In the body of the letter it is necessary to include information which does not repeat the one in the resume. It can be a reference to the advertisement where the applicant learned about the vacancy, details of relevant education and/or previous job, a willingness to attend for a job interview. The job seeker may highlight his/her skills and experience that can contribute to the company. All in all the writer must emphasize his/her suitability for the post in question, express his/her enthusiasm to work for the company. It is necessary to concentrate on positive aspects of the job, underline the potential for promotion if the candidate is employed.

So we have mentioned some peculiarities of job search documents, samples or templates of which can be easily found on the Internet. Keeping that information in mind, it will be possible to elaborate effective tasks/exercises to teach students how to prepare such pieces of writing so that they can receive an invitation for the job interview from the prospective employer. In our opinion, based on numerous research works, elaborated exercises must be done in interactive format of class activity, because applying interactive means of teaching can motivate students to write, provide them with necessary knowledge and assistance to acquire the writing skills. That is why now we want to dwell on applying interactive approach to teaching students writing employment documents.

The importance of using interactive activity, which can take different forms in the classroom, has been long proved by various researchers (H.G. Widdowson, N. Brieger, M. Ellis, Ch. Johnson, J.M. Dobson, J. Comfort, D. Nunan and others). They emphasize the effectiveness of cooperative learning, which implies full participation of both teacher and student and the interaction of student with student with the purpose of planning classroom and independent activities, organizing vocabulary, drawing lexical charts, doing other tasks (for example, preparing a project). Interactive learning also implies small-group activity, large group instruction, interacting in pairs, while the teacher becomes an advisor, guide, helper, supporter, and partner in cooperative venture. According to M. Williams and R. Burden [9; 59], learners in the language classroom can be treated as partners by involving them in decisions about what activities to carry out, asking them what topics they are interested in or allowing them to select books to read. Such an approach to teacher-student relations can ensure mutual respect and responsibility for the results of studying, provide information for discussions and writing different texts, which all together promote interaction as a powerful means of forming communicative competence and successful language learning. Interaction in the classroom can be stimulated if the teacher creates a friendly and business-like atmosphere, in which students feel free to communicate using their knowledge and demonstrating acquired skills and thus learn writing in the process of meaningful and appropriate to the context communication, which corresponds with the requirements of communicative and student-oriented approach to foreign language teaching. So we can deduce that the process of mastering

basics of written business communication in the ESP course by the students must be organized in interactive forms of work with sample documents, authentic texts for reading and/or listening in order to learn the structure of business letters, style of writing, special terminology. Also students in interactive activity will expand the knowledge of socio-cultural context of business contacts and learn how to apply this knowledge in modelling situations of business communication. The use of interactive teaching methods in the classroom and individual work will allow students to solve business problems, develop their creative abilities in the process of doing professionally oriented tasks and learn cross-cultural communication standards of writing documentation [10].

The purpose of interactive teaching, as A. Obskov states, is creating by the teacher certain conditions, in which learners can themselves «open, acquire and construct knowledge» [11; 121]. Using interactive teaching methods also stimulates all-round development of students, which implies forming one's own point of view and expressing it in the classroom, supporting one's opinion with arguments, analyzing received information, using creative approach to the learning material [12; 195]. Researchers single out plenty of activities aimed at developing writing skills: (a) work in pairs or small groups of three or four students when organizing presentations and disputes; (b) professionally oriented role plays and case studies while analyzing business documentation and preparing these documents for further use (for example, during the job interview). No doubt, all these activities proved to be useful and must be practiced in the classroom as they promote communication, which in its turn enhances learning vocabulary of business writing, structure and style of business correspondence, socio-cultural peculiarities of the items, which are different for non-native speakers of English. Such an approach to interactive teaching/learning pays a considerable attention to developing communication, to acquiring knowledge about language elements, to carrying out communicative functions in a written form (for example, asking for an interview and/or rejecting the offer, agreeing to accept the position and/or denying some information, and the like). Participating in a meaningful communication, students choose activities they best satisfy their needs as communicators in different social and professional (or, rather, quasi-professional) roles. Pointing out interactive forms of activity as the most efficient in the process of teaching/learning a foreign language, including mastering vocabulary and professional terminology, we can provide students with a powerful means and techniques to form their communicative competence. That is why it is necessary to prepare various tasks for developing writing skills in the interactive format of classroom and individual activities.

As it has been noticed by many researchers, writing allows to present a product of this activity, a piece of text, which serves a criterion of the quality of learning, shows the degree of competence in writing, and in the long run testifies the success of education. Writing as a process requires following certain steps: create ideas, organize them, write a rough draft and polish it by editing and making revisions. To create ideas prior to writing a resume, students need to read relevant materials about it, take notes and evaluate critically peculiarities of the structure and style. Discussing each type of a resume, students interact in small groups of three or four students to express different views so then one speaker from each group presents the results to the whole group. In such a way all students will acquire basic knowledge about the types of resume and will invent ideas how to write them. Also students will discuss the best way of organizing essential structural components of the resume in one coherent text when they get acquainted with the samples and templates of the resume. Reading samples will enhance receptive skills while filling in blanks in the template will develop reproductive and productive skills. In the interactive activity of discussing, arguing, debating students will start working on revising and editing the final text, which may serve as a model for writing a resume which reflects actual information of each student. Also students are engaged in peer evaluation of the written resume, which is interactive in its nature and fosters such skills as listening, responding, agreeing, denying, etc. Students receive feedback from their colleagues (which might be more effective than the feedback from the teacher) and learn in the activity that involves much speaking and listening. So in the described above mode of work students will demonstrate their skills in reading, speaking, listening and writing, providing one of the basic principles of interconnected teaching in all kinds of speech activity. Free samples of resumes can be retrieved, for example, from the web-page https://career.eng.ohio-state.edu/student/resume-templates.php and given to students for reading, analyzing, discussing, evaluating and further creating their own resumes.

The same procedure like writing resumes can be applied when teaching students writing cover letters. First of all it is necessary to plan the letter, to make a list of items that must be incorporated in it. The letter should contain all points in a logical sequence, linking up sentences and paragraphs by means of 'transitions', such as *however, moreover, for this reason, therefore, etc.*, to provide unity and coherence. The first paragraph of the letter states the general purpose; middle paragraphs (body of the letter) provide information

the writer wants to find out (to clarify, to request, to order, etc.). The final paragraph rounds off the letter with a friendly (complimentary) closing line: *We hope to hear from you soon; We are looking forward to your reply; Please contact us (me) if you would like further (more) information.* It is advisable to use the American block system: begin every new paragraph at the left-hand margin with no indentation. Whichever style is used, the writer must be consistent and use that style throughout the letter. Accuracy is also important because careless spelling, punctuation and grammar mistakes in a letter create a bad impression on the reader. All these points about the structure and style should be explained to the students and discussed with them when reading samples and analyzing each part of the letter. This activity can be conducted with the whole class while writing students' personal letters can be done individually and in pairs so that each partner can evaluate the written product of each other (peer evaluation) and express his/her remarks aimed at improving the final text before submitting it to the teacher. Samples of cover letters for reading, analyzing and further writing can be retrieved, for example, from the web page http://www.career.vt.edu/JobSearchGuide/ CoverLetterSamples.html#Sample34.

Conclusions

Thus we have analyzed typical features of a resume and a cover letter that students are supposed to know in order to prepare such documents and present them to their desired employers in the process of their job search. In the cover letter and resume would-be applicants present a picture of themselves that highlights their abilities and accomplishments and quickly communicates that they have enough qualifications for a job interview. A cover letter serves as a sales letter for the applicant's services, so it must be neat, clear, polite, purposeful, accurate, and technically correct not only to make a good impression on the reader, but persuade him/her that its writer is a proper person to be offered a job. Keeping this information in mind, students will in their interactive activity both in class and out of class acquire the knowledge of resume and cover letter peculiarities, obtain skills of writing these employment documents as it is required by the studying program. Also students will learn socio-cultural features of such documents, which will enable them to present their resumes and cover letters in a real job seeking process. So teachers of ESP should pay considerable attention to the problem of developing students' skills in writing employment documents, which will help future specialists to be knowledgeable and competitive on the labor market. This research does not embrace all the aspects of teaching students writing employment documents, so the perspective of our further research will tackle the problem of creating effective tasks aimed at polishing students' writing abilities and preparing them for the second step in the job search process, namely for the job interview and post-interview activities.

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Ю.О.Семенчук

Ағылшын тілінде студенттерді түйіндеме және іліспе хатты жазуға үйрету

Әлеуметтік-экономикалық әлемдегі өзгерістер мен ғаламдық еңбек нарығындағы академиялық ұтқырлық және интеграциялау мүмкіндіктері болашақ мамандарға білім беру парадигмасының өзгерістерін ашады. Сондықтан ағылшын тілінде студенттерге осындай іліспе хат және түйіндеме жазу құралдар әдісін оқыту проблемасы осы мақаланың негізгі бағыты болып табылады. Экономикалық мамандық бойынша студенттерге жазу дағдыларын меңгеруі қажеттілігі оқытушылар жазбаша сөйлеуге оқытуында әр түрлі тиімді құралдар мен әдістерді өңдейді. Арнайы мақсаттар үшін ағылшын тілін оқыту әдістемесін студенттердің жазу дағдыларын дамыту түрлері көрсетіліп, теориялық нәтижелерін анықтау жолдарына педагогикалық әдебиеттерге шолу және талдау тәжірибесі жасалған.

Ю.О.Семенчук

Обучение студентов написанию резюме и сопроводительного письма на английском языке

В статье отмечено, что социально-экономические преобразования в мире и изменения в образовательной парадигме открывают для будущих специалистов возможности академической мобильности и интеграции в мировой рынок труда. В центре внимания статьи находится проблема обучения студентов методике написания таких документов, как сопроводительное письмо и резюме на английском языке. Потребность в приобретении навыков письма студентами экономических специальностей побуждает преподавателей найти и разработать эффективные средства и подходы к обучению письменной речи. Обзор педагогической литературы и анализ практики, представленные автором, помогут определить теоретические предпосылки обучения письму и предложить пути для освоения навыков письма студентами в соответствии с последними тенденциями в методике преподавания английского языка для специальных целей.