ESP TEACHING IN THE MODERN DIGITAL WORLD

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Abstract: For a long period of time, ESP teaching process has been only dealing with teaching specialized and professional terminology and understanding texts whereas nowadays the digital age has transformed the resources and the sources of information into an accessible tool opening new perspectives. However, today’s globalized professional environment asks for its members to also master important communicative skills that strengthen their specialist knowledge if they are to fulfill their tasks productively and secure their way to success. In spite of the probable need for competent communication proficiency, there seems to be deficient available research producing an exact understanding of the methods of teaching professional communication to college students as part of the ESP curriculum. The paper takes into consideration the essential skills supporting rewarding professional communication and tries to discuss a functional combined professional communication example to be used in academic environment, highlighting the use of English in an engineering setting.

Key words: teaching resources, communication, digital world, competent performance

During recent years, the role of educational resources has undergone a metamorphosis. The changes have not only transformed media, they have distributed production of and access to digital resources while altering fundamentally how, when and for what purposes resources are created and used. The metamorphosis has been propelled by the exponential growth of information systems such as the Internet and the World Wide Web, and the ubiquitous presence of enabling technologies in classrooms, libraries, homes, businesses and communities.

The digital age has both changed the nature of resources and information and transformed basic social and economic enterprises. Both the amount of information and access to it has grown exponentially. There were predictions in the past that individuals would have more information at their desktop than was available during an entire lifetime all along the 20th century.

Teaching ESP has always been aimed at developing students' skills of professional communication in English no matter the area of their professional expertise. Literature is reviewed and analyzed in an attempt to give teachers practical advice in three areas within the field of instructional communication: classroom guidance, student learning, and self-presentation. Specifically, nonverbal immediacy and social message strategy employment are discussed as options for improving classroom management and for reinforcing student learning. Suggestions for the proper use of tests and evaluations to boost learning are also addressed. Research on teacher strategy and style are considered as operational instructional strategies. Other factors that students focus on when
evaluating teachers' performance are re-evaluated and classroom applications are discussed.

The educational implications may prove more daunting. Technology capabilities hold considerable promise for teaching and learning, but current practices may prove insufficient in optimizing available resources and preparing individuals to learn in resource-rich environments. Schools and classrooms need to become resource intensive, where digital resources can be readily generated and accessed for specific goals of teachers or students.

Resources are media, people, places or ideas that have the potential to support learning. Resources are information assets. For learning, they must be contextualized to determine situational relevance and meaning. Resources also need to be re-contextualized to enable the use of information gleaned from various resources. Once contextual meaning has been established, information becomes organized as knowledge, operating in a larger context of meaning encompassing relevant patterns, biases, and interpretations.

Resource-based learning involves the reuse of available assets to support varied learning needs. While the concept of resource-based learning is not new, digital environments have been constrained by how resources were created and distributed. Existing resources may be consistent with the needs and goals of designers, teachers and learners, and can be used largely intact; in many instances, however, this is not the case. Individuals must find and adapt resources to meet learning needs unlike those for which it was initially created.

Communicating in today’s workplace requires a mix of language knowledge and business communication skills. English language knowledge gives us the security that we are using the correct forms; communication skills in English helps you build relationships and accomplish tasks. Taken together these two elements will ensure you have the necessary skills to perform competently in English, in a professional environment.

We have to develop the level of English we need to perform effectively in the workplace and feel more confident when dealing with colleagues and partners. By focusing on essential grammar and vocabulary, one will learn how to write more effective reports and emails, participate more actively in meetings and telephone calls, and use English more accurately and fluently in a variety of professional situations.

The last five decades have witnessed vast changes in our understanding of how languages are learnt, and subsequently taught. Empirical results from linguistics, psycholinguistics, cognitive psychology and sociolinguistics have better established the complex nature of language learning: it has become evident that linguistic, psychological and sociocultural factors play a key role in this process.

The process of globalization has entailed a melange of distinct cultures, races, and economies, creating a global village, a border-free environment, and proliferating political and cultural relations of similar values. In today’s multinational and globalized businesses, an internationally understood language
is the sine qua non component, and for many decades now English has enjoyed the status of the lingua franca, which ensures a seamless way of communicating and sending messages worldwide.

How can we open doors for a more personalized approach to teaching and learning? Technology in the classroom can be a powerful catalyst. But while technology is ever-evolving, one thing remains the same: the importance of the teacher in motivating students, customizing instruction for each of their needs, and managing classrooms that blend digital with live instruction.

Teachers will always remain the “gold standard” of quality in education. Technology, in the hands of great teachers, can empower higher degrees of engagement and equip students with the 21st-century skills they will need for success after graduation. Embracing digital learning means appreciating teachers’ permanent and critical role in the classroom, while empowering them to harness the tools that expand their curriculum, and enhance communication with parents, administrators, and individual students.

Great learning for students isn’t a matter of “waiting for super person,” or waiting for technology to become a “silver bullet” for student success. Learning comes from quality teachers who consider high-tech tools—including online books, lessons, and other resources—part of a larger ecosystem of learning in a classroom. Targeted learning—whether one-on-one or in small groups—becomes easier to implement; advanced students stay challenged, and those at risk of falling behind get the remedial help they need.

A teacher once told me, “My classroom is so much more engaging, efficient, and inspiring for students. These students come in each day, set new learning goals with me and work to demonstrate mastery of their subject.” These students set goals, have access to technology tools and resources that allow them to build their own projects, and set curricular goals aligned to the state academic standards to demonstrate their learning.

Technology gives teachers more opportunities to allow their students to go deeper into learning subjects, building their skills in researching, writing, and communicating. And those opportunities extend outside the classroom more easily; far better than can be done through old-fashioned schooling.

So much of the world we live in is digital. College life and the working world after graduation require the knowledge to use technology to communicate, collaborate, and problem-solve. By providing teachers the training and resources they need to implement technology in the classroom, they can change the way students learn and better prepare them for our globally competitive world.

We must remember that this world is both high tech and high touch. Students want both high tech for individualization and flexibility and high touch from great teachers. Computers will never replace people in any setting, especially in the education of our youth. The promise of technology to help our teachers catalyze learning is a promise worth investing in, so that our teachers can motivate and guide students with the best tools and have even more impact for student success.
Investments in high quality professional learning opportunities to support teachers in designing meaningful, highly engaging, blended learning experiences for students do pay off. Professional dialogue and learning opportunities for a digital world need to be designed and led by professional mentors, teaching colleagues, and school leaders who model 21st century teaching and learning practices.

The transformative power of any technology in schools depends on human choices and circumstances. As digital technologies become increasingly ubiquitous in daily life, it becomes ever more important to consider not only how they might contribute to learning, but also why. Technology has been used mainly to support regular classroom teaching, as operated in the form of distance education, for a minority of students or in specialized departments (often in continuing education or extension). However, in the last ten to fifteen years, technology has been increasingly influencing the core teaching activities of even universities. Some of the ways technology is moving from the periphery to the centre can be seen almost anywhere.

As more instructors have become involved in online learning, they have realized that much that has traditionally been done in class can be done equally well or better online. As a result, instructors have been gradually introducing more online study elements into their classroom teaching. So learning management systems may be used to store lecture notes in the form of slides or PDFs, links to online readings may be provided, or online forums for discussion may be established. Thus online learning is gradually blended with face to-face teaching, but without changing the basic classroom teaching model. Here online learning is being used as a supplement to traditional teaching. Although there is no standard or commonly agreed definitions in this area, I will use the term ‘blended learning’ for this use of technology.

These rapid developments in educational technologies mean that faculty and instructors need a strong framework for assessing the value of different technologies, new or existing, and for deciding how or when these technologies make sense for them and their students to use. Blended and online learning, social media and open learning are all developments that are critical for effective teaching in a digital age, a standard which is looked for not only by teachers but also by learners.

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