

Foreign Language as Teachers' Skill in the 21st Century

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Abstract

The article analyses English language knowledge as one of the teachers' skills in the 21st century. Emphasis is put on English for specific purposes and its significance for the profession of a lower-secondary teacher. The target group of teachers is so-called non-linguists, i.e. those who are not qualified to teach a foreign language.

The paper also describes new features and demands that today's world puts on individuals and which teachers must face. It includes some partial results of a research carried out at the Faculty of Education, Palacký University Olomouc among future lower-secondary teachers. Its aim was to reveal students' opinions on the importance of the English language within their future professional duties.

Key words: lower-secondary teacher, non-linguist, general English, English for specific purposes, teachers' skill.

Abstrakt

Článek se zabývá dovednostmi učitele v 21. století s důrazem na znalost anglického jazyka. Zvláštní pozornost je věnovaná odborné angličtině a jejímu významu pro učitele na 2. stupni ZŠ. Cílovou skupinu tvoří učitelé, kteří nejsou aprobovaní pro výuku cizího jazyka. Příspěvek také popisuje nové požadavky moderní doby, které jsou kladeny na učitele i na jednotlivce. Dále příspěvek popisuje dílčí výsledky výzkumu, který se uskutečnil na PdF UP mezi budoucím učiteli na 2. stupni ZŠ. Jeho cílem bylo zjistit názory studentů, zda je znalost anglického jazyka důležitá pro vykonávání jejich budoucí profese.

Klíčová slova: učitel 2. stupně ZŠ, nefilolog, obecná angličtina, odborná angličtina, dovednosti učitele.

Introduction

Since the beginning of pedagogy as a science and its theoretical principles, there have always been attempts to define main teachers' skills and competencies which are necessary for effective teaching. The emphasis on particular abilities may have changed depending on the needs and priorities of society in particular historic periods.

Teaching as a human process ought to reflect the world around with its specific demands determined by social development. The few recent decades are characterised by terms such as globalization, multiculturalism, information technologies, internet, social nets etc. The nature of many professions has changed and society puts emphasis on new skills, knowledge and competencies. This trend has also strongly influenced the teachers' profession and caused a shift of the teachers' role within the teaching process.

This article primarily aims at analysing the importance of a foreign language within teachers' skills and professional profile reflecting changing needs of modern society of the 21st century. Firstly, it attempts to specify the social and educational features of modern society which may differ from the previous era. Secondly, it closely defines particular areas of foreign language skills, which could be considered essential for the profession of future teachers.

After the theoretical introduction, it depicts the quantitative research which was carried out at the Faculty of Education among future lower-secondary teachers. The main objective of the research was to reveal students' opinions on the significance of a foreign language (concretely English) within their future profession and their notions about effective and competent foreign language teaching which is compulsorily involved in their study at the Faculty of Education.

Teachers' skills in the 21st century

To begin with, we need to specify 2 terms which may be mixed up: competence and skill. Kalhous and Obs (2002) quote Švec, who points out that competence is a broader term than skill including three main components: behaviour, knowledge and experience. When talking about teachers' skills, it is significant to mention Kyriacou's publication *Essential teaching skills* in which the author says that "successful teaching skills crucially involve knowledge, decision-making and action" (Kyriacou, 2007, p. 1). The need to state and define new skills and competences of a teacher of the 21st century has already been reflected in pedagogical literature. Holoušová (1999) points out that

a teachers' role as the main source of information has been reduced due to a rapid development of technical and scientific progress. Moreover, students have large possibilities to look up information on their own. A teacher then must intensively study the latest trends and have general knowledge relating to the main areas of human life.

Besides gaining new knowledge and information, in the world of media it appears to be necessary to sort this information and critically assess its value which correlates to a skill called critical thinking. As it is indicated in the publication *Man and education in an information society* by Sak and col. (2007), expansion of medial impact has strengthened a human concern about the fact that it could lead to dehumanization of the world and uniformity would prevail over heterogeneity of human opinions and attitudes. On the other hand, Rotherham and Willingham (2010) highlight the fact that critical thinking along with problem solving are not new at all. The difference seems to be in the nature and global overlap of media these days.

The most visible trend of the last few decades is the concept of multiculturalism, i.e. co-living of various nations and ethnic groups with different mother tongue and cultural background. The Oxford Dictionary defines multiculturalism as "the presence of, or support for the presence of, several distinct cultural or ethnic groups within a society". An ability to understand, respect and accept diverse culture has become an important part of modern society. If we demand this skill from the future generations it is then reasonable to demand it from teachers as well. In this respect it is worth mentioning a concept presented in an article *Didactic Principles by Comenius and 21st Century Skills* by Jůvová and Bakker (2015) which contains a set of skills required in the society of the 21st century. In terms of this subject, we can list the following skills and knowledge: Social and cross-cultural skills, cross-cultural understanding, to be prepared to thrive in today's global economy, to understand, negotiate and balance diverse views and beliefs to reach workable solutions, particularly in multi-cultural environments, to communicate effectively in different environments (including multi-lingual), to learn from and work collaboratively with individuals representing diverse cultures, religions and lifestyle in a spirit of mutual respect and open dialogue in personal, work and community context.

When analysing the above mentioned aspects, we can notice they have two features which they have in common: worldwide scope and awareness. To gain the information necessary for having objective and emotionally not affected attitudes and knowledge which overlaps the frame of our everyday life we may need a tool – foreign language which enables us to communicate effectively in a large community and comprehend facts properly.

Based on the information gathered above, it is evident that foreign language competences (primarily English due to its world expansion) are inevitable for human personal and professional life. The Czech school curriculum guarantees teaching of the English language from the third grade of primary education to the final grade of secondary level.

1 General English versus ESP

These days, all university students who are preparing for the profession of a lower-secondary teacher are obliged to study a foreign language as a compulsory subject. Foreign language classes are provided either by language centres included in the faculty or university organizational structure or by departments of foreign languages. In this case, we talk about non-linguists – the students who do not major in a foreign language, or in other words, those who are not specialized in teaching a foreign language as their main subject. Even though non-linguists are not supposed to teach a foreign language in their profession, we can assume that they will need it for their future professional duties. The majority of the students prefer English (as it is called *lingua franca* of the modern world) to other foreign languages, followed by German, French, Russian or Spanish in this geographical region. Due to dominant role of English as a communicative tool in the social and educational sphere, we will narrow the following parts of the article to this particular language.

The lessons at the Faculties of Education primarily cover only general English including basic grammatical structures and vocabulary describing everyday situations with a small emphasis on register or professional context. A question which arises from this fact is: Is general English sufficient for future lower-secondary teachers, or do they need to acquire any specific language knowledge and skills?

To attempt to answer this question, firstly we need to define “kinds of English” we may take into consideration. Besides general English, we differentiate ESP (English for specific purposes) which is used especially in concrete professionally-oriented areas. On the other hand, “general English provides basic knowledge and skills of the English language at a school level where the occupational/professional and higher educational orientations of the students are not defined properly” (Islam, p. 69).

Schleppegrell and Bowman point out that ESP students are primarily “adults who already have some familiarity with English and are learning the language in order to communicate a set of professional skills and to perform particular job-related functions (Schleppegrell and Bowman, 1986, p. 2). From this point of view, we can agree that university students (future lower-secondary teachers) should have already acquired a certain level of English language competences during their previous studies and are being prepared for a job gaining specific skills and functions.

ESP appeared in English as a second language methodology in the 1960s. Since that time a wide range of ESP syllabi has been designed for particular job-related needs (business, medicine, tourism, IT, engineering etc.). After exploring available and thematically suitable sources, in fact, there are not many of them (if any) which relate to use of ESP for needs of future teachers. Thus, a main benefit of this topic is its novelty, as it has not been properly researched until this time.

Due to a lack of theoretical findings we have assigned 3 areas of English language skills which can be important for future lower-secondary teachers. The reasons for these choices will be explained subsequently.

- a) English for information technology
- b) English containing pedagogical terminology
- c) English covering the subjects teachers will teach

All these “kinds” of English ought to be embodied in ESP since they are characterised by subject specific knowledge as well as by language skills which may prevail when using them.

1.1 English for information technology

It is undeniable that IT as an inevitable tool for all professions has also its place in education. Internet has become the most common source of information, and the majority of worldwide net and computer programs use English as a means of conveying and understanding this information.

1.2 English containing pedagogical terminology

Regardless of the subjects which teachers teach, studying new pedagogical methods, trends and approaches presents a lifelong process which should not be limited only to facts and findings provided in their mother tongue. The amount of Czech or Slovak sources and foreign ones is still incomparable, moreover, the latest pieces of information usually appear first in international articles or monographs.

1.3 English covering the subjects teachers teach

As in the previous two cases, teachers' awareness of the fields they are specialized in may be enhanced by studying relevant sources which are much wider when searching among originally English written ones. Especially more specialized texts require a certain level of EL skills and specific range of vocabulary.

Not necessarily, merely these areas cover all possible needs of future lower-secondary teachers. On the other hand, we have reasonably attempted to define a language and content framework which may determine professional requirements of this target group. The following step is to find out what current students think about and how they specify their language needs to be useful in their professional life.

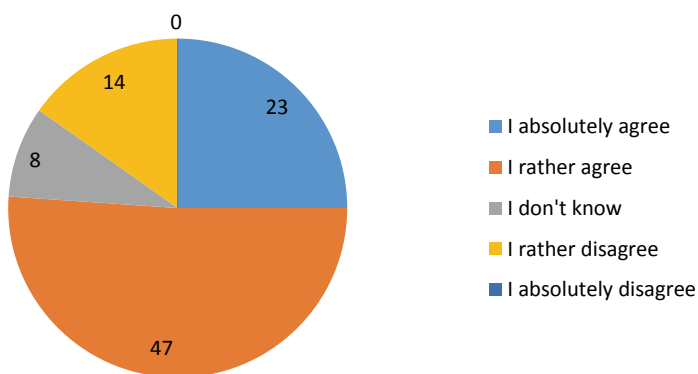
2 Research results

As mentioned above, all the students being prepared for a profession of future teacher are obliged to study a foreign language as their compulsory subject. At the Faculty of Education Palacky University, students (non-linguists) choose among English, German and Russian for non-linguists. Most of them (almost 80%) choose English. The syllabus of the lesson covers only general English, including grammar and vocabulary of basic literature and practising all 4 skills. These students participated in the research whose main aim was to find out students' expectations about EL competences that may be useful and needed when working as lower-secondary teachers.

The students (in total 92 respondents) were given a questionnaire containing 15 items. In this article we will analyse those items which closely relate to an importance of ESP in their curriculum to be well prepared regarding their language competence.

Item no. 7

"Knowledge of English language is important for my future profession of a lower-secondary teacher." Do you agree with this statement?

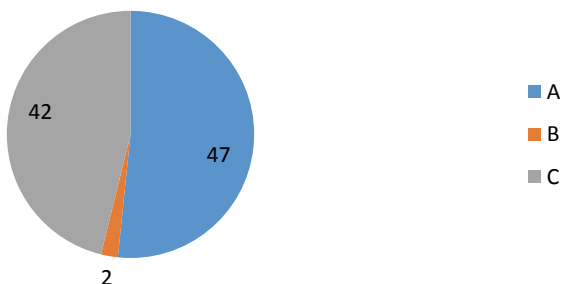


In this item, no student absolutely disagrees with the statement. Approximately 2/3 of all respondents think that English language is important for their future career and only 14 of them rather disagree with it. The next item relates to the "kinds" of English which should prevail in respondents' knowledge.

Item no. 8

Which of these statements do you agree with? Tick only one.

- a) For my future profession of a lower-secondary teacher I need only knowledge of general English.
- b) For my future profession of a lower-secondary teacher I need only knowledge of English for specific purposes.
- c) For my future profession of a lower-secondary teacher I need knowledge of general English and English for specific purposes.

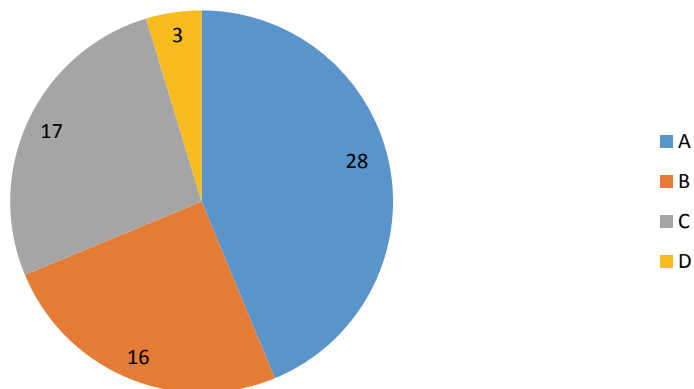


As results show, the majority of students consider only general English as sufficient. The number of other 42 respondents having chosen answer B is not negligible. The next item specifies what concretely respondents find important in ESP.

Item no. 9

If you ticked B or C, which specific knowledge do you need in ESP? Tick one or more options.

- a) information technologies
- b) pedagogical terminology
- c) ESP covering subjects which you are supposed to teach in your specialization
- d) other _____

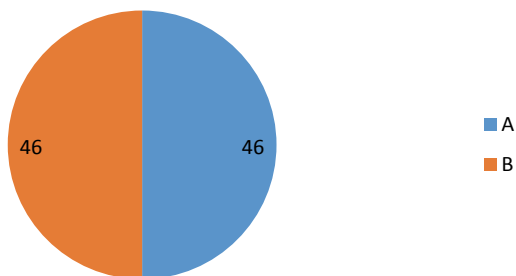


From the offered options most respondents find a field of IT as relevant, approximately the same number of students chose pedagogical terminology and ESP covering subjects which they are specialized in. The following item corresponds to item no. 8 as it detects whether respondents consider teaching ESP in their teacher training important.

Item no. 12

“English lessons at the Faculty of Education should cover ESP” Do you agree with this statement?

Yes No



This item finds out whether respondents would appreciate ESP in the curriculum of English lessons. Similarly to item no. 8 in which the number of respondents who think that ESP is and is not important for their profession is about the same, the proportion

of answers in this item is comparable. It points to the connection between teacher training and students' expectations about their future job.

Conclusion

Social and technical changes which have appeared in the last decades are undeniable. People must be (probably much more than in the past) prepared to face all new challenges and possible obstacles arising from the globalized world. Teachers as main models for young people should possess the qualities which may lead to successful orientation in the modern society. For the above mentioned reasons, knowledge of English language proves to be essential. This article aimed at presenting the needs analysis in the field of English language skills among students being prepared for a profession of a future teacher. Most students realize the importance of English language for their future professional needs but the results are not clear, especially in terms of concrete ESP which should be embodied in teachers' language skills. The next step, which should logically follow, is to do the same needs analysis among practising lower-secondary teachers and compare whether their opinions correspond to each other or are different.

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