Forming ESP oral communication skills of students by means of Zoom

Формування у студентів навичок усного професійно орієнтованого спілкування англійською мовою засобами програми Zoom

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Abstract

The paper revealed the outcomes of the research on the efficacy of the formation of ESP oral communication skills of "International Law" students who studied via online platforms in the period of the emergency state. The practical research was targeted to explore the issues of an appropriate organization for the efficient students' online ESP oral communication skills formation and the advantages for their development provided by online ESP classes. Systematization and comparison of the data of placement and progress tests from the period of the offline academic process (September-November 2021) and the outcomes of online academic period (March-May 2022) were mathematically processed and presented. It was concluded that e-learning using online platforms does not impede the productive formation of ESP oral communicative skills by students, due to the organization of synchronous online communication between the lecturer and students in a remote format, providing students with genuine language practice, increasing their motivation by preparing for performing future professional duties in the virtual environment.

Анотація

У роботі розкрито результати дослідження ефективності формування навичок усного професійно орієнтованого мовлення англійською мовою у студентів спеціальності «Міжнародне право», які навчалися через онлайн-платформи в умовах надзвичайного стану. Практичне дослідження було спрямоване на вивчення питань відповідної організації формування ефективних навичок усного спілкування студентів з англійської мови в Інтернеті та переваг для їх розвитку, які надають онлайн-заняття з англійської мови. Математично оброблено та представлено систематизацію та порівняння даних початкових і контрольних тестів періоду навчального процесу офлайн (вересень-листопад 2021 р.) та результатів навчального періоду онлайн (березень-травень 2022 р.). Зроблено висновок, що дистанційне навчання з використанням онлайн-платформ не перешкоджає продуктивному формуванню студентами навичок усного мовлення ESP завдяки організації синхронного онлайн-спілкування викладача зі студентами у дистанційному форматі, забезпечує студентам справжню мовну практику, підвищує їхню мотивацію шляхом підготовки до виконання

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Bilotserkovets, M., Fomenko, T., Klochkova, T., Shcherbyna, Y., Korniienko, L. / Volume 11 - Issue 56: 73-81 / August, 2022

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майбутніх професійних обов'язків у віртуальному середовищі.

Introduction

In the period of the global lockdown the entire educational system in Ukraine as well as in the whole world was transmitted to emergent remote study. Students, teachers and university professors were torn off from each other and began to cooperate using electronic means of communication. Indeed, the learning outcomes during that period will be understood only after the end of the pandemic situation, so it is too early to give any assessments now. Meanwhile, many academicians have already revealed that the quality of education has significantly decreased, as facing the force majeure situation, they were not equipped with all necessary knowledge and technologies that could fully replace offline teaching (Bugreeva, 2021; Mazlan et al., 2021; Suardi, 2020).

Nevertheless, when the state of emergency in Ukraine in spring 2022, caused by the full-scale military invasion, has led to the immediate transition to the distant mode of learning in all the educational establishments, academicians have already been experienced in applying various digital tools. Besides, the need for skills of professional virtual communication, that enables efficient fulfillment of working duties under conditions of emergency states, time or distance obstacles, the lack of mobility, were highlighted.

This study is targeted to explore the possibilities of training English for Special Purposes (ESP) oral communication skills of "International Law" students in a digital network. It is essential as, according to Ukrainian educational standards, university graduates, who major in "International Law", must have "the ability to communicate in oral and written forms in native and foreign languages, solving the problems of interpersonal and intercultural professional interactions" (Zapara et al., 2022). Besides, in the context of a global pandemic or any other state of emergency, there is an increasing need for the study of teaching foreign languages for international professional communication not only in-person, but also in an online format, because currently many international conferences, forums, and meetings are held remotely (Bates, 2015).

Theoretical Framework

Apparently, the aspect of "speaking" plays a key role in the professional activity of future International Law graduates (Chinvinijkul, 2014; Adewumi & Bamgbose, 2015). According to the professional qualification requirements, the ESP training for students, who are majoring in International Law, is vectored to their preparation for writing and oral communication while conducting business negotiations with partners from other countries; advising foreign colleagues or clients on legal issues; public representation of the interests of Ukrainian companies or clients in international judicial bodies; implementation of legal support for the economic, political or civil international activities of organizations; participation in international conferences and professional development programs (González Ramírez, & Ramirez, 2015; Bykonia et al., 2020).

The linguistic component of the ESP training content includes: a) a certain command of lexical and grammatical means of ESP oral communication in the field of jurisprudence; b) speech, sociocultural, intercultural, professional knowledge; c) types of dialogues and monologues used in oral communication in the field of jurisprudence; d) spheres and topics of oral intercultural communication; e) texts on the legal specialty; f) situations of oral intercultural communication in the field of jurisprudence; g) paralinguistic means of oral communication of a lawyer (facial expressions, gestures, posture, etc.) (Chinvinijkul, 2014; Bykonia et al., 2020).

Oral communication is impossible without understanding the speech of an interlocutor, since in the process of verbal communication, everyone acts as both a speaker and a listener. The process of teaching ESP speaking can be presented in stages as follows: reproduction of sounds and sound patterns; use of stress in words and sentences, intonation patterns and rhythm;

selection of appropriate words and sentences depending on the social environment, audience, situation and topic; organization of narration in a logical sequence; using English as a means of expressing values and judgments; the ability to speak fluently and with few necessary pauses. Oral communication can be distinguished into dialogue and monologue forms. The dialogue form involves two or more participants in the communication chain. Dialogue speech affects the communicative functions of the language, so, it implies the desire of the interlocutors to hear and understand each other, the ability to ask a question correctly, the ability to express joy, regret, agreement / disagreement. Monologue speech consists of such units as a sentence and a logically related text, representing a "subject / object" type of communication (report, presentation, message, retelling) (Gürbüz & Cabaroğlu, 2021).

The main requirement for efficient monologue and dialogue communication is the knowledge of the educational material (vocabulary, speech patterns, grammar, visual materials), which is provided by speech exercises and tasks aimed at the development of ESP skills of oral intercultural communication in the field of jurisprudence. These learning communicative exercises and tasks of a professional and intercultural orientation, contribute to the boosting of independent communicative and creative activities of students through the reproduction of real conditions of the professional communication of a lawyer. The result of performing speech exercises and assignments is the ability of the future bachelors to participate in all types of oral communication in the field of jurisprudence in compliance with the linguistic and cultural norms of speech and non-speech behaviour of a lawyer, adopted in the foreign professional subculture of lawyers (Adewumi & Bamgbose, 2015).

Teaching to speak a foreign language on a digital network is not the same as training oral speech in a face-to-face classroom.

On the one hand, the study of scientific sources for the study exposed the widespread belief that online learning is less effective, that students cannot be engaged in a distance learning in the appropriate way, that a teacher, while conducting a lesson online, puts forward less strict criteria for assessing students' work than in a regular lesson in the classroom (Supiano, 2020, April 23). Many educators treated online mode with disapproval, they revealed that it required constant tension and control from the teacher,

dependency on digital tools that impeded the opportunities to listen and see students, monitor the correctness of their language and pronunciation; provide feedback to encourage students' efforts (Al-Nouh et al., 2015; Thakker et al., 2021). Such digital platform, as a free version of Zoom software, for instance, has a number of significant restrictions on time, settings and number of participants. Academicians experienced a number of difficulties related to external factors, such as: technical problems with connection and video broadcasting; the need to register participants and provide access to each conference through a password or personal teacher ID; lack of experience with the program; emotional complications associated with the embarrassment of students to speak on camera, ask questions in chat or go online from their workplace due to different socio-economic conditions of residence (Önalan & Kurt, 2020).

On the other hand, digital modes can contribute to a foreign language training as well. Many video conferencing platforms have the technical ability that enables students hearing sound as loud and clear as possible. The use of the format of webinars in foreign language classes promotes students' genuine language practice and direct acquaintance with the foreign language culture by contacting with native speakers. The organization of webinars with representatives of various companies, having previously agreed on the topics discussions, for example, about undergraduates' internship in companies and institutions, about their careers in a specific field of professional activity, increases the motivation of students to learn a foreign language, the quality of knowledge and their level of communication skills (Kobzhev et al., 2020).

In both contexts, offline and online, it is vital for the instructor to sustainably meet the individual needs of the learner and continually improve own professional, linguistic and computer competencies in order to provide quality teaching (Sosas, 2021).

Methodology

Theoretical analysis, synthesis and generalization of scientific sources were used to prepare the conditions and the materials for the survey. The study was held by lecturers who were watching students' progress during practical classes. In order to confirm or deny the efficacy of ESP oral communication skills by means of Zoom in comparison to offline classes, the data of placement and progress tests from the

period of the offline academic process (September-November 2021) and the outcomes of online academic period (March-May 2022) were systematized and compared. Mathematical methods were applied to measure and assess the results of the experiment.

A sample of 70 second- and third-year students who were majoring in "International Law" was determined for the survey. The research was carried out in Sumy National Agrarian University (SNAU), Ukraine. According to the target of the study, the most important variable in it was the academic environment. So, the authors explored the dynamics of ESP oral communication skills formation of the same group of participants during their offline and online studies. The participants were voluntarily involved in this study. The data concerning the features of students-participants of the experiment are resumed in Table 1.

Table 1.
Students-participants' features

Participants' features	Participants
Age	18-19 years old
Gender	54% female, 46% male
English language knowledge level	A 2 (according to the international certification levels)
Amount of ESP classes a week	3
Quantity of students	70

Source: Authors own conception

The academic discipline "English for International Law students" is aimed to form students' communicative competence, which implies their knowledge, skills and abilities of oral and written communication in English in situations of intercultural and professional interaction. In the course of offline classes, ESP oral communication skills, necessary for a specific future professional activity of students were fostering in an artificially created educational linguistic environment. The students read professional original texts in English, worked out professional vocabulary and terminology in English, watched / listened to audio-video material in English according to students' specialization, studied professional documentation in English, prepared presentations on professional topics in English, followed by discussion.

When the entire academic process in SNAU was transferred online because of the state of emergency, Zoom was chosen for the organization of distance learning of English. Zoom service enabled the organization of synchronous online communication between the lecturer and students in a remote format, where a large number of participants with a camera and a microphone could simultaneously connect to the video conference for a group discussion of topics. Those online classes were reminiscent of face-to-face classes, in a way that they were directed towards discussion, frontal work of the teacher with the group, and work in pairs and small groups in real time. Various forms of information interaction between all participants in the educational process (oral and written communication) took part in Zoom conferences and chat rooms, providing either prepared or spontaneous responses of students with the integrated use of ICT. The application of the format of webinars in ESP classes enabled teachers to create an English-speaking online environment for communication through: exchange of written, audio and video information; inviting guests (experts, foreign specialists, etc.), conducting students' surveys, interviews and their online broadcast. If necessary, the teacher and students could display Power Point presentations, videos, photos, pictures, connect podcasts for all participants and even an interactive whiteboard on which important information could be written; there was also a chat for messages, which was available to all conference participants.

The experience of the previous application of e-learning tools (during the lockdown period in 2020-2021) in the practice of teaching English at the university enabled the authors to elaborate a step-by-step algorithm for working on the platform online using tools of the Zoom program to solve the problems of students' ESP oral communication skills development. This step-by-step algorithm is presented in Table 2.

Table 2.
Algorithm for organizing phased work in Zoom

Learning phase	Tools of Zoom	Types of learning activity
Stage of learning material presentation	Message board Screen demonstration Chat box for questions Reaction ("Raise hand" option)	Explanation of lexical and grammatical learning material, question and answers tasks
Training stage	Message board Screen demonstration Breakout rooms	Development of learning material in training exercises (writing, speaking, listening)
Application stage	Message board Screen demonstration Chat box for questions Reaction Breakout rooms	Practice of writing and speaking
Control stage	Breakout rooms Screen demonstration	Discussion, report with presentation, project

Source: Authors own conception

Criteria for assessing the oral speech of the subjects were worked out от follows: 1) mastering lexical and grammatical means of oral English communication in the field of jurisprudence; 2) the volume of the statement and the rate of speech; 3) the consistency of disclosing the subject of the message (Conrad & Openo, 2018). Students' statements were assessed on a 5-point scale. Exploring students' levels of ESP oral communication skills formation, the authors distinguished minimum, medium, and high levels. The presented criteria for evaluating the oral statements of the subjects clearly demonstrated that the average result in the range of 4.5-5 points indicated a high level of the student's ESP oral communication skills in the field of jurisprudence; the result in the range of 4-4.4 points revealed the medium level; result in the range of 3-3.9 points presented the minimum level; the result is 2.9 points and below corresponds to the lack of the required skills.

Assessment of lexical and grammatical means of ESP oral communication in the field of jurisprudence was carried out through the control of: a) knowledge of English-language legal terms, lexical units, speech clichés and grammatical constructions from texts on the legal specialty and dialogues of legal topics, speech clichés of oral communication in the field of jurisprudence; b) the formation of the skill of lexical and grammatical design of an oral statement on a legal topic. 5 points were received by students who did not experience a shortage of the indicated means of communication and accurately used language units and speech clichés in their statements, without replacing these units with vocabulary and grammar from the everyday sphere of communication; 4 points

– were given to those students who made 1-2 mistakes in the use of English-language legal terms and lexical units or did not use 1-2 etiquette phrases and applied 1-2 substitutions; 3 points were received by students who made 3-4 mistakes in use or absence of 2-3 speech clichés and 3-4 substitutions; 0 points received for an answer meant that more than 4 mistakes in use were made, as well as the absence of more than 3 necessary speech clichés and the use of more than 4 substitutions.

The volume of the utterance and the rate of speech were assessed according to the program requirements: students received 5 points for answers of 11-12 replicas / sentences, with a speech rate of 150 or more syllables per minute; 4 points – were given for the answers of 9-10 replicas / sentences, 130-149 syllables per minute; 3 points – were received by students for the answerers of 7-8 replicas / sentences, 110-129 syllables per minute; 0 points – meant that the students' answers consisted of less than 7 remarks / sentences, less than 109 syllables per minute.

The consistency of the statement revealed the student's ability to express his/her thoughts coherently and logically, with the development of the main idea in subsequent sentences or remarks in accordance with the communication situation. In monologue communication, the means of ensuring consistency were the structuring of the statement (introduction, main part, conclusion) and causal adverbs. In dialogical communication, this function was performed by causal adverbs and the maintenance of the main idea in the entire dialogue. Evaluation scale according to the

criterion is the following: 5 points were received for students' logical statement, in which two means of logical expression of thoughts were used in a dialogue or monologue; 4 points were given for answers, in which one means was used, though in general the consistency is not violated; 3 points were received by students for the answers, in which one means was used, but there were violations of the consistency of the main idea; 0 points revealed that the consistency of the statement was violated, the main idea was not traced due to the lack of means of expressing consistency. Placement test assessment was taken in the beginning of the offline and online learning terms which coincided with the start of autumn and spring semesters of the 2021-2022 academic year correspondently. Progress test assessment was taken in the end of the offline and online learning terms which coincided with the end of autumn and spring semesters 2021-2022 academic year correspondently. The findings of the research were limited to the sample of its participants and the institution where it took place. The sample, consisting of 70 participants determined the margin of error (at the 95% confidence level) for this research at about 4%. The time interval for this survey was limited with the above mentioned term. The obtained data was verified by cross-checking and member-checking. The reliability factor for the diagnostic techniques had a value from 0.85 to 0.91 (at $p<0.01$), that proves their high reliability.

Results and Discussion

The offline learning process was started with the indication of the level of the ESP oral communication skills of students-participants by holding placement test. In the end of the semester the progress test was taken to check in what way the level of the ESP oral communication skills of students-participants had changed. Their oral answers were assessed according to the above mentioned criteria and systematized in Table 3.

Table 3.
The amount of students-participants, showing certain levels of the ESP oral communication skills during the placement and progress tests in the period of offline studies

Students' skills Test	Skills are not developed (less than 2,9 points)	Minimum level (3-3,9 points)	Medium level (4-4,4 points)	High level (4,5-5 points)
Placement test	22	27	16	5
Progress test	18	24	19	9

Source: Authors own conception

After obtaining the data about students-participants' levels of the ESP oral communication skills during the placement and progress tests in the period of offline studies, the authors calculated the ratio of efficacy (Re) for the whole students' group (Bespalko, 2002):

$$Re = a / n,$$

where a is the number of subjects who showed a generally positive result on oral tasks (average score of 3 points and above); n is the total number of subjects in the group (N = 70). So, the received data were the following:

Re (placement test) is 48/70 = 0.68; Re (progress test) is 52/70 = 0.74;
Re dynamics is (0.74 – 0.68) = 0.06

Further, by analogy with the processing of data from the previous semester, the level of development of the ESP oral communication skills during the placement and progress tests in the period of online studies was determined. The obtained data are shown in Table 4.

Table 4.
The amount of students-participants, showing certain levels of the ESP oral communication skills during the placement and progress tests in the period of online studies

Students' Skills Test	Skills are not developed (less than 2,9 points)	Minimum level (3-3,9 points)	Medium level (4-4,4 points)	High level (4,5-5 points)
Placement test	18	24	19	9
Progress test	15	25	20	10

Source: Authors own conception

We calculated for the whole students' group levels of the ESP oral communication skills during the placement and progress tests in the period of online studies according to the same formula (Bespalko, 2002). The received data were the following:

Re (placement) is 52/70 = 0.74; Re (progress) is 55/70 = 0.78;
Re dynamics is (0.78 – 0.74) = 0.04.

Comparative analysis of the data obtained from the offline and online sections showed a positive dynamics of changes in the indicators of students' ESP oral communication skills development, by the insignificant difference between the online and offline ESP learning outcomes (Re dynamics offline = 0.06 versus Re dynamics online = 0.04). Results of the study enabled authors' revealing that, albeit teaching ESP online is different from communicating face-to-face with a lecturer and group-mates in the classroom, but that does not mean that it should be less effective.

Indeed, the quality of education nowadays depends greatly on the ability of people to learn independently throughout life, see the advantages of studying in a place convenient for them, according to an individual schedule and with the possibility of contact with a trainer by means various technical tools. However, educators, who belong to earlier generations, are inherent to operate within the traditional classroom education system (Zawakcki-Richter & Latchem, 2018). Furthermore, they state that the use of computers and special software cannot fully replace the 'live' communication and emotional exchange available in the traditional classroom form of education, which complicates the perception of information and reduces the degree of its assimilation (Zvacek et al., 2019; Bugreeva, 2021). Though, there are obvious difficulties with the perception of the traditional frontal learning format among representatives of Generation Z, which teachers are gradually pointing out. Among them, the frontal learning as a strategy for obtaining information that is not characteristic of the centennials. The linearity of presentation, own passivity in perception, the lack of a quick practical result, large amounts of information make this form difficult to integrate into students' own picture of the world (Grajek, 2016; Yundayani et al., 2021).

Results of the study contributed to the working out methodical recommendations how to make the process of online ESP learning as fruitful for students as the offline one. They regarded functions of an instructor and students, peculiarities of learning materials and technical tools usage.

Apparently, the introduction of online learning requires a restructuring of educational approaches on the part of teachers: they need to get used to the new roles of tutors (facilitators, mentors), who now rely on individual pedagogical support, coordination of the learning process, provision of individual consultations, management of educational projects, etc. In general, the passive form of material perception is a thing of the past. Academicians truly need to realize the necessity to move away from the passive-declarative style of teaching towards the active learning, that involves students' research instead of reading, challenges for students either by discussing some issues or by passing interactive tests instead of teachers' direct control (Bilotserkovets et al., 2021). Given the socio-psychological characteristics of modern students, various options for mostly individualized training, such as "blended learning", "flipped classroom" or "flexible learning", instead of the traditional classroom system, will strengthen their ability to learn thoughtfully and independently, using the enormous capabilities of the Internet, by implying not obedience, but self-organization (Fomenko et al., 2021).

Creative learning materials for the online class should be more dynamic, but prepared according to the principles of micro learning. They should be divided into small but complete modules or blocks of materials. Each module should have three phases: a strategic one – for students to understand what this piece of material is used for. The phase of performance is directed into the practical functioning of the learning material. The self-assessment phase enables students' checking the acquired knowledge (Chamberlin-Quinlisk, 2012). The use of technology needs a general orchestration of the training session conducted on the platform (Sharples, 2013). The essential features of planning and managing classes in online format are associated with the ability to adjust and regulate technologies in a certain way, so that interactivity does not interfere, but promotes effective synchronous communication, as well as the expansion of the geography format due to the possibility of video conferencing with foreign peer students, experts, foreign specialists strengthens students' engagement and motivation.

Conclusions

To sum it up, e-learning using online platforms, caused by the current situation with the state of emergency, does not impede the improvement of the quality of the educational process. In general, work in the virtual educational environment is convenient, understandable and, undoubtedly, contributes to an increase in the efficiency of students' comprehension of the English oral speech; development of their ability to adequately communicate in professionally situations; systematization of their knowledge of ESP. The efficient implementation of Zoom in the online ESP teaching should necessarily include the following aspects: clear planning of the training session and the selection of the essential educational content in conjunction with the use of certain program tools for the best presentation of the material; teachers' and students' digital competence to work with the program; the style of pedagogical communication and didactic technologies of involving students in online interaction, students' abilities for self-organization and motivation.

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