



Development of Learners' Soft Skills in ESP Instruction

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Abstract

We are facing unprecedented challenges - social, economic and environmental, driven by accelerating globalization and a faster rate of technological developments. These global trends are already affecting individual lives, and may do so for decades to come. The development of personal/professional skills, which consist of life/career competences and which are basically referred to as "soft skills" in subject-specific literature, have become an important part of any coursework required to earn Bachelors, Masters or PhD. Skills such as creative thinking, critical thinking, learning to learn, communication and collaboration are value-added skills essential to any career. Consequently, while earning their degree students ought to develop these skills within the framework of three foundational contexts: emotional development, digital literacy and discipline knowledge. Thus, the aim of the current paper is to define the domain of soft skills in the ESP context, as well as thoroughly elaborate and introduce a number of authentic ways and means, which can support the development of these skills in "ESP: Business and Management" course instruction. In order to devise the activities properly we had to provide answers to two basic questions:

- *What competences do students need to thrive and shape their world in modern employment market?*
- *How can these competences be effectively developed in "ESP: Business and Management" course instruction?*

As it has been observed, in ESP instruction the teacher should be committed to developing not only language – communicative competences, but also helping every learner develop as an individual, fulfilling his or her potential [1]. It follows that, the ESP course should be designed around students to motivate them and recognize their prior knowledge, skills, attitudes and values. Students should be offered a diverse range of topic options, and the opportunity to suggest their own topics which should be challenging and enable deep thinking and reflection. In this way learners will be able to link their learning experiences to the real world and have a sense of purpose in their learning. The activities introduced in the current paper are adaptable and dynamic, they give learners opportunity to discover how a concept or a topic can link and connect to other concepts or topics within and across disciplines, and with real life as well.

Keywords: *English for Specific Purposes, soft skills*

There have been many initiatives to address the skills and competences our students need for the 21st century - each relating to different contexts. As it has emerged soft skills is the learning domain that contributes significantly to career readiness and leads to future job success. Efforts to teach soft skills, however, often lead to frustration and disappointment, not because they can't be developed, but because objectives are vague and traditional teaching approaches are not effective. With the changing educational trends, versatility in educational courses, availability of masses of qualified personnel, the competition for job acquisition and job sustainability is becoming more and more tough [4]. To get an edge over the competitors, students are left with no choice but to add values to their hard skills with soft skills to exhibit their true potential. Hard skills are discipline specific academic skills, experience and level of expertise which indicate the knowledge of concepts, principles and methods, procedures and techniques needed for performing jobs, while soft skills are interactive, communicative, human and transferable skills that employees demonstrate unconsciously and routinely on the job [3]. Literature suggests that hard skills contribute to only 15% of one's success, while remaining 85% is made by soft skills. Most employers these days want to hire, retain and promote people who are dependable, resourceful, ethical, self-directed, having effective communication, willing to work and learn and having positive attitude. Though, the importance of soft skills has been recognized throughout the world, the terminology used to refer these skills varies from country to country. Thus, in Australia these skills are generally referred to as key competences, soft skills, generic skills or employability skills, in the United Kingdom: key skills or core skills, while in New Zealand these are referred to as essential skills; and finally: necessary skills or workplace know-how in the United States.



Although, the nomenclature may vary, their centrality to competence of an individual and need and importance especially in today's techno-economic scenario has been accepted and readily appreciated. Thus, the current higher education and training system has to deal with the twin challenge of building both: higher order soft skills as well as specific hard skills because the manpower with only hard technical skills will have little value if it is poor in soft skills. The need of the present time is to find out from industry, business and service sector, their expectations of the type of manpower in terms of both discipline specific hard skills and soft skills and inculcate these in the students through various curricular and extra-curricular interventions. Giving sufficient weightage to soft skills in curriculum of the courses of higher education would not only strengthen the employable skills for workforce effectiveness and competency but also help in building better social and cultural relations leading to success and quality of life. So, effective communication is the buzzword today, whether you are at home, workplace and in society, at national or international level.

Thus, defining the main list of highly-ranked soft skills which ought to be developed in any ESP course we cannot but mention communication skills, collaboration skills or team work skills, creative thinking skills, problem-solving skills, critical thinking skills, learning to learn skills, as well as leadership skills and IT skills.

The use of learning methods for developing soft skills such as: experiential learning, role-play and demonstration, teamwork methods, case studies, problem solving and extra-curricular activities are highly recommended in ESP courses, as they enable the students to use the language in the changing socio-cultural context. The selection and implementation of any method, however, should be conditioned by individual students in terms of their previous knowledge, skills background, learning style, pace and convenience.

The activities in the current paper are designed around the field of Business and Management, nonetheless, they have general use and significance. At root they relate to how we deal with, and work with people in everyday interactions, including colleagues and members of the public. The activities that follow hereafter are introduced in receptive and productive stages, where the students are assigned corresponding tasks aimed at the development of their soft skills.

✚ **Talk about the given topic for one minute answering the following questions.**

Job Interviews

- Are job interviews an effective way to recruit staff?
- How a candidate should prepare for the job interview?
- What kind of clothes are appropriate?
- What body language should be used by the interviewee?

✚ **Practice the given situation at class by means of a role play.**

You are making arrangements for a one-day conference at a local hotel. The examiner is the conference organizer for the hotel and is visiting you to discuss the further arrangements. Find out:

- the capacity of the conference room,
- the cost of the room per-day,
- the equipment available.

Do you think the hotel is offering you a good price for the service?

✚ **Speak about your future career by completing the unfinished sentences.**

Career Plans

Over the next two years....

I intend to...

And I'm going to try to...

If possible, I would also like to...

And I hope to..., although I know it won't be easy.



✚ **Pair work:** Discuss the expressions below and match the words with their definitions.

Work skills

1. Active Listening
2. Proper Etiquette Tips
3. Business Letters
4. Reading Techniques
5. Communication
6. Reports
7. Memorandums
8. Speaking

... having a clear idea of your purpose, audience, subject.

... used to communicate the results of research; title is centered, in ALL CAPS two inches from the

top; after the title, key the body in DS.

... a formal method used to communicate with people outside the office such as customers and suppliers; they are usually printed on company letterhead or stationery.

... preview, skimming, context clues.

... responding with full attention, focusing on main ideas being communicated, using body language

and facial expressions to respond, sitting up straight, leaning forward, smiling, or nodding.

... an exchange of information between sender and receiver.

... modulating your voice; using appropriate body language and gestures; maintaining eye contact

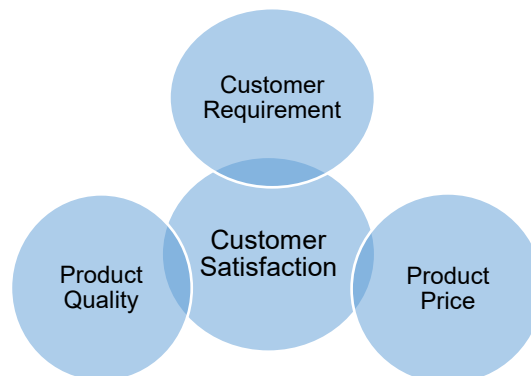
with an audience.

... used for communication with others in the same office; brief, focused on a limited topic, informal

in tone.

✚ **Group work:** Study the diagram and present the roles of the Manufacturer and Customer.

Figure 1: Venn Triple Diagram: Roles of the Manufacturer and Customer



✚ **Express your opinion in 5-7 sentences answering to one of the given questions.**

- Have you ever played the board game Monopoly? Is it a good way to teach children about commerce? Can you think of other fun ways to learn about business?
- Have you considered running your own business? What kind of business would you like to run?
- Should the government do more to support small businesses and startups? What could they do?



✚ **Describe the differences answering to the given questions.**

Managers VS Leaders

- How do they motivate their teams?
- What is the most difficult part of being a leader/a manager?
- Is competition among a team healthy? Why yes or why not?
- How do they go about resolving conflict?
- Who are the most important members of their teams?
- What managerial style do they use?

✚ **Prepare a presentation with one of these topics and present in pairs.**

- Time Management
- Positive Thinking
- When is it time to get a new job?
- Using credit cards responsibly
- Renting vs. Buying

✚ **Use the following phrases to complete the sentences below. Two of the phrases of inviting are informal. Which are they?**

Would like to	How about	would like you to
Why don't you	Writing to invite you	Would you like to

1. going to Saint Sargis Church on this weekend?
2. visit a place of natural beauty like Garni?
3. I am going to organize a presentation about our new product and to be a part of it and give your comments about it.
4. We're to the ceremony of our wedding, which will take place in July.
5. I invite you to a concert taking place in the Republic Square.
6. come to my house to discuss the issues in a comfortable and more relaxing atmosphere.

✚ **Read the question below and give an answer by following how to write a notice.**

You are Aram, the head of the Chess school. Your school is going to organize a competition between the players. Write a notice for your school notice board inviting names of all the interested students.

Key: Optional

NOTICE
CHESS SCHOOL
MARCH 03, 2020

INTER SCHOOL PARTICIPATING COMPETITION

Our school is organizing an inter-school participating competition on March 30, 2020; Monday, at 10 A.M. in the hall. All the interested participants may contact. The deadline is by March 15, 2020.
Aram, Head of the school.

✚ **Arrange the contents of the letter in the correct order of how to write a letter.**

1
2
3
4
5
6
7



The date
The body of the letter
The signature
The salutation
The close
The beginning
The common ending

As it has been observed, the activities in the current paper include and integrate subject-specific language knowledge with soft skills leading to a proper linkage between theory and practice and thus ensuring the successful development of ESP learners' soft skills.

Conclusions

Being vital for the majority of careers, soft skills are specific qualities that companies' recruiters consider desirable for employees to possess. They are often used as benchmarks to rate and evaluate candidates during the recruitment process, especially when reviewing application forms and at interview [2]. We ought to mention that Institutions of Higher Education in Armenia have also realized the importance of developing soft skills in students for making them relevant to the changed requirements of the world of work. Although the level of understanding amongst students varies, one point of consensus is there, that without appropriate soft skills, survival and growth in today's competitive world is not possible, as these skills lead to better performance in workplace. So, we are hopeful that the practical activities introduced in the current paper can serve as an example for the development of learners' soft skills in any specialty, as they incorporate not only subject-specific language knowledge, but also skills and qualities necessary for the implementation of daily business duties such as communication, collaboration, team work, creative and critical thinking, problem-solving, learning to learn, as well as leadership and IT skills.

References

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- [3] The Future of Education and Skills, Education 2030, OECD - <https://www.oecd.org/education/2030-project/>
- [4] The Cambridge Framework for Life Competences, Introductory Guide for Teachers and Educational Managers, Cambridge University Press, <https://www.cambridge.org/elt/blog/2018/04/05/cambridge-framework-life-competencies/>