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**ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING AND TEACHER TRAINING AT
THE UNIVERSITY OF PORTO AND PAVLO TYCHYNA UMAN STATE
PEDAGOGICAL UNIVERSITY: COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS**

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The article presents the comparative analysis of the English language teaching and teacher training at the University of Porto and Pavlo Tychyna Uman State Pedagogical University. Special attention and requirements to the English language teaching and training of English language teachers in the modern society are outlined. Special features of the work of the language departments of the respective universities are distinguished; their curricula, language and training programs, content of language teaching, and teacher training courses are analyzed and compared. Principles of organizing groups, number of students in the class, duration of the class, types of classes, principles of teaching practice organization, and peculiarities of student-teacher-supervisor co-operation are introduced in the article. Suggestions for implementation of the positive experience in the Ukrainian educational system are given.

Key words: English language teaching, teacher training, comparative analysis, Porto University, Pavlo Tychyna Uman State Pedagogical University, department, curriculum, training program, content, facilitator, teaching practice.

Introduction

Nowadays, the development of our country lies in the expansion of international relations and integration into the European community. Various transformations, taking place in the modern society, cause respective changes in the system of higher education. The dynamics of social processes determine new strategic directions of the educational process reformation in order to enable the higher educational institutions to train competitive professionals for various branches of economics and public sector. The topicality of these reformations is often intertwined with the ability to know and speak a foreign language, in particular English, as it is considered a major factor for the future success.

Special attention is given to teaching and learning English from the state and the government. Thus, 2016 was proclaimed the Year of the English language, a number of initiatives, such as «Go Global», running the national program «Ukraine Speaking» were established [5]. The latter is intended to increase the demand for learning English, re-orientation to the use of the English language in all the spheres,



development and introduction of the new standards and content of teaching English as well as assessment of knowledge and skills etc. Another initiative, which commenced in 2016, is a joint project of the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine and the British Council Ukraine – «New Generation School Teacher». It is aimed at the involvement of the advanced experience in the English language teaching and the transformation of the English language teacher training paradigm in the higher educational institutions [4]. Thus, the Ukrainian higher educational establishments are facing an ambivalent challenge – on the one hand, the necessity to give the students of various specialties good command of English in order to make them competitive in the respective branches of economics and public sector, on the other hand, the urgency to train the teachers of English who could bare the above mentioned responsibilities with up-to-date knowledge, skills and approaches.

The aim of the article is to accomplish the comparative analysis of the English language teaching and teacher training at the University of Porto (UP) and Pavlo Tychyna Uman State Pedagogical University (PTUSPU) in order to find out advantages and highlight the drawbacks of both systems with further suggestions for implementation of the positive experience in the Ukrainian educational system. The analysis is performed on the basis of the authors' own experience gained while participating in the EMINENCE project (Erasmus Mundus program, financed by European Commission).

Brief information about the departments. The comparative analysis of the English language teaching and teacher training at the University of Porto and Pavlo Tychyna Uman State Pedagogical University is carried out on the basis of the curricula and the activities provided by the two departments of the above-mentioned institutions – the Faculty of Arts and the Foreign Languages Department respectively. The Faculty of Arts of the UP offers 13 undergraduate courses, 30 Master's courses and 18 doctoral courses in the variety of areas, among which we should emphasize Modern Foreign Languages, Literature, and Cultures, Teaching Methodology, and Translation Studies, whereas a number of courses are taught jointly with other faculties. Apart from the degrees offered, the Faculty also provides a variety of open courses including a range of language programs [6]. The Foreign Languages Department of PTUSPU offers 5 undergraduate courses, 2 Master's courses, comprising Modern Foreign Languages and Literatures, Teaching Methodology, and Translation Studies. The department also runs vocational language training courses.

Although the mentioned courses look similar, it's worth mentioning that the Faculty of Arts provides Teaching Methodology courses only for Master students as the part of «English and Foreign Languages Teaching» Master program in Teacher Training. The graduate students have to take a 2-year Master course in order to get the teaching specialty, if they choose. On the contrary, the Foreign Languages Department has a teacher training program for undergraduates consisting of both language learning and methodology training, which gives the students the possibility to obtain teaching specialty with their Bachelor degree. Master's curriculum enables them to deepen their knowledge in theory and methodology of education and is not mandatory if the student chooses to work in the primary or secondary education.



Another difference that is important through the viewpoint of our research is that there are total 5 years of schooling at the UP (3 years of Bachelor's degree and 2 years of Master's degree) and 6 years at PTUSPU (4 years of Bachelor's degree and 2 years of Master's degree). The different number of schooling years influences the curriculum, structure and the content of the subjects provided at the respective departments. Consequently, all above mentioned differences are reflected in two aspects under research – English language teaching and teacher training.

English language teaching. Learning foreign languages is a very important part of education in Portugal. According to the curriculum of compulsory education, primary school students have to study 2 foreign languages, including English, Spanish, French and German, with the priority traditionally given to the first two. In Ukraine the situation is gradually changing to the same pattern: the students start learning English in the 1st form and add up another foreign language in the 5th. The same importance is given to teaching English through the whole system of education, from primary school to the higher education level. Under such conditions the teachers of English can play various roles in controlling the learning process, either as teachers or as facilitators, leaders, and activity managers. The students will demonstrate a positive response and focus in learning, if the teacher indicates seriousness in teaching without tedium. At present, the field of education is very challenging since there are various issues and criticism especially involving teachers' ability to provide the best service to the students throughout the educational process. Taking into consideration our research made in Porto University, we made conclusion that some factors influence quality of teaching English at the university level greatly. The following aspects are outlined in order to give a complete picture of approaches to teaching English at PTUSPU and UP.

Principles of organizing groups

In the UP the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEF or CEFR) is widely used. It was put together by the Council of Europe as a way of standardizing the levels of language exams in different regions. The CEFR describes foreign language proficiency at six levels: A1 and A2, B1 and B2, C1 and C2. The groups of students are organized according to the level the student is having at a certain time, no matter what department he/she belongs to. Ukrainian teachers may often be teaching a class of students who are clearly of different levels. They may have different starting levels of English or they may learn at very different speeds for any number of reasons. In mixed ability classes students are grouped according to their year of education, representing the same department. First 4 years all the students have «Practice of oral and written speech», then they start to learn «Practical course of the English language».

In mixed ability groups the usual problem with effective teaching of foreign language is that while some students may find the learning task very easy to deal with, others may find it difficult to understand. Besides, learning also depends on what students have brought with them into class since each comes from a different family, a different background and with different school knowledge.



Of course two students can hardly be the same in terms of the language background, learning speed, learning ability and motivation, but grouping of students on the basis of the CEFR provides more transparent, coherent and comprehensive basis for the elaboration of language syllabi and curriculum guidelines, the design of teaching and learning materials, and the assessment of foreign language proficiency.

Number of students in the class of English. The budget cut for education in 2016 was 1.5 billion €, and the national investment in education only now stands at 4.4 per cent of GDP, which is clearly not enough to ensure students with quality education [2].

Changes in curriculum have been approved to further cut the education budget. This includes the enormous increase of class size. The austerity measures also require less working hours for teachers in class which consequently leads to lower education quality. Hayes says there is no quantitative definition of what constitutes a large class, as people's perception of this varies from context to context [3, p. 1]. At PTUSPU, for example, a class with 20 students may be considered large at all non-language departments and super large at the Foreign Languages Department.

In comparison, at the UP now it is a common practice for English instructors to teach a class with more than 40 or even 50 students in groups with various specialties: Applied Languages, Languages and International Relations, Languages, Literature and Cultures etc.

It can be seen that in different context or culture, people have different degrees of tolerance of class size. As Ur concludes, what is relevant to the class considered large one is how the teacher perceives the class size in the specific situation, regardless of the exact number of the students in it. Therefore, a large class is the one with more students than the teacher prefers to manage and available resources can support. From this point of view, large classes usually are considered to pose insurmountable problems for teachers [7, p. 56].

There is no consensus when it comes to the effects of class size on students' learning achievements, but many language teachers take a negative attitude towards teaching English in large classes. We can often hear them say such words as «out of control», «hard to organize class activities» or «impossible to communicate».

Similar worries are also shared by the UP English teachers who emphasize such main problems associated with teaching in large classes:

- 1) control problems (discipline aspects);
- 2) lack of individual attentions;
- 3) difficulty of evaluation;
- 4) learning effectiveness.

As we see, these problems can be physical, psychological but to a great extent technical. It makes difficult for teachers to contact with the students sitting at the back of the class and for the students to get individual attention, and it is even impossible to organize dynamic and creative teaching and learning sessions. This also indicates that teachers need more technical strategies in large class. And they do their best providing more chances for students to participate through individual work, pair work, group work and whole class work and organizing cooperative learning activities such as think-pair-share, three-step interview etc. They are constantly



jig-sawing to develop students' comprehensive language competence and cooperative skills. Though, no matter how hard they try to encourage students to participate, how often they move around during the class or what modern means of teaching they use, they still fail to provide equal chances for 40-50 students, to give feedback in time and to assess students' assignments properly.

Duration of the class. There is no theoretical framework on optimal class duration in Europe. The class is mostly based on tradition rather than on learning theories or empirical investigations. To compare, at the UP the duration of every class is 120 minutes with 5 minutes break in the middle, if any. At Pavlo Tychyna Uman State Pedagogical University the optimal class duration is 90 minutes with no break at all.

On the one hand, the optimal length of the class can depend on the subject. For some subjects, a short «input» type class of 60-90 minutes might be fine, but it seems to be clearly inappropriate for some practical courses and so on.

On the other hand, the question is «How effective is a 2-hour class for the students?» In this case, we think, the principle «the more we tell students, the more they remember» doesn't work. The results of our observation at the UP show that students are fully concentrated on the subject for 15-20 minutes. Then they need a couple of free minutes to relax and to work again. It works perfectly nearly 1 hour, after that the students are getting more and more bored no matter what the teacher is doing. So, at every 2 hours class only 60-90 min are effective, the rest of the time students work automatically and think about everything except the subject.

Things are even worse with 2-hour lectures. How interesting should the information be to keep your full attention for 2 hours?! And what if there are 50-60 other students in the class listening to the same lecture? Being professionally trained and highly motivated, I managed to listen to the lecturers for 2 hours, but I failed to hear and understand what they were speaking during the last 30-40 minutes of the class. Now, let's imagine a student who's got already used to have such long classes, but is much less motivated than me! The conclusion of the observation is that the longer the class is the more different types of activities you need, and even this doesn't guarantee you a success.

Types of classes. At the UP English at all the levels is comprised of two different kinds of approaches - traditional English classes and tutorial sessions. The role of both the student and the teacher is different in each of them. We should emphasize that at the Faculty of Arts of the UP the tutorial course can be classified as tutorial groups and evaluated tutorials. The last type is usually obligatory as its main purpose is in putting more focus on students' academic results.

Tutorial groups are smaller gatherings of students with a tutor (a special group class at the Faculty consists of 16 or more students of different levels who are instructed together). Tutorial groups are formed at the beginning of the academic year and you will be in the same group for the whole year.

Tutorials are more communicatively focused on doing of a particular task than traditional English classes (e.g. reading a poem, an article, discussing a piece of music or art), and sometimes they are devoted to a particular topic. However, the most important difference between traditional classes and tutorials is that the



students do most of the talking in the tutorials – to each other, and to the teacher. Students themselves do almost all the work of the tutorials.

At the University of Porto tutorial groups are very course-specific, require advanced enrollment, and generally meet once a week. Regular attendance is required to maintain enrollment. Each session is a minimum of 2 instructional hours per week. Special group classes usually follow a regular schedule.

The ultimate goal of *evaluated tutorials* is to monitor student progress and to ensure that all students are successful in attaining proficiency due to the state and regional standards. Evaluated tutorials are worth one third of overall marks for each year of English.

Unlike many people's suspicion of the benefits of tutorial classes, the survey results indicated how the positive impact of tutorial classes attracts the students.

There can be a lot of benefits of having groups within the course. We believe that the most important of them are:

- the capacity to monitor and check grades by group rather than entire cohort (It makes a lot easier to check grades. For example, if we tend to check things class by class in daily work, we may go and sit down with a group and check how the whole group is going. If we have got them grouped within the course, we can just call up the relevant grade of that particular group and do not have to wait through every single student that is enrolled in every single way in that course);

- allocating specific tasks or content to particular groups (facilitating customization) (it allows you to make a variety of mini courses within the course. You can set the tasks that are relevant to you. It's the way to have multiple options within one course);

- setting up collaborative tasks or projects to be handled in designated groups (when you've got learners together into a group they can actually work on projects together within the course and have access to each other within the group).

Other than that, it can also provide quite a lot of benefits to the students such as getting knowledge and having more confidence, as well as providing benefits to the teacher, because the students are able to speak English better. In addition, tutorials make all the students participate (even shy or quiet people).

However, it was also observed that tutorial sessions have a lot of problems as well. Among the most important we can mention the following:

- They require significant investment of resources, especially tutor time.
- Tutorial sessions depend on the facilitation skills of the tutor and so may be variable in quality.

- They need to be organized and well managed in order to promote discussion, but also to ensure that the specific learning outcomes for the session are met.

- Tutorial sessions may be less effective if all the students do not prepare adequately (ensuring students come to class having done their reading or pre-work is a fairly common difficulty, especially in mandatory modules).

Ukrainian national program stresses the importance of individual approach to students. Thus, tutorials are the traditional practical English classes at PTUSPU. The reason is very simple. This is the only type of class, in which the tutor can really give individual attention to the students.



At PTUSPU a «tutorial» is a class of 8-12 students who meet on a regular basis under the guidance of a tutor. The tutorial focuses on a certain subject area (e.g., language tutorial) and generally proceeds with careful reading or listening of selected texts and working through associated exercises, with the priority given to the development of communication skills. Since formal lectures do not play a big role in teaching English (or other foreign languages), the tutorial is the primary method by which the subjects related to the English language are traditionally taught at the Foreign Languages Department of PTUSPU.

English language teacher training. As mentioned above, special attention in the modern society is given to learning foreign languages, and, consequently, it touches the teaching process as well. It's a no-brainer that teachers of English and other foreign languages must be proficient, educated and skillful in order to ensure proper language training of the students. For that reason various teacher training programs provide the students with methodological instruments which enable them to promote a quality teaching, capable of ensuring significant learning success; develop the understanding of teaching as a socially integrated activity; promote lifelong professional development; set up professional, social and ethical adaptation of young teachers to the challenges of the school and community contexts etc. The following aspects are picked out in order to give an idea of approaches to English language teacher training at PTUSPU and UP.

Duration of practice. The process of organization of teaching practice is quite different at both departments. Usually, the students of the Foreign Languages Departments of PTUSPU have several opportunities to go to practice during their schooling. The duration of school placement varies – from 2 weeks to 6 weeks per year during the Bachelor program, and 6 weeks per year during Master program. It's worth mentioning that Master students take their practice at the higher educational establishments while undergraduate students are assigned to secondary schools. The reason for this is that Master's degree enables students to work at higher educational establishments, so the teaching practice gives them the necessary knowledge and skills to teach at the higher level of education.

The Master students of the Faculty of Arts of the UP usually have their teaching practice during their 2nd year of schooling in the form of the year-long internship. Often they are placed into the schools of their choice, usually the ones, ready to employ the students after graduation. The student-trainees spend the whole year at schools doing long and short term planning, lesson preparation, assessment and extra-curricular activities. They come to the Faculty usually once a week to have their classes, to discuss the course of their practice with other student-trainees, and to get consultation from the supervisors.

Curriculum organization. As mentioned above, the Master students of the Faculty of Arts spend 4 days of the week at schools during their teaching practice. During the only day when they come to the Faculty they have the so called «classes for teachers», for instance English for teachers, Grammar for teachers, Innovative teaching methods etc. The majority of these courses are designed in order to give the students the chance to express themselves and share their school experience. For example, during the 2 hour class of Grammar for teachers two students make



presentations on selected topics, run the discussion with their peers and share their experience, either positive or negative on teaching this topic. Sometimes they find solution to their problems after discussing it with peers, sometimes the supervisor suggests settlements, yet this kind of class organization proves to be challenging but useful. The curriculum of the Foreign Languages Department is organized in such a way that the students receive proper theoretical knowledge and practical skills in compulsory and optional courses, preparing them for teaching practice, and then they actually commence it. During the practice they don't have any classes at the department, instead they work with their supervisors individually. Co-operation with teachers and other student-trainees usually takes place at schools. In other words, we can say that the curriculum of the Foreign Languages Department is directed from theory to practice, and the one of the Faculty of Arts is directed from practice to theory.

Lesson preparation and conduction. The process of the lesson preparation and conduction starts with compiling of the lesson draft and includes several stages:

- *Consideration of the structure and the content of the lesson.*
 - Participants: teacher, student-trainee, teaching supervisor.
 - Procedures: the student presents the draft of the lesson with reference data to the teacher and the supervisor, gives a detailed description of his activities during the lesson, time management and expected outcomes.
- *Conduction of the lesson.*
 - Present at the lesson: teacher, other student-trainees, and supervisor.
- *Discussion of the lesson outcomes.*
 - Participants: teacher, student-trainees, supervisor.
 - Procedures: firstly, the student-trainee that conducted the lesson analyzes his/her lesson, then other student-trainees share their points of view. Next, the teacher shares his/her ideas about the lesson, and the last person to analyze the lesson is the supervisor. In the end, the supervisor fills the report on the conducted lesson, giving points for the structure and activities; the overall score makes the student-trainee's grade for the lesson.

The process of the lesson preparation and conduction is organized practically in the same way at PTUSPU. The only significant difference lies in the stage of consideration of the structure and the content of the lesson. Usually, the student-trainee submits the lesson draft to the teacher's and the supervisor's approval separately, so the teacher-supervisor cooperation is mostly remote at this stage. The reason for it could be the significant difference in the work load of teachers and supervisors in Portugal and Ukraine as well as the number of student-trainees assigned to the supervisor (normally 2-3 student-trainees at the UP and 5-6 at the PTUSPU).

Conclusions.

As the result of the comparative analysis of the English language teaching and teacher training at the University of Porto and Pavlo Tychyna Uman State Pedagogical University some suggestions for implementation of the positive experience into the educational process of Ukrainian universities can be made. First of all, organization of academic groups on the principle of similarity of the level of language skills would be a sound idea, especially at specialties other than English



language and literature, as here the students of the certain level of English are admitted. Tutorial sessions could also work well under conditions, when the students in the group have the same level of English, as it would give them invaluable opportunities to develop communication skills. We believe that English language teacher training at Ukrainian universities would improve if the duration of teaching practice is increased and the periods of school placement are combined with regular classes at the department in order to give the student-trainees the opportunity to combine theory and practice, communicate with peers and get proficient advice during the teaching probation.

The accomplished research is not exhaustive. The experience of English language teaching and teacher training at different European higher educational institutions deserves further attention in order to create a complete picture of potential implementations of the positive experience into Ukrainian realities.

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