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DEVELOPING STUDENTS' SPEAKING SKILLS AT ESP CLASSES

As a rule the engineering students are lacking communication skills, and speaking in particular. It is resulting from the fact that they are traditionally focused on the professional content rather than linguistic skills, though the main function of a language is 'facilitating communication with others'. Speaking skills are quite relevant for them to communicate professionally. Content-based learning (CBL) seem to be the most logical approach in teaching this category of students. Together with a traditional teacher-centered approach it does not help much in developing students' communicative skills. So it would be more productive to combine content-based learning with activity-based learning (ABL). ABL is generally defined as 'any instructional method that engages students in the learning process in the classroom.

Learner-centered approach within the frame of ABL will stimulate students' participation in getting new knowledge, involving them in doing, clarifying, applying.

The input in combined CBL and ABL may be a) topic for discussion, b) impetus article, dialogue, video, actually any teaching materials that provides students with an opportunity to actively participate in learning experiences, "construct their own knowledge" by being engaged in various activities.

The important feature of teaching materials is to ensure coherence in content and language provision so that communication would be meaningful and feasible. A conversation may be based on expressing opinion, providing or clarifying information, sharing ideas, coming to a conclusion, etc.

The classroom activities may include discussion, role play, storytelling, interviews, collecting information on a relevant topic, summarizing, making presentations. All these types of communication require observing grammar rules, pronunciation, cohesive elements, language etiquette sufficient for proper interaction, as well as mastering soft skills, what, how and when to communicate aptitude.

Presenting technical and scientific proposals, conducting meetings, making presentations, delivering reports are but a few essential workplace tasks. Effective communication skills are a must not only in professional, but academic setting.

Good communication skills are valuable but not easy to achieve. Teachers and students should combine their efforts to solving this ambitious task. The step forward to solving it is a development of assessment criteria worked out by both teacher and students as long as an assessment is an integral component of learning process. The teacher has to spend time training students on assessment and working out adequate assessment criteria. But this work is not wasting a precious contact hours' time in the classroom, but contributing to the learning process, enhancing students' responsibility for their assessment and motivating them. The main among assessment criteria are usually grammar, pronunciation, analysis of communicative mistakes, style, fluency, comprehension, coherence, interactive skills, logical presentation, evidence-based argumentation, etc. Their knowledge stimulated to learn deeper and progress faster. The combination of external and external feedbacks facilitates the formation of sound communicative competence. Continuous formative self- and peer-assessments are powerful tools in developing strong speaking skills, developing autonomy and self-judgement so necessary for life-long learning, identifying personal weaknesses and strengths, motivating to be more persistent in polishing language and personal interactive skills.