

LEARNING ENVIRONMENT IN TEACHING BUSINESS ENGLISH

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An understanding of the ways in which aspects of the environment affect learning is very important for Business English trainers and trainees. The immediate physical environment of the classroom and the nature of the personal interactions, which occur within it, will have a profound influence upon whether, what and how any individual learns a language. So, the learning process must be viewed holistically with as much emphasis being placed on relationships and interactions as on the participants and the content of what is learned.

Different individuals, and probably also groups of individuals, find certain environmental conditions more conducive to learning than others.

The four learning conditions that influence the outcome of the learning process are identified as (a) environmental (noise, temperature, lightning, etc.), (b) emotional (motivation, persistence, etc), (c) sociological (preference for learning alone or with others), (d) physio-logical (time of day preference for learning, need for food intake, etc.). It seems highly likely that individual preferences are strongly linked to cultural background and that taking this into account when trying to provide the best possible conditions for learning could well help to improve both learning achievements and attitudes.

Unfortunately, I have found no official data as to the learning environment preferences of the Ukrainian learners and can only rely upon my own teaching practice /experience, but nevertheless the comparison of learning preferences of learners from different ethnic backgrounds gives us an idea of how different and even opposite those preferences can be. A recent study of learners of Caucasian, African-American, Hispanic and Asian ethnic backgrounds found, for example, that Hispanic and Asian learners prefer more formally structured lessons in comparison with Caucasian and African-American learners. African-American and Hispanic learners both expressed a strong preference for food intake whilst learning in contrast to the Caucasian and Asian learners. The African-American and Hispanic learners preferred to have sound present while they were learning, but Asian and Caucasian learners showed preference for a quiet learning environment.

By making themselves aware of such cultural and individual differences, Business English trainers should be able to interact more profitably with their trainees. So a discussion with trainees about whether they prefer to work alone, in pairs or in groups, whether they

prefer structured or less structured environments, whether they consider that they work better at certain times of day is likely to produce helpful information. Although it may not be possible to produce conditions that meet every individual's preferences, what it should do is to encourage a greater flexibility in teaching and classroom organization.

Such factors as temperature, ventilation, light intensity, noise level and acoustics all can play a significant contributory part in facilitating or hindering learning. Though the perception of these factors is also very individual. What to one group may appear to be physical barriers to learning (overheating, overcrowding, lack of resources, etc.) may be accepted as the norm by others.

Concerning the classroom structure, the main debate has been on whether learners learn better in competitive, co-operative, or individualistic environments.

It has been found that competition is only helpful to those who do well. The success of one person or group must always work to the detriment of the others, a situation, which is exacerbated if rewards are only given for right answers. This inevitably leads to a situation where learners become fearful of making mistakes and fail to see any value in doing so, a state which is not conducive to learning a language, especially Business English, where trainees need to feel able to try to communicate in the language. In competitive settings success and failure tend to be attributed to greater or lesser ability and self-esteem becomes dependent upon one's perception of one's own ability.

Within individualized structures where rewards are based on self-improvement the emphasis is not on comparing oneself with others, but instead on comparing one's present level of performance with previous achievements. In such circumstances, success or failure is more likely to be attributed to effort. Another benefit of individualized learning is that it makes it possible to concentrate upon the learning process and to identify personal strategies that are likely to lead to successful learning of the language.

Within co-operative structures the trainees become dependent upon each other in order to achieve success. Ways of organizing groupwork in class vary enormously, but are generally based upon the five key principles of positive interdependence, individual accountability, face-to-face positive interaction, the development of social skills, and regular group processing. Research appears to show that the group outcome of any task or activity has an effect upon individual's perceptions of their own ability and their feelings of satisfaction and self-esteem. Group success can help to improve an individual's poor self-esteem, but equally, group failure can modify the positive self-perceptions of those who perform well individually.

Arranging a competitive learning atmosphere is likely to be effective in enabling some Business English

trainees to pass examinations and achieve well. However, it will have the opposite effect on other trainees and may also have negative long-term consequences for the high achievers. Co-operative groupwork, is likely to produce more positive general achievements across a broad range of trainees but will not necessarily produce autonomous, self-directed learners. A classroom, which was run on totally individualized lines, would miss out on important aspects of social interaction and communication.

So, no one approach can ever be fully effective on its own in teaching Business English. Each Business English trainee is an individual who must be helped to find his or her own way to become autonomous. Business English trainees are also members of both a social and a business world and will need to be given opportunities to work co-operatively with others in order to be successful in such a world. At the same time, an element of healthy competition with oneself and between groups can be highly motivated in the short-term and can provide added zest to any classroom. The secret, therefore, must surely be to find ways of providing a flexible structure in the Business English classroom, which effectively incorporates all three forms of organization.

Business English is a multi-faceted subject (Brieger 1997: 10). As would be expected, those who work as teachers in this profession can be found in a range of institutional and non-institutional environments. Just as there is no single Business English, there is no single profile of a Business English teacher. The profile is fashioned by the characteristics of the working environment and its view of Business English, as well as by the demands of the learners.

In conclusion, it can be said that teaching and learning are two different processes, complementary maybe, but teaching rarely guarantees learning. At best, teaching can hope to influence learning, to make learning more effective, to provide a suitable learning environment.

The Business English trainee is an intelligent human being who brings his existing assortment of knowledge and previous experience to the learning situations and is generally capable of finding things out for himself. As a rule, he is very active cognitively in discovering language, developing skills and takes responsibility for the learning process. The responsibility of the Business English trainer in this case is to create a positive/favourable learning environment that is to provide the best possible conditions for learning and to present material in such a clear, concise way that meaning is apparent and that learning may take place. The trainer organizes, guides, assists, encourages, monitors, evaluates. The trainee thinks, discovers, uses, exploits, solves problems, learns.

References:

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TEACHING ENGLISH FOR BANKING

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Thanks to recent developments in ESP and Business English research and publications teachers of English for Economics seemed to have been saved the troubles connected with searching for suitable teaching aids. The latter, though, especially those published by foreign publishing houses have one disadvantage – their prices which proved to be unreasonable for the students in most cases. One of the ways out found by the teachers of foreign languages department is creating the so-called «teaching complexes» that is sets of teaching materials consisting of copiable extracts from original textbooks in economics or ESP followed by comprehension questions, close tests and translation exercises. We have also supplied such complexes, as an experiment, by extracts from literary works, in our case from the novels by Arthur Hailey, Sidney Sheldon or John Grisham. These extracts turned out to be invaluable sources of background knowledge, reading skills development and provoking discussions at English classes.

The complex «English for Banking», for example, contains a copy of a small practically oriented teaching aid «Banking» with alternative exercises and evaluation tests, a comprehensive text «Federal Bank of Atlanta» with questions, optional texts about types of banks and history of banking and extract from «Morning, Noon & Night» by S. Sheldon that contains 25 terms and deals with the situation of massive borrowing in order to invest in high-risk securities.

The advantage of this and other similar complexes is in its flexibility: it can be copied and used as a whole or by parts depending on the number of classroom hours and the level of English language assessment of the students; it can be supplemented and updated in the course of Ukrainian banking service development or complicated in order to meet the demands of the students' future professional orientation.

The complex «English of Banking» was tested and used during English language classes at DSU for the students of International Economics Faculty.



“BROWN – NOSING” AND COMMUNICATION

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Speech acts are a kind of cultural concept, not real things out there that are separate somehow from their interpretive use in interaction. Speech acts such as promising, gossiping, brown – nosing cannot be dissected and diagrammed to find their objective essence. In the ongoing interactions that make up our social lives, speech acts entail a pattern of understanding important enough to a com-