

THE VALUE OF DEVELOPING THE PRAGMATIC ENGLISH COMMUNICATION SKILLS IN TECHNICAL VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING

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English language remains indispensable in many business sectors and fields of activity, facilitating communication, collaboration and innovation at global level. The present article highlights the importance of the development of the pragmatic English communication skills in technical vocational education and training, ISCED level 4, as well as the students' concern for the development of this skill, considering the increasingly demanding requirements of employers regarding the mastery of the English language. The study carried out within this research confirms the fact that students consider this skill essential for the development of their professional career and to ensure their competitiveness on the labour market.

Keywords: *pragmatic communication skills, English language, technical vocational education and training.*

VALOAREA DEZVOLTĂRII COMPETENȚEI DE COMUNICARE PRAGMATICĂ ÎN LIMBA ENGLEZĂ ÎN ÎNVĂȚĂMÂNTUL PROFESIONAL TEHNIC

Limba engleză rămâne să fie indispensabilă în multe sectoare de afaceri și domenii de activitate, facilitând comunicarea, colaborarea și inovația la nivel global. Articolul de față evidențiază importanța dezvoltării competenței de comunicare pragmatică în limba engleză în învățământul profesional tehnic, nivel ISCED 4, precum și preocuparea elevilor pentru dezvoltarea acestei competențe, având în vedere cerințele tot mai stringente ale angajatorilor privind stăpânirea limbii engleze. Studiul realizat în cadrul acestei cercetări, confirmă faptul că elevii consideră această competență esențială pentru dezvoltarea carierei lor profesionale și pentru a-și asigura competitivitatea pe piața muncii.

Cuvinte cheie: *competențe de comunicare pragmatică, limba engleză, învățământ profesional tehnic.*

Introduction

The pragmatic English communication skills are essential for the professional success of technical vocational education and training (TVET) graduates. The professional training programs of level ISCED 4 in the Republic of Moldova include the module for studying English language applied in the domain, in order to develop the pragmatic English communication skills, an aspect that opens new professional horizons, facilitates the efficient integration of graduates on the labour market. Therefore, graduates can become specialists able to cooperate with other organisations in the professional field, participate in international professional networks and benefit from continuing professional development internships. Moreover, pragmatic English communication skills contribute to their involvement in the life of the community and society, turning them into active actors of social change. In this context, pragmatic English communication skills become a priority for the professional career. From this perspective, it is important and necessary for graduates to hold pragmatic English communication skills, focused on the communicative-functional perspective and the pragmatics of communication, which emphasises social interaction and a pragmatic, action-oriented approach. Thus, students' motivation and interest in studying English are determining factors for the success of this educational endeavour.

The value of developing pragmatic English communication skills to TVET students

Starting from the need to develop students' pragmatic English communication skills in TVET, level

ISCED 4, we identify its particularities in a professional context. Pragmatic communication skills in the context of the professional career refers to the competence to use language specific to the professional field.

The professional skills imply the ability to adequately select, combine and use knowledge, skills, values and attitudes, necessary to successfully solve various work or learning situations, tangential to a certain profession. Professional competence includes a dynamic and integrated body of knowledge (knowing and understanding specific language, explaining and interpreting concepts) and skills (putting into practice, knowledge transfer, problem solving, critical thinking, and creativity) [7, p. 12].

In this context, V. Goraș-Postică mentions that professional communication skills include the action of combining and using knowledge, skills and attitudes in order to achieve the proposed results [4, p. 32].

The researcher N. Bîrnaz defines competence as „a set of knowledge (savoir), skills and abilities (savoir faire) organised to solve a task or a set of tasks corresponding to social requirements (savoir vivre). Moreover, the researcher defines the components of skills and presents a graphical model of competence [1, p. 47-48].

Thus, the skills include the following components:

- the cognitive aspect - the use of theories and definitions, as well as the knowledge acquired through life experience;
- the functional aspect (skills and abilities) - the application of skills and abilities in professional, educational and social activities;
- the ethical aspect - capitalising on personal and professional principles and values.

In the process of studying English applied in the domain, these skills are approached from the perspective of professional training and are manifested as follows:

The cognitive component (Savoir/to know):

- knowledge of terminology in English specific to the professional domain;
- identifying pragmatic English communication situations in professional contexts.

The praxiological component (Savoir faire/be able to do):

- receiving and producing written and oral messages in English in professional communication situations;

- reasoning the ideas in English in the context of professional communication.

The axiological component (Savoir vivre/ to take attitude and behaviour):

- developing motivation for studying English applied in the domain;
- consistent application of acquired terminology in a practical context;
- openness to communicate in English in a professional context;
- orientation towards success in the process of pragmatic English communication.

Likewise, in the professional career context, „savoir vivre” is reflected in the use of English and associated behaviours designed to create a favourable impression, ensure message clarity, and facilitate professional interactions. In this context, the researcher Nina Bîrnaz emphasises that the component “Savoir vivre/take attitude and behaviour” aims to develop students’ attitude and behaviour in the context of well-defined social conditions. „Knowing on how to take an attitude” represents the ethical aspect, which aims at the presence of personal and professional values [apud 1, p. 45-46].

The opinion of TVET students regarding the importance of pragmatic English communication skills

The importance of pragmatic English communication skills represents a central aspect of the research on the development of TVET students’ pragmatic English communication skills. In this context, it was considered relevant to investigate the students’ opinion regarding the importance of the English language by means of a psycho-pedagogical experiment. *The target group in the research* was the TVET students, level ISCED 4, from the College of Ecology, Tourism specialty, the professional training domain: Travel, Tourism and Leisure and the qualification: Travel Agent (average qualification). The aim of the psycho-pedagogical experiment was to evaluate the level of pragmatic English communication skills and

identify the students' perception and opinion regarding the relevance of these skills for their professional career. The psycho-pedagogical experiment was carried out during the academic year 2022-2023 and it took place in three stages: primary research findings, development of pragmatic English communication skills and final findings of control stage. The research instrument applied at the primary findings and control stages was a *Questionnaire on assessment of the pragmatic English communication skills within the subject English applied in the domain of tourism*.

The results of the primary research findings

Most of the students of the target group (77%) are 20 years old (20 students). besides, 4 students are of 19-year-old (15%), a student of 18-year-old (4%) and a student of 21-year-old (4%)

The results of the survey at the primary findings stage, showed that all students (100%) consider pragmatic English communication skills very important for their professional success in the field of tourism.

The arguments offered by the students were grouped into the following categories:

- *Employment and professional career* – 46%

Most of the students (46%) consider that the English language facilitates employment and success in the chosen professional field. It is considered an essential requirement for the field of tourism, English gives students a competitive advantage, especially in interactions with international tourists and in professions such as travel agents or tour guides.

- *Usefulness of pragmatic English communication skills for travelling* – 42%

Another aspect frequently mentioned by students is the usefulness of the English language in the context of international travel. English, as a global language, gives students the opportunity to communicate effectively while travelling, regardless of the destination country. In addition, tourism frequently involves travelling, and knowledge of the English language is a mandatory requirement to interact effectively in various international environments.

- *Intercultural communication* – 38%

The students emphasized the importance of the English language in facilitating intercultural communication. In the field of tourism, English communication skills facilitate the establishment of effective relationships with tourists from other countries and cultures, thus contributing to the improvement of the tourist experience. The ability to understand and communicate effectively in English with people from different cultures is essential for overcoming language and cultural barriers, thus increasing the efficiency of professional interactions and contributing to the success of activities in the tourism sector.

- *English as an international language* – 23%

Some students pointed out the fact that English is recognized as the most spoken language globally, being used especially in tourism and many other fields. The students recognized that the international status of English makes it indispensable for the field of tourism, where interactions with people of various cultures and nationalities are a constant component.

- *Personal and professional development* – 12%

A smaller but still significant number of students mentioned that pragmatic English communication skills contribute to their personal and professional development.

The stage of the development of the pragmatic English communication skills

During the stage of the development of the pragmatic English communication skills, the 26 students studied the module English language applied in tourism, according to the curriculum, approved in 2016 by the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Moldova, the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Industry of the Republic of Moldova and the Teachers' Councils of the following ISCED 4 institutions from Moldova: ASEM College of Commerce, College of Ecology, International College of Administration and Business and the National College of Winemaking and Viticulture. This module, with a duration of 120 hours, was organised as follows: 30 hours of theoretical lessons (T), 30 hours of practical lessons (P), 60 hours for individual guided study (IGS), and final evaluation (Table 1).

Table 1. Organization of the module English language applied in tourism.

| Code | Title | Total no of hours | Number of hours | | | Semester | Evaluation form | No of credits |
|---|-------------------------------------|-------------------|-----------------|----|-----|----------|---------------------|---------------|
| | | | T | LP | SIG | | | |
| G.08.O.005 | English language applied in tourism | 120 | 30 | 30 | 60 | VIII | exam (Written test) | 4 |
| Professional competence from the qualification description: - Mastering a foreign language and the ability and skills to manage the tourist activity; - Providing translation and presentation of the tourist attractions and travel itinerary. | | | | | | | | |
| Competences specific to the subject English applied in the domain: - Organisation and management of tourist activity. - English language communication skills (Producing and receiving the oral and written messages). - Pragmatic English Communication Skills in the field of tourism, travelling and leisure. - English language for promotion of customs, traditions, historical and cultural personalities. - English language for intercultural contexts, values and attitudes. - English language for promotion and appreciation of national and local heritage in the global context. | | | | | | | | |

The didactic approach regarding the development of pragmatic English communication skills was built on a solid theoretical framework, based on a set of fundamental theories, which guided the entire educational process. This theoretical framework includes theories such as: constructivist theory, with its two fundamental dimensions – cognitive constructivism, represented by Jean Piaget, and social constructivism, represented by Lev Vygotsky; the theory of multiple intelligences, with an emphasis on interpersonal intelligence, proposed by Howard Gardner; the humanistic theory of personality, developed by Carl Rogers; and relevance theory, established by Dan Sperber and Deirdre Wilson.

Starting from these theories, the essential principles were deduced that substantiated the teaching approach in the process of developing the pragmatic English communication skills. These principles include:

- The principle of the student's active involvement in the learning process;
- The principle of univocal involvement of educational actors (teacher - student) in the learning process;
- The principle of friendly interpersonal relations;
- The principle of student-centred learning;
- The cognitive principle of relevance;
- The communicative principle of relevance.

This system of principles has been applied to ensure an effective dynamic of the teaching approach, stimulating the active involvement of students in an interactive, collaborative and friendly process that favours knowledge, communication and the development of pragmatic English communication skills.

The results of the final findings of the control stage

At the end of the experiment, in the control stage, all students (100%) reconfirmed the importance of pragmatic English communication skills. The results highlight a significant increase in students' awareness of the relevance of this skill.

In the control stage, the students supported the following arguments:

- *Broad employment opportunities in the professional field and professional career development – 76%*

In this stage, 76% of students mentioned that pragmatic English communication skills are essential for career opportunities, a significant increase from 46% in the primary finding stage. This growth suggests an increased awareness of the importance of the English language in the context of tourism as a professional domain. The students also mentioned examples of the specialties where they will apply the pragmatic English communication skills, such as: tour guide, travel agent, hotel receptionist, etc.

- *Usefulness of pragmatic English communication skills for travelling* – 47%

47% of students recognized the usefulness of pragmatic English communication skills in the context of international travel. The 5% increase from the primary finding stage underlines the importance of effective communication in international travel.

- *Intercultural communication* – 12%

Compared to the primary stage, fewer students gave arguments about the importance of pragmatic English communication skills for facilitating intercultural communication. The result can be explained by the fact that most arguments focused on the professional aspect and career in tourism.

- *Study abroad* – 15%

Arguments that were not mentioned at the primary findings stage and highlighted by students at the control stage, refer to the fact that pragmatic English communication skills are a key factor for access to international education programs.

Conclusion

The pragmatic English communication skills are a key element of professional education and training, having a particular value in preparing students for the challenges of a globalised labour market and in continuous technological transformation. Studying the English language applied in TVET contributes significantly to the development of students in this educational segment, offering them practical tools to meet the specific requirements of their chosen professions.

The results of the conducted experiment support the relevance of pragmatic English communication skills for the professional success of students in TVET, level ISCED4. The students realised that having these skills can represent a differentiating factor on the labour market, considerably increasing their opportunities and chances of employment and career progression. At the same time, the results of the research study emphasise the fact that the English language plays a crucial role in strengthening professional skills and facilitating the integration of students on the national and international labour market.

Thus, the inclusion of applied English in the TVET curriculum is not only opportune, but also necessary for the training of competitive and qualified personnel, able to navigate successfully in an intercultural and dynamic professional environment.

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