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A model for the development of communicative and presentation skills in the English tuition of university students

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Abstract: *The purpose of this paper is to present a sample teaching model for development of communicative and presentation skills in the English tuition of students from the bachelor degree courses: Biology and Chemistry, Biology and English, of the Biology Department at the University of Plovdiv. The English tuition model is based on the textbook "English for Biology Students" – author G. Stankova, where there are tasks that help master students' communicative skills in English. Highlights of the teaching model research work are: 1) to select and include the sections from the textbook that are related to the purposes of the research; 2) to get students ready to make a multimedia presentation in the context of the topics covered; 3) to organize the implementation of a system of tasks by using interactive teaching methods. The following algorithm of the communicative process is in the basis of the model: starting a presentation; using a "survival" language during a presentation; how to deal with the nervous tension when speaking to an audience; preparing a mini-presentation as an element of the evaluation-resultative component of the teaching process; verbs that express changes when presenting results and indicators.*

Keywords: *teaching model, development of communicative and presentation skills, presentation, mini-presentation*

Introduction

The theory of communication and the process of communicative skills development have been extensively studied. Communication is the basis of almost every human activity. There are specific methodology requirements for the development of communicative and presentation skills in the particular professional training of future specialists.

The present study aims to explore the possibility of developing communicative and presentation skills through the created didactic model in the English tuition of students-biologists and educationalists; the study presents a sample working model with students from the bachelor course Biology and English –

in English, according to the curriculum in the discipline English for Biology Students, which is taught in 5th semester, 3rd year; and the bachelor course Biology and Chemistry as an optional discipline – English language, 1st semester, 1st year. Students who have completed these courses acquire teaching qualifications. Thus, this fact determines the great importance of the development of communicative and presentation skills as a major part of students' key competencies.

Material and methods

The methods applied in this study were: a critical review of the specialized literature on the problem, didactic modeling of a methodical model for the development of communicative and presentation skills in students from the pedagogical courses of the University of Plovdiv, Biology Department, in the subjects: English for Biology Students and English language.

The present teaching model is mainly based on the textbook "English for Biology Students" that has been used for many years [1]. The textbook comprises 6 Units; each unit has 4 Sections – A, B, C, D. The Sections A of each unit work with developing of various communicative skills – speaking, presenting (Table 1– in green), and writing; the Sections B – grammar; Sections C – vocabulary; Sections D – biology.

Table 1. The content structure of the textbook

Units	1	2	3	4	5	6
Sections						
A	Speaking	Speaking	Speaking	Speaking	Speaking	Writing
B	Grammar	Grammar	Grammar	Grammar	Grammar	Grammar
C	Vocabulary	Vocabulary	Vocabulary	Vocabulary	Vocabulary	Vocabulary
D	Biology	Biology	Biology	Biology	Biology	Biology

The main focus and purpose of the research are the development of a methodology model in several steps, which integrates: units from the textbook; a system of tasks; a multimedia presentation, based on a reflective approach, as current control assessment; relevant vocabulary sections; formal and scientific correspondence.

Results and discussion

Theoretical analysis of the problem

In the specialized literature, the problem of communicative and presentation skills has been repeatedly developed, but its development is directly related to technological advancement and the development of teaching methods, thus, this keeps the topic up-to-date.

The development of key competences is a paramount task that is basic for most of the European Union's strategies for growth, sustainable development, and jobs for young people and improving their educational attainment. Among the very first key competences, classified by the European Reference Framework [2], are: native language communication, foreign language communication.

The essence of the communicative process has been interpreted by many authors. According to Roland Burckart, the word "communication" has become a fashion label in our everyday language. As a rule, the usage of this word is something quite ordinary: messages between people – the fact that we are transferring some messages to each other ... This is just the daily routine that hides, to a large extent, the complexity of the process that stays behind this transmitting [3].

Todor Stoev defines the presentation as "an interactive dialogue, and that a good presentation can be a powerful channel for communication – through it the message can reach an important group of people, ie. conditions for a dialogue on important issues are created." [4].

Communication is an interpersonal process, in which some information is transmitted, but it also has rich behavioral content. Vakleva Zl. claims that "communicative competence is not an innate ability, but it is formed by the interaction between people and their social environments" [5].

In this context, it should be sought the connection between the communicative, presentation skills and the pedagogical tuition of the students, trained as future biology teachers, and the formation of key competences in their foreign language communication. Moreover, the list of job descriptions of a teacher's position includes the requirement to build relationships and valuables, skills and general knowledge, and a teacher's communication skills are in the first place.

Teaching methodology model

Communicative and presentation competencies are acquired in many subjects in accordance with the academic curriculum at universities; one of these subjects is English. It is also quite motivating to point out the important role of presentations in contemporary society, a role that most students have already realized. In this aspect, it is a good practice to introduce students to the communication option – presentation (eg, when presenting a coursework, preparing talks, presenting various indicators, reporting survey results to colleagues or faculty, etc.), where students will need to form and upgrade their presentation skills.

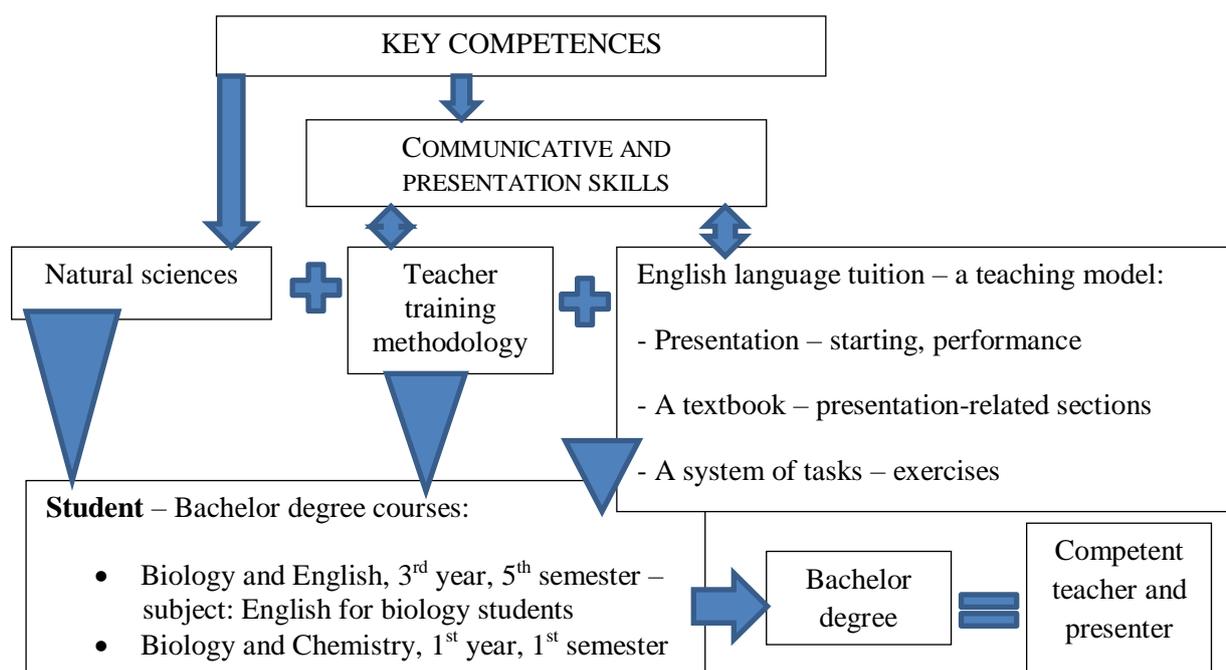


Figure 1. Teaching methodology model

For the purposes of representing the sample teaching model, only the presentation-related sections are shown below (Table 2), to introduce the teaching methodology.

Table 2. Content analysis of the sections from the teaching model

Units	Sections	Teaching methodology for development of presentation and communicative skills
2	A	1) Starting up a presentation (structure, steps) – theoretically, demonstration as a roleplay; 2) New vocabulary (phrases, expressions, collocations) that can be used at starting a presentation – exercises (gap-filling); 3) The usage of the so called "survival language" during a presentation – example sentences.
3	A	Phrases for stating the purpose of a presentation – matching and gap-filling exercises.
4	A	1) How to deal with nerves during a presentation (some tips) – theoretically; 2) Verbs that describe changes (e.g. <i>increase, fall, stop rising or falling, etc.</i>) – lists, gap-filling and matching exercises.

5	A	1) Preparing a mini-presentation on the biology topics – a self-study task as an element of the evaluation-resultative component of the tuition, so forming the final grades; 2) Filling a chart list, with given criteria, for self-assessment – intergroup work on the basis of the reflexive approach in assessing the presentations; discussion.
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Section A of Unit 1 is a speaking lesson, while Section A of the last Unit 6 is referred to formal letter writing; that is why they are not included in the present study, as being not related to oral presentations.

Section A of Unit 2 gives the starting structure of a presentation. The introductory words explain how presentations are less formal than in the past. Nowadays, most audience prefers a relatively informal approach. However, there is a certain structure that should be followed at the various stages of the opening of a presentation. Figure 2 shows the five steps that should be observed for starting up a presentation [6].

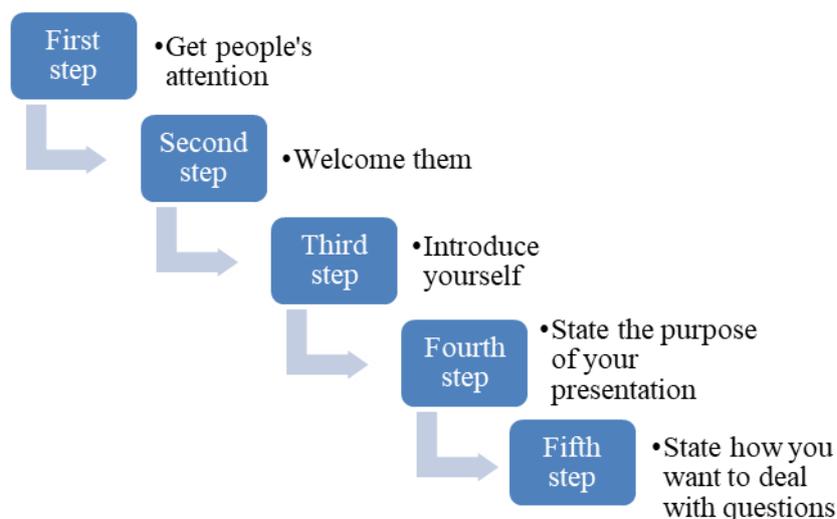


Figure 2. Certain steps for starting a presentation

The teacher starts Section A of Unit 2 as a presentation game model, the situation is role-played by the teacher, using selected expressions from those that students will later work with, and strictly following the steps for starting a presentation. This is the second unit of the textbook, i.e. the teacher and the students have already worked out the four sections of the first unit, so they have known each other relatively well. Thus, the students are genuinely surprised, when it comes to the second and third steps, because they are welcomed in a very formal way and given well-known information – the teacher's name and responsibility for their English tuition, on behalf of the Biology Department, etc. This definitely catches their attention, and then the purpose of this presentation is stated, namely how to start a presentation.

It is very important, after attracting the attention of the audience, with appealing and minor expressions in the first step, then to proceed to the second step, namely to welcome those who have come to see and hear the presentation, i.e. to address a personal message in this type of communication.

After the opening organized in such a way, the fourth step follows, which clearly states the purpose of the presentation – exactly what information will be given, reported, discussed.

And last but not least, the fifth step is to give a specific plan when to ask questions, to state how the presenter wants to deal with questions. Usually, the emphasis is placed on the importance of the fifth step, since the success of an entire presentation very often depends on how this part is organized. Here, the teacher's personal experience can be shared: once, presenting a teaching methodology study with many graphs, diagrams, slides, an excellent presenter got confused with the hands raised for questions at a conference, because the presenter had failed to announce specifically how he wanted to deal with questions; then he asked the audience to leave the questions until the end, however, there was a big

disturbance with the slides, and this spoils his otherwise brilliant speech. The example is particularly eloquent, and even in the opening of a presentation, the person presenting the information should have organized the work very well at this stage, in order for the communication to flow smoothly and clearly for both transmitting and receiving parties involved.

The exercises for development of communicative skills in Section A of Unit 2 are given as language tasks to master new vocabulary [6]. For each of the five steps for the beginning of a presentation, ready-made sentences and expressions (3-4 for each step) are given, with gaps that students should fill in, while the missing words shuffled are in a box above the expressions (Figure 3).

Complete the sentences with a word from the box

If for get Perhaps responsible ladies behalf
those attention charge Marketing

1 Get people's attention

1. If I could have everybody's _____
2. _____ we can start.
3. _____ we should begin?
4. Let's _____ started.

2 Welcome them

1. Welcome to Microsoft.
2. Thank you _____ coming today.
3. Good morning, _____ and gentlemen.
4. On _____ of Intel, I'd like to welcome you.

3 Introduce yourself

1. My name's Jane Shaw. I'm _____ for travel arrangements.
2. For _____ of you who don't know me, my name's Tom Stotter.
3. As you know, I'm in _____ of public relations.
4. I'm the new _____ Manager.

Figure 3. Exercises for development of communicative skills [6]

This section of Unit 2 also includes example sentences that can help students be able to use the so-called "survival language" during a presentation, i.e. how to "survive" in complicated or confused situations during the speech, e.g. if you get your facts wrong, if you have forgotten to make a point, if you cannot remember a term, if you are short of time, etc.

Stating the purpose of a presentation clearly is exclusively important for a good speech; Section A of Unit 3 provides general information with phrases and ways to do this. Students do matching and gap-filling exercises to practice how to state the purpose of their talk in order to develop and improve their communication skills.

From a psychological point of view, the nervous tension that a presenter feels when speaking in public is one of the most common fears of people – shame, fear of mistakes, fear of failure. Section A of Unit 4, in a pleasant and friendly way, starts with some very useful pieces of advice how to overcome this anxiety and how one can stop oneself from feeling too nervous. These helpful tips included in this section are intended to encourage students to control and overpower that tension, in order to make their oral presentation smooth and calm, rather than being in panic, having a destructive behavior or causing communication disruption. Moreover, it is a matter of great importance just for these students who will acquire teaching qualifications and will have a daily appearance in front of an audience and communication with their future students.

An important point in developing of communicative and presentation skills, from a linguistic point of view, is Section A of Unit 4, which upgrades students' knowledge with a wide variety of English verbs related to presenting of qualitative and quantitative indicators or generally speaking – verbs that describe changes occurring in different parameters (e.g. decrease, increase, fluctuate, peak, etc.) [6]. Taking into account that the university students, especially these that are taught in the two courses, may also work in scientific, experimental, or pedagogical spheres, such skills acquired are of paramount importance to them

for reporting or recording (e.g. results, comparison of various indicators, values, etc.) in a foreign language.

Section A of Unit 5 represents some methods and exercises that can get students ready to prepare a mini-presentation on some news and topics from the mass media [7]. For the purposes of the present teaching model for communicative competence development, the themes in the section have been changed, in order to turn the specific students' teacher-training into practice by providing them with clear explanations and instructions how to prepare their presentations (not longer than 2-3 minutes) and to cover already taught general biology texts from the textbook. The goal of that task is students to work and master their knowledge on well-known scientific factual material, and in such an interactive way, with the means of computer technology, e.g. a multimedia projector, a slide show, to present themes that are known and familiar to both sides of the communication process – the presenters and the audience.

The preparation and presentation of the task can be given either as coursework or as a self-study assignment, and it can be used as an element of the evaluation-resultative component of the teaching process, as a final grade. For the course Biology and English as an oral exam in the discipline English for Biology Students, where the final grade is formed in percentages, and it also includes points from current control tests, equated to a six-point scale; while for the course Biology and Chemistry – as an aspect of current control tests to form a final grade.

The clear and certain criteria for assessing a presentation performance quality are as follows:

1. Selection of one of the studied biological topics from the textbook;
2. Length of the presentation (about 3-4 paragraphs), so that the preset duration of the presentation (2-3 minutes) to be observed;
3. The five steps for opening a presentation must be included - Section A of Unit 2 (Figure 2);
4. The usage of "survival language" expressions and/or phrases learned for a clear stating the purpose and topic of a presentation;
5. The text should be presented clearly, smoothly and persuasively, with verbal clarity when interpreting the content;
6. Language correctness and ease of presentation in the foreign language;
7. Artistic skills – presenter's voice, position, pose, gestures, etc;
8. Visual aids and/or slide show quality.

Particularly useful for the presented teaching model would be the idea that some students to get ready to ask questions that have been preset together with the presenter, in accordance with the stated presenter's plan for questions; thus, the performance will be more vivid.

In past years, this interactive situation was acted out with students whose final grade at the end of a semester was unstable or varied, and their final mark depended on their performance at the presentation.

Basing on the reflexive approach, proposed in Section A of Unit 5, the textbook offers an interesting way of assessing students' performance, as well as self-evaluation, in order to select the best presentations. Students complete cards with listed presenters and the certain criteria that should be met. Everyone can add or take points according to the fulfillment of the criteria, so the presenter that has the highest score is the winner or, in the same way, the best presentation-selected.

Conclusions

From the methodical approach of work proposed for the development of communicative and presentation skills in the English language tuition of students from the teacher-training courses, the following conclusions can be drawn:

1. The development of communicative and presentation skills in pedagogical students is a complex and multidimensional process that is based on extensive experience, however, it develops dynamically in a technological and methodological aspect.
2. In order to be effective, the educational process for the formation of communicative and presentation skills in students requires a specially developed teaching methodology model, in the context of the discipline taught, and supplemented by a specialized complementary textbook.
3. The teaching methodology model developed by us has been tested in real learning environments, and its positive results obtained can be subject to experimental research work.

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