

CONTRASTING CURRICULA IN EFL IN HIGHER EDUCATION: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF STUDENTS' NEEDS

This research aims to scrutinize the curricula and their implementation on the course in Practical English/Modern English at the departments of Ukrainian and Polish Universities. Using pedagogic research with a qualitative and descriptive methodology, the data in this study was collected via observations, interviews with informants, and written sources in the form of self-assessment surveys and diagnostic tests. The purpose was to contrast the curricula and their implementation to establish their compliance with the CEFR and detect some problems in students mastery of communicative competences to modify the instructions and planning processes. The results of this study reveal that both curricula lack clearly outlined sociopragmatic learning outcomes and students have some problems producing sociopragmatically adequate utterances. As a result, some recommendations have been formulated and further research investigation tasks have been established.

Keywords: curriculum, error analysis, CEFR, communicative competences, pragmatic competence.

Стасюк Л. С. Контрастивне порівняння навчальних програм з англійської мови як іноземної у вищій школі: аналіз потреб студентів. Стаття присвячена проблематиці аналізу та вдосконалення навчальних програм з дисципліни “Сучасна англійська мова” та “Практична англійська мова” на кафедрах прикладної лінгвістики НУЛП (Львів, Україна) та кафедрі англійської філології та прикладної лінгвістики Університету ім. М. Коперника (Торунь, Польща). Висвітлено результати розвідок спрямованих на встановлення відповідності програм цих дисциплін стандартам МОН України та Загальноєвропейським рекомендаціям з мовної освіти (ЗЄРМО), модернізацію змісту, уніфікацію вимог і навчальних результатів, впровадження інноваційних форм викладання та найкращих вітчизняних та міжнародних практик. Застосувавши методи спостереження, інтерв’ю з інформантами, опитування (самооцінка), діагностичного тестування, встановлено: при розробленні та проектуванні навчальної програми з англійської мови як іноземної необхідно враховувати як роль англійської мови в суспільстві, так і її роль на ринку праці; формування цілей програми, навчальні результати, матеріали щодо розвитку знань та навичок та схема для оцінювання результатів навчання повинні співвідноситись з вимогами ЗЄРМО та досвідом і потребами студентів. Визначено, що навчальні результати зі згаданих дисциплін на I курсі повинні відповідати вимогам до рівня B1+ та B2 відповідно; навчальні програми не мають чітко окреслених

соціально-прагматичних навчальних результатів згідно ЗЄРМО; опитування студентів та спостереження за ними на заняттях допомогли визначити труднощі, що мають студенти в освоєнні комунікативної англійськокомовної компетентності. Причини цьому виявлено в ході дискусії з викладачами, які звернули увагу на те, що хоч студенти й мають ґрунтовні знання лексики та граматики, вони не завжди знають як їх використовувати в розмові, взаємодії один з одним. Інша складність полягає в тому, що не всі студенти почуваються впевнено, щоб правильно застосовувати свої знання мови у швидкому темпі розмови. Наведено результати тестування та опитування студентів. Встановлено, що проблематичним для них є висловлення прагматично адекватних висловлювань, соціокультурна компетентність у більшості студентів є слабшою ніж прагмалінгвістична та соціопрагматична. У висновках сформовано методологічні рекомендації та перспективи подальших досліджень, а саме: студенти зможуть продемонструвати лінгвопрагматичні, соціолінгвістичні та соціокультурні компетентності, якщо цілеспрямовано розвивати їхню культурну чутливість щодо норм мови та правильного прагматичного вибору; навчальна програма з вивчення англійської мови як іноземної повинна передбачати заняття для навчання прагматиці в менш охоплених і складніших аспектах.

Ключові слова: навчальна програма, аналіз помилок, ЗЄРМО, комунікативні компетентності, прагматична компетентність.

Introduction

English as the language of international communication, commerce, trade, scientific and technological advancement has long since become lingua franca in the European Union. The English language, thus, plays an important role in the internationalization and integration of Ukrainian Universities into the European and global educational realm. In 2019, the Ministry of Science and Education of Ukraine adopted the requirements in the standards of the higher school concerning the teaching of English. According to the standards described in the conception of the development of the English language skills in Ukrainian Universities (МОШ, 2019), students regardless of their specialty must learn English at the B1+ level of Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) to receive their bachelor's degrees. By 2025, this requirement will have been maximized to B2 level. Besides, subjects like English for Specific Purposes (ESP) / English for Occupational Purposes (EOP) and English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) should be introduced, which entails quality training programs for teachers of professional disciplines in English and provision of methodological

support as pointed out in the final report by R. Bolitho and R. West (Bolitho, West, 2019) on the impact of the English for Universities Project on ESP and EMI in Ukrainian Higher Education .

In the light of these conceptual principles even more important is the successful mastering of English by professionals whose specialty requires the proficient level of the English language acquisition, like translators, conference interpreters and philologists or programmers. Thus, the new curriculum in the subject "Modern English" for the students studying for the bachelor's degree in *Philology* at the department of Applied Linguistics at Lviv National Polytechnic University has been introduced, which counts for the role of English in the society and in the labour market. A lot has been done to update the program for the students who major in English, but there is still a lot to be improved.

Therefore, the study has been conducted with the aim to improve our instructional and planning practices and our understanding of the language learning processes and needs on the course and to grow the knowledge base in the field of TESOL in general.

To achieve these aims the following tasks have been defined:

- to analyze the curricula in the disciplines "Modern English" and "Practical English ". These disciplines share similar curricula, which have been contrasted in order to modernize the content of the Ukrainian curriculum and to align it with the CEFR requirements;

- to observe and critically analyze teaching methods in teaching linguistic and sociopragmatic aspects of communicative competence to the 1st year students with the aim of improving teaching excellence at both institutions;

- to design tests for (self)-assessment of communicative competences of students to raise their awareness of different aspects of this competence and detect possible problems in mastering it;

- to establish unified framework of reference for the learning outcomes of 1st-year students in the disciplines *Modern English* and *Practical English* in order to simplify the integration of Ukrainian students into the EU educational system;

- develop methodological recommendations on improving curricula and teaching English-language communicative competence to students majoring in English.

Methods

With the above-defined tasks in mind, the research has been conducted oriented to 1) evaluating learning and teaching strategies, activities and materials; 2) surveying learners and teachers; and 3) learner's error analysis at the departments of two Universities.

The first stage was a pedagogically oriented enquiry, which involved evaluating the effectiveness of approaches to teaching and learning, activities, and materials.

At this stage, firstly, the curricula were analyzed, compared and contrasted based on the following criteria: learning outcomes, teaching methods, content, teaching material, and assessment methods and criteria. Next, the effectiveness of the curricula, that is teaching strategies, activities and materials were evaluated based on class observations. I have observed four classes in the subject *Practical English*. The first two classes were devoted to the Use of English (Grammar and Vocabulary aspects of learning English) and the following two were on Speaking and Listening. These were compared to classes conducted on *Modern English Part 1* at LPNU.

Secondly, questionnaires and interviews with learners and teachers have been designed to examine their views, attitudes or preferences in relation to a specific aspect of language learning and teaching. The findings have been used as the basis for practical actions. First-year students at both departments have been offered to take self-assessment surveys that aimed at analyzing their communicative skills and overall language competence. These have been planned as diagnostic and formative tests in English for both learners and teachers as well. Unfortunately, few students took the self-assessment tests and this served as an obstacle on the way of obtaining reliable results concerning deficiencies of their current communicative competence on the one hand, and revisiting their English learning history on the other. Finally, students were also given a written test to diagnose the most common errors as planned. The test was designed taking as a model the one proposed by E. Koran (Koran, 2016). The designed test contains discourse completion tasks as well as rating questions, where the learners had to rate the statements in accordance with their level of formality and politeness. There were also proverb/saying completion tasks, and a task involving interpretation of the tone of the statement.

Participants

The test was taken by 62 students overall. Out of this number, 40 students were from Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń and 22 from Lviv National Polytechnic University. Polish students' level of proficiency overall was a bit higher (B1+) than that of Ukrainian students (B1). Both groups have been studying English for more than 10 years. Whereas students at Polish University study to take a certified test in English (FCE and CAE) before their graduation, Ukrainian students may also take it, but it is not a formal requirement in this discipline. Two students from Nicolaus Copernicus University in Torun were Ukrainian refugees studying there and one student was Afghani.

Procedure

Students had 1,5 hour to complete 4 discourse tasks containing 8 tasks each, they also had to rate 10 greetings in accordance with their level of formality and grade 5 statements in terms of politeness levels expressed. Finally, students were asked to compose sentences containing proverbs/sayings that they know or were taught at the classes and to interpret the tone of the utterance.

The Main Material

1.1. Curricula: general overview

The analysis of two similar curricula has shown that they contain common descriptors like: learning outcomes, number of hours, content, assessment methods and criteria. Despite the fact that they are alike in containing these integral parts, there are some differences in the layout of the curricula that should be pointed out. This could promote the exchange of the best teaching practices between departments. These differences concern learning outcomes, teaching methods and approaches, content and assessment methods.

1.1.1. Learning outcomes

The Polish curriculum integrates the requirements of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (Council of Europe, 2001) into the outline of the learning results and the requirements for each of the 4 skills and the vocabulary and grammar knowledge are clearly set and described. The learning outcomes for this course meet the requirements of CEFR for B1+ level and B2 levels. If the result we aim to achieve in all

the 4 skills and language knowledge is established this way, it facilitates the assessment of the learning outcomes and contributes to the successful teaching.

Thus, learning outcomes outlined in the Polish curriculum are three-fold and concern the **knowledge (K)**, **(universal) skills (S/(U))** and **social competences (S)**. Knowledge concerns the following 4 components:

K1: can define and apply selected English grammar rules pertaining to tenses and nouns at B2 level;

K2: has the practical knowledge of selected vocabulary items, such as verbs and nouns at B2 level;

K3: has the practical knowledge of grammar, vocabulary and spelling, making it possible to understand and create formally and linguistically accurate formal texts on selected topics at B2 level ;

K4: has the practical knowledge of grammar, vocabulary and spelling, making it possible to comprehend and create accurate and fluent oral texts in formal register at B2 level.

As far as skills are concerned students should:

S1: use accurate grammar of the English language and appropriate lexis when it comes to articles, nouns, verbs and tenses applying English language skills matching the description of B2 level.

S2: cooperate in negotiating solutions to usage problems relating to articles, nouns, verbs, and tenses in English.

S3: read and comprehend formal texts at B2 level;

S4: understand differences between a formal and informal register and can use impersonal formal English writing texts at B2 level;

U5: prevent plagiarism;

U6: read and write formal texts at B2 level;

S7: understands British and American English and differences between a formal and informal register and can use impersonal formal English in speech at B2 level;

S8: make effective oral presentations in English and support and defend one's own arguments

S9: have the English formal language skills as described by B2 level of CEFR

S10: can work with a group, negotiating solutions to discussion oriented tasks and problems

Social competence at B2 level presupposes:

K 1: awareness of the level of their knowledge and skills in English grammar and lexis and understanding of the need for continuous practice and development;

K2: awareness of the level of their knowledge and skills in reading and writing and understanding of the need for continuous practice;

K3: is aware of the level of their knowledge and speaking and listening skills and understands the need for continuous practice .

Summing up, learning outcomes are too abstract and general in the Ukraine curriculum. Besides, the analyzed curricula differ in **the number of hours** allotted to practical classes with Polish students having 30 hours less of practice in the class. Besides, **learning outcomes** were formulated differently. Thus, *it is very important for the Ukraine curriculum to be revised and new learning outcomes and new requirements be adapted that are in line with the CEFR requirements for B1+ level.*

1.1.2. Teaching methods and approaches: comparison and suggestions

It has also been of importance to observe how these learning outcomes are achieved at Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń. For this purpose the observation of classes has been conducted to define teaching methods, the content and teaching materials employed. This yields the following observations and recommendations.

In terms of teaching methods, it has been discovered that both the *Communicative language teaching* methodology and *Competency-Based Language Teaching* are employed. Through learner-centered, dynamic, active learning, and an extensive language input/output learning environment learners of English are able to improve their communicative ability through authentic materials, as well as communicative activities in the class. Collaborating with assigned conversational partners to interact in the well-designed communicative activities, students are able to improve their communicative competence (linguistic competence (grammar / vocabulary), pragmatic competence (giving information/offering help / gestures / nonverbal cues, miscommunication and repair) and sociolinguistic appropriateness).

Polish and Ukrainian *curricula could still be improved by the introduction of approaches that a) develop intrinsic motivation and promote learners' initiative and involvement, like reflective writing, logbooks, portfolios of learners' work, quizzes, etc.; b) language experience approach, e.g.: dialogue journals, auto-narrative.*

Ukrainian one would benefit from the introduction of activities that aim at improving higher order thinking skills via group projects, storytelling, discussions, etc. Whilst Polish curriculum seems to lack activities aimed at critical thinking skills development. Overall, the innovative methodology for teaching Practical English / Modern English at both departments could be adapted by other international and home institutions for the development of English language competence.

1.1.3. Content: outline

Both curricula are well-structured and outlined in terms of content. In one case, the coursebook *Language Leader: upper intermediate* (Cotton, Falvey, Kent, 2015), which contains *definite topics for vocabulary and grammar suitable for developing B2 language and study skills*. At UMK *Key-note Advanced* (Hughies, 2015) coursebook is used for developing upper-intermediate skills. The latter textbook may not always contain suitable topics for discussion for adolescent learners, being overall very useful for developing skills and competences necessary to achieve learning outcomes. Computer mediated learning, like Moodle and Pearson electronic learning platforms, significantly facilitate the exchange of materials between teachers and students, consolidation, assessment of home-assignments and giving and receiving the feedback.

1.1.4. Assessment methods and criteria

Both programs describe a similar system of assessment, based on the principle of continuous assessment that integrates informal and formal assessment. Formative and direct tests are used. FCE or IELTS requirements are the accepted standard with which students' responses are compared.

1.2. Data analysis

1.2.1. Survey results

As it has been mentioned, students have been asked to complete short surveys described in Table 1 aimed to diagnose difficulties arising in interacting in English. To diagnose these difficulties, a questionnaire consisting of 5 questions was used; each question contained at least three answer options. The questions aimed at determining the state of the subjects when communicating in English and did not assign points for certain answers.

Based on the survey analysis, it can be concluded that students' spoken English is of high (answers ranging from 10 to 15 on a 20 points scale) or very high (from 16 to 20) level. Nonetheless, 14 out of 30 students who participated in a survey would have some difficulty in communicating

in different social situations. Holding a conversation with some difficulty and only occasionally being lost for words is true for 11 out of 30 students. The rest neither agree nor disagree.

Table 1

Survey Questions

Questions	Answers
Q1: Rate your spoken English from 0- (I speak no English at all) to 20 - (I am completely fluent)	
Q2:When you speak English, do you... A:always construct a whole sentence in your head? B:frequently have to think about what you are going to say? C: speak with occasional hesitations?	
Q3:: I can hold an ordinary social conversation with some difficulty, but I am occasionally lost for words	Strongly agree Agree Neither agree nor disagree Disagree Strongly disagree
Q4:I can only talk about a very small number of topics:	Strongly agree Agree Neither agree nor disagree Disagree Strongly disagree
Q5: How easy is it for you to speak several sentences together in a connected way?	Impossible Hard Easy

For 18 out of 20 students who answered that question, it is easy to speak several sentences together in a connected way, which means they are fluent in English. Two out of 20 find it hard. 5 out of 21 plan on how to say something before they speak, the rest speak with occasional hesitations.

The range of topics students can communicate about is small for 4 students out of 30, and for 6 students it is medium.

The reasons for students' difficulties were revealed through a discussion with teachers, who pointed out that though students may have good vocabulary and grammar knowledge, they do not always know how to use them in the discussion, interaction with each other. Another difficulty is that not all students feel confident to apply their linguistic knowledge appropriately at a fast pace of the conversation.

Thus, a diagnostic test has been designed to reveal the problem they may have in producing sociopragmatically appropriate and linguistically correct utterances and to use this information for planning a course.

1.2.2. Diagnostic test

Students had 1 hour to complete 4 discourse tasks containing 8 tasks each, they also had to rate 10 greetings in accordance with their level of formality and grade 5 statements in terms of politeness levels expressed. Finally, students were asked to compose sentences containing proverbs/sayings that they know or were taught at the classes and to interpret the tone of the utterance. The test was aimed to diagnose students' pragmatic and sociolinguistic competences.

Table 2

Test results in diagnostic pragmatic and sociolinguistic competences of students at UNC:

Total students score (%) / SA	Pragmalinguistic component (UNC)	Sociopragmatic component (UNC)
Request	99.1%	91.3%
Apology	90.2%	86.9%
Congratulation	89.3%	86%
Invitation	63.6%	87.8%

Table 3

Test results in diagnostic pragmatic and sociolinguistic competences of students at LNPU:

Total students score (%) / SA	Pragmalinguistic component(LPNU)	Sociopragmatic component (LPNU)
Request	86.9%	84.8%
Apology	82.8%	80.6%
Congratulation	83%	84.2%
Invitation	77.9%	81.1%

Error analysis shows that students mostly had problems with producing appropriate speech acts (SA) of invitations, apologies and congratulations. Besides, points for the sociopragmatic component were overall slightly lower than for the pragmalinguistic one. In particular, though they could produce the basic act, these acts there not supported by appropriate supporting acts that are expected in the context of apology or invitation

(Descriptions of Speech Acts) and are used to meet felicity conditions of the speech acts in question (like inviting somebody also involves informing them about where and when they are invited, otherwise this invitation is not carried out properly/felicitously, that is as one meeting sincerity conditions). Another problem is being aware of politeness issues (Brown, Levinson, 1987) in the performance of speech acts and delivering a polite-sounding request was challenging at times for them. Learners need to determine the context appropriate utterances: what can be said, to whom, where, when, and how.

Students' ability to match the communicative intent with linguistic form based on the knowledge of an inventory of verbal schemata that carries illocutionary force was assessed. In other words, their knowledge of linguistic elements used in English to perform speech acts of request, invitation, congratulation and apology. The analysis shows that they mostly lack language for invitations, apologies and congratulations, making grammar mistakes while producing these acts (using incorrect collocations, prepositions, articles and word-formation or modals). Overall, the results prove a complex interplay between linguistic forms, context of use, and social actions and the learners (partial) inability sometimes to choose the language exponents (lexical, grammatical, punctuation, spelling and idiomatic) that are used in combination with specific contextual factors to produce unambiguous, context appropriate and relevant utterance.

Finally, the knowledge of conversational formulas and sayings and their ability to differentiate the tonality of utterances (humour, sarcasm, irony and implicature), which are the part of culture and the integral part of communication, has been assessed:

Table 4

Test results in diagnostic sociolinguistic and cultural competences of students at UNC and LNPU

Social and cultural components	Total students score(%)/UNC	Total students score (%)/LNPU
Greetings	49.2%	41.3%
Politeness	60.5%	60%
Sayings/idioms	63%	62.2%
Tonality	49%	42.7%

Thus, students had most problems in differentiating tonality and formality/informality of greetings.

Conclusions

The analysis of the curricula in the disciplines *Modern English* and *Practical English* shows that they would benefit from the course outcome specifications in terms of pragmatic and sociolinguistic competences. The curricula should be clearly indicative of what the students were expected to be able to do using the target language on completion of the course. Instead, the analyzed curricula were at some points lacking sociopragmatic descriptors altogether or these were too general to be measurable.

Results obtained from the error analysis and the analysis of the theoretical material on the problem (Cohen, 2019; Ishihara, 2022) presuppose the following pedagogical implications:

1. pragmatic performance benefits from explicit instruction ;
2. for students to demonstrate linguistic and pragmatic competences teachers need:

- to support their students in developing cultural sensitivity about TL norms and in making their own pragmatic choices ;

- to develop classroom activities that help in the instruction of TL pragmatics in the less-covered and more challenging areas;

- make more resources available so that both groups can learn TL pragmatics with greater comfort and facility.

- to focus not only on the visible layers of culture (e.g., food, festivals, and habits) , but also on “the hidden layers of culture” such as values, politeness, beliefs, attitudes.

3. Improve the existing curriculum in the discipline of *Modern English* / *Practical English* with the aim of introducing a pragmatic and sociolinguistic descriptor as one of the learning outcomes in the discipline based on the CEFL.

4. Alternatively, to teach pragmatic competence as a separate discipline in the way practical grammar or morphology are taught. This would involve a design of a curriculum with clearly outlined topics and learning outcomes.

5. To compile a Learner Corpora of Written Students Texts for thorough error analysis of students mistakes and needs.

Summing up, all the recommendations proposed in the report are not imperative, but only of advisory nature.

NOTES

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ABBREVIATIONS used in the text:

ЗЄМО – Загальноєвропейські рекомендації з мовної освіти

НУЛП – Національний університет “Львівська політехніка”

МОН – Міністерство освіти і науки

EFL – English as a Foreign Language

CEFR – *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages*

ESP/EOP – *English for Specific Purposes/English for Occupational Purposes*

EMI – *English as a Medium of Instruction*

TESOL – *Teaching English for Speakers of Other Languages*

K – knowledge

S/(U) – (universal) skills

S – social competences

FCE – First Certificate in English

CAE – Certificate in Advanced English

UNC – University of Nicolaus Copernicus in Torun

IELTS – International English Language Testing System

SA – Speech Act

LPNU – Lviv Polytechnic National University

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