Flipped Classroom and Blended Learning in Teaching English for Specific Purposes

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ABSTRACT

The objectives of this research are to analyze the preferential modes of teaching English for Specific purposes (ESP) upon the concept of learners’ autonomy and blended learning within the increased use of digital technologies; to overview opportunities for constructing a tailor-made subject-specific course for enhancing students’ hard and soft skills. This research is a qualitative approach using a case study design, which focuses on analyzing the course content, learning activities and learning outcomes. This research involves 60 students and 4 teachers. Analysis of the data have comprised five steps: 1) a needs analysis and diagnostic test revealing vocabulary gaps and limitations in speaking skills, 2) a topical plan for the course recommending a number of Internet sites and library resources for students, 3) independent home assignments providing personal activities and much peer support, 4) formative assessment including continuous throughout the course assessment, 5) summative assessment of vocabulary range and a speaking skills test. The results of the research show that autonomous, blended, flipped learning can boost learners’ language proficiency and engage them deeply in their learning process providing freedom in selecting textual input for extended periods of time.

Keywords: blended learning, flipped classroom, inverted scenario, learner’s autonomy.

Introduction

The impulse for this investigation was triggered by major transformations in providing language policy (Yudina et al., 2020), applying digital technologies (Gapsalamov, 2020), training highly qualified specialists (Voskovskaya et al., 2019) and the lag in time between publishing textbooks for ESP (Shirokikh, 2018). The novelty of the approach to the English language teaching at higher educational institutions which is considered in this article is in the fact that there is a way out to eliminate this lag. Considering the fact that the English language is the language of the 21st century, and that there are connections between the English language and sustainable education (Bekteshi & Xhaferi, 2020), it would be quite possible to provide a creative educational environment for the students and to give them freedom in selecting textual input from outside resources for extended periods of time. Meanwhile, the roles of a teacher and students could be changed: students are becoming active participants in the learning process and the role of the teacher is just to supervise the process in two ways: by issuing guidelines on how to organize these activities (the facilitating function) and overlook formative and summative assessment issues (the control function) (Hrabala et al., 2017; Szydlowski, 2019; Busygina et al., 2020).
The assumption behind this approach is that the pedagogical value of autonomous, blended, flipped learning can engage them deeply in their learning process, their learning performance will be higher and, as a result, this approach can boost learners’ language proficiency. Moreover, the project of independent glossary compilation and its collaborative discussion is seen as a major didactic tool that would allow for more efficient continuous formative and summative assessment (Rudenko et al., 2020).

Based on the students’ needs analysis it would be efficient to arrange autonomous, blended, flipped learning that can boost learners’ language proficiency and engage them deeply in their learning process providing freedom in selecting textual input for extended periods of time.

Theoretical Review

The problem associated with the development of students’ independent work skills has been the subject of study by many researchers, including matters of teaching a foreign language. Many teachers agree that it is impossible to force students to learn: you can only give them an incentive to discover everything themselves. As a result, students are held accountable for their education rather than shifting this responsibility onto teachers.

Self-education issues challenged the appearance of such a term as ‘autonomous learning’ which is considered to be one of the main provisions of the human activities and one of the most significant human competences (Knowles, 1975). Initially, this concept appeared in general pedagogy, and only then it was developed in the methodology of teaching foreign languages. H.Holec in his manuscript Autonomy in Foreign Language learning defined this term as the ability to take responsibility for one’s own education (Holec, 1981). There exist a lot of definitions of the concept ‘autonomous learning’ but the core of most of them concentrates on the point how to teach the students to learn on their own.

Much theoretical research is devoted to creation of healthy and realistic learning environment (Hurd & Lewis, 2008; Munzur, 2012; Rahman et al., 2017; Yemelyanov et al., 2018); a new role of a teacher in this environment (Scharle & Szabo, 2000; Pogosyan, 2019); such issues as the learner, the learning task and the learning process (Crabbe et al., 2001); evolution of self-managerial skills and self-learning scopes inside or outside higher educational institutions (Garner & Miller, 2011; Sbaihi, 2015; Dudukalov, 2014). C.Balskani considers that students must have freedom in choosing authentic materials that they use in class (Balskani, 2010). J. Siegeris suggests LearnTeamPlenum method, the first stage in which is to make students investigate a certain topic independently instead of providing them with a prepared script (Siegeris: 2017). There is a substantial merit of autonomy in language teaching. Any ESP teacher feels the challenge of teaching technical vocabulary that reflects “obscure field-specific concepts” (Walker, 2008) while autonomous learning can help eliminate teacher’s “knowledge gaps” as learners will take on responsibility for the subject-specific component of a course (Melnichuk, 2016). The task of a teacher will be just to combine content studies with language acquisition techniques and modern pedagogical technologies (Robinson, 1991). That is why for modern language education, the concept of autonomous learning should become radical, as it contributes to more effective mastering foreign languages. Such approach motivates, stimulates learners to active, conscious learning activities, strengthens the initiative and responsibility of learners. Meanwhile, some researchers presume that there are substantial limitations for learners’ autonomy that can be productively promoted (Borg, 2012; Khoruzhy et al., 2020; Avdeev et al., 2020).

However, it should be noted that search for authentic resources, learners’ independence and possible measures of self-management increase with exposure to Internet-based assignments (Henri et al., 2018), as the participants of the educational process are not satisfied with the contents of traditional textbooks. This applies even more to the ESP textbooks, because they are often outdated, not close to surrounding reality and, as a consequence, such textbooks do not inspire learners to study (Lou, 2017). A facilitator of autonomous learning is the use of online technologies. The use of online resources leads to new and different conceptions of the in-class/out-of-class relationship, both in terms of teacher roles and materials development. Immersion programs, i.e. the use of an immersive both linguistically and culturally rich environment, can be created by the extensive use of ICT and multimedia (Muslem & Abbas, 2017). That is supposed to add authenticity to the language studies and provide students with greater choice of materials for language input.

Besides, it should be also noted that increased usage of the Internet resources also leads to inverted teaching scenarios and flipped classroom. The concept of inversion is seen as a method to allow the students to study independently and after that take time to discuss their issues in class (Pfennig, 2017; Ivanova et al., 2019). The flipped classroom model is considered to be an educational approach in which traditional instruction is reversed with the target of providing interactive learning activities in class and individual teaching is based on Internet resources (Aycicek & Yelken, 2018). The flipped classroom model aims at a learner-centered approach in teaching, where studied material is explored more thoroughly and meaningful learning challenges are generated (Steinberger, 2017).
Indeed, the use of Internet technologies and blended learning techniques provide up-to-date information on the trends in a subject-specific domain, stimulate teacher-learners and peer-to-peer interaction and enhance learner autonomy.

Methods

The objective of this research is to overview opportunities for constructing a tailor-made subject-specific course for ESP, which will enhance students’ hard and soft skills. The evaluation of learners’ roles is based on the dichotomy of active learners versus passive learners because it will allow us to more precisely define the status of their autonomy on the scale from inactive to most active. This research included theoretical and empirical studies, and involved a number of steps. The theoretical analysis of literature helped to identify a healthy and realistic learning environment, a new role of a teacher and students. The research core activities included empirical analysis of learning outcomes. Data was analyzed using thematic analysis and descriptive statistics in the forms of the rate quantity and rate percentage.

The experiment described in this article was started in January 2020 but continued in the pandemic period which had specific features (Novikov, 2020). After considering the theoretical basis, the experiment was conducted at the beginning of the ESP course for final year bachelor students of the Financial University under the Government of the Russian Federation. The participants in the experiment were 4 teachers and 60 students: 4 groups, 15 students in each group.

The experiment described in this case study assumes while students choose textual input on their own, the teacher’s task is to organize a mode of enhancing their speaking skills and a project on vocabulary range; the course is evaluated in formal and informal ways through a learners’ questionnaire form and subsequent interviews. First of all, the needs analysis was conducted. Needs analysis is about students’ perceptions of what is necessary to learn in order to be communicatively efficient at a workplace, limitations of the teaching context (Basturkmen, 2010). It should be also noted that people vary in their cognitive strategies and value for learning (Donohue, 2020), that is why the analysis of the experiment under the consideration is based on the taxonomy developed by M. Knowles who distinguished concrete, analytical, communicative, authority-oriented learning styles (Knowles, 1980). The survey questions are developed by D. Nunan who also linked the styles to students’ motivation in acquiring new knowledge (Nunan, 1991). As “Informal debrief meetings” (Macalister & Nation, 2011) are a more productive type of evaluation, more details become explicit, in private talks. Another issue to consider is measuring the pedagogical value of the course in terms of assessing linguistic and professional knowledge acquired by students. The evaluation of the teacher’s role is based on Harmer’s taxonomy, i.e. the roles of a controller, prompter, participant, resource or tutor (Harmer, 2001). Thus, the aim of this research is to describe the teaching procedures employed in the course, evaluate its didactic benefits, and reveal limitations.

Collection of data with the help of data-analysis techniques went through the following stages presented here chronologically:

Step 1. Diagnostic testing to reveal vocabulary gaps and deficiencies in speaking skills is undertaken before the course.

Step 2. Teacher suggests a topical plan for the course. After consulting colleagues, teaching professional disciplines, teacher recommends a number of Internet sites and library resources where relevant information could be found.

Step 3. Independent home assignments:
- Students are asked to choose materials for language input (textual / audio / graphic resources) on their own. While reading/listening they share internet links in google classroom with their peers.
- Students prepare comprehension and vocabulary activities based on textual (audio and visual) / graphic input using various plugins and platforms. Two types of online instruments can be used— integrated with Google Class like Quizzlet, Kahoot, Edpuzzle, Padlet, Bookwidgets etc.; (students’ results are seen in the Google record book) or other platforms like learningapps.org (a link can be placed in google classroom, but the record of students’ performance cannot be found in Google Class).
- Students also compile a glossary (as a google table shared among all the participants) that includes definitions, translations, contexts, etymology, derivatives and grammar properties of words. This glossary also contains links to vocabulary tasks prepared on the above-mentioned platforms. At the end of the course, this glossary will be presented as a “product”.
- In-class activities are mostly topical discussions or other speaking tasks topically matched with the sources chosen by students.

Step 4. Formative assessment allows a teacher to alter the content of a course to meet the desired objectives and promote a more beneficial backwash effect on teaching. The types of formative assessments employed here include a continuous assessment, i.e. glossary compilation done throughout the course; speaking assessments
(recorded speech tasks out of class and ‘spontaneous’ speech event in classes); discrete-item and cloze-up tests on comprehension and vocabulary. Formative assessment was undertaken in the following forms:

- Assessing learners’ participation in glossary compilation process. The glossary is kept as shared google table. The glossary articles are filled in based on a set of thematically selected texts for each particular lesson. How much each student has invested in the glossary can be checked through the “File” button in the google table (see history of versions). Thus, the teacher can make a judgement about the size of a student’s ‘contribution’ and the quality of ‘processing’ work, i.e. if the information in the glossary entries coincides with the criteria for glossary assessment (see Table 1 below). One advantage of continuous assessment is that students get accustomed to being evaluated with criteria and requirements becoming more and more familiar to them. Glossary compilation is performance-based testing. This type of task is especially valid in ESP courses because it helps accumulate terminology on a specific topic, analyze language properties of subject-specific words, and fix this information in a form convenient for regular revision. Glossaries also provide input for speaking tasks. The criteria for assessing the glossaries relate to both subject domain (criterion 1, 3, 4) and language use (criterion 2, 5, 6). Each criterion weighs 1-2 points with maximum score of 10. If a glossary is assessed as 6, it means that either a criterion has not been met or some information about a word is missing or not full. Teacher scores students’ work and provides informal oral feedback (see Table 1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Descriptors</th>
<th>Score</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Words/terms relate to the topic</td>
<td>Included words/terms are key for understanding the subject-specific topic; the range of terminology on the topic is comprehensive and reflects the present state of art; interpretations in terms of other subject-specific/colloquial domains of language are either excluded or contrasted.</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Words/terms are not repeated</td>
<td>There is no repetition of items and items are placed in sub topical “nests”, e.g. vocabulary on the topic of reinsurance is grouped and represented as a chapter of items within the glossary.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Words/terms have reliable, explicit and simple definitions</td>
<td>Definitions are short (no more than 25 words); definitions are precise, i.e. provide the true meaning of the word; definitions are easy to understand; the sources of definitions are reliable dictionaries.</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Words/terms are given in contexts that relate to the domain</td>
<td>Contexts are taken from authentic sources; contexts are taken from subject-specific texts; contexts are interesting to read and demonstrate frequently used speech patterns.</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extra features are included</td>
<td>Entries include synonyms/opposites, grammar properties, collocations, etymology.</td>
<td>1,5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Translations of terms are given keeping contextual use in mind</td>
<td>Translations are adequate; translations are paralleled with the contexts given in the entry.</td>
<td>1,5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Assessing the degree of memorization of vocabulary items. Each set of glossary items has a link to an online platform where students themselves prepare a set of discrete-item and cloze-up tasks on the set of items. The degree of memorization can also be checked in the following way. The teacher makes a copy of a glossary table; deletes some boxes from it (like translations or definitions etc.; sends the learners the link to the google table; asks the students to fill in these gaps again in online regime; and sets a time limit of approximately 10 minutes. The google instruments allow you to see how fast and accurately students are filling in the gaps – this information is reflected on the screen of your computer instantly.

- Assessing learners’ comprehension of textual (visual and audio) input – the results of the comprehension activities prepared by students themselves on different platforms are either reflected in Google class record book or can be found on other sites that students use. For instance, for a lesson about energy crises students created a number of interesting Kahoots about the history of energy crises, causes of crises, the present day situation etc. Playing these Kahoots was really interesting, engaging and informative.

- Assessing learners speaking activities is still done in class. On the one hand, there are online tools that allow to record students’ voices and make video casts like screencast-o-matic.com or flipgrid.com. You can also check if your students are able to read out well on the platform Fluency tutor (texthelp.com). The advantage of these online
methods for assessing learners' oral performance is that a teacher can always re-listen to a recording and provide more comprehensive and profound feedback. On the other hand, recording and preparing something for future online use is something alien to real life speech situations. The aspect of spontaneity of natural verbal performance is missing in such tasks. Thus, speaking in offline environment is virtually important in language learning. Moreover, if we look at the table of criteria for speaking performance (see Table 2 below; the criteria are based on Cambridge requirements), we can conclude that there is one aspect, i.e. interactive communication, which can never be assessed properly in recorded samples of speech. Indeed, only real life situations and face-to-face discussions can reveal how prompt a person is in switching between different topics or if his verbal reaction to someone's unexpected utterance is polite and to the point.

**Table 2. Criteria for assessing speaking performance**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aspect of Assessment</th>
<th>Language and skills descriptors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grammar and vocabulary</td>
<td>Control of simple grammatical forms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Use of complex grammatical forms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A range of appropriate vocabulary in use (general lexis/academic vocabulary/terminology)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discourse management</td>
<td>Hesitation in speaking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Repetition of words/ideas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Use of cohesive devices/discourse markers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pronunciation</td>
<td>Appropriate intonation / sentence and word stress / individual sounds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interactive communication</td>
<td>Starting discussions / introducing new ideas/ reacting appropriately / need of support</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Step 5. Summative assessment of vocabulary range and a speaking skills test are conducted at the end of the course.

- Assessment of the vocabulary range can be done in online format. Students choose a subtopic investigated within the course, select appropriate vocabulary from the glossary and present it as a map/poster/book, i.e. a “product”. They can use online instruments like Padlet that allows you to create a webpage or just Prezie.com presentation. The point here is that students are required not only report on their results but also get some feedback from the audience. This feedback can be received in MS Teams chat room while we are in our virtual ‘synchronous’ class or in social chats, e.g. this type of assessment helps summarize students’ achievements in vocabulary range and assess their speaking/cognitive/communicative skills.

- Assessment of speaking skills is done in face-to-face format for the reasons discussed above. Face-to-face format in its traditional meaning as an offline class is impossible now, the time of the coronavirus pandemic. Thus, we have to deliver ‘synchronous’ classes on web platforms such as Zoom, MS Teams, Webinar, Skype etc. Not all platforms are equally suitable and efficient for language learning.

The initial idea behind the course discussed in this article was to do a case study as a summative assessment of speaking skills at the end of the course. This activity requires:

- investigating the contents of a case (this can be easily done in online format);
- working in small groups and finding a solution through a SWOT-analysis (Zoom’s functions are more efficient for this part of the task than MS Teams’s, e.g. it is easier to allocate students to different virtual room in Zoom, they do not have to switch off from the classroom);
- reporting back to class on the results of the investigation (the instruments for this part were discussed above).

In fact, we managed to perform the task even in MS Teams, but if you compare how it could have been done in real ‘brick-and-mortar’ classroom and how it was done in virtual ‘synchronous’ classroom, one may conclude that online assessment is much more time-consuming and requires proficient digital skills.

As for the algorithm of the five steps in organizing ‘inverted’ scenario for a language classroom presented earlier in this article, it may be useful to define the roles of the teacher and the learner (see Table 3).
**Table 3. Teacher’s and students’ roles**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Steps</th>
<th>Activities</th>
<th>Teacher’s Role</th>
<th>Students’ Role</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Step 1. Needs analysis and diagnostic testing</td>
<td>On the one hand, teacher decides if to conduct a needs analysis or not. The teacher prepares questionnaires. The teacher prepares the test for diagnostics. The teacher interprets the results. On the other hand, students define and prioritize the activities they want to be engaged in through their responses.</td>
<td>Resource / tutor / controller</td>
<td>Rather active learners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 2. Teacher suggests a topical plan for the course</td>
<td>On the one hand, teacher suggests a syllabus and recommends resources. On the other hand, students are allowed to reformulate a theme, add more Internet sites to the list of resources, and introduce new concepts or ideas.</td>
<td>Tutor / Prompter</td>
<td>Rather active learners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 3 Independent home assignments</td>
<td>In fact, students are responsible for all the activities at this stage. There are many personal activities and much peer support. Teacher just provides guidelines and helps when needed.</td>
<td>Resource / prompter / tutor</td>
<td>Most active learners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 4 Formative assessment</td>
<td>There are four aspects in this step: • Assessing learners’ participation in glossary compilation process. • Assessing the degree of memorization of vocabulary items. • Assessing learners’ comprehension of textual (visual and audio) input • Assessing learners speaking activities. Each aspect differs in the degree of teacher’s participation. Teacher is to assess the quality of glossary and their speaking performance in class. While the internet-based tasks on vocabulary and comprehension require more active and autonomous approach on behalf of learners. No feedback from the teacher at this stage.</td>
<td>Controller / participant</td>
<td>Very active learners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 5 Summative assessment of vocabulary range and a speaking skills test</td>
<td>In both summative assessments, i.e. presenting a glossary as a ‘product’ and a case study (speaking test) teacher can only issue the task and help if asked to. Students prepare both tasks autonomously.</td>
<td>Controller / prompter</td>
<td>Very active learners</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Results and Discussion**

At the initial stage of the experiment the needs analysis demonstrated that the only activity learners appreciate in class is different forms of speaking. When asked to choose activities they prefer doing in class, most interviewees chose role-plays, case studies, presentations and discussions rather than tasks on listening, reading or writing (see Figure 1). Another interesting feature was that students really wanted to be involved in projects. Computer-based activities also scored well, but the needs analysis does not indicate the type of online activities they like.
In subsequent interviews and private talks we asked students what they meant by online activities. The response was that they were prepared to do anything what could be done outside the class whether it was listening, reading or writing. The interviewees also stated that the thing that prevented them from speaking more fluently was poor vocabulary range and words skipping memory. Forty eight out of sixty students surveyed acclaimed that vocabulary/terminology range/accuracy lags behind in their language education. They also expressed disappointment about the contents of traditional textbooks, e.g. The Business by John Allison et al., as they wanted more subject-specific language vocabulary input. In general, most interviewees voted for the use of mass media and internet sources for vocabulary and content input. The implication that stems from the needs analysis is that an ESP course should be blended and flipped with extensive modes of autonomous learning.

It would be interesting to note that the further analysis of the learner’s preferences identified most students as either belonging to the communicative or analytical learning styles (see Figure 2).

The results indicate that students from the experimental groups are either independent problem-solvers, able to apply logic and develop their own principles (analytical type) or communicators, who appreciate feedback and thrive in classroom democracy (communicative type).

The following conclusions have been made from the results of the described above needs analysis:

• There is a need to constructing a tailor-made course that would reflect the state-of-art development of students’ subject domain.

• The course should be based on the assumption that speaking is done in class while vocabulary work is done outside the class, as internet-based assignments.
The learners are prepared to analyze their vocabulary and content input in an autonomous modes of learning and will like it being involved in project activities.

One more observation arises from the initial aim of the experiment, i.e. to construct a tailor-made course that suits these particular students, to do speaking in class and vocabulary work as internet-based assignments and to provide learners with more autonomous modes of learning like project activities. It seems like the aim has been achieved. The students were never inactive during the course, they were just rather active at the beginning and either very or most active as the course developed further. In fact, if we assume a rough percentage of work done by teacher to work done by students it may be 30 to 70. On the other hand, do we really assume that teacher’s time spent on getting for the lessons decreased that much? The matter is that the algorithm described in the article requires the teacher to ‘keep pace’ with what students do:

• to be accessible 7/24 in order to answer any questions that may arise;
• to constantly upgrade his/her knowledge of both students’ subject-specific domain and related language skills;
• to be a skillful and advanced user of technologies;
• to be inventive and resourceful for your learners;
• to keep in rapport with his/her students so that they do not think that the teacher just delegated the duties to them.

All that requires even more time and effort than a traditional class-based English course.

Evaluation of the course was done through a formal type of evaluation, i.e. a students’ questionnaire. Respondents were to assess the results of the course by choosing “yes”, “no” and “I doubt” options in answer to the questions about the development of hard skills (professional development, fluency in speaking English, increase in vocabulary range) and soft skills (autonomy of learning, amount of time and effort, motivation to learn languages) (see Figure 3).

![Students' responses from the survey](image)

**Figure 3. Students’ responses (formal evaluation)**

Students’ responses are represented in blue (yes), red (no) and grey (I doubt).

The highest bars are for the increase in the vocabulary range and the increase in the amount of time and effort spent to complete the tasks. It means that on the one hand, students recognize that glossary compilation and online vocabulary tasks bring along skills and knowledge. On the other hand, the implication is that such activities require much more time and effort in comparison to traditional class tasks.

The second result (40 out of 60 students) is for professional development. Indeed, being allowed to choose texts for input on their own, students seized the opportunity to combine reading for English class with reading for their subject-specific classes. They collected a range of authentic subject-specific sources on topics of their course and diploma works. It is interesting to note that the samples included both purely scientific and journalist style texts. It means that learners’ scope of interests is not limited by economic issues only. They do feel involved in other aspects of social life such as psychological or environmental issues.
According to the results of formal evaluation, students become more autonomous. The corresponding bars indicate that only 4 learners do not feel any increase in their learning independence. 36 students admit that the mode of the course implies more independence. However, 20 students doubt how to answer the question. Probably, they are confused with the concept – being independent from teachers or from other students, i.e. learner autonomy versus individual work. Another explanation may be that students usually find autonomous activities rather challenging as they have never been exposed to unguided assignments before. They have got used to rely on the teacher in his role of a supervisor.

The disappointing thing is that students did not quite achieve the expected level of language fluency (only almost half of the students recognized that their fluency in speaking has been enhanced). That may be explained by the format of online ‘synchronic’ classes delivered on the MS Teams platform. This was due to the current pandemic and the requirements of the university to use this platform only (all classes were automatically saved in the cloud of the university and in this way teachers and students were controlled).

One more frustration comes from the motivation aspect. One third of the respondents say their motivation is the same as before the course and 8 learners were doubtful about the answer. Full-time education indicates that those who opt for this form want to be taught, not guided. They want brick-and-mortar, not virtual classrooms. They want knowledge well-prepared for consumption, not extracted out of the oceans of data on their own. On the other hand, the decision to experiment with flipped classroom was taken on the basis of the needs analysis conducted at the beginning of the course. That needs analysis suggests that the learners do want more project and vocabulary work, and a third of them can be reported to belong to analytical type of thinking. However, we should have taken into consideration that the same needs analysis indicated students’ dislikes toward quizzes, dictations and tests. Nevertheless, the digital tools we used throughout the course imply just that type of assignments. One more explanation for the rather low level of motivation is that one and a half third of students who participated in the experimental course belong to the so called ‘communicative type’. They expected to be exposed to more speaking tasks like case studies, role-plays and discussions. This was not always possible due to the requirements of online learning only discussed above.

We asked the participants of the course to give us some informal evaluation of its aspects. The interviews support our previous assumptions. There is confident increase in students’ vocabulary range and they really appreciate it. They have developed knowledge of their subject domain. They like interacting with peers but probably do not realize that they have become more independent from the teacher. They really want to come back to their brick-and-mortar educational environment, but appreciate online tools for vocabulary work. They do not think that motivation in learning English can depend on the format of their studies.

Conclusion

In creating the course, the authors hypothesized that self-directed learning and the use of specially selected Internet sources as an alternative to traditional textbooks can enhance student professional development, language learning motivation, vocabulary range and speaking skills. The increasing proliferation of digital technologies in teaching and the learners’ need for immediate feedback are driving significant changes in the content and methodology of ESP teaching. In connection with these trends, the content of the course was selected – the search for relevant topics, text (audio and visual) verbal input and students’ autonomous preparation of assignments for lessons online and offline. The role of the teacher varied throughout the course: from the role of mentor to the role of peer, bystander and supervisor.

As shown by the results of the questionnaire at the end of the course, providing more autonomy in ESP learning contributes to the development of professional competencies, soft and hard skills. The experiment also reveals that project like glossary compilation and its collaborative discussion is highly estimated by language learners. They appreciate the process of achieving the results and the progress they have made. Well-organized feedback during the experimental course of learning in a distance format has made up to some extent live communication between students and teachers, contributed to the establishment of trusting relationships based on mutual respect. Despite the time and effort on behalf of both teachers and learners, the mode suggested in the course for learning vocabulary turned out viable for future use. However, to develop and improve the effectiveness of online courses, further research is needed to determine if online learning can replace traditional classes in terms of developing fluency and communication skills. It is also advisable to conduct additional experiments on the use of such courses for students with a low level of language proficiency, who prefer different learning styles, belonging to different age groups.
References


