



## Review Article

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# DEVELOPMENT OF COGNITIVE SKILLS OF STUDENTS WHEN WRITING FOR A SPECIAL PURPOSE

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### Abstract

Writing skills include all the knowledge and abilities related to expressing ideas through the written word. Well-known writing conveys our message or information with high clarity.

*The purpose of the thesis* is to make a survey of and analyze the cognitive capability of students to clearly communicate professional ideas through writing that is in high demand for employers in any industry, to study modern approaches and perspectives in teaching writing for professional needs from methodological, psychological and didactic positions. Written communication skills expand the connection between employer and manager, specialist and client, thus the chain continues.

*Methodology.* The mixed methods were used, observation and comparison, the questionnaire and the individual case analysis ones inclusive.

*Results of research* show that when it comes to writing for professional purposes writing might be beneficial to cognitive skills because it requires focusing of attention, planning and forethought, organization of one's thinking, and reflective thought, among other abilities, thereby sharpening these skills through practice and reinforcement.

Thus, the author comes to the conclusion that developing structures within creative writing helps students, future young specialists, to clarify their thoughts into a logical process, as well as their emotions. They will be able to look at situations in the workplace and in the rest of their life with clarity, being able to define clear pathways in order to overcome problems in the professions. Thus, knowing students' writing issues may not only hasten the learning/teaching process but also contribute to the development of students' cognitive learning skills. Hence, the effects of designing supporting schemes of different types on development of students' cognitive and communicative skills in the process of learning a foreign language is evident.

**Keywords:** *English for Special Purposes (ESP), motivation for learning, English for Occupational Purposes, effective language learning, effective writing communication, a specific working environment, development of metacognitive strategies*

### **Relevance**

In an unstable labor market during the economic downturn as a result of a new political situation, military aggression in Ukraine, a country on the European continent, and as a result, the objective requirements of employers to form "soft skills" of young professionals in online work, the universities and educational institutions of our country face the challenges not only to develop specific professional competencies (providing a set of professional knowledge, skills and abilities), but also to develop cognitive factors which affect second or foreign language learning, thus help in the development of metacognitive strategies for successful employment and professional activities. The relevance of new approaches to the methodological task, taking into account the psychological aspects in teaching written professional communication in a foreign language, is obvious.

### **Methodology**

The purpose of the study is to study and analyze various modern approaches and perspectives in teaching writing for professional needs from methodological, psychological and didactic positions; to study the development of students' cognitive skills to convey information to readers in the workplace, since professional writing is formal and different from a written text, i.e. it is not considered literary or artistic. It was decided to make use of such research methods in order to raise the effectiveness of the presented survey: the questionnaire method (aimed to collect data as regards the students' opinions in terms of professional writing), the comparative and contrastive methods (aimed to compare and therefore contrast the obtained data, i.e. the students' opinions and information provided in the survey), the individual case analysis method (aimed to analyze and present each student's feedback individually and thus reach additional conclusions).

### **Results**

Commitment to the goal of providing language instruction that addresses students' own language learning purposes is what those who take an English for Specific Purposes (ESP) approach see as distinguishing it from other approaches to English Language Teaching (ELT). To understand the issue of English for Special Purposes (ESP) clearly, first, it is worth analyzing what English for Special Purposes really is. Some researchers define ESP as an approach to language learning which is based on learner needs and in which all decisions as to content and method are based on the learner's motivation for learning. They support the idea that ESP is the type of a language that reveals numerous and unique features, both absolute, such as specific needs and underlying methodology, appropriate language elements, and variable, such as specific disciplines, modified methodology allowed, designed mostly for students and advanced learners, partly based on the basic knowledge of the target language.

Others suggest that the term ESP refers to the type of discourse implemented in a specific working environment in order to suit the needs of the intended profession and facilitate the process of information run in a professional context. And, when it comes to



ESP courses at university, developed and first officially presented in the late 1960s, the teacher needs to conduct a thorough analysis of the specific character of the ESP type of written and spoken discourse before implementing, and thus addressing their students' needs.

To my mind, the teacher needs to be aware of the multiple character of ESP courses, differ the types and specific characteristics. As a result of personal observance and interviews of my colleagues, some teachers favor a clear separation of ESP courses into the two main categories: English for Academic Purposes (EAP), designed for university students to address their academic needs, and English for Occupational/Special Purposes (EOP/ESP), designed for a variety of professional communities, such as psychologists, military men, lawyers, businesspeople, doctors, etc. Besides, there are also less-known categories of ESP courses, which constitute a combination of the above-mentioned types of ESP phenomena, for example, English for Academic Legal Purposes, or English for Academic Business Purposes, or Military English, as one of such hybrids. Today, it is one of the most requested aspects of training during the period of hostilities in Ukraine. The concept of Military English claims that it is a type of a language that tends to be used in military contexts and constitutes the vital outcome of the progressive process of globalization of military conflicts as well as integration of armies in multinational and multicultural coalition forces. No surprise that English has become the major language tool responsible for the interconnection between individuals and professional groups and organizations, between the national and the international (NATO, UN, and UNICEF).

Writing for special/professional needs differs significantly from ordinary writing, as special training courses are aimed at preparing students for professional communication. Metacognitive strategies should be developed in every lesson in writing in a classroom. There are also two forms (mentioned above) of preparation for the study fundamentals of special writing: basic, initial, introductory preparation, and special. Then, as part of the initial training, students undergo a wide range of university classes, such as an introduction to the subject, the history of the subject, specialization within the future profession, students from the first day of study become active participants in the educational process, where they are assigned various additional responsibilities, not related to study. Being a university student is also reflected in the fact that students observe academic discipline, and after class they devote a lot of time to self-development on the topic of scientific and educational interests.

The place of writing texts in English for professional purposes, as one of the types of online professional communication during the period of military aggression in Ukraine and Covid-19 pandemic occupies a separate place in modern curricula and is of paramount importance. The students are usually taught integrated language skills, which means that the four major skills are properly balanced in order to achieve the intended learning objectives in writing.

In the course of observing the process of preparing teachers for this aspect of education over the past years the author concluded that when it comes to teaching professional writing, usually there is no special training aid or textbooks for this skill and, as a result, teachers are forced to use various materials selected on the basis of their practical experience. While observing the process of developing professional writing skills with psychology students, the author of the theses concluded that when developing academic/professional writing skills, one should focus on the key recommendations and warnings:

- when students write a text on professional topics, they engage in a process of developing an appropriate topic for a certain audience;
- they need to explore various possibilities to discover what they want to write, how to focus the subject, how to form a thesis, and how to develop an appropriate plan of organization;
- if they try to engage in all of these activities simultaneously, they become frustrated as writing is a process that usually requires a considerable investment of time, because they need to return to a specific activity several times.
- understanding the target audience (psychologists, military men, businessmen, etc.) will help the student to decide on the length and depth of the text, the kind of vocabulary to use, and the examples that will be the most effective;
- students, as future specialists, should differ from the professional audiences which vary considerably.

In the course of observing the preparation of students, the author of the theses notes that there is no unified approach to planning and writing a text on the stated topic: some students like to plan and draft their texts with a clear sense of audience already in mind; others like to focus on the audience primarily: good students, at some point, think clearly about who will be reading their writing and first define for themselves if their choices are appropriate for this audience, and only then get to work.

In a course of interview with my psychology students I concluded that well-prepared (advanced) students know their target audience before they even start, that is a professional group that has significant knowledge of the subject and topic, and show a keen interest in it. If the student's topic is new methods in coping with PTSD, methods and approaches, a group of clinical psychologists or social workers will obviously constitute a specialized audience. The authors of an article for a specialized journal in Psychology would do the same, although when writing for this audience the student would allow for a greater variation in information, given the narrow professional interests of the reader.

The empirical conclusions show that writing for special purposes and specialized audiences, students need to consider how much and what kinds of information, as well as what methods of presentation, are called for. They should adjust their tone and the kind of language/vocabulary they use as they tailor their text/presentation to their expertise and attitudes. Many of the papers students draft and write are for a specialized audience.



In the course of self-observation during the learning process, comparing the methods of teaching a foreign language with colleagues, who also teach a foreign language for special purposes, I concluded that when students write an essay on a special topic, they assume that their teacher is well informed about the material, and I suggest that it should be a must for a teacher at the profile faculty. Sure, no teacher is ever entirely expert, and is usually pleased to learn something new, and writing for a specialized audience does not necessarily demand that the teacher should know more than specialists in that field. At times it may be sufficient to demonstrate that you understand the material and can use appropriate language to discuss it. Moreover, a specialized audience for one subject would be a general audience for another.

In the process of teaching English for Special Purposes for five or more years, as a teacher, I cannot but mention an equally important aspect of my observation - the attitude of teachers to the first level of training, which includes aspects of practical grammar, and according to my observations 30- 40% of teachers ignore it, considering it the school stage of teaching a foreign language. When it comes to results, at the exam in professional writing the undergraduates show low results, having a good vocabulary on the topic and the ability to discuss it, about 60% of the students cannot correctly state it in writing.

Evaluation becomes a challenge then because, when evaluating writing skills, the teacher is supposed to investigate whether the paragraphs written by a student cohere with the other ones. In other words, students need to know how to organize ideas in accordance with the main points of the target task or simple sequence of events; the teacher needs to evaluate whether the ideas have been related in writing clearly, and the transitions between them have logical organization. The fact is that students usually can control simple, commonly used grammatical structures, but they face difficulties when practicing more complex structures and thus refrain from using them in developing professional ideas. As far as professional vocabulary is concerned, it may be used incorrectly either, which means that students can make use of a number of circumlocutions in order to compensate for their lack of knowledge. Finally, there is a possibility of distortion in the text of meaning due to a student's grammar and professional vocabulary. In the end, when it comes to the expected results, students ought to write about not only everyday life but about job-related issues of their future speciality, and thus formulate full paragraphs that consist of simple and complex sentences. However, the task must be grammatically and lexically correct, logical and coherent.

Moreover, my practical conclusions and recommendations are that the teacher should keep in mind that many psychology students view this issue more broadly and, thus treat writing as the most useful skill, hence, they should never dominate on the choice of format of preparatory work or writing either. Furthermore, for those students who take into consideration various promising types of work in the profession abroad, writing plays a significant role in communication and their ability to perform professional duties.

From my point of view, the approach that rules out the possibility of using English at graduates' work is not entirely justified and desirable. First of all, such an attitude may contribute to lower motivation when learning to write effectively. What is more, as psychology graduates are not decisive in terms of their future assignments, whereas cooperation between the European and the Ukrainian institutions gradually increases, opportunities regarding international encounters and contacts should not be doubted. When it comes to self-assessment as regards the respondents' writing difficulties, the results obtained in the survey are satisfying (70%), as the students' confidence in their writing skills increases over the course of their studies. The more experience they get, the more self-assured they become.

The author also assumes that the students' positive attitude towards this ability influences their willingness to practice it. However, the most qualitative data provide information concerning the students' solutions and expectations regarding their writing problems. As the respondents are adult and experienced learners, they are undoubtedly aware of their language and educational needs, including language learning styles (about 60%). That is why the respondents' opinions as regards the possible ways of dealing with writing problems constitute essential pieces of feedback. Finally, the results obtained by the authors indicate what psychology students' needs are, and they can be guidelines for English teachers when it comes to the areas that ought to be practiced more intensively.

Developing the skills of written (professional) communication, the teacher should not forget about the didactic aspects in the learning process, especially in the era of the dominance of bot farms and fake information - the development of critical thinking in the process of discussing a future topic is of fundamental importance. This aspect of a young person's/student's development should be devoted some time in class either. As practices have shown, ten to fifteen minutes of preliminary analysis of the topic in terms of validity justifies itself. Critical thinking is essential for critical reading and writing. It is also essential when writing arguments and undertaking other types of writing.

Critical students know that they cannot believe everything they are told or they read. They understand that different sources discussing the same topic, even professional topic, and drawing on the same evidence can reach significantly different conclusions. Instead of routinely agreeing with the opponent who seems to reinforce reassuringly familiar beliefs, critical students are likely to discover that different sources have each revealed a part of what may ultimately prove to be true. The challenge for students, then, is to determine which ideas make more sense than others and to determine the extent to which those ideas are reliable and useful. In addition, student critics scrutinize the language of a professional text and the information in it because they understand how it might affect the professional reader by employing a range of rhetorical strategies that may not be obvious at first glance. Because thinking and reading critically involve making well-reasoned choices, these closely related skills are among the most valuable the students at university can acquire. The teacher can help to master them through oral practice, just as they have mastered skills in writing.



The author compared the opinions and suggestions provided by the students representing prior years of studies and psychology faculty in order to evaluate their attitudes towards professional writing skills before and after the exam in the mid 4th year.

As far as methodology is concerned, it was decided to make use of such research methods in order to raise the effectiveness of the presented survey:

\_ the questionnaire method (aimed to collect data as regards the students' opinions in terms of professional writing),

\_ the comparative and contrastive methods (aimed to compare and therefore contrast the obtained data, i.e. the students' opinions and information provided in the survey),

\_ the individual case analysis method (aimed to analyze and present each student's feedback individually and thus reach additional conclusions).

### Conclusions

Professional writing for special purposes always poses a challenge for students, as it requires extensive application of various elements of students' knowledge, such as grammatical rules, appropriate vocabulary, etc. Only when all of these elements are combined can the target text meet the proper writing standards and thus become coherent and correct. The better the students are prepared to tackle their writing problems, the better their writing performance can be. As a corollary, there might be the fundamental role of English teachers, i.e. to equip their students with successful writing strategies, focus on students' needs in relation to psychology, legal and other specialized vocabulary, and grammar practice. In other words, knowing students' writing issues may not only hasten the learning/teaching process but also contribute to the development of students' cognitive learning skills. Hence, the effects of designing supporting schemes of different types on development of students' cognitive and communicative skills in the process of learning a foreign language is evident.

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