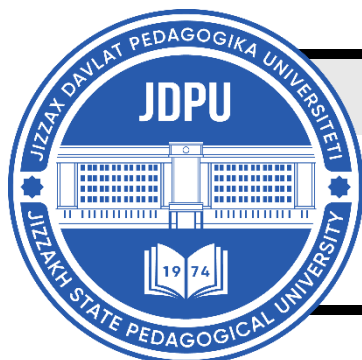


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IMPROVING ESP STUDENTS' SPOKEN INTERACTIONS: THE ROLE OF TRANSACTIONAL STRATEGIES

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ABOUT ARTICLE

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Abstract: This article analyzes and discusses the topic of improving students' verbal communication: the role of transactional strategies.

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Introduction

In an increasingly globalized world, communication skills are vital for success in various academic and professional domains. Speaking skills are particularly crucial for students engaged in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) programs as they prepare to enter professional environments where clear, efficient communication is key. ESP focuses on teaching students the language necessary to function in specific fields, such as business, law, medicine, or engineering, with an emphasis on language that is both relevant and functional in their professional lives. Speaking, a core communicative skill plays a fundamental role in these programs. Speaking skills in ESP programs not only enhance students' ability to convey technical information accurately but also foster their confidence in professional interactions. These programs often incorporate role-playing exercises, presentations, and simulations of real-world scenarios to provide practical experience using field-specific terminology and communicative strategies. Furthermore, developing strong speaking skills within an ESP context can lead to improved career prospects, as employers increasingly value candidates who can clearly articulate complex ideas and engage effectively in international business settings.

Although ESP students often acquire technical language, they frequently face difficulties in applying their knowledge to real-world spoken interactions. One of the most effective ways to develop these speaking skills is through transactional strategies. Transactional communication refers to goal-oriented interactions in which information is exchanged with the intent of achieving a specific outcome. These strategies differ from social or interactional communication, which focuses on building relationships or engaging in casual conversations. Transactional strategies can help students hone the practical, task-oriented speaking skills that they need in their careers. These strategies include techniques such as clarifying information, asking probing questions, and providing concise summaries to ensure effective communication in professional settings. By practicing transactional communication, ESP students can bridge the gap between their technical knowledge and practical applications, enhancing their ability to participate confidently in workplace discussions and negotiations. Moreover, mastering these strategies can help students develop a more nuanced understanding of cultural and professional norms within their specific fields, further improving their overall communicative competence.

This article explores how incorporating transactional strategies into ESP curricula can enhance students' speaking skills, with a focus on activities that simulate real-world professional scenarios. This study investigated the effectiveness of these strategies in improving ESP students' fluency, confidence, vocabulary usage, and interactional skills. This study aimed to analyze the impact of transactional communication strategies on ESP students' speaking abilities in professional contexts. It examines various methods for integrating these strategies into ESP curricula, focusing on activities that replicate authentic workplace scenarios. Additionally, this study will assess how these approaches contribute to improving students' overall communication competence, including their fluency, confidence, and ability to effectively use specialized vocabulary.

Method

Participants

This study involved 60 students enrolled in ESP programs at a university. Students were divided into three groups, each representing a different discipline: business, engineering, and healthcare. These fields were chosen for their diverse communicative and professional needs. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 25 years and had varying levels of English proficiency, although all were at an intermediate or higher level, as determined by their TOEFL or IELTS scores. The research design incorporated a mixed-methods approach that combined quantitative surveys with qualitative interviews and classroom observations.

This comprehensive methodology aimed to capture both the breadth and depth of student's experiences and perceptions of ESP courses. Additionally, the study included a longitudinal component that tracked participants' progress and changes in attitudes over one academic year.

Research Design

This study used a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative data collection techniques. The research was conducted over 12 weeks, and the following steps were implemented:

1. **Pre-Assessment:** Before the intervention, all students participated in an initial speaking test to assess their baseline speaking skills. The test involved transactional tasks such as role-playing, presenting a business pitch, explaining a technical concept, and negotiating a contract. Students were also asked to rate their confidence levels in these speaking tasks.

2. **Intervention:** Over 12 weeks, students engaged in activities designed to promote transactional communication, including:

- **Role-Playing and Simulations:** Students practiced real-life scenarios relevant to their field, such as business meetings, patient consultations, and engineering project discussions.

- **Task-Based Learning:** Students worked on tasks that involved problem-solving, collaborative decision-making, or information exchange (e.g., giving a presentation, or negotiating a business deal).

- **Debates and Discussions:** Structured debates on relevant topics within the student's field of study were incorporated into the lessons to develop their critical thinking and persuasive speaking skills.

- **Information-Gap Activities:** Students engaged in activities that required them to exchange information to complete a task, such as planning a project or solving a case study problem.

3. **Post-Assessment:** After the intervention, students took the same speaking test as in the pre-assessment phase. The aim was to measure improvements in fluency, vocabulary use, interactional competence, and overall speaking ability. Additionally, students completed a self-assessment survey evaluating their confidence and perceived improvement in their speaking skills.

4. **Reflection and Feedback:** After the post-assessment, students participated in focus group discussions to reflect on their learning experiences. They were asked to provide

feedback on the activities, the usefulness of the transactional strategies, and their overall perception of progress in their speaking skills.

Data Collection

- **Quantitative Data:** The pre- and post-assessment tests were scored based on a rubric that evaluated fluency, coherence, vocabulary use, and interactional skills. The scores were then compared to determine the extent of improvement across the three groups.

- **Qualitative Data:** Focus group interviews were transcribed and analyzed for recurring themes related to students' experiences with the transactional activities, their perceived confidence in speaking, and the real-world applicability of the strategies.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data from the pre-and post-assessments were analyzed using paired t-tests to assess whether there were statistically significant improvements in students' speaking skills. Qualitative data were analyzed using thematic coding to identify key themes in students' reflections on the activities and their self-perceived improvement. The paired t-tests allowed for a direct comparison of individual student's performance before and after the intervention, providing a robust measure of change over time. Thematic coding of qualitative data involved careful reading and categorization of students' responses, enabling the identification of recurring patterns and insights. This mixed-methods approach provided a comprehensive understanding of both measurable skill improvements and students' subjective experiences with the speaking activities.

Results

Quantitative Results

The pre-and post-assessment results demonstrated clear improvements in the student's speaking abilities across all three groups (business, engineering, and healthcare).

- **Fluency:** The average fluency score increased by 18% across all groups. The business students showed the greatest improvement, with an average increase of 22%. Engineering students, who initially struggled with technical vocabulary, also showed a marked improvement, increasing their fluency score by 17%.

- **Vocabulary Use:** There was a significant improvement in the accuracy and relevance of vocabulary used in professional contexts. Business students showed a 15% increase in the correct use of business terminology. Engineering students had a 12% increase in the application of technical vocabulary, while healthcare students saw a 14% increase in their ability to use medical terms appropriately.

- **Interactional Skills:** The ability to take turns, ask clarifying questions, and respond effectively in conversations improved by an average of 16%. Students in the engineering and healthcare groups showed particularly strong improvements in their interactional competence, likely due to the problem-solving and collaborative nature of many tasks in these fields.

Qualitative Results

The qualitative data from focus groups revealed that the majority of students found the transactional activities to be highly beneficial in developing their speaking skills.

- **Confidence:** 85% of participants reported feeling more confident in their ability to engage in professional conversations. Many students mentioned that role-playing scenarios allowed them to practice speaking in a risk-free environment, which helped them overcome the anxiety often associated with speaking in real-world settings.

- **Real-World Relevance:** Students across all groups noted that the activities were highly relevant to their future careers. For instance, business students appreciated the chance to practice negotiation skills, while healthcare students found the patient consultation simulations particularly useful.

- **Engagement:** Students were highly engaged in task-based activities, particularly those that involved collaboration. Many students mentioned that they enjoyed the interactive nature of the tasks, which encouraged them to work together and intentionally use language.

Discussion

The results of this study confirm the effectiveness of transactional strategies in enhancing ESP students' speaking skills. The significant improvements in fluency, vocabulary use, and interactional competence suggest that task-based learning, role-playing, and information-gap activities are highly effective for developing the communicative abilities needed in professional settings. These strategies helped students move beyond theoretical knowledge and develop practical language skills. This approach not only fostered confidence in using English for specific purposes but also enhanced students' ability to navigate real-world professional scenarios. The implementation of these transactional strategies created a dynamic learning environment that simulated authentic workplace interactions, allowing students to practice and refine their communication skills in context. Moreover, the observed improvements in students' speaking abilities highlight the potential for integrating similar task-based and interactive methodologies across various ESP curricula to better prepare learners for their future professional roles.

The findings also highlight the importance of relevance in language learning. Activities that simulated real-world tasks specific to students' fields not only motivated them but also ensured that their learning was directly applicable to their future careers. By focusing on the practical aspects of communication, students were able to build confidence in their ability to navigate professional conversations in English. This approach to language learning not only enhances linguistic competence but also develops critical soft skills such as adaptability, problem-solving, and cultural awareness. The success of these transactional strategies underscores the need for continued research into innovative teaching methods that bridge the gap between classroom learning and real-world application. Furthermore, the positive outcomes suggest that incorporating industry-specific scenarios and role-playing exercises could be beneficial in other areas of language education, potentially revolutionizing how language skills are taught and assessed in academic settings.

Furthermore, the study suggests that the integration of interactive activities fosters a deeper level of engagement and encourages active participation. In contrast to traditional lecture-based methods, transactional strategies place students in situations where they must actively communicate and problem-solve, thus enhancing their speaking skills in a more authentic, context-driven manner. The implementation of these transactional strategies could also lead to increased student motivation and self-confidence, as learners experience tangible progress in their language abilities through practical application. Moreover, this approach aligns well with the growing emphasis on experiential learning in higher education, potentially paving the way for more interdisciplinary collaborations between language departments and other academic fields. By simulating real-world scenarios, students may also develop a more nuanced understanding of the cultural nuances and professional etiquette associated with using the target language in various contexts. Additionally, the incorporation of industry-specific content and role-playing exercises could help bridge the gap between academic language learning and professional language use, better preparing students for their future careers.

Conclusion

This study demonstrated the effectiveness of transactional strategies in enhancing ESP students' speaking skills. By incorporating role-playing, task-based learning, debates, and information-gap activities, ESP programs can provide students with practical speaking experience they need to succeed in their professional domains. The significant improvements in fluency, vocabulary, and interactional skills observed in this study suggest that these strategies should be integrated into ESP curricula across disciplines. Future

research should explore the long-term impact of these strategies on students' speaking abilities, and examine the potential for adapting these strategies to other fields of study. The findings of this study can be further extended by investigating the effectiveness of these transactional strategies in online or blended learning environments, which are becoming increasingly prevalent in modern education. Additionally, exploring the impact of cultural differences on the implementation and success of these strategies could provide valuable insights into ESP programs in diverse international settings. Future research might also consider the potential benefits of combining these transactional strategies with other innovative teaching approaches, such as gamification or virtual reality simulations, to create more engaging and effective ESP speaking experiences.

As ESP programs continue to evolve, focusing on the real world, transactional communication will ensure that students are well equipped to engage confidently and competently in their professional careers. Further research could also investigate the potential role of artificial intelligence and natural language processing technologies in enhancing the implementation and assessment of transactional strategies in ESP programmes. Longitudinal studies that track students' progress over extended periods could provide valuable insights into the sustained benefits of these strategies beyond the immediate academic context. Additionally, exploring the potential for peer-to-peer learning and mentorship programs in ESP courses could offer new perspectives on fostering transactional communication skills among students.

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