The role of technology in acquiring and maintaining English language skills for professional lifelong learning

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The importance of lifelong learning for future graduates, how English for Specific Purposes courses in higher education can train undergraduates in becoming lifelong learners, as well as how technology is a critical contributing factor in such courses and future employees' lives.

Contents:

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- ESP courses and technology
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Lifelong Learning

The concept of lifelong learning relates to a set of values and principles regarding the role of ongoing acquisition, integration, and application of new knowledge throughout one's lifetime, and also includes the practices and structures that position professionals to be relevant, effective, and engaged in their career.

(Nissen et al.. 2014, p. 386)

Lifelong Learning

- Formal settings (schools, universities) – development of cognitive skills

- Informal settings (outside the classroom) – use of super-cognitive skills – autonomous learning

- Learner autonomy as a pedagogical approach to lifelong learning (Dam, 2012)

Lifelong Learning

- **Council of Europe (2019):** Recommendation on eight competences which would enable citizens to reach their full potential in learning and extending learning in their lives

- **National Strategy for Lifelong Learning 2014-2020 in Cyprus:** Form a system that will enable citizens to develop those skills that would help them 'deal with any challenges, […] have the opportunity to move freely between learning settings, jobs, regions, and countries, and […] participate actively and equally, thus helping to strengthen the country's productivity, innovation, competitiveness, and dynamism'.

- **Need for higher education:** Equip prospective employees with those skills that would enable them to engage in autonomous lifelong learning and become competitive and employable.

ESP courses and technology

- The role of English language competence in the development of professional lifelong learning skills is essential.
- Reading fluency: professionally-oriented literature (e.g., research, reports, news, etc.) occurs in English (Graddol, 2000; Bloch, 2013).
- Listening comprehension: evaluation of the details of radio, television and Internet-based broadcasts relating to professional interests.
- Speaking: international professional meetings (Barančicová & Zerzová, 2015), oral presentations.
- Rapid development of information technology all professionals need to possess at least an overall intermediate level (CEFR B1) of English language competence.

ESP courses and technology

- English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses in higher education: language skills in the field of study of the learners in the English language.

- However, what about professional lifelong learning?

- Change of mindset in undergraduate students towards pursuing their own professional development and the English language skills required to do so.

- Technology provides an abundance of authentic materials for professional purposes, including English language maintenance and enhancement (Lesiak-Bielawska, 2015; Vaičiūnienė, V. & Užpalienė, 2012; Bloch, 2013).

ESP courses and technology

- However, time constraints in the classroom.
- Need to train learners in the classroom to effectively utilise technology beyond the classroom.
- Formal education can create conditions which may lead to instilling a mindset for lifelong learning.
- Technology is a key element in the maintenance of one's English language competence outside the classroom (Lai, 2017)

A model ESP course

- LC CUT ESAP courses: first year undergraduate student – 2 semesters (B1, B1-B2 CEFR level)

- Incorporate 21st century skills.

- Make students aware of the need to actively pursue their ongoing professional development (lifelong learning) and provide them with the necessary skills (both in digital literacy and English competence) to do so.

A model ESP course

- English for Rehabilitation (ESAP, Cyprus University of Technology).
- Two-semester compulsory subject for first-year students majoring in Speech Language Therapy, a Health Faculty discipline.
- Goal: increase students' linguistic and digital literacy competence to allow them to function professionally in English as independent and lifelong learners in all four skills at a high-intermediate (B2) level.
- Each semester, three/four thematic blocks, each lasting three to four weeks.

Activities and Technologies:

Discipline-based lectures (30-45 minutes by a member of the academic staff or an area professional) and observation of cases:
- Listening
- Notetaking
- Paraphrasing
- Collaborative synthesis in written course summaries

Oral Presentations

Disciplinary readings (printed and web-based sources):
- Notetaking
- Paraphrasing
- Critical thinking

Collaborative web-based research on discipline-related topics (choosing reliable internet sources)

Preparing for conference/seminar attendance and participation

Selecting reliable sources

Carrying out literature review

Engaging in teamwork

Paraphrasing and summarizing to convey information

Giving presentations

Critical evaluation

Activities and Technologies:

Interviews	**Preparing interview questions on profession-related topics (interviewing future clients)**
Essay outlines and argumentative text writing	**Arguing a point of view with evidence**
In-class communicative language use - Small group interactions	**Engaging in teamwork, expressing opinions, persuading and coming to a consensus**
YouTube, WWW sources, Google Applications (GDrive, Google Slides), Prezi	

- Technology use – both inside and outside the classroom

- Easy access to online materials

- Ubiquitous online access to shared documents

- Co-construction of disciplinary knowledge

- Collaboration and ICT training

Conclusion

The development of professional lifelong learning skills is essential for graduates to enter a competitive and demanding market, to maintain employment and aspire to promotion. In order to achieve these goals, it is of vital importance that today's students learn how to independently maintain a high level of English competence in order to effectively access professional resources and actively participate in the English-dominated professional world.