

THE ROLE OF COMMUNICATION IN THE STUDENT-CENTERED CLASSROOM

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Abstract: *Communication plays a vital role in human daily life, being mainly defined as a two-way process or as a system whereby messages are sent and feedback is received. No human being can live without communication with other people such as family, friends or colleagues. The speech was invented in order to make communication more efficient and it represents a significant tool in all social activities and professions such as lawyers, teachers, sailors, journalists and so on. Thus, communication, by its social nature, engages people in sharing their knowledge and experience. This paper presents the results of our research conducted in order to emphasize the role of communication in the ESP (English for Specific Purposes) student-centered classroom. When organizing and conducting ESP classes, the teacher obtains better results if s/he applies student-centered methods. For this purpose, s/he should take into consideration elements such as the students' training level and main field of study, the types of exercises that could rise their interest (including working in groups and in pairs), the oral expression of scientific and technical symbols, the verbalization of graphics, the interpretation of schemes, the systematization of the vocabulary items according to the principles of logic order, the definition and interpretation processes and operations, finding the meaning of words in context, etc. Moreover, the teacher should also take into account the students' individual variables (i.e. their individual special skills, such as "a good ear", "power of imitation," "superior verbal memory", previous linguistic experience, learning pace and style, motivation, desire to be praised and encouraged).*

Keywords: *communication, student-centered approach, English for Specific Purposes (ESP), teacher, learning*

Introduction

Due to their social nature, human beings are inherently dependent upon communication. When talking and working with colleagues, friends, subordinates, superiors, experts, teachers, students or family members, when reading and /or writing a text, when listening to or delivering speeches, when listening to the radio or watching television and movies, when buying or selling products or services, when being involved in any other social activity, human beings are invariably involved in communication situations. Moreover, due to the technological progress (particularly in the field of information and communications technologies and telecommunications), the contemporary world is marked by a constantly growing number of contacts, triggering the communication between persons with different linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

General considerations on communication and language

Generally speaking, communication is defined as a system or process through which messages are sent, and feedback is received. It is therefore, the process of transferring particular information or messages from an information source to a desired, definite or a particular destination. The process of communication consists of only a few steps (Tyagi, 2011: 15). The sender (also known as the communicator or the encoder) initiates the

communication process. S/He decides to communicate, conceptualizes and encodes a message and then transmits it through a channel to the receiver. It is noteworthy that the efficiency of the communication process is inherently influenced by the sender's communication skills, knowledge, and attitude as well as by the goals of his/her message (i.e. the ways in which s/he intends to affect or to influence the receiver). When encoding the message, the sender formulates it in his/her mind, translating his/her goals (transmitting information, asking for information, persuading, giving advice, etc.) into a message and deciding on the most adequate channel in order to transmit his/her message. Thus, from this perspective, the message can be defined as what a sender produces for transmission, using a certain communication channel (i.e. the means through which a message is sent), such as spoken or written words (verbal or written communication), images (photographs, drawings, paintings), articles, etc. Therefore, the formulation of a message involves considerable effort and communication skills in order to be understood by the receiver and to achieve its goals (Tubbs and Moss, 2008).

Subsequently to its transmission, the message is interpreted by the receiver (also known as the message recipient), who usually reacts by formulating his/her own message and by

transmitting it to his/her interlocutor (process called *feedback*). In this regard, it is noteworthy that the recipient of the message should be able to listen, read and think, in order to be able to receive and decode (or interpret) it, as the sender wants him/her to. It should be noted that the feedback is possible (the communication process being thus successful) only if the receiver reacts, in one way or another (i.e. verbally or non-verbally), the message being thus formulated and reformulated by the sender and the recipient until its meaning becomes clear (Fiske, 2006).

However, the communication process may be hindered, in some circumstances, by barriers of cultural, psychological, physical and linguistic nature. Such an instance (of physical nature) is represented by *noises*, interruptions or *distortions*, which may interfere in the communication process, and affect it, making it less effective (or even ineffective). In this regard, the surrounding environment represents an important factor that often influences the message reception by its recipient. More specifically, physical barriers to effective communication may be represented by surrounding noises from car engines, the constant chattering of other persons or passers-by, transmission interferences, poor or illegible handwriting (in written communication), heavy accent (especially in intercultural communication) (Lunenborg, 2010). Therefore, the communication process should be designed as such so as to draw the receiver's attention, use the signals, symbols, or codes that are easily understood by the receiver. Furthermore, it must arouse needs in the receiver and suggest some ways out to satisfy these needs. Only then it can create the desired response.

The issues presented above reveal that effective communication is a two-way process, since both the ability to receive messages and the ability to send messages are equally important. Therefore, in order to be successful, communication needs feedback, as it reveals how the message is interpreted by the receiver (Tyagi, 2011: 15). From this perspective, communication is seen as the action of interacting between participants, thus becoming a dynamic process that constantly changes. Moreover, communication also involves the word “understanding”, which refers to perception and interpretation. Another word known for its constant presence in “communication” is “sharing” because communication involves the sharing of information from the senders to receivers. Sharing occurs when interlocutors express feelings, thoughts, ideas or even insights to others (Rosengren, 2000).

When individuals communicate, they encode and exchange two types of messages, i.e. of verbal

and nonverbal nature. The verbal system is composed of linguistic symbols, represented by oral or written words; it also involves other factors, such as the intended meanings of the words used by the interlocutors and the ways in which people speak a certain language, depending on their regional, social and cultural backgrounds. On the other hand, as far as the nonverbal communication is concerned, the message system consists of nonlinguistic symbols, represented mostly by body language, mimicry, vocal tones, and gestures (Moran, 2010). Consequently, in line with Rosengren's understanding of the communication process (2000), we may state that communication is strongly connected to the idea of sharing or exchanging ideas, pieces of information, opinions or feelings among at least two individuals, by means of a certain system of signs and symbols. Another important aspect related to the communication process is related to its functions. In this regard, according to Asha Kaul (2009), the main *functions* of communication include information, education, entertainment, discussion and persuasion. The education and instruction function begins early in one's life and continues throughout his/her entire life. The above mentioned scholar states that communication provides information and helps the human being acquire experience and new skills. Furthermore, it entails awareness and offers them the opportunity to integrate within the society and to actively involve themselves in the public life.

It is noteworthy that language plays a central role in communication and it represents one of the main elements that separate human beings from animals (Alberts, 2007: 109). People often use language automatically, especially when it comes to their mother tongue or a second language that they use almost daily and master very well. Thus, they usually are not aware of the roles that it plays, such as helping them to order dinner, give orders and advice, ask for information and write different types of texts. Furthermore, a certain phrase or utterance can fulfill more functions, depending on the context and on the interlocutors. For example, the question “what time is it?” not only expresses a request for information, it can also suggest to the recipient implied meanings such as “it is late, we should go” or “time is up, the meeting should end”; it may also transmit to the recipient the implied message “I just want to start a conversation with you and get to know you better” (in case of small talk). Therefore, when the interlocutors are aware of the language functions, they can improve their communication. From this perspective, Alberts Jess (2007) states that language has seven main functions, i.e. instrumental (in order to obtain what is needed or

desired), regulatory (the purpose is to control or regulate the recipient's behavior), informative (used in order to communicate information or report facts), heuristic (for the purpose of *acquiring* knowledge and understanding), interactional (the goal is to create and define social relationships in interpersonal and group settings), personal (in order to express the sender's individuality and personality), and imaginative (the sender expresses himself/herself artistically or creatively). These functions can be illustrated as follows:

Table 1. Language functions

Language function	Example	Observation
<i>Instrumental</i>	"I'm throwing a surprise party for my husband. Would you like to come?"	Someone wants to invite a friend to come to the surprise party and the invitation helps make that happen
<i>Regulatory</i>	"Please, bring some flowers and balloons".	This request controls/regulates the recipient's behavior
<i>informative</i>	"The meeting begins tomorrow at 8 a.m. Don't be late!"	The sender informs the recipient when s/he wants him/her to come
<i>Heuristic</i>	"What were you doing on this time yesterday?"	The sender wants to acquire information about the recipient's activities at a certain date and time.
<i>Interactional</i>	Tim: "Hello, John! This is my wife, Mary." John: "Nice to meet you, Mary!" Mary: "Nice to meet you too, John!"	These lines represent an instance of interaction, of behavior that helps create/maintain interpersonal relationships.
<i>Personal</i>	"Don't bring those awful flowers and that cheap chocolate, like you did last time".	Uttered jokingly, this line expresses the sender's sense of humor.

<i>Imaginative</i>	"Roses are red/ Violets are blue/ And I love you".	These verses artistically express the sender's feelings (i.e. love) to the recipient.
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Source: Author's own processing

The teacher's role in the student-centered classroom

Along with the age of information, the communicative approaches to education triggered the shift from the teacher-centered classroom (typical of traditional and unilateral teaching, involving coverage of the context and rote memorization on behalf of the students) to the student-centered classroom (specific to modern teaching), and gave students more freedom in order to cope with real life situations. This shift is based on the idea that it is the student who needs to learn the language, and it is the learner who controls the learning process.

The term *role*, as Dörnyei and Murphey point out, is a technical term "which originally comes from sociology and refers to the shared expectation of how an individual should behave. In other words, roles describe what people are supposed to do" (Dörnyei, and Murphey, 2003: 109). Therefore, from this perspective, this term makes reference to behavior patterns and to the parts that individuals play in society. In its turn, the online *English Oxford Dictionary* defines it as "an actor's part in a play, film, etc. (...); the function assumed or part played by a person or thing in a particular situation". According to the same online dictionary, the term "role" originates from the early 17th century, from the French word "rôle", which was "referring originally to the roll of paper on which the actor's part was written" (for more information see <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/role>).

In the EFL/ESL field, scholars such as Littlewood (1981), Tudor (1993), Harmer (1995) and Richards and Rodgers (1986) mentioned several roles that language teachers may play in the EFL classroom. For instance, Richards and Rodgers (1986) consider teacher roles as part of the teaching method, emphasizing that they are connected to issues such as the functions that teachers should fulfill and their degree of control over the ways in which the learning process takes place. Moreover, according to the same scholars, the teachers' roles are also related to the extent to which they are responsible for establishing the taught content, and to the interactional patterns developed between teachers and their learners (Richards and Rodgers, 1986: 24).

According to Turney et al. (1986: 16), the teacher's activities in the classroom represent the manifestation of a number of roles and responsibilities attributed to them, such as planning, initiating and guiding learning, facilitating, monitoring and assessing the students' learning performance. It is also noteworthy that the roles attributed to teachers assume that, in line with their classroom responsibilities, they simultaneously play several different roles (derived from the above mentioned activities), for example planner, guide, facilitator, manager and evaluator. In his turn, Nunan (1989: 20) summarizes the six roles teachers fulfill into three actions, i.e. "to plan, to implement, and to reflect on their programs". The teacher-planner plans the activities, the general and specific objectives and how the activities will be carried out in order to meet the objectives. The implementation stage involves several roles, such as the teacher-guide (who provides students with guidance and instructions in order to perform their tasks), the teacher-facilitator (who helps students in order to make the process of learning easier) and the teacher-manager (who keeps the class working according to planned programs). Last, but not least, in the evaluation stage, the teacher performs the role of evaluator, verifying the students' achievement level and the program success. Furthermore, Bailey and Nunan (1996: 11) summarize the teachers' duties by pointing out that teaching is not simply a "doing", rather, it includes "doing, thinking, and interpreting". This implies that teaching is a dynamic process, which requires teachers to carefully analyze and interpret materials, situations, and student conditions, so they then can act accordingly. This further suggests that the teacher's main duty is to be able to assist students to learn and benefit from his/her teaching.

Although the views presented above take into account important aspects of teachers' classroom roles, they only list the roles universal to all teachers in any classroom, and fail to take into account language classroom specific aspects, which define roles that are specific and important to a language teacher. Therefore, it is worth mentioning the work performed by Littlewood (1981), who conceptualizes the role of the language teacher broadly as the facilitator of learning in communicative language teaching instead of the rather narrow concept of the teacher as instructor. Furthermore, Littlewood strongly believes that in the EFL/ESL classroom, language teachers play additional important roles that distinguish them from teachers of other subjects, such as language suppliers and co-communicators, as they are involved in real communication situations with their students.

In his turn, compared to Littlewood, Harmer (2001) defines the term "facilitator" in a much broader way, emphasizing that the ultimate aim of all roles is to facilitate the students' progress in some way or the other. For this purpose, in line with the shift from the teacher-centered to the student-centered classroom, he states that teachers play the following roles: controller, organizer, assessor, prompter, participant, resource, tutor and observer (Harmer, 2001). In one of his studies on the teachers' resistance to lessening their controlling role in learner-centered classrooms, Harmer (1995: 340) notices that there is considerable evidence that learners respond well to prominent, attention-attracting professionals. Such teachers are flexible and favorably disposed to adopting and adapting to new strategies that suit their new roles in communicative classrooms, which indicates that teachers' roles are crucial in shaping their attitudes towards teaching methods.

In line with Harmer's findings, Tudor (1993: 22-31) also discusses the importance of the teacher's role in the student-centered classroom (i.e. the degree of learning success is directly connected to the teachers' success in exercising their roles), where the emphasis falls on the students' active involvement in the learning process. It is noteworthy that, in many EFL/ESL classrooms, teachers may represent the only model speaker, the classroom being the only setting where they learn English and the list of the teacher's roles thus expanding (Tickoo, 1995). Therefore, besides the adequate linguistic skills and knowledge of the language, the teacher is required to use the language in real communicative contexts (i.e. the ability to speak the language), and at the same time, s/he should be able to answer the students' form-related questions. As Widdowson (1978) states, EFL/ESL teaching activities should have in view not only the teaching of language "usage" but also, and more importantly, the language "use", insisting on fluent English speaking, on sufficient teaching learning resources, and on the reformulation of local concepts of teaching and learning. Therefore, tasks should have meaning for the students (internalized as linguistic competence) and they should be conceived as means of using the language in order to learn the language. For this purpose, the process of understanding should be explored through authentic texts and real-world contexts, where students perform and reflect on the real use of the target language, fostering learning in a cyclical, ongoing manner.

In a student-centered English learning classroom, there is a simultaneous interaction between the students who can discuss different views in pairs, be engaged in task solving and have enough time

to express their points of view. The student-centered learning is focused on every student's interests, skills, and personal learning styles, while the teacher is seen as a learning facilitator (Nunan, 1996). This classroom teaching method acknowledges the students as central to the learning experience, as they choose their learning content and strategies and also their self-assessment methods, encouraging learner training, problem solving, critical thinking skills. Consequently, in student-centered learning, students should become aware of the learning process, by being actively and responsibly involved in their own learning. Moreover, the teacher's role is to promote positive attitudes to learning, positive motivation, self-confidence, self-esteem, and low anxiety. In other words, the language classroom must be a non-threatening learning environment, and the teacher should play roles such as learning facilitator, social and academic counselor, creator of a classroom environment conducive to language learning. Another important issue which should be taken into consideration is related to the fact that, when planning his/her courses and selecting his/her teaching materials, the teacher has to take into consideration not only the curricula and the appropriate teaching methods, but also the social relationships that s/he wants to encourage among students (Allwright, and Bailey, 1991; Blair, 1982) and the students' individual variables (i.e. students' special skills, previous linguistic experience, individual learning pace and style, motivation, etc.) (Krashen, 1981: 22).

Strategies for teaching maritime communication in the EFL classroom. Case-study

This section shows several pedagogical research results that emphasize the role of communication in the ESP classroom and the efficiency of the strategies specific to the student-centered teaching. The research tackled key elements specific to student-centered strategies and it was conducted on two groups of students (i.e. a control group and an experimental group), majoring in maritime law. In order to demonstrate the efficiency of these strategies, when teaching the unit on maritime communication, we used traditional teaching methods with the control group, and in the experimental group, we applied student-centered strategies. Before and after the experiment, the students passed some tests (in order to assess their EFL skills) and we compared and analyzed the results (to be sure that both the control and the experimental/focus group have similar English skills and level of knowledge and to be able to analyze their evolution, in connection to the applied teaching strategies). Moreover, we made sure that both the control and the

experimental groups are heterogeneous in terms of the number of students, age, gender distribution, cognitive level and social background. Considering the main hypothesis of our research, i.e. the use of strategies specific to the student-centered classroom increases the quality of instruction, we used, as research methods, the observational research and the experiment, which dealt with responsive classroom approach topics, and teaching a unit, i.e. maritime communication. Communication requires the use of special certain morphological and syntactic means (Slama-Cazacu, 1964: 187), such as the high frequency of verbs, adverbs, interjections with imperative and addressee value. Moreover, many nouns, adverbs and adjectives replace whole sentences with imperative meaning, for example, "Down", "Up". Some proper names become common nouns and some grammatical categories are replaced by gestures and ample movements; for instance, the adverbs "here" and "there". In general, phrases are incomplete, elliptical, short, but an extra-linguistic analysis demonstrates that they can be considered extensive messages through their implicit reference to the situation (Slama-Cazacu 1964:198), for instance, on a fishing boat: "OK! Beware... Ready!".

When teaching maritime communication in the EFL classroom, we noticed that, in solving all their exercises, and especially in dialogues, students displayed a certain articulation automatism, imposed by the technical communications at sea, comprising distinct mandatory phases (Albu, 1995: 37). Generally, maritime communication requires the rapid transmission of information, which hampers their preparation in advance. However, it is advisable to avoid unnecessary interruptions and the loss of valuable time on the respective communication channel. The messages sent at sea have a standard structure, that the students majoring in maritime law must appropriate and use it correctly in the communication at sea. In this regard, it should be also taken into consideration that many maritime words and phrases are linguistic calques and/ or literal translations, such as "warship"/"battleship" ("navă de război/luptă"), "engine room" ("sala mașinilor/ motoarelor"), "icebreaker" ("spărgător de gheață"), "light ship" ("navă far"), "foghorn" ("corn de ceață"), "lifeboat" ("barcă de salvare"), "passenger ship" ("navă de pasageri"), "fishing boat" ("navă de pescuit"/ "pescador"), "pilot boat" ("barca/șalupa pilotului"), "subchaser" ("vânător de submarine"), "landing ship" ("navă de desant"), ("minelayer"- "puitor de mine"), "fire fighting assistance" ("asistență (în lupta) contra focului"), "life-jacket" ("vestă de salvare"), "freeboard" ("bord liber"), "chartoom" ("camera hărților"), "patrol boat" ("vedetă", "navă de patrulare"), "destroyer"

(“distrugător”), “aircraft carrier” (“portavion”). Moreover, many maritime terms and phrases originate from other foreign languages, mainly French (which is a Romance language, like Romanian): “submarine” (“submarin”, from the French term “sous marin”), “frigate” (“fregată”, from the French word “frigate” and from the Italian term “fregate”), “dredger” (“dragor”, from the French term “dragueur”), “anchor” (“ancoră”, from the Italian and Latin term “ancora”), “trawler” (“trauler”, from the Russian word “траулер”, the English term “trawler” and the German noun “Trawler”), “flotability” (“flotabilitate”, from the French term “flottabilité”), “stability” (“stabilitate”, from the French term “stabilité” and the Latin noun “stabilitas-atis”), “manoeuvrability” (“manevrabilitate”, from the French noun “manevrabilité”), “caboose” (“cambuză”, from the French term “cambuse”), “compressor” (“compresor”, from the French noun “compresseur”), “ballast” (“balast”, from the French word “ballast”), “pump” (“pompa”, from the French word “pompe”)

Research subjects and sample

The goal of observation and control experiment is not to describe the sample, but the larger population, this generalizing ability being dependent on the representativeness of the sample. Being aware of the fact that a representative and generalizable sample hinders both the sampling and the non-sampling error, for our present research, we chose two groups of students, which are heterogeneous both in terms of the demographic variables and intellectual capacities. Demographic variables include such measures as gender, age, socioeconomic status. Taking into account the above-mentioned issues, the groups included in our research have the following features:

The control group has 21 students, i.e. 12 men and 9 women (representing 57% and 43% respectively). Moreover, the entire group is heterogeneous in terms of the students’ intellectual capacities. As far as the students’ English skills and knowledge are concerned, the initial tests applied to the first control group revealed the following results:

Table 2. Initial English test results (control group)

Test results	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Number of students	0	0	1	4	3	2	3	4	3	1
English class average	6.47									

Source: Author’s own processing

The table presented above reveal that the students of the control group got quite low marks at their initial English test, the general class average being 6.47.

The experimental group has 24 students, i.e. 11 men and 13 women (i.e. 46% and 54%, respectively). The experimental group is also heterogeneous in terms of the students’ intellectual capacities. As far as the students’ English skills and knowledge are concerned, the initial tests applied to this first experimental class revealed the following results:

Table 3. Results of the initial English tests (focus group)

Test results	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Number of students	0	0	2	2	6	3	4	2	3	2
English class average	6.37									

Source: Author’s own processing

The data above reveal that both the control and the experimental groups are similar as far as the students’ intellectual capacities and the demographic features are concerned. Moreover, it is also noteworthy that they have a similar group average grade as far as their EFL skills are concerned (i.e. 6.47 for the control group and 6.37 for the experimental one).

Analysis and Results

As far as the experimental group is concerned, we tackled the teaching unit on maritime communication by means of student-centered strategies, reflected in the ways of organizing students, guided discovery, interactive modeling, engaging academics, student practice, interactive learning structures, active teaching, guided discovery, collaborative problem solving, effective management, developmental awareness, student-centered guiding principles, components and activities. Tasks became thus active, interactive, appropriately challenging, purposeful, and connected to the students’ interests. Furthermore, they were accompanied by clear directions, high-quality feedback and effective classroom management, against a calm, orderly background that promoted autonomy and allowed students to focus on learning. As far as the control group is concerned, we used traditional teaching methods. The unit on maritime communication tackled topics related to the following elements used in contexts:

- a) dimensions (height, breadth, width, depth, thickness), under different form, such as “The ship is twenty meters in length”; “The ship has a length

of twenty meters”; “The length of the ship is twenty meters”; “The ship is twenty meters long”;

b) shape, using geometric figures (for instance, “shaped like a triangle”; triangular), alphabet letters (“The sign is shaped like the letter S = an S-sign”; “a stand shaped like the letter Z = a Z-shaped stand”), objects with well-known shapes (“a bulbous object”, “a star screwdriver”);

c) actions using verbs ending in “-en” (“tighten”, “widen”, “loosen”, “strengthen”);

d) compound nouns, consisting in noun + noun (such as “cargo ship”, “cylinder cover”, “salt water”, “back plate”, “wheelhouse”, “hand pump”, “butterfly nut”, “steam turbine”, “Vernier calipers”), present participle + noun (“regulating valves”, “cooling water”), past participle + noun (“fitted bolts”);

e) number compounds (“the mast is twenty feet high/ it is a twenty - foot mast”; “the load weighs ten tons/ it is a ten-ton load”);

f) quantifiers (e.g. “a large amount of”, “a small amount of”, “all”, “most”, “many”, “much”, “some”, “several”), insisting on the positive and negative contrasts between “few”, “a few”, “little”, “a little” (in contexts such as: “As there was a *little* time before the break ended, he walked on the shore longer”; “As there was *little* time before the break ended, he climbed the stairs and entered his office immediately”; “A *few* people were walking on the seashore, because it was a beautiful sunny day”; “Few people were walking on the seashore, because the storm was coming”);

g) logical connectives (in contexts such as : “This ship carries passengers *and* cars”; “This instrument is designed to crush *or* grind hard substances”; “He is a very hard-working person *but* sometimes he breaks safety rules”; “This ship carries both passengers and cargo”; “This ship carries *not only* passengers *but also* cargo”; “You are free to choose *either* this task *or* the other one”; “The man had *neither* his driving license *nor* his ID card”; “He wanted to promote faster, *therefore* he decided to work even harder”; “*Although* he wanted to promote faster, he did not work hard enough”; “He wanted to ask for a promotion; *however*, he advised to wait a little bit more”; “He did not work hard enough; *consequently*, he did not fulfill his task in due time”);

h) time relaters (e.g. “first”, “firstly”, “at first”, “in the first place”, “second”, “secondly”, “in the second place”, “third”, “thirdly”, “after”, “afterwards”, “before”, “during”, “eventually”, “finally”, “later”, “last of all”, “last but not least”, “lastly”, “at last”, “next”, “prior to”, “subsequently”, “then”, “ultimately”, “until”, “when”, “while”);

i) verb tenses, passive voice, causative verbs, articles, prepositions; expression of obligation, condition, purpose; relatively small sentences; for

example: “The machine that was repaired last week broke again/ The machine repaired last week broke again”; “The vessel that is carrying hazardous substances asked for help/ The vessel carrying hazardous substances asked for help”.

Among the learning strategies used by students we can include:

a) regularization (i.e. discovering similarities between various forms, their categorization and the introduction (auto-reformulation of a rule), such as “torpedos” instead of “torpedoes”, modeled after “photos”, “pianos” (see Slama-Cazacu, 1973, p.82);

b) contamination (“tragger” instead of “trigger”, from the Romanian term “a trage”);

c) lexical creations (“rower” from the verb “row”);

d) calques (“in the same time” instead of “at the same time”).

An approach specific to the student’s learning behavior is represented by the tendency towards contamination. Essentially, the contamination is the result of the learner’s active attitude in relation to new knowledge from the target language. Analyzing the contamination in the children and adults’ language, Slama-Cazacu (1957) stressed the intervention of the subjects’ thinking, who try to give a meaning and even to correct the form of the unknown words by comparing them to the known ones. When learning a foreign language, students try to make conscious associations based on the comparison of unknown words, phrases and grammatical structures with their prior knowledge, in accordance with semantic and phonetic similarities (Doca, 1977), such as “anti-fireing assistance” instead of “fire fighting assistance”.

At the end of our experiment (i.e. after the teaching stage), the students passed some final tests and we analyzed and compared the results obtained by the control and by the focus groups, in order to verify the validity of our hypothesis (i.e. teaching maritime communication by means of student-centered strategies increases the quality of instruction, students show increased achievement).

The statistics of the students’ results are presented in the tables below:

Table 4. Final English test results: control group

Mark	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
No. of students	0	0	1	2	4	2	4	4	3	1
English class average	6.66									

Source: Author’s own processing

If we compare the results presented above with the ones obtained by students at their initial

English tests, we notice only a slight improvement in their EFL skills (from the initial group average 6.47 to the final group average 6.66). This reveals that the traditional methods used with the control group did not help students improve their learning results.

Table 5. Final English test results: focus group

Mark	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
No. of students	0	0	0	0	1	3	3	7	6	4
English class average	8.08									

Source: Author's own processing

The data above reveal that the students from the experimental class greatly improved their EFL skills, as their initial English class average was 6.37 and, at the end of our experiment, this average increased to 8.08. These results reveal the efficiency of student-centered strategies. By comparing the final test results obtained by the students of the control class with the results of the students from the experimental class, we may

notice that the latter got a higher general class average (i.e. 8.08). Moreover, as far as the control class is concerned, 3 students got marks lower than 5, while no student from the focus class got marks below 5.

As for the control class, 4 students got marks between 5 and 5.99; 2 students obtained marks between 6 and 6.99; 4 students obtained marks between 7 and 7.99 and 7 students obtained marks between 8 and 9.99. Only one student from the experimental class obtained a mark between 5 and 5.99; 3 students got marks between 6 and 6.99; other 3 students obtained marks between 7 and 7.99 and 13 students got marks between 8 and 9.99. It is also noteworthy that only one student from the control class took a 10 (the maximum mark), while 4 students from the experimental class got this maximum mark. Therefore, the analysis reveals that our hypothesis is valid (i.e. the use of student-centered strategies when teaching maritime communication increases the quality of instruction and students show increased achievement).

Conclusions

Teaching and learning is a dynamic process in which many elements interact in order to ensure the success and the efficiency of this pedagogical act. One of these factors is represented by the roles that teachers play in the ESP classes. Thus, teachers should be aware of the attitudes shown towards the students' performance in different moments of the class, play different roles and apply appropriate student-centered strategies, depending on the course objectives, the class plan and the activities they carry out. Moreover, it should also be taken into consideration the fact that learners have the autonomy to control their own learning and be aware of the processes and strategies involved by language learning.

Acquiring a foreign language implies developing several skills in the target language, which sometimes can be a challenge for students, especially when they are exposed to real life situations of communication. Therefore, using efficient teaching methods in class can be a useful tool to motivate students and make them feel comfortable using the foreign language. In an English learning classroom, where the teacher uses innovative techniques and methods, there is a simultaneous interaction between the students who can discuss different views in pairs, be engaged in task solving and have enough time to express their points of view.

Therefore, our study has revealed that when teachers use student-centered strategies, they increase the quality of their instruction, students show increased achievement, regardless of their socio-economic background, and benefit in many other important ways (such as the improvement of their social skills and of teacher-student interactions and more positive feelings toward school among students and teachers).

The learner-centered classroom offers teachers an opportunity to develop elements of their students other than just those concerned with the acquisition of knowledge. While the work is challenging, many teachers will discover that they can develop their skills far more fully than the traditional classroom. This approach is different, effective and more powerful in promoting learning. For this purpose, the teacher should take into consideration elements such as the students' training level, individual variables, main field of study, types of exercises that could raise their interest, oral expression of scientific and technical symbols, systematization of the vocabulary items according to the principles of logic order, etc.

It should also be taken into account the fact that language, in general, and specialized language, in particular (such as maritime English), is one of the main barriers to effective communication. In this regard, the persons who speak different mother tongues or who do not master well enough their interlocutor's language may encounter difficulties when transmitting their messages. Moreover, when they do not share the same language, the interlocutors may also face the possibility of misunderstanding the messages (and the feedback) they receive. Nevertheless, even when sharing the same mother tongue, misunderstandings may occur, as, sometimes, the speakers of the same language understand differently the meanings of the same

words or because other physical or psychological barriers to communication may interfere. Therefore, it is also noteworthy that the knowledge of the factors influencing the communication at sea (such as sailing location, noise circumstances, distance, weather conditions, sailing tradition) and of the specific types of communication (between ships, on board, etc.), as well as the appropriate and correct use of English represent key elements that influence the communication process at sea.

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