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English Language Education at Ukrainian University: Interdisciplinary Aspect

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Abstract

The main aim of the article is to consider the interdisciplinary aspect of English language education of pre-service teacher training at Ukrainian university. Since it is a review article, the paper intends to address the theoretical issue and the practical implementation of the interdisciplinary approach at Ukrainian university. In the authors' opinion, interdisciplinary aspect is important for raising the quality of language. It helps achieve the goal of Ukrainian pedagogy to bring up an all-round creative personality with the capacity and skills to establish an intercultural dialogue. English language proficiency is a facilitator for accomplishing these tasks. Thus, the authors believe that the purposes of pedagogical and language education research are interconnected and lie in the modernization of educational content. The study underscores the significance of the interdisciplinary aspect of English language specialists' training. It encourages gaining and sustains knowledge through multiple teaching and learning styles and the integration of different disciplines. The findings of the study highlight the necessity to meet the requirements of Ukrainian society. They demonstrate the issue is worth addressing since it improves the educational practices and raises the prestige of Ukrainian education.

Keywords: English language education, interdisciplinary aspect, integration of knowledge, Ukrainian university

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Introduction

Raising the quality of English teacher preparation is increasingly coming under scrutiny and stems from the political context. The interdisciplinary aspect of Ukrainian university is a means to enhance language education. The condition of English proficiency has become an area of serious concern since 1991, the year of Ukraine's gaining independence. As it is known, language education did not rise to priority in Soviet Ukraine: the contacts with other countries were limited, and the international dialogues were scarce. Among the other reasons why the general level of English was low were the old methodologies of instruction developed in the country that was isolated from the rest of the world.

However, due to a significant shift in modern political orientations, reconsideration of the role and place of Ukraine on the international arena (Sidenko, 2019; Waal, 2019), language education has acquired a new status, updated tasks and ambitious perspectives (British Council, 2018; Etherton, 2019; Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, 2016; Nikolaeva, 2017, p.54). The English language helps bridge a gap in intercultural communication with the other countries, reach mutual understanding between peoples, exchange experience and accomplish Ukraine's mission of becoming a full-fledged European country (Bolitho & West, 2017; Dikov, 2019; Lee, 2010; Sidenko, 2019; Waal, 2019). Therefore, the issue was paid close attention to from the government of Ukraine (Order of President of Ukraine, 2013; Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, 2017a, b, c).

As a consequence, language education in Ukraine has had to undergo many alterations in methodologies of foreign languages teaching in secondary and higher education (Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, 2017 c). Teachers had to revise student engagement and motivation approaches, time and classroom management strategies, language specialist content and training principles, which, eventually, have received a deserved priority in the modernization of English teacher training and improvement of the quality of the knowledge of English and other foreign languages in Ukrainian schools (British Council, 2017; British Council: New School Generation Teacher Project, 2013-2019; Etherton, 2019). In search of new findings and innovations to update language specialists' preparation, along the methodologies of teaching and the array of linguistic studies, the non-linguistic features were identified as indispensable and contributing to the professional qualifications of modern teachers of English in today's globalized world.

As the UNESCO Declaration on Higher Education for the Twenty-First Century Vision and Action (1998) stated, to solve the complicated social and economic issues in society, and to do thriving scientific research, higher education should integrate interdisciplinary, trans-disciplinary, multidisciplinary approaches into educational processes (UNESCO, 1998). However, many educational institutions face challenges while integrating the strategies mentioned above into practice (Chernysh, 2019; Kushchina, 2013; Orekhov, 2018).

The literature review provides the information about the change in the political orientations of Ukraine, which, as a result, affected the attitudes positively towards language training in Ukraine and urged to consider interdisciplinarity potent enough to improve education through integrating other disciplines and relating language issues to real life. The literature has shown that the issue of

interdisciplinarity is getting more topicality in Ukrainian education. The resources present the research and findings that appeared years ago and more recent studies. The scholars G. Gunn, H. Jacobs, W. Jacob, J. Klein, T. Augsburg, G. Slavicek, E. Bushkovska, E. Kushchina, H. Hansen, A. Orekhov, etc. studied the nature, history, practical application, impact of interdisciplinarity. The findings are relevant to study in Ukraine.

Theoretical Background of the Research

Understanding the Nature of Interdisciplinarity

The analysis of the sources testifies that scientific literature published both in foreign countries and Ukraine lacks uniformity regarding terminology, namely, concerning the definition of the term “interdisciplinarity.” The definitions vary because they depend on the meanings implied by experts from various fields of knowledge. (Augsburg, 2012, Bushkovska, 2010; Gunn, 1992; Jacobs, 1990; Jacob, 2015; Klein, 1990; Slavicek, 2012; Mokiy, Lukyanova, 2017).

According to Bushkovska (2010, p. 154), interdisciplinarity that was in use in the times of Greek philosophy has the same nature and promotes the development of education in aspects of commonly accepted standard knowledge, its integration, synthesis, and unification. Greek philosophers and dramatists borrowed the elements from such fields as medicine and philosophy to broaden their expertise (Augsburg, 2012; Bushkovska, 2010; Gunn, 1992).

Wikipedia informs that interdisciplinarity involves the combining of two or more academic disciplines into one activity. In an e-dictionary by M. Webster, we read that “interdisciplinarity encompasses two or more academic, scientific or artistic disciplines” (Merriam Webster, n.d.). The meaning of the term is described broader on the site Dictionary.com. It denotes interdisciplinarity as a combination of two or more academic disciplines in subject areas and several professions, technologies, etc. Slavicek (2012, p.109) presented the most well-grounded understanding of interdisciplinarity nature from a historical perspective. He divided the word into the prefix “*inter*,” which in his opinion denotes a link between the two components or a space that exists between them, and the root of the word, which is “*discipline*” meaning in Latin “the instruction mentors provide students with.” In this case, the prefix “*inter*” can be interpreted, on the one hand, - as a link element between the two independently existing disciplines; on the other hand,- as a reference to the space that separates the elements (Slavicek, 2012, p.108).

Interdisciplinarity Actions, Effects, and Language Studies

Although the interdisciplinarity approach highlights the actions that occur within the two fields of knowledge (disciplines), including the space separating them, it does not grant a close intertwining of the disciplines within the boundaries of one approach. Moreover, it becomes sufficient if only they cooperate (Slavicek, 2012, p.107). According to Bushkovska (2010, p.153), “interdisciplinarity” is a combination of various subjects which don’t have an evident content connection: music, mathematics, history; “multidisciplinarity” covers the disciplines that have content connections, yet, they preserve the existing dividing lines between them; the term “transdisciplinarity” accepts the presence of common axioms for a certain array of disciplines, it implies destroying the boundaries between disciplines to explain one discipline field in terms of another. Thus, the terms essentially differ by effects they may exert. (Bushkovska, 2010; Jacob, 2015; Orekhov, 2018).

Jacobs (1990), president of the association of academic syllabi developers, suggests dividing the aspect into knowledge view and the discipline-field knowledge view. He proposes to refer to interdisciplinarity the scientific approach in the context of which within the central topic, problem, event, experience research, the methodology and terminology of more than one field are consciously applied to knowledge view. The interdisciplinary approach significantly varies from those that are limited to the body of knowledge of one particular area, although, they are still widely used in scientific spheres.

According to Kushchina (2013, p.10), the interdisciplinarity effect broadens the scientific outlook: students study different phenomena transcending the boundaries of one discipline. To some extent, the interdisciplinarity effect in science and education results in avoidance of the harmful consequences of excessive specialization and fragmentation. The emergence of the interdisciplinary approach changed the field of language studies and language education. Previously, the domain of philology was “compartmentalized” (Hansen, 2004, p.9). However, the comparative aspects that emerged with time created the space for interdisciplinarity. According to Hansen (2004, p.11), due to the interdisciplinary approach, the new paradigms of language studies were put into practice, which appeared to be an exciting and challenging interdisciplinary collaboration in language. It is evident language education engages the collective effort of specialists from other fields. The multidisciplinary approach to language education and studies ensures better linguistic proficiency and, through language studies, - profound expertise in cultural and historical studies (Kolawoles, 2013, p.9).

Drivers and Orientations in Research

It is necessary to admit that the complexity of nature and society are the main drivers of the interdisciplinary research at the current stage of societal development. In addition to the main drivers, the problems and questions limited to one discipline, the requirements to solve social issues, the need to generate revolutionary ideas and technologies serve as the drivers in research (Facilitating Interdisciplinary Research, 2005; Klein, 2010, p.32). The body of the interdisciplinary approach to scientific research lies in using various methods for subject research (Interdisciplinary Research, 2016). In considering this research from different points of view, scientists of two or more disciplines combine and adjust the approaches to ease understanding its nature in the framework of several traditional branches of knowledge (Klein, 2010, p.38; Orekhov, 2018, p.91). Moreover, interdisciplinary scientific research engages the collaboration of experts from different fields; therefore, it results in qualitatively new knowledge and experience of application of practical approaches to solving various issues.

An interdisciplinary approach to research on education is, probably, one of the most effective. The interdisciplinarity develops pedagogical theory and practical application opportunities. It strengthens the methodological platform for building the subject content. Furthermore, interdisciplinarity identifies the scientific ideas which systematize and ease the study of different subjects. The educational reform recommended by UNESCO (1998) highlighted several orientations in educational research. In compliance with these recommendations, the humanization of education necessitates the sociological adjustment, which prioritizes the studies related to the current global problems of human development. The ethnological orientation reveals the

interconnection between nations and peoples. The cultural orientation has a focus on the educational strategy of developing a culturally and spiritually vibrant personality (UNESCO, 1998).

Another orientation requires to underpin the sociological and ecological awareness as the content priorities in education, which implies strengthening the functions of educational systems to transfer universal and national cultural values and to compare civilizations and cultures.

The integration with educational technologies, different formats of teaching, utilization of informational-communicative techniques - another significant orientation to improve research and knowledge.

The orientation towards consistent education from pre-school to life-long professional education is believed to be a concluding one. The interdisciplinary approach to teaching relies on the ties between different disciplines, that is why, it implies collaborative planning of the learning process with technology integration, an effective reciprocity, interpenetration of elements of independent disciplines, the integrated learning, and teamwork. What also interesting is that such a way of instruction leads to deep, conscious comprehension and assimilation of knowledge (Interdisciplinarity Research, 2016; UNESCO, 1993; UNESCO, 1998).

Practical Application for Sustainable Language Education

Good teachers would agree that language education should be content-based and intended to account for student achievement in the core areas, which will provide skills that enable students to practice and research. Before the changes in education, English teachers practiced the approaches that were isolated and conflicting due to the lack of a holistic approach to the subject. Furthermore, they focused on one specific feature such as grammar, reading, or vocabulary, which resulted in weak knowledge of English at secondary and higher education institutions.

The interdisciplinary approach, probably, got its start in language education as counteracting the previous methods, when educators began to relate teaching practices to real-life situations. Life, by definition, is always versatile and diverse. With schooling becoming more informal and different, there appeared more freedom for pondering how to occupy young minds with more creative, informative, and fulfilling studies (Nikolaeva, 2017, p.55). It was noted that the emergence of the interdisciplinary approach at higher educational institutions had made the programs of English teacher preparation more sophisticated and enriching (Ministry of Education and Science, 2017 c). Simultaneously, because of the content overlapping, the elements of one subject are under study and revision, while considered in the context of another discipline, which is especially beneficial regarding learning foreign languages where repetition is necessary. Students enlarge the knowledge of vocabulary and grammar and develop holistic thinking and critical thinking skills to be able to operate in multiple subject contexts.

To adapt to the changing times, academic and work curricula at leading language education universities of Ukraine such as Kyiv National Linguistic University, Taras Shevchenko National University, National Kyiv-Mohyla Academy, offer undergraduate and graduate students teaching syllabi that include several aspects of one vast discipline: Linguistics comprises History of

Linguistics, Text Linguistics, Psycholinguistics, Socio-linguistics, etc. Language is traditionally studied from philosophical, historical, and cultural perspectives. Phonetics and Translation Studies provide knowledge of theory and practical application. The courses of Literature encompass English-speaking countries that teach stylistic analysis and text interpretation; Writing distinguishes between composition, academic, and creative. Typology is concerned with the comparison of native and foreign languages. Such a context of training engages effectively the interdisciplinary, trans interdisciplinary, and multidisciplinary approaches.

In our opinion, ties between the disciplines become evident when two or more disciplines have common problems or research subjects, but students study them in different aspects. Interdisciplinary integration under such conditions has the following constituents: Linguistic and Country studies component (knowledge of lexical units with national and cultural semantics and an ability to use them in the situations of intercultural communication); Socio-linguistic component (language peculiarities of the representatives of various social strata); Socio-Psychological component includes communication-oriented learning role-plays; Culturological part deals with gaining the knowledge of history, the culture of people/peoples who are native speakers of the language studied by students. Multicultural communicative competency is doubtful without effective teaching methods that ensure successful communication in different styles depending on the conversation and situation. Teachers, as a rule, associate the interdisciplinary integration with the abundance of methodological tools that help develop in students not only communicative competencies in specific languages. Skillfully utilized, they sustain a solid multi-language communicative competence (Nikolaeva, 2017, p.56).

It is hard to disagree, the methodologies of teaching English and intercultural communication skills are given a significant part in English teacher preparation. The teacher-training universities from Vinnytsia, Zhytomyr, Rivne, Uman, Kharkiv, Chernivtsi, Nizhyn, Melitopol, Uzhhorod have become participants in the Pre-service Training Reform project that has been running since 2013 under the auspices of the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine and the British Council (British Council, 2019). The project became cutting-edge and a breakthrough in English teacher preparation. The students and faculty of the universities-participants admit the project benefits greatly from an extensive engagement of the interdisciplinary aspect in it (Etherton, 2019).

In 2013 Vinnytsia State Pedagogical University initiated an exciting experiment in methodologies of teaching English. An international online project, “Web-Blended Education for English Skills,” was created in collaboration with several American and Canadian universities (Vinnytsia State Pedagogical University: web-blended education, n.d.). What differs this project from the regular classes of the methodology is mastering the methods of teaching English, e.g., academic writing, reading, basics of research, TESOL methodologies, etc. in the context of social, special education, academic honesty, internationalization, technologies application issues (Powell, Kuzmina, Kuzmin, Yamchynska, Shestopaliuk, 2014).

According to the standards set by the Ministry of Education, the procedure of final professional certification for a Bachelor’s degree at linguistic and language training universities is provided in the field of Secondary Education and Philology. The degree requires studying foreign languages (one or two), and literature at different educational levels. Students graduate with the professional

qualifications Teacher of Foreign Language and Foreign Literature (English) in Secondary Education (014), and Germanic Languages and Literature (English) in Philology (035) (Ministry of Education and Science, 2017 c; Ministry of Education and Science, 2019). The degree is obtained after completing the programs enriched with the interdisciplinary aspect that include comparative linguistics, text linguistics, text interpretation, the topics of historical character to mature the outlook and increase the worldview (Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, 2019). At the same time, traditional classes are conducted in parallel with innovation to generate students' interest in learning. Besides, future teachers are taught the foundation of self-education methodology to become life-long learners, which will facilitate professional growth corresponding to the demands of our ever-changing world.

In the Ukrainian educational system, Graduate School awards a Master's degree as an independent degree and provides the qualifications in Philology (035) and Secondary Education (014). But Philology (035) qualifies graduates as Teacher of Germanic Languages and Literature (translation included); Secondary Education (014) - as Teacher of English and German Languages and Literature (Ministry of Education and Science, 2017 c).

Obtaining a Bachelor's degree, students get the basics of linguistic and pedagogical disciplines, which entitle them to apply for a Master's degree. The degree provides the professional specialization and ensures the highest competency in teaching foreign languages (English as a rule) at secondary or higher educational establishments. Graduate School focuses on research potential to continue scientific work. Master's degree programs unite students of different majoring fields in the same groups for obligatory classes. However, students can choose themselves the optional courses that fit their learning trajectories and future careers, on condition that they enroll in required classes and take the required number of credits in the majoring fields, which implies an interdisciplinary approach to education. In accordance with the chosen specialization, students work on a large number of texts, annotations of the scientific discourses and translations of the abstracts from foreign into the native language. The acquired skills enhance language competences that apply to different fields of science, technology, economy. Another benefit of such training is better opportunities for future employment. Graduates critically analyze various points of view, phenomena, and events through the application of the languages mastered at the university. This is how students integrate into practice the interdisciplinary aspect in the process of foreign language learning, which results in language competence and multilingualism in students.

Conclusion

Although Ukraine is a young independent country, many changes have already taken place in language education, owing to the new political aspirations and social changes. The quality of English language education is paid close attention to since it enables the country to establish the ties and integrate into the European Union. Concluded of the findings of the research, the authors have agreed that the time of narrow-profile specialists' preparation is in the past. The interdisciplinary aspect of English language preparation is a must nowadays at a Ukrainian university. Based on the ties between different disciplines, it involves technology, the integration of other disciplines, the subject content interrelation, and interpenetration of the course elements. While analyzing the literature, it becomes evident that such preparation broadens the realm of intellectualism and develops an all-round personality and a highly qualified specialist who regard

the acquired knowledge as a good foundation for the future professionalism of the contemporary teacher of English. Interdisciplinarity aspect integration into language education specialists' training at Ukrainian university ensures a sustainable and systematic complex of language knowledge. It significantly raises students' cognitive ability, intelligence, and critical thinking skills, promoting professional development and intercultural competence.

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