

## MOCK JOB INTERVIEWS FOR ENHANCING ESP STUDENTS' MOTIVATION AND AUTONOMOUS LEARNING

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**Abstract.** *When we carefully examine most of the theory behind CALL, instructional teaching and the overall implementation of technology in teaching and learning, there is still one question to be answered - what is the need for using technology in the English language classroom? What is the benefit for teachers as well as for students? To begin with, technology brings the world to the classroom - times are changing and education, together with society, also enhances students' motivation. Effective language teachers should be enthusiastic and creative because language learners can easily lose their motivation and desire (Ellis, 1997:56). Secondly, it broadens choices for students to demonstrate learning. In this sense, technology also allows weak learners to reveal their capacity in learning the language. In the end, it enhances learner autonomy as an ultimate goal for any language learner. When we say technology, we usually mean computers for language learning, but in this paper we are going to present the use of cameras in creating and performing a mock job interview as part of the ESP Business Informatics syllabus.*

**Key words:** *autonomy, technology, motivation, ESP students, job interviews*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Learner autonomy is based on the idea that if students are involved in decision-making processes regarding their own language competence, “they are likely to be more enthusiastic about learning” (Littlejohn, 1985:258) and learning can be more focused and purposeful for them (Little, 1991; Dam, 1995; Camilleri, 1997).

Fostering autonomy in the classroom is done by providing learners with “opportunities to make significant choices and decisions about their learning” in an informed way (Nunan, 2003:290). That means the learners have a say in what and how they learn, and the teacher encourages this by giving the learners opportunities and tools to make informed decisions regarding their learning. This applies both to choosing appropriate material and to selecting learning strategies. Giving choices to the learners is a change that needs to be made gradually, taking into consideration the age of the students and the level of responsibility to which they are accustomed (Lowe & Target, 1999).

In recent years, as there has developed a great interest in using technology (mainly computers, but now even smart phones and tablets) for language teaching and learning, autonomous learning has become a point of interest for both teachers and students. Especially with the advent of the Internet, the role of computers in language instruction has now become an important issue that great numbers of language teachers throughout the world must confront. It is evident that we should always be careful to use technology wisely in class. To cite Richardson, teachers must “incorporate technology as seamlessly

as possible. The technology is the means, not the content of the presentation. It should not overwhelm the lesson, but enhance it. If a non-technology-based means of presentation would be more effective, then by all means use it. The simplest, most intriguing tool to impart instruction is the best tool. Paper and pencil can sometimes be more effective than computer equipment - and paper does not crash!" (2004).

In this respect, the question of motivation arises: how can teachers motivate students to learn English in class when they are already exposed to numerous language distractions inside and outside the classroom? How can a teacher teach English if students, especially ESP students, think they already know all they need to know? In such cases it is primarily the responsibility of the teacher to motivate them and, at the same time, to make them more aware of their own role in the learning process, that is, to make them more autonomous. This is where technology use is at its best.

In this paper we will demonstrate how the use of a camera in mock job interviews enhances students' autonomous learning and their motivation for studying the English language. The interviews were done with second year students at South East European University (at the Skopje branch) who study Business Informatics and have English for Specific Purposes 1&2 in their third and fourth semester.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Learner autonomy has now become an ultimate goal for all learners, not just those who study languages. It is our job as teachers to equip students with all the necessary life skills they will need in the real world.

Inside the language classroom, the traditional view is that teachers should be in control of the classroom and should direct learning. To some, learner autonomy may sound like a means of bringing chaos into the classroom. Nevertheless, teachers can successfully make the choice of relinquishing control and of sharing it with the learners (Lacey, 2007). The promotion of learner autonomy thus requires a change in beliefs about language learning on the part of both the learner and the teacher, as well as a corresponding change in roles; learners and teachers may need preparation (if not explicit training) to undertake self instruction (Dickinson 1987:121).

Speaking generally, the term autonomy has come to be used in at least five ways:

- for situations in which learners study entirely on their own;
- for a set of skills which can be learned and applied in self-directed learning;
- for an inborn capacity which is suppressed by institutional education;
- for the exercise of learners' responsibility for their own learning;
- for the right of learners to determine the direction of their own learning (Benson & Voller, 1997:2).

The concept of learner autonomy emphasizes the role of the learner rather than the role of the teacher. It focuses on the process rather than the product and 'encourages learners to develop their own purposes for learning and to see learning as a lifelong process' (Jacobs & Farrell, 2001). Promoting learner autonomy in the classroom involves a shift towards what Finch (2002:8) calls *informed learning*. The more a learner is consciously aware of his or her learning, the greater is that student's chance of being more independent. Nevertheless, autonomous learning is by no means 'teacherless learning'. As Sheerin (1997, cited in Benson & Voller, 1997:63) puts it, "teachers have a

crucial role to play in launching learners into self-access". Voller (1997) identifies three roles for the teachers - the teacher as a facilitator, as a counselor and as a resource. Moreover, we are social beings and the development of learner autonomy depends on social interaction (Little 2009). It is therefore important that one views the classroom as a place where learners collaborate in learning and in sharing knowledge. "It is our condition that we learn from one another (Little and Dam 1998)."

Learner autonomy is unavoidably associated with the use of technology in education, now more than ever before. When it comes to technology, Yaratani discusses how it is a widely agreed fact that technology has unavoidably been established in our lives. We live in an era in which no one can imagine a proper life without the use of technology. Over the last decades, education too has represented a prominent field that has been affected by appealing technological developments (2010:161). Furthermore, Yaratani states that educational settings have been significant environments for technology so far. Making use of educational technology has been inevitable, as teachers seek to keep in step with the rapid changes in contemporary educational systems and their targets. The field of education has quickly familiarized itself with technology, and the results have been outstanding. Instructional technology offered quick and effective solutions to educational goals (2010:161).

When CALL (computer assisted language learning) appeared, it was initially regarded as, according to Levy, a study of applications of the computer in language teaching and learning (1997:1). Beatty defines CALL as a process in which the student learns the language by using computers and enhances his or her knowledge because of that (2003:7). The so-called Digital Revolution is changing how we spend our free time: watching television, playing video and computer games, and chatting on the Internet. Hanson-Smith points out that where education has long been controlled by schools and universities, information is now accessible by the individual at his or her own discretion (Hanson-Smith, 1997).

Moreover, it is a commonly held belief among language teachers that students have a variety of learning preferences or styles. Researchers also note that the more different neuro-systems are deployed in learning, the better the target content is learned and the more easily it is accessed again later. Computer technology is superbly adapted to this concept in that it can provide sound, color, graphics, animation, and video, all in addition to or layered onto text. (Hanson-Smith, 1997). Educators, however, need to avoid putting technology ahead of learning in their classrooms (in other words, educators should not be *technocentric* in their thinking) (Egbert, 2005:6).

Scholars in the field of CALL agree that by using technology the overall goal must be to achieve balance between attention to meaning and attention to form, or, in Skehan's terms, an equilibrium must be attained among the pedagogical goals of fluency, accuracy and complexity in the learning of the grammatical system, which enables learners to use more difficult language (1998:135). Learner autonomy and technology bring us to the question of motivation in language learning. What motivates students to learn English? Is motivation measurable?

Motivation is one of the most important factors when it comes to learning a second language, especially when learning that language in school. Different opinions exist regarding what motivation is and, even more importantly, how to motivate students to learn the language fully. Unfortunately, there is no universal way to achieve this, because the techniques that work in certain conditions with certain students do not necessarily

give the same results in other conditions. In terms of defining motivation, the different views on this subject could, generally speaking, be divided into three different viewpoints from the aspect of cognitive theory, behaviorism and humanism (Moore, 1998:232).

Cognitivists (e.g. Victor H. Vroom with his expectancy theory (1964), or Edwin Lock with the goal-setting theory (1990)) explain motivation from the aspect of a human's active need for meaning and satisfaction in life. Motivation is thus internal, and the role of the teacher is to recognize and lead the self-active students.

On the other hand, behaviorists (e.g. Skinner, with his reinforcement theory (1957)) explain motivation from the aspect of external stimulus and enhancement. In that case the greatest meaning is given to the physical environment and the behavior of the teacher.

Humanists (Maslow with the hierarchy of needs (1970)) emphasize the need for personal growth and pay special attention to the whole person and his or her needs for personal freedom, choice and self-determination. According to the humanists, all students are motivated.

From all of the aforementioned it follows that the sources of motivation are either internal or external. For the effective learning of a second language it is necessary to pay equal attention to both motivational sources. Internal motivation includes those elements that the student carries in the school environment, i.e. his internal attributes - attitudes, values and needs. Contrary to this is external motivation regarding external factors that shape the behavior of the student. This, initially, regards the influence that the teacher has over the student and his/her motivation to learn. Internal or external, the motives for learning a second language are interconnected and influence each other.

Robert Gardner and Wallace Lambert (1972) suggested the terms *integrative motivation* and *instrumental motivation*. Integrative motivation refers to language learning for personal development and cultural enrichment (the desire to learn something about the culture of the native speakers of the second language), and instrumental motivation to language learning for more direct and more practical goals (language learning for finding a better job).

### 3. THE SETTING AND THE METHODOLOGY

The proper use of technology in class ultimately leads to enhancing students' teamwork, encourages them to work in groups, revise their own work, and to give constructive feedback. It also reinforces classroom materials.

In this study, second year students (12 in total) from the Business Informatics program at SEEU have ESP in the third and fourth semesters of their studies. Their level of proficiency is very high and they are expected to be at C1 level according to the CEFR. Nevertheless, the class is still a mixed-ability class due to the fact the some students have a higher level of English (graduated in the USA, in a private school, etc.).

Due to the fact that they study a blended program of both business and informatics, they are exposed to the language of Business English and English for Technology as well. Through informal conversations with the students outside class time I understood that more of them wanted to continue with informatics and become programmers, and only one wanted to work with marketing.

As part of their syllabus, they have job-hunting skills which include preparation for job searches, designing presentations, doing mock interviews and giving constructive feedback. For the students, it was their first somewhat hands-on experience with actual

job preparation skills. To make it more motivating we decided to record their job interviews using a camera in the class and later to reflect upon it. In that way, the students didn't feel intimidated and the task wasn't seen as daunting but, on the contrary, as being encouraging, advantageous and highly motivating.

In order to measure the performance a set of criteria was established. A rubric was created for assessing the performance in the interview and later on there was individual feedback. The criteria were set in agreement with the students who decided what was expected of them and what they should deliver and concentrate on. In that way, they knew exactly what was expected of them and they got the chance to be involved in the process of establishing criteria prior to the given task. The criteria included students' characteristics, qualifications, job expectations and long term objectives. These criteria were used to help them decide on the way they will present themselves and on the creation of interview questions.

The students used this set of criteria for their own purposes (reflecting upon it later in the individual feedback) and we didn't collect the data in class.

Table 1 Job interview criteria

Characteristics	Poor	Average	Good	Excellent
Achievement-Oriented				
Cooperative				
Responsible				
Outgoing				
Dedicated				
Poise				
Professional				
Verbal/Persuasive				
Qualifications	Poor	Average	Good	Excellent
Education/Training				
Accomplishments				
Skills				
Relevant Experience				
Potential				
Job expectations	Poor	Average	Good	Excellent
Realistic				
Match employer's needs				
Long term objectives	Poor	Average	Good	Excellent
Realistic				
Potential to grow				

Students were divided into groups of three according to their preferences. I allowed this in order to minimize the stress they might feel while being filmed and during the ensuing discussion. The rationale behind this decision was that the students feel more comfortable with people they know better and they will therefore prepare better for the given task. They agreed among themselves who would take the role of the interviewer and who would be the interviewee. They also had the task of choosing a company and a

job position for which they would compete. The company could have been a real or an imaginary one, it was up to them to make the decision.

### **3.1. The job interview**

The students gave their best to create a job interview which, as closely as possible, resembled a real one. In advance, as homework, they watched some mock interviews online to get the idea of what was expected of them. As previously agreed, the groups of three students agreed on the different roles within the interview, i.e. one being the interviewer and two being the interviewees who competed for the same job position.

One student agreed to record the interview with his camera that also had a tripod; therefore it was static and recorded from one angle only. The angle covered the three students well. Their facial expressions were also covered; this element was important because afterwards the students were expected to analyze the non-verbal communication as well.

The students had previously chosen five questions to ask from a set of questions prepared beforehand. The questions were again prepared by them, the teacher only giving directions and online materials that could be useful. The questions used targeted a certain business vocabulary found in real life interviews. During the interview two of the students faced the interviewer and he asked them the questions alternately. The students took the task very seriously and came very well prepared. They paid attention to details, particularly to the dress code and to their overall behavior and posture. This is likely to some extent due to the fact that they were being recorded.

### **3.2. The feedback and the relevance**

After the interview there was an open discussion of the performance and of the general impression of the process. Later on, the students were given the task of writing individual feedback to measure and evaluate their performance, marking both strengths and weaknesses. They were also supposed to comment on their motivation while preparing and delivering the job interview. The questions that were addressed in the individual feedback were the following:

1. What were my greatest strengths in the interview?
2. What were my greatest areas of weakness?
3. Which questions did I have most trouble answering adequately?
4. How would I assess my overall performance? Poor/Adequate/Good/Excellent
5. How could I improve this interview if I had the chance of doing it again?
6. How motivated was I to perform well on the task? Poorly/Adequately/Well /Highly

The students who had the role of the interviewer exchanged the third question with the following one:

1. Were the questions I asked relevant for the job position? Please comment on the relevance.

The answers to the first question were that the greatest strengths were preparedness, fluency and confidence. The students identified their emotions as their biggest weakness. They took the interview very seriously and they were very emotional about it, which means that they didn't want to give a negative impression of themselves, and this trepidation eventually led them to some level of stress. Because the interview questions were set previously, the students didn't have any trouble answering them. Moreover, they

had a chance to practice the interview at home. Most of the students assessed their performance as good; one said that he did poorly because he didn't take it seriously and one thought that his performance was excellent.

On the fifth question, the students gave the following answers:

- the next time I need to be more calm - I was stressed throughout the interview;
- the next time I will try to give longer answers;
- four students answered that they wouldn't change anything;
- I wasn't satisfied with the interview, next time I will take it more seriously;
- I will prepare more;
- I will try to improve my language.

On the last questions, almost everybody said that they were highly motivated to fulfill the task as expected, and only one said that he was poorly motivated, but that was due to the fact that he didn't take it seriously. Regarding the question for the interviewer, all of them agreed that they choose adequate questions for the job position. As a final task, the students watched the recorded videos of themselves, and discussed the non-verbal features and the things they would have done differently. They commented on their eye contact, posture and their overall sitting position. The whole implementation of the task (including the preparation stage, the delivery and the post feedback stage) spread over a period of five classes, each class being 2 hours long. The role of the teacher throughout the stages was that of a facilitator and a resource. The spotlight was on the students, and not on the teacher.

After carefully examining the student feedback we came to the conclusion that a task like this was greatly motivating for students because of three reasons:

- they were involved in every stage of the task;
- they considered the mock interviews relevant;
- they learned how to prepare for a real life task.

They felt more confident once they did an interview in front of their classmates, and they found it a challenging task to watch each other (and themselves) later on, and to be able to give constructive criticism in the areas that need to be improved. However, it should be mentioned that with limited experience in job-hunting skills, these job interviews were not intended to show precisely their readiness to go into the real world and look for an actual job. They merely served as an exercise in bringing part of the real world into the classroom and to use it for our learning purposes. In this way, the world of business and jobs became more tangible and students could explore it and make a first step in preparing for it.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

Modern education should focus on the whole person of the student as a thinking, feeling, and creative individual who will become a responsible member of society. That is the underlying idea of learner autonomy. Teachers equip students with lifelong learning skills. With such skills, an individual will learn how to ask questions, how to set goals, and how to reflect on the achievement. To achieve such goals, teachers themselves need to learn to let go of absolute classroom control, to reflect upon their own learning and teaching experiences and upon their own beliefs about what autonomy is.

With these practical job interviews, we did precisely that. The ultimate goal was letting go of the control on the side of the teacher and putting more emphasis on the autonomy of the students. The recorded mock interview is one of the very best ways to prepare for an actual employment interview. It allows students to gain experience and practice in answering questions similar to ones asked during an interview. Then, by watching the recorded video, they are able to see themselves as others see them during an interview. The mock interviews done in this concrete ESP class proved to be highly motivating and a very successful task. Students enjoyed the actual interview and they loved the idea of being able to participate in every phase of the organization and the final delivery.

However, having in mind that these were the first recorded mock interviews both for the students and for the teacher, there are certain areas that require improvement. First of all, the students need to pay more attention to details and try to answer the questions in as detailed a manner as possible. They should also have a longer preparatory period, in order to avoid the stress they felt at times and to be more confident. Finally, we should include some target vocabulary and aim at learning the vocabulary as well as doing the interview.

On the whole, it is highly recommended that these mock interviews (with slight improvements included) continue to be part of the ESP Business Informatics syllabus. They proved to be an adventurous and very demanding task that needed maximum involvement on the side of the students. The final result produced highly motivated students aware of their involvement in the learner process, which is a positive step towards autonomous learning.

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