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ENGLISH TEACHER'S CLASSROOM LANGUAGE – AN
EMPOWERING TOOL FOR ENGINEERING STUDENTS

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Abstract

The aim of the research is to identify the characteristics of the English teacher's classroom language likely to encourage engineering students to improve their knowledge of English and endow them with a currently highly empowering tool – prerequisite for their multicultural professional mobility.

The goal of an English teacher is to develop communication competences and implement a type of language that will better fit into the engineering students' framework of professional needs and assist them in improving not only their linguistic social and emotional skills but also raise the quality of instruction in technical higher education.

The research is a comparative study between two Romanian technical universities: University Politehnica of Bucharest and University Politehnica of Timisoara and was conducted on 234 engineering students studying electronics, mechanics and electrical engineering, between 2014-2016.

A questionnaire was devised and students had to mention and identify their English teacher's language characteristics likely to endow them with linguistic skills and ensure linguistic performance. Hence, the type of language to be used by the English teacher in technical higher education must be accessible, scientific/academic, correct/ fluent and accurate/expressive and specialized, flexible and adapted to students' different levels of knowledge.

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1. Introduction

This research addresses the new paradigm of language study in technical higher education which requires new teaching tools and approaches likely to ensure the quality of language didactics and learners' professional performance. In the aftermath of the Bologna Process, the technical higher education system in Romania has tried to comply with the quality requirements addressed by the present multicultural world. Thus, the need to enhance engineering students' language performance has become a prerequisite for any English teacher. All in all, the relevance of the current study is illustrated, on one hand, by engineering students' need to improve their language competences and on the other hand, it is extremely important for English teachers in higher technical education to endow their students with an empowering tool that will ensure their smooth insertion into the present globalized multicultural labour market.

Such a tool is the *Responsive classroom* (<https://www.responsiveclassroom.org>) which highlights social, academic and communicative growth in a quality-oriented technical higher education community. This approach consists of hands-on strategies likely to assist engineering students in building life-long lasting academic and social-communicative competencies. The *Responsive Classroom Approach* (<https://www.responsiveclassroom.org>) falls within the purview of educational theorists and prodigious classroom teachers and it has also been adopted and implemented in technical higher education as a means of ensuring the quality of language didactics and engineering students' professional and social performance. The seminal flowering of the literature review available at <https://www.responsiveclassroom.org/about> highlights the following guiding principles of this approach:

1. the social curriculum is as important as the academic curriculum;
2. *how* engineering students learn is as important as *what* they learn;
3. cognitive acquisition is the result of social interaction;
4. to be successful both professionally and socially, engineering students need to acquire and develop a set of social and communicative skills such as: accountability, teamwork, empathy, politeness, assertiveness and linguistic skills;
5. knowing the students we teach –their professional and personal needs and expectations - is as important as the content we teach.

Moreover, if applied to the study of languages in technical higher education, the *Responsive Classroom Approach* (<https://www.responsiveclassroom.org>) consists of a set of strategies that foster professional and linguistic competencies. Teacher language is embedded in these language teaching practices and implies the intentional use of language likely to enable engineering students to engage in their own learning. Furthermore, the English teacher's language used in classroom will help them achieve academic performance and communicate better in a multinational work environment, hence ensuring the quality of language pedagogy.

The above-mentioned approach also emphasizes teachers' effectiveness, mainly by raising their awareness about the skills and teaching methods they need in order to ensure a high-quality educational environment. The overall objective of this approach is to enable high-quality engineering student's study of languages.

Thus, in order to assist engineering students' smooth academic and social insertion onto the multicultural labour market, language teachers must also become aware of the type of language they use in classroom.

It becomes worth mentioning that *Responsive Classroom Approach* (<https://www.responsiveclassroom.org>) also capitalizes on human communication which is not only about *giving information*. It is rather likely to alter an individual's behaviour. Therefore, as teacher language used in classroom becomes a prerequisite for didactic communication. Communication is not only "knowledge" but rather an empowering tool for students' academic and social and emotional development which can be achieved by means of a type of teacher language mostly characterized by *expressivity* which can be interpreted "as the quality of language to effectively convey meaning and feeling", according to Merriam-Webster Dictionary.

The current research supports Slama-Cazacu's (1973, p. 95) statement that *expressivity* (<http://www.merriam-webster.com>) is a means of communication or a complex behavioural trait which facilitates cognitive aptitudes and mental design and enables the accurate and expressive conveying of an idea.

Hence, as Popescu-Neveanu (1978, p. 258) argued the role of accuracy and expressivity is to give meaning to communication, to make language clearly understood by the student.

2. Problem Statement

The present paper capitalizes on the *Responsive Classroom Approach* (<https://www.responsiveclassroom.org>) – which builds social, emotional and linguistic growth into an academic language studying framework that will nevertheless ensure engineering students' professional achievement and mobility. This approach is supportive of teachers' instructional quality in technical higher education through language – an empowering tool for engineering students' academic and social development.

Promotion of engineering students' active language learning, motivation and assertiveness can also be achieved by positive efficient teacher language – characterized by those features students identify and consider most professionally empowering: clearness; accuracy and effectiveness, fluency, correctness.

The type of language used in classroom by the English teacher is determined by the educational background and the logics of the learning and instructional process.

As a consequence, in the study of languages, didactic communication also entails the teacher's effort to expressively integrate the content to be taught, to make it accessible, clear, specialized and accurate.

3. Research Questions

The students were questioned about their appreciation of the type of language to be used by the English teacher in technical higher education: "What characteristics of the language used by your English teacher in the classroom would you find most useful for your language performance?" "Do you consider your English teacher's language an empowering tool for both your professional and social successful performance?"

4. Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of the current research is to identify the main features and type of language any English teacher must use in the classroom so as to provide engineering students with an empowering tool likely to bring about their language performance. Nevertheless, teacher's language can ensure the quality of language didactics in Romanian technical higher education.

5. Research Methods

5.1. Hypothesis

The following hypothesis was postulated based on the previous problem statement and purpose of research:

If we identify the main features of the English teacher's language used in classroom, then we will be able to ensure the quality of the study of English within the Romanian technical higher education and empower engineering students with language competences likely to assist them in their further professional performance.

5.2. Research method and instruments

The research is a comparative study between two technical Romanian universities: the University Politehnica of Bucharest and the University Politehnica of Timișoara. The research was conducted on 234 engineering students studying electronics, mechanics and electrical engineering between 2014-2016. Moreover, an empiric research was carried out beforehand and the students were interviewed about their preferences regarding the most useful and important features of the language used by the English teacher in class– prerequisites for their language and professional performance.

A questionnaire was devised based on students' opinions and the data were analysed statistically and validated through Levene's Test for Equality of Variances.

6. Findings

The respondents helped identify the following language features likely to ensure their linguistic and professional performance. Moreover, the features were conceptualized for better understanding of their importance:

- Accessible and expressive (“easy to communicate and deal with or capable of being understood or appreciated” – according to Merriam-Webster Dictionary);
- Scientific (“of, relating to or exhibiting the methods and principles of science” - according to Merriam-Webster Dictionary);
- Academic (“related to school, colleges and universities and connected with studying and thinking, not with practical skills” – according to Cambridge English Dictionary);
- Correct/accurate (“to make or set right” or “to alter or adjust so as to bring to some standard or required condition”/ “free from error, confirming exactly to truth or to a standard” - according to Merriam-Webster Dictionary);

- Fluent (“capable of using a language easily and accurately” –according to Merriam-Webster Dictionary) ;
- Specialized (“designed, trained or fitted for one particular purpose or occupation” - according to Merriam-Webster Dictionary);
- Flexible and adapted to students’ different levels of knowledge (“characterized by a ready capability to adapt to new, different or changing requirements” - according to Merriam-Webster Dictionary) (<http://www.merriam-webster.com>).

Table 01. English Teacher’s Language Features

Features	Statistical scores
accessible/expressive	4.397
scientific	4.333
academic	3.795
correct/accurate	4.559
fluent	4.464
specialized	4.070
flexible/adapted to students’ different levels of knowledge	4.117

The results show that students expect their English teacher to speak so that they could understand them thus, *accessible/expressive* language is highly appreciated. This may explain the teachers’ tendency to use a sophisticated highly advanced language, unaware of their students’ level of language knowledge and professional needs. *Correctness and accuracy* rank first as engineering students are aware of the possible negative effects of an erroneous performance. *Fluency* is also greatly appreciated – a characteristic of a professional efficient language teacher. *Flexibility* and *adaptability* to students’ different levels of knowledge as well as *specialization* are not valued to such a great extent. One possible interpretation is that students consider that competent professional teacher, who speaks fluent, accurate/correct English, is doubly capable of adapting his/her language to their needs and knowledge.

7. Conclusion

By way of conclusion, the current research has managed to identify some of the main features of the type of language any English teacher in technical higher education must use in classroom in order to ensure the students’ language performance – a prerequisite for further professional development. Hence, the language to be used by an English teacher must be characterized by accuracy, fluency and adaptability which proves the English teacher’s ability to adapt his/her language to students’ needs and levels of knowledge and comprehension. Moreover, the research results illustrate that linguistic correctness, accessibility and expressivity are also highly valued by engineering students since these features are considered to ensure the quality of the didactic communication and engineering students’ language performance and professional advancement.

Furthermore, the results show that most of the respondents consider that an English teacher's use of language in classroom and, more precisely, the use of a type of language characterized by correctness, accuracy and fluency is an empowering tool for both their professional and social successful performance.

It becomes worth mentioning that these language characteristics prove the engineering students' growing need for a teaching approach that will better meet their academic and social and emotional requirements. Thus, the use of *Responsive Classroom Approach* may become a must in the study of English in technical higher education. All in all, the authors are of the opinion that the use of an accurate, accessible and fluent kind of language by English teachers in technical higher education rests on the students' need to acquire and develop communicative competency – a prerequisite for their career development in a multicultural globalized world.

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