ACTIVITAT PER INTEGRAR 3 COMPETÈNCIES GENÈRIQUES EN EL GRAU D’ELECTRICITAT

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ABSTRACT

With the integration of English at university teaching, there are several aspects to improve, to emphasize, to integrate... For example, we have observed that there are a certain distance between students and teachers when using a foreign language due to a lack of practice and self-confidence. To bring the student into English and also, to improve this self-confidence, it is necessary to find strategies to integrate the fact of speaking English into the class, and get student expressing in English.

From this point of view, in the subject of Sistemes Elèctrics de Potència we propose a specific activity in order to improve not only the interventions in the class, but also the oral exposition of projects. At the same time, we shall deal with other generic competences as the oral communication and the use of information resources. Then, we propose an English papers research activity about the topics given in class. Then, students have to choose one of these papers and summarize it in English. From this paper and the summary, the student has to prepare an oral exposition to explain the work done.

Here we are going to expose all the material and process that we have followed to prepare and develop this activity and also the results that we have obtained.

KEYWORDS: Oral exposition, English speaking, English integration

INTRODUCTION

The use of English at university is, nowadays, becoming more and more common. Different subjects of different degrees have the Third Language Competence, which means that a part or the totality of the subject is in English. But it is also true that when we (teachers) use a foreign language, the distance between the teacher and students increase a lot due to a lack of practice and self-confidence. There are fewer interventions in class and the class is followed with difficulties. To deal with this situation, we thought that we need to find strategies to integrate the English speaking into the class, and get student expressing in English.
One strategy is to prepare an activity to develop the oral communication. The subject Sistemes Elèctrics de Potència is a main subject of the electrical degree that includes the third language competence. In this subject, we prepared an oral activity, where students have to research a paper in English about the topics given in class and then expose the information found. This kind of activity is a good way to improve not only the interventions in the class, but also the oral exposition of projects inside the third language competence.

The difficulty is to prepare this activity well enough to obtain a good result and a good response from the students. We have to give them enough material, information and guidelines to do and prepare the activity. They have two difficulties: to do the activity and to do it in English.

This takes us to think about what they need, how we guide them, etc. With the material we have, we realize that we had to deal with three generic competences, not only the third language one. We had to deal with the use of information resources and oral and writing efficient communication competence [1].

To explain the material we had used to prepare the activity, the activity itself and the results of it, we have structured this article as follows:
- Explain and focus on these three competences. We will introduce this competence and how do we used them for our activity.
- Detail the activity, how we prepared it, how we developed it, and how did it go
- Comment the results
- And finally, conclusions of our work

To carry on, the following part talks about the three competences that include our oral activity.

THE THREE COMPETENCES FOR THE ORAL ACTIVITY

a) Competence of third language
In a degree there are different subjects which include this competence. In these subjects it is necessary to know a third language (English preferably), and also, a good oral and writing level is asked in accordance to the needs of each degree. [1]

This means that a student in a degree needs to achieve a minimum English level to obtain this competence.

To make easy this task for students and above all, for teachers, there is a resource done by different teachers of Linguatech [2]. This resource is called Classtalk [3]. It is a good resource where you can find a lot of sentences in
Catalan and in English to make the development of the class easy. This document helps to build a whole lecture starting from the: starting the lecture, delivering the lecture, interacting with students, using visual aids, referring to documents and ending the lecture. Also there is a second document for specific situations, for example, how to introduce yourself the first day of class, how to explain when you want the questions or doubts, how will you structure the course and topics, the class activities, the lab activities, etc.

Then, going back to our activity, to achieve this generic competence, we need not only to do the activity and the class in English, but also it is necessary to develop all the parts of the activity in English to get used to it and to get self-confident with a foreign language.

Then, with this activity, students will improve their level of English spoken and written with a specific vocabulary. This point is not always highlighted, but it is very important. A lot of students have a high level of English but not with specific vocabulary of their degree. The subjects in English help to expand the specific vocabulary of the degree.

Finally, the other part of this competence is the part that the teacher has to give. That’s why the class-talk document is very helpful.

b) Competence of oral and writing efficient communication

As advanced in [1], the competence of oral and writing efficient communication is: “to communicate orally and in writing with other people about learning results, thought elaboration and taken decisions, to participate in debates about topics of their own speciality”.

This generic competence has three possible levels:

- Level 1: it is a basic level: then the activity must be developed at that level. This level corresponds to the first subjects you find in the degree.
- Level 2: it is an intermediate level: the activity must be developed at that level. This level is for the specific subjects in the middle of the degree.
- Level 3: advanced level: all the documents and oral aids must be done with a high level. The subjects that have this level are the ones at the end of the degree.

In [1], you also can find a guide to develop this generic competence: where the definition, the objectives to be achieved (plan, write, review and expose), in what level you have to develop the subject and the competence, and finally, a guide to do the evaluation and the follow of this competence are explained.

Also, there is a notebook to work this competence in the subjects. This notebook is very extensive and you can find some examples of activities, a
good guide to evaluate each activity, etc, in it. But all this examples and guides are proposed for each level.

Then, as we can see, these two documents are very useful to improve all the activities year after year, material and information given to the students to facilitate the integrations, communication, comprehension of oral and writing English.

But, a part from that, which is a very good material, we have developed a two-paged schematic guide with the aim of helping the student to prepare and develop an oral activity and also, to have a quick guide to consult for oral expositions.

On this document you can find a guide to choose the topic for the activity, to make a good research of the information, to structure these information found, how to develop the topic and finally how to prepare and develop the oral exposition. Also, we include some generic advice to do the oral exposition and an auto-check-list to make sure that everything is included and that the work prepared is good enough.

This document is not published yet but it will appear in Linguatech web page [2] on the teaching resources part.

c) Competence of use of information resources
Finally, we have to deal with the competence of use of information resources. This competence appeared at the moment that we need to make a good research of information.

As advanced in [1], the competence of use of information resources is: “to manage the acquisition, the structure, the analysis and the display of data and information in every degree speciality and also evaluate in a critical way the results of this management”.

This generic competence has also three possible levels:

- Level 1: which is also a basic level: students only have to be able to use the sources and services that the university and the teacher give them to search information.
- Level 2: intermediate level: here the student has to be able to use an advanced research, select the necessary information and organize the references, a part from the point in level 1.
- Level 3: advanced level: students have to be able to use the information for an academic work.

Also, as it happens with the second competence (b), the level of this competence increase as the specific subjects moves forward through the degree.
As in the second generic competence in [1], it is possible to consult a guide and a notebook. They are as extensive as in b) competence and the structure is the same, i.e., the contents are the same but in this case they are focused on the information resources and how to obtain and manage the information that is found.

Again, this information is very useful, specially for teachers, because it gives you an expanded guide to use and find the information and also examples for every level.

Also, there is other good material. We think that this document is a quick guide to be given to the students so that they can look for and find information. This aid is [4], which is a document done by the Documentation and Libraries service of UPC. This information is done to explain how to use the information resources to find the information you want even it is generic or specialized. And also, it provides different resources to consult to obtain the information.

Moreover, the library service of UPC gives us a high range of scientific documents to consult, apart from the possibility to access to scientific publication web pages to consult a lot of scientific published papers.

So, this generic competence lets us know how to use all this information, all the possibilities and sources and what a student needs to achieve at the end of the degree.

After this explanation about what the generic competences that we had to deal with for our activity are, we will explain the activity we had proposed, how we choose it and its parts.

**PROPOSED ACTIVITY**

As advanced in the introduction, the subject Sistemes Elèctrics de Potència, is a main subject of the Electrical Engineering Degree. It is in Catalan but the notes are in English, the exercises are in English and also, the practices are in English because this subject has the Third Language Competence.

Then, students have to understand notes, exercises and practices in English and also they must give the solution in this language. Apart from that, we thought about an extra activity to become familiar and/or improve the research of information about scientific topics as voltage drop, voltage regulation and voltage collapse in the context of Smart Grids. The main idea was to make a good research in the IEEE Xplore web page and choose one article to make a summary of it. But then we thought to extend this search to the common searchers on the internet and ask for a summary of a part of the information found.
Then we prepared the following activity:

The first step was to explain the activity and give the students the information they need to develop it and to know where to look for the information. Then, each student has to make a good research about scientific papers or scientific information about voltage regulation, voltage drop and/or voltage collapse in the context of Smart Grids in the IEEE Xplore web page and also in the internet.

After this search, they have to choose one article or piece of information, to read it and to make sure they understand it. It is very important to understand the information found, especially if it is in English. Finally, they have to summarise it and prepare a presentation to explain what they have found. The time given for the oral presentation is 15 minutes maximum.

The only clue given to the students was where to find the information and what they have to do and the time they have for the oral exposition. But we did not give them the guide for developing an oral exposition explained in b). We would have liked to give it to them but we prepared this material later on.

We think that this guide is good enough to help them to prepare and improve the oral exposition.

Finally, only remains to explain the experience lived in class during the oral expositions.

THE EXPERIENCE

As advanced, students had maximum 15 minutes to talk about what they did. The students were the audience and the objective of each presentation was to explain the information found. Then, it was very important that every student had understood the information.

Before the presentation, they gave us the summary done to facilitate the comprehension of each presentation to us.

First of all, we have to say that we had a great surprise because they developed good topics, good summaries, and good presentations and in general the level of English was quite good. We also observed that two students have a low level of English and one of them made a very big effort to express himself in English without reading and the content was very good.

But, also, we think that there are several areas to improve for next year. We observed the following:
First, students exposed mostly the same that they had in the summary. And the summary was nearly the same as it was in the article or in the information found. So we think that we have to emphasized how to summarize the information (not copy it) and tell them to express what they found in their own words. That is why it is really important to understand the information.

Second, the chosen topics were good but one or two students shifted from the main topic and then, the expositions went to another point and they did not focus on the topics given. So, we think that it would be good to highlight the possible topics and not to move from them.

Also, we saw that most of them needed more than 15 minutes. They did not control the time. This is one of the points that we highlight in the oral guide document. So it will be good to give them this guide for the next time. Not only to control the time, but also for other aspects to take into account to do a good oral presentation.

Finally, we observed that the slides of each presentation had a lot of text which made them slow. We observed that the slides were not good structured as a guide only to help to do the presentations. The slides were used to read and explain the topic. Due to this problem, the presentation became slow and heavy.

So, we think that we obtained a good result with this new activity but we have to improve it. Again, in the guide for an oral exposition document, we discuss these points that we think that need to be improved. We expect better results the next time.

CONCLUSIONS

To conclude, we can say that it is very difficult to prepare a good activity in a foreign language that touches on many points. This activity helped us to see what we need to improve and how do we have to prepare it to make it clear.

But we also have to say that we obtained a very good result. The students that had done the activity are not used to do this kind of exercises and for most of them it was the first time that they talk in front of an audience in a foreign language.

As advanced in the experience part, it is necessary to give the guide for oral presentation document that we did to the students.

Finally, we think that next time we will obtain better results.
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