

## TEXTBOOK SELECTION – AN IMPORTANT FACTOR IN INTRODUCING ESP IN VOCATIONAL SCHOOLS. A CASE STUDY

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### **Abstract**

*The purpose of the present study is to prove the importance of introducing English for Specific Purposes in high school textbooks, in our case for the specializations that are **oriented** towards science and technology, to create a framework within which each individual will be able to face the new challenges imposed by the change in their status after graduation – that of being a university student.*

*As a university student, the individual must be capable to look for specialized updated information, to be able to write well-documented reports, to enrich his/her knowledge in a certain field of interest for passing an exam, to take part in international conferences, symposiums or workshops, to be part of an exchange programme or to benefit of an internship abroad.*

*Thus, the high school teachers must be aware that introducing topics (in accordance with their specialization), that meet their students' needs within the teaching process, represent the foundation for the further deepened study of ESP in the university.*

**Key words:** ESP, student, textbook, motivation

### **INTRODUCTION**

It is clear that, in time, the importance of teaching and learning ESP will become obvious. In order to attend a technical, medical or economic faculty, it is no longer enough to speak general English. Attending international projects, being involved in international student exchanges, we must underline the imminent need of speaking ESP (Sifokis, N and Sougari, A.: 2003). The aim of teaching ESP is to develop both linguistic and professional skills and abilities, as well as, knowledge and competence (Sysoyev, P.: 1999). On one hand, by involving high school students in projects with the aim to develop their general English, teachers must be aware of the additional need to use ESP during the development of the project.

On the other hand, teaching general English at technical specializations, without involving students in project activities and students' exchanges, leads, as the present study will show, to a lack of interest, from students' part, to learn English as a foreign language.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

The present study was made on three generations of students attending “Mihai Viteazul” Vocational School, specialization: environmental protection. The number of students in each class was around 25, and the average per year in English was based on the recorded grades during the English classes.

In the present paper, we try to prove, by taking into account the students' grades in English language, the progress or lack of progress of three generations of high school students (2005-2008; 2006-2009 and 2007-2010) according to the textbook they followed at the respective moment. Each generation benefited of a different textbook. Thus, the differences in average grades of one generation to another can be quantified and interpreted accordingly. Each textbook had its own specific characteristics regarding the types of exercises, topics approached, grammar explanations and so on. However, the most suitable textbook proved to be the one used for generation 2008-2010, which included besides the general topics characteristic for each language textbook, interesting topics in environmental protection (their major subject matter), computer science, agriculture, and so on.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Each generation had its specific regarding its study material evolution. Generation 2005-2008 could be characterized as showing a low interest in learning English as a foreign language, having an average on four study years of 6.54 (See Fig. 1).

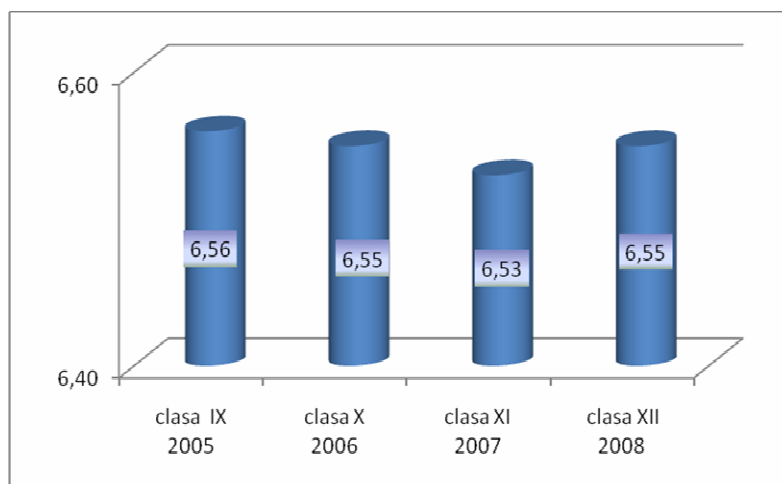


Fig. 1. Averages for generation 2005-2008

However, we can notice a rise of interest in learning English for generation 2006-2009, whose average was of 7.10. Generation 2006-2009 started with an average of 6.55 in the ninth form and ended with 7.70 in the twelfth form. Thus, it is noticed a steady average increase of 1.15 (See Fig. 2).

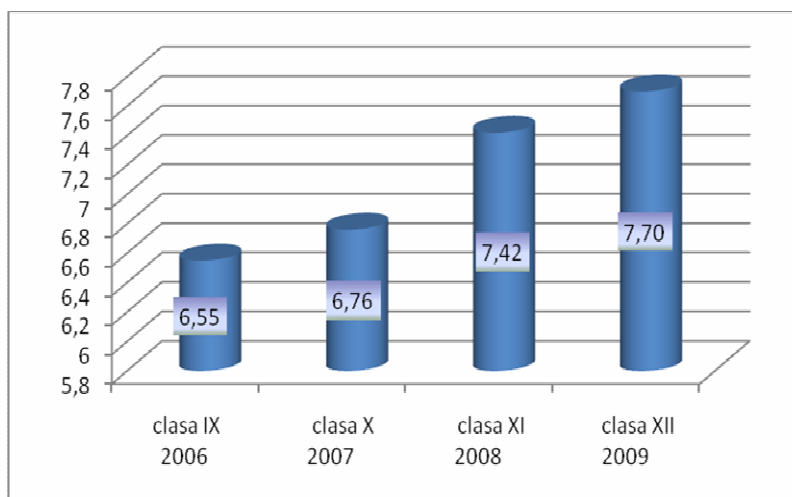


Fig. 2. Averages for generation 2006-2009

A higher awareness in learning English has been shown by the generation 2007-2010, whose average was of 7.46. The evolution is quite remarkable from an average of 6.82 in the ninth form at one of 8.09 in the twelfth form (See Fig. 3).

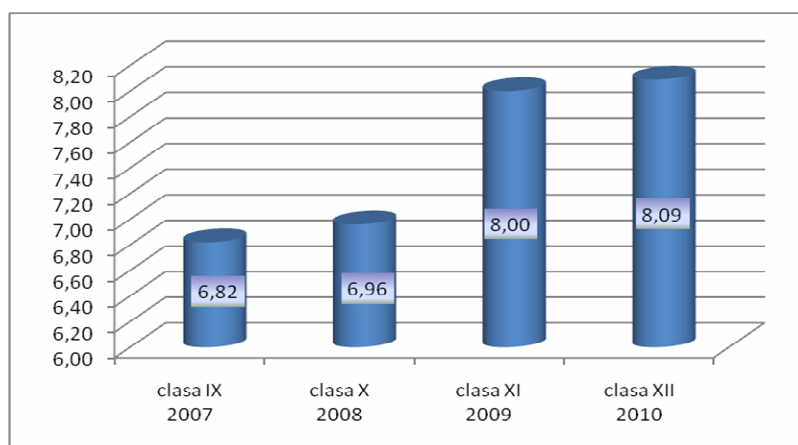


Fig. 3. Averages for generation 2007-2010

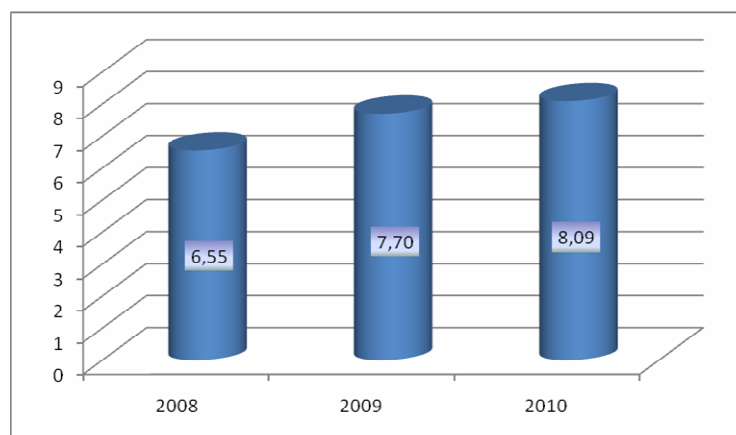
The evolution of the grades is strongly connected to the knowledge they achieved, based on the proposed subjects in the textbooks. The textbooks used by generation 2005-2008 were different from those used by the following generations.

At that moment the textbooks, proposed as support for the English classes, were selected among the already existing textbooks written by English teachers of Romanian origin, without having the perspective of an up to date curriculum, in accordance with the major subject matter. They were focused on old culture and civilization, the selected texts from the English literature having hurdling words, and non-contextualized grammar exercises (Balan, R. & Carianopol, M.: 2004). The students found it difficult to be understood and followed, thus, most of the time they showed lack of interest regarding the proposed subjects.

The following generation 2006-2009 could benefit of new textbooks offered by English publishing houses with a new perspective on teaching English as a foreign language. The lessons were in a way updated to those times, but the students couldn't find subjects they were interested in (environmental issues, eco-technology). The students were pleased with this new perspective of learning English as a foreign language, but they considered the degree of difficulty very low and the subjects approached in the textbooks as being not too appealing (Evans, V. & Edwards, L.: 2003). They characterized these textbooks as being too boring, and their social and cultural taste for debating in English wasn't fully fulfilled.

For the last generation 2007-2010, the English publishing houses had a new offer of textbooks including new approaches to learn English as a foreign language. Within these textbooks, updated subjects could be found to be studied that comprised new items of vocabulary (the input) and specific vocabulary (technical one) according to the proposed subject, all mingled in an ordinary context, easy to be understood (Harmer, J.: 2006). The grammar exercises were all contextualized and the debating subjects were varying from science to technology, environmental and medical area. Some titles of the lessons that were appealing to this generation were: Artificial Intelligence, Wind Farming, Underground Housing, How to Be a Winner and so on (Evans, V. & Edwards, L.: 2003). The students were more content with the contextual quality of their textbooks, than the previous generations.

The positive evolution of the students' grades from one generation to another in studying English language which proved to be significantly influenced by the suitability or lack of suitability of the English textbooks is clearly proved in Fig. 4.



**Fig. 4. Averages for all the three generations under study**

So far, the study followed the factual approaches regarding the importance of the appropriate support for a better acquisition of English as a foreign language, and the practice of the productive skills. The following approaches will take into account the psychological factors that are influencing the process of learning English as a foreign language. The methods of teaching English, the way of presenting the new lesson, the putting into real context of the teaching materials are some factors that influence students' acquisition of new language. The new methods of teaching have been applied to recent generations, but in the past we should admit their lack of applicability. The old methods were based on translations, giving rules and explanations for the grammar issues by using mother tongue in explaining the new vocabulary. All these factors determined the students not to practice the productive skills, and together with the non adequate teaching materials led to a lack of acquiring English as a foreign language. Instead, the following generations have been offered the chance to experience and practice productive skills through new proposed methods, such as: debating, pair work, gapped texts, multiple choice exercises and brainstorming. The lesson included all these new methods of teaching English through out exercises, and the impact could be seen in the students' grade evolution.

## CONCLUSIONS

It is felt the need among students to encounter a new approach of learning English as a foreign language, an "English" gloved on their needs as individuals (Johns, A., 1991; Laurence, A., 1997; Sysoyev, P., 1999), on their need to practice the theoretical terms they use at their major subject matter: that is, environmental protection.

We can talk about a need of introducing technical language, first at a lower level, and then at a higher level of comprehension in order to arise students' interest and taste for learning an English useful for their future professional activity.

Therefore, English teachers when choosing their teaching materials and when performing the act of teaching must follow the idea of fulfilling students' goals regarding their future career, and not only to follow a given curriculum.

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