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TEACHING ROMANIAN AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE TO MEDICAL STUDENTS - AN EVER-GROWING CHALLENGE

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Abstract

Academic education practices must provide the students with an open access of education and equality through mediated learning in all universities all over Romania. The present article represents a case study assessing the Romanian language course for foreign students studying medicine enrolled in the English program within the University of Medicine and Pharmacy of Craiova. The statistical descriptive analysis was based on anonymous questionnaires received by students assessing the Romanian language course in terms of *the level of effort the students put into the course, skill and responsiveness of the teacher and course content*. The study revealed interesting results, useful both for the Romanian language course teacher and for other teachers open to improve their teaching skills and materials, especially those related to listening and speaking skills of their students.

Keywords: Romanian, foreign language, medical students, academic teaching

Introduction

Romanian as a foreign language has increasingly become a market product in all the universities all over Romania. In medical universities, the ever-growing number of foreign students is not a novelty for anyone, anymore. There are new sections of teaching medicine in English, and, therefore, teachers of Romanian as a foreign language have been faced with a new challenge: teaching Romanian with the aid of the English language. Most ESP teachers have embraced this new tendency of teaching Romanian to foreign students enrolled within the English section of medical universities. This is also the case of the University of Medicine and Pharmacy of Craiova, where foreign students can study medicine in English for almost 8 years now. The nationalities of the foreign students are quite diversified, including Greek, Arabic, Israeli, Italian, English or German. All these medical students study medicine in English for six years, with no previous contact with the Romanian language. As such, the task of the Romanian language teacher becomes a little more difficult, in that she/ he must resort to the use of English language in order to teach Romanian, as English is the common language used by all these foreign students, both for communication with the academic staff and for studying medicine within our university.

Institutions of higher education attempt to improve and change the quality of their academic practice, through creating a better learning environment for both the students and the academic staff (Kissock, Richardson, 2010). In recent years, within the context of social development and knowledge creation as main factors for the professional development of academic teachers, the use of technology has become a mediation tool for reflection and learning. As such, academic education practices must provide the students an open access of education and equality through mediated learning. Professional knowledge is fostered by collaboration and reflection, accompanied by skills development of prospective teachers enriched through the power of technology.

Beyond the learner's cognitive abilities, digitalization works as a drive for the educational system to create authentic environment for learning in order to enhance transferable skills for employment and future work. Nowadays, the use of devices of mobile communication connected to the internet has become a new and necessary trend in the process of learning (Nolan, Stewart, 2015). In the educational system, teachers tend to become mediators in order to provide students with the necessary tools for continuously challenge themselves.

As such, technology should be viewed as a mediation mechanism in order to facilitate new knowledge acquisition in a setting of experiential and collaborative efforts. In this respect, Eun (2010) stated that contextualized and activity-oriented instructions with the support of technology provides learners to learn in action.

During the Romanian language courses within the University of Medicine and Pharmacy of Craiova, the most used and efficient learning methods are through videos and role-playing. These help both the teacher and the students to learn and practice the medical language in Romanian language, fostering skill development within peer learning and contextualized group learning. Moreover, peer learning is an important way of improving high learning thinking and communication skills while sharing specific specialized medical knowledge. Peer learning promotes an active learning achieved by positive interdependence, group processing, face-to-face interaction and technology-based learning. In this way, active involvement makes learners understand deeper and faster the Romanian medical language. As part of the peer learning method, role-playing is a technique supporting a real experience opportunity for the medical students (and not only) in order to increase the quality of learning.

The use of videos containing specialized medical information also helps the students to enrich their Romanian medical language vocabulary and pronunciation. It is well-known that listening is the most efficient method for teaching and learning pronunciation.

Material and Method

The present study included a number of approximately 80 foreign students in the 1st and 2nd year who learn Romanian language within the University of Medicine and Pharmacy of Craiova. They received an anonymous questionnaire via e-mail from Google Forms. The questionnaire created especially for this study included questions regarding *the level of effort the students put into the course, skill and responsiveness of the teacher and course content*. All the answers were sent back to the study coordinator, anonymously. A statistical descriptive analysis of the data collected was performed, by establishing the number of answers and percentage from the total respondent students, according to the criteria included in the questions of the questionnaire.

Findings

Of the total number of respondent students, 30 (37.03) were in the 1st year of study and 51 (62.96) in the 2nd year. All of them study Romanian as a foreign language within the University of Medicine and Pharmacy of Craiova. Regarding *the level of effort* they put into the Romanian practical course, 14 (17.28%) students answered "excellent", 29 (35.80%) considered it "very good", 28 (34.56%) regarded their effort as "satisfactory", 9 (11.11%) "fair", and only 1 (1.23%) student saw the effort as "poor" (Figure 1):



Figure 1. Assessment of the Romanian practical course according to the level of effort the foreign students put into the course.

As far as *the skill and responsiveness of the teacher* was concerned, the assessment of students included six criteria, namely:

1. *the instructor was an effective lecturer;*
2. *presentations were clear and organized;*
3. *instructor stimulated student interest;*
4. *instructor effectively used time during course;*
5. *instructor was available and helpful, and*
6. *grading was prompt and had useful feedback.*

The results revealed that 42 (52.5%) students strongly agreed, 36 (45%) students agreed and 2 (2.5%) students were neutral regarding the criterium that *the instructor was an effective lecturer*. The following criterium assessment showed that 47 (59.49%) students strongly agreed, 31 (39.24%) students agreed and 1 (1.26%) student was neutral on *the clear aspect and organization of presentations* during the course. As far as the ability of the *teacher to stimulate the student interest* was concerned, 43 (54.43%) students strongly agreed, 28 (34.56%) students agreed and 8 (10.12%) students were neutral. The fourth criterium under assessment showed that 47 (59.49%) students strongly agreed, 31 (39.24%) students agreed and 1 (1.26%) student considered *the teacher effectively used the time during the course*. The *teacher being available and helpful* was evaluated by 49 (62.02%) students as strongly agree, by 27 (34.17%) students as agree and 3 (3.79%) students were neutral. The last, but not least, criterium evaluated by the students was on the process of grading; as such, 52 (66.66%) students strongly agreed and 26 (33.33%) students agreed that *the grading was prompt and received a useful feedback* from the teacher (Figure 2):

Skill and responsiveness of the teacher

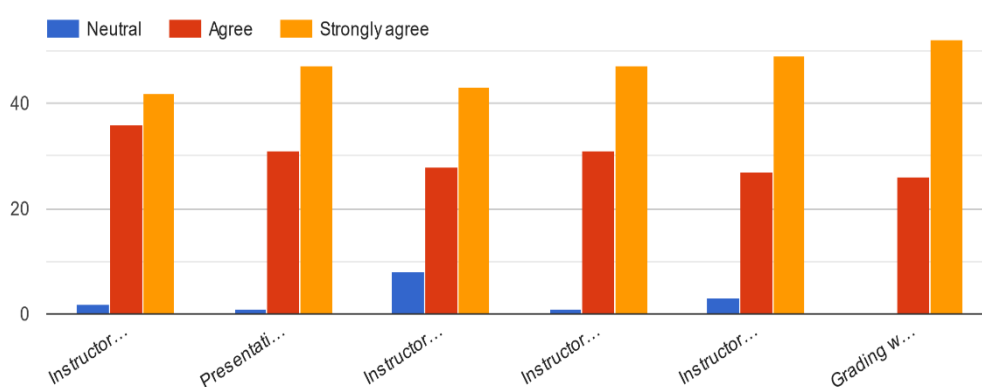


Figure 2. Assessment of the Romanian practical course according to the 6 criteria on the skill and responsiveness of the Romanian language teacher.

The students were also asked to give their anonymous opinion on **the content of the Romanian language course** for foreign students studying

medicine in English within the University of Medicine and Pharmacy of Craiova. For this assessment, there were used 4 criteria, namely:

1. *learning objectives were clear;*
2. *course content was organized and well-planned;*
3. *course workload was appropriate, and*
4. *course organized to allow all students to participate fully.*

As such, for the first criterium, 56 (69.13%) students strongly agreed, 23 (28.39%) students agreed and 2 (2.46%) students were neutral regarding the *learning objectives being clear*. 53 (67.08%) students strongly agreed, 24 (30.37%) students agreed and 2 (2.53%) students were neutral that *the course content was organized and well-planned*. As far as *the appropriateness of the course workload* was concerned, 57 (70.37%) students strongly agreed, 22 (27.16%) students agreed and 2 (2.46%) students were neutral. The fourth criterium allowed the course assessment in terms of *its organization allowing all students to participate fully*; 56 (70%) students strongly agreed, 23 (28.75%) students agreed and 1 (1.23%) student was neutral during their assessment (Figure 3):

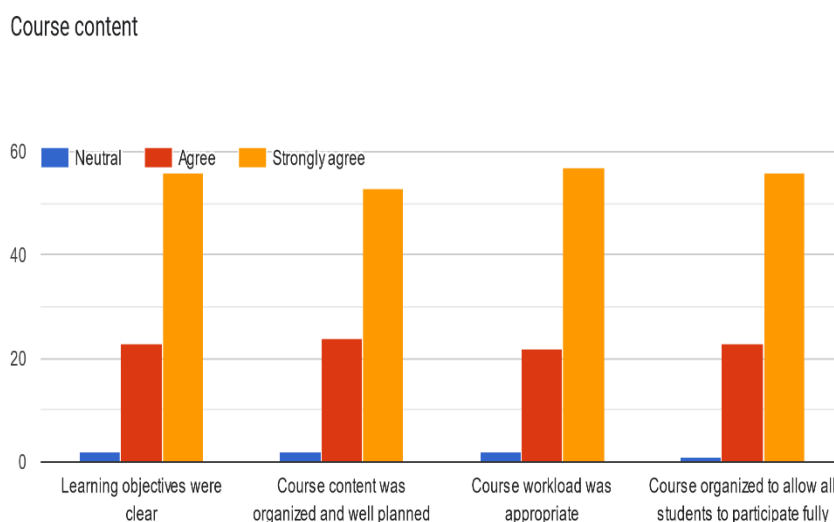


Figure 3. Assessment of the Romanian practical course according to the 4 criteria on course content.

Conclusions

Romanian language courses within the University of Medicine and Pharmacy of Craiova mostly make use of videos and role-playing. These help both the teacher and the students to learn and practice the Romanian medical language, fostering skill development within peer learning and contextualized group learning. The Romanian medical language vocabulary and pronunciation is also enriched by videos containing specialized medical information, as it is well known that listening is the most efficient method for improving pronunciation, vocabulary or speaking skills. The statistical descriptive analysis of the data collected revealed interesting results regarding the students' assessment of the Romanian language course and the teacher. These data should be useful both for the Romanian language course teacher and for other teachers open to improve their teaching skills and materials, especially those related to listening and speaking skills of their students.

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