

THE DIDACTIC POTENTIAL OF DIPLOMATIC READINGS AS A COMPLEX EDUCATIONAL EVENT

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This article explores the didactic potential of Diplomatic Readings as a complex educational event conducted at the Department of English for International Professional Activities (focusing on the Humanities Section). Diplomatic Readings, held annually, encompass a diverse programme involving academic discussions, quizzes, role-plays, mini-conferences, and other non-conventional forms of class organisation aimed at developing students' foreign language professional competence along with other universal competencies (problem-solving, critical thinking, etc.). The educational events presented in the article are related to both: English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and General English, and promote the integration of innovative teaching methods and forms. Diplomatic Readings have proved their efficiency in strengthening students' language proficiency, cultural intelligence, and social engagement, fostering essential skills and competencies for future specialists in international law and international relations.

Keywords: Diplomatic Readings; didactic potential; universal competencies; foreign language professional competence; cultural intelligence; English for Specific Purposes; innovative teaching methods.

ДИДАКТИЧЕСКИЙ ПОТЕНЦИАЛ ДИПЛОМАТИЧЕСКИХ ЧТЕНИЙ КАК КОМПЛЕКСНОГО ОБРАЗОВАТЕЛЬНОГО МЕРОПРИЯТИЯ

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В настоящей статье рассматривается дидактический потенциал Дипломатических чтений как комплексного образовательного мероприятия, проводимого на кафедре английского языка международной профессиональной деятельности (фокусируясь на секции гуманитарных специальностей). Ежегодные Дипломатические чтения включают в себя разнообразные академические дискуссии, викторины, ролевые игры, мини-конференции и прочие инновационные формы организации занятий, направленные на развитие профессиональной иноязычной коммуникативной компетенции студентов наряду с иными универсальными компетенциями (решение сложных задач, критическое мышление и т. д.). Образовательные мероприятия, представленные в статье, охватывают аспекты «Английский язык для специальных целей» и «Обще-

литературный английский язык» и способствуют интеграции инновационных методов и форм преподавания. Дипломатические чтения доказали свою эффективность в развитии языковой компетенции студентов, их культурного интеллекта. Они также содействовали усилению социальной активности студентов, совершенствованию навыков, необходимых будущим специалистам в сфере международного права и международных отношений.

Ключевые слова: Дипломатические чтения; дидактический потенциал; универсальные компетенции; профессиональная иноязычная коммуникативная компетенция; культурный интеллект; английский язык для специальных целей; инновационные методы преподавания.

The collective monograph of the Yaroslavl State Pedagogical University named after K. D. Ushinsky expresses an opinion that the use of innovative educational technologies and modern universal methods of instruction is the most important factor that contributes to the development of students' universal competencies (often referred to as soft skills) that are demanded from future specialists by the community [1, p. 244–245]. According to the updated educational standards of the Republic of Belarus, they largely include the integrative foreign language communicative competence that denotes a human ability to carry out communication in the foreign language for effective problem-solving at interpersonal and intercultural levels [2]. Foreign language classes in general have a great didactic potential due to the multi-faceted nature of the subject per se and the inclusive nature of the phenomenon known as the “foreign language education” [3, p. 6–7].

It has to be said that the application of innovative forms of foreign language instruction is widely promoted at the Department of English for International Professional Activities [4, p. 17–30]. Therefore, it has become a tradition to conduct annual Diplomatic Readings in autumn during which groups of students who learn English take part in various thematic round tables, academic discussions and debates, competitions, quizzes, mini-conferences, role-plays and business games, presentations of projects and other unconventional forms of class organisation. Diplomatic Readings are a complex educational event that embraces all types of learners: beginners and advanced students, those who study English as their first and second foreign language, bachelor and master degree seekers. The given abstract focuses on the outcomes of the recent Diplomatic Readings carried out within the Humanitarian Section of the Department of English for International Professional Activities and highlights their didactic effects.

Within the framework of the varied programme, over forty events took place [see: 5; 6]. More than a half of them were centred upon the aspect of English for Specific Purposes: Legal English and English for future specialists in international relations. All these events involved the application of innovative forms of class organisation: mostly, structured academic discussions, round tables, seminars, “flipped classrooms” and mini-conferences. For instance, during the mini-conference devoted to constitutional law development

students were expected to take part in scholarly discussions aimed at improving their polemic speech culture, the ability to construct persuasive discourse for defending their viewpoints on topical issues facing the humanity (problems of inequality, combating international crimes and crimes of an international character, promoting accessible quality education, dealing with environmental concerns, etc.).

Paramount attention was given to deliberations on the role of international organisations, the United Nations Organisation, its major organs and specialised agencies. Worthy of mention are the round tables dedicated to the modern tendencies of international law, and the role of international lawyers in developing new legal norms. While taking part in these classes, students managed to revise the relevant professional vocabulary and enrich it with new lexical units along with useful introductory phrases and emphatic constructions. All the participants received hand-outs and other necessary materials aimed at upgrading their oral speaking skills. The method of heuristic dialogue was widely implemented by the lecturers of English for specific purposes, which helped students to find meaningful answers to the questions asked by the teachers. During the Diplomatic Readings attention was given to considering topical issues of both: public and private international law. Undoubtedly, classes like these are designed to contribute to the overall development of the legal culture of future specialists, inspire them to be responsible citizens.

In terms of General English, most common forms of class organisation involved quizzes, contests of presentations, and role plays. From the didactic viewpoint, a number of events were connected with cultural specific studies. Much attention was given to the tourist attractions of the Republic of Belarus, with a focus on those included on the UNESCO World Heritage List. This promotes patriotic upbringing and increases students' cultural intelligence — one of the key universal skills essential for modern business leaders [7, p. 324]. Some events were directly aimed at the development of the soft skills that are crucial in the XXI century: namely, public speaking, critical thinking, problem-solving, etc. [8, p. 26—27].

Some of the classes were professionally oriented and included job interview simulations. Most of the lecturers worked with educational podcasts aimed at improving the students' skills of listening comprehension. The mindful application of visual aids was a great asset for increasing the efficiency of the events included on the programme of Diplomatic Readings. The demonstrated materials were of great communicative value as they were authentic and corresponded to the standards of received pronunciation. Moreover, they contained intonation contours widely used by native speakers. Most importantly, the provided speech material was later used in the students' dialogues during the final parts of such classes, which allowed to make their answers more lexically diverse.

Such a language aspect as Home Reading was also announced on the programme of the Diplomatic Readings. It turned out to be useful for future

specialists in international law because it dealt with working on detective stories that contained a lot of vocabulary on the topic connected with crime. A structured discussion was carried out on the basis of a set of lexical-grammar exercises offered by the lecturer. Such a form of class organisation helped to introduce the students to the works of fiction in the original language, cultural realities of the countries of the target language described in them, and revise some key concepts linked to criminal law.

As a final remark it has to be said that the complex educational event of the Diplomatic Readings not only helped the students to improve their linguistic skills that could be added to their language portfolio, but also contributed to the development of their socially active position, creativity, feeling of patriotism and sense of belonging to the community.

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