Interviews in Business Communication

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Abstract

This paper tackles the role and the advantages of studying job interviews in business communication and proposes several activities and strategies that can be implemented in English Business Communication courses and seminars. The first sections of the article deal with certain theoretical issues related to the concepts of communication (in general), communication in the business environment and job interviews. It further proposes several types of activities that can be employed in order to teach students about job interviews, such as roles and interview simulations, analysis of real interviews, analysis of CVs and cover letters, research projects and presentations, writing and revision exercises, vocabulary exercises on the topic of job interviews, discussions with specialists from the field, online resources and authentic materials. It is expected that the knowledge about employment interviews, implemented in ESP courses and seminars provide students the skills and tools required for the success on the workforce market.

Key words: interviews, communication, English Business Communication, ESP, teaching activities
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1. Introduction

Since the success of a company depends, to a great extent, on its employees, interviews play a crucial role in the recruitment process, as they represent an opportunity to certify and assess a candidate's skills and competences, mentioned in his/ her CV and/ or cover letter, and decide whether s/he is suitable for the respective vacant position in the company. Inappropriate interviews are often affected by biases, by prejudices that influence the interviewers' judgement in the selection of candidates that are not suited for the vacant position. Inadequate recruitment processes based on poor interviews that do not provide sufficient or competent information about the candidate usually trigger the employment of people that are not suitably qualified for the respective positions, often entailing financial losses for the company, and psychological consequences as well, such as motivation decrease and decline in the employees' trust in the management team.

2. Theoretical background

The English word "communication" – which originates from the Latin "communicare" – generally refers to the idea of sharing information, attitudes and/ or feelings in various ways and understanding it (see *Cambridge Dictionary* online). Communication also encompasses the idea of dynamism and interaction between the participants involved in this process of information conveyance, being assigned various meanings and perceptions, depending on the field of study that tackled it.

The specialists in the field (see Nadrag, 2019; Novak, 2019; Chaturvedi and Chaturvedi, 2012) also add that the communication process generally involves a person who sends the information (i.e., communicator) and another one who receives the respective information and from whom a response is expected (i.e., receiver). The scholars further explain that the communicator's purposes are attained if s/he succeeds in estimating the communication levels typical of the receiver and if s/he employs appropriate elements that serve the purposes of the message, such as language type (verbal and paraverbal), language items (e.g., words, idioms), the receiver's level of comprehension of the

respective elements, etc. In his/ her turn, based on previous experiences, the receiver seeps through the information and develops an answer, switching thus the roles when s/he sends it (i.e., the receiver becomes sender of the message and the previous sender becomes receiver). The communication process includes paralanguage elements as well (e.g., mimicry, body position and movements, etc.), which contribute to the interpretation of the message.

As far as business communication is concerned, it represents a vital instrument in a wide array of business contexts, in order to achieve goals and attain success, from daily activities to important meetings, negotiations, interviews, procedures and transactions. In the perspective of scholars such as Beck et al (2002), Coffelt and Smith (2020), Gulati et al (2017), adequate and solid communication skills support managers in their progress on the career ladder and in their endeavors to develop their companies. Furthermore, scholars mention several communication methods, from the dispatch and reception of physical things or beings to the conveyance of information by using various technological means, and the transmission of ideas, feelings and attitudes via different forms of art. In the business environment, communication takes the form of an art as it is often the key to successful business transactions (see Novak, 2019; Chaturvedi and Chaturvedi, 2012). In his turn, McLean (2005) sees business communication as an art of persuading others persons for the attainment of certain objectives, as a skill that should characterize efficient leaders. The specialists in the field have noticed that when the organization develops and the number of employees increases, communication turns into a laborious and challenging process and it is often replaced by information, which is a one-way (downward, upward or horizontal) partial process (McLean, 2005; Mumby and Kuhn, 2018). In this situation, the information flow and its processing play a vital role as far as the success of the organization is concerned (see Sutherland et al, 2004).

Conrad and Newberry (2011) and Conrad (2014) pinpoint that, in the business environment, communication allows people to perform a wide array of actions that are vital for the survival and development of the organization they work for, i.e., discuss, react, interact, convey messages, negotiate, coordinate, brainstorm, design regulations, perform various transactions, monitor and cooperate in order to achieve their common goals. Since it takes place inside the organization, it is known as internal communication, and it also keeps the both people and the company branches interconnected. It is noteworthy that efficient communication skills empower an organization's employees. In addition, the specialists in the field (see Kumaran, 2012; Avram, 2015; Katter, 2021) assert that a successful communication process benefits both the organization and its employees on the long run, as it brings solutions to various problems and conflicts, enhances productivity, helps employees climb the career ladder and strengthens collegial relationships.

In the literature (see Kumaran, 2012; Avram, 2015; Katter, 2021) it is further explained that the communication process among different organizations/ bodies or between an organization and the public/ persons outside it is known as external communication; such instances (given by the aforementioned scholars) are the communication processes that an organization has with its distributors, customers, state authorities or agencies; public speeches held my managers; informative documents, advertisements and press releases referring to the organization and/ or to its products/ services; responses to various events in the media related to the company; etc. External communication is mainly aimed at constructing and administering the image and reputation of the organization, removing irrelevant correspondence, boosting the number of customers and stakeholders, thus increasing its profit (see Conrad, 2014; Conrad and Newberry, 2011).

When it comes to efficient communication, there are several aspects that should be taken into consideration, such as effective listening, adaptation to the audience, non-verbal communication (Nadrag, 2008). Effective listening, which is a skill that should be mastered by medium and top-level managers, is often encumbered by the pace discrepancy between the comprehension process and the speaking ability, external attention distractors, lack of time, faulty listening, biased message filtering (see Scott McLean, 2000, p. 25). Methods recommended for the development of effective listening are focusing on facts and feelings, retention of key words, paying attention to the speaker's point of view and to paraverbal elements, avoiding unpleasant remarks, message clarification where necessary, ensuring common ground (Novak, 2019; Chaturvedi and Chaturvedi, 2012). When it comes to the adaptation to the audience, speakers should have in view that their message may not be always comprehended entirely and that their audience may have a different understanding level, especially when it comprises more receivers. This triggers the requirement of a constant adaptation

to the audience, an open mind, knowledge of the audience and awareness of what is being communicated, in order to maintain their attention and make sure that the message is clearly and fully understood (see Mujezinovic, 2011; Littlejohn and Foss, 2009). As far as non-verbal communication is concerned, is refers to both willing and unwilling body language elements of the individuals involved in the communication process, which add meaning to the conveyed messages (see Mujezinovic, 2011).

Job interviews are organized in order to help an employer (i.e., interviewer) decide whether a candidate (i.e., interviewee) is suitable for a certain vacant job (Huffcutt and Culbertson, 2011), in accordance with the business principles, policies and strategies of the respective organization and with its prospects, the largest power being held by the interviewer, as s/he usually controls the entire process. Interviews are vital in the selection process, as poor staff selection may trigger serious issues within the organization, especially in terms of image and profit, having in view that they usually provide various products and services, thus satisfying the customers' needs (see Half, 2022; Di Pietro, 2018; Charaba, 2023).

In order to achieve their goals and employ the most suitable applicants, organizations use various types of interviews (see Salgado and Moscoso, 2011; Dippoye, 1997), such as the unstructured conventional interview (although it is the most widely used, it is less reliable because it is an informal conversation whose content is shaped in accordance with the candidate and it has feeble psychometric grounds), the structured conventional interview (it is based on a script/ instructions, so as to obtain similar pieces of information from all candidates, and it has psychometric grounds – see Huffcutt et al, 2013), the structured behavioral interview or the competency interview (it is the most reliable and it has predictive capacities, as it is based on the behavior consistency principle, in order to forecast the candidate's work behavior, based on past behavior – see Chorogwicka and Moscoso, 2007; Salgado et al, 2007).

Interviews can be conducted either one-to-one (i.e., between one interviewer and one interviewee), between two or more interviewers and one interviewee (where one interviewer conducts the interview and the others ask addition questions occasionally) or between one interviewer and more interviewees (group interview) (Hamdani et al, 2014).

The interviewer's main objective is to select the best candidate for the vacant position, while the interviewee seeks to convince the former that s/he represents the best choice for the respective job (Macan, 2009). The literature highlights three main parts that make up the selection process based on job interviews (see Hamdani et al, 2014), i.e., company and interviewer presentation, the applicant's presentation of his/ her knowledge, skills, experience and motivation in connection to the vacant position within the company, negotiation of the pecuniary aspects (e.g., remuneration package, holiday leave, responsibilities, etc.). Moreover, scholars (see Derous et.al, 2016) explain that the job interview consists of several stages, i.e., the opening (the first contact between the parties involved in the interview), the rapport (the interviewer attempts to generate a climate of trust, prone to the exchange of information), rules communication (awareness of the rules underlying the interview), development (asking questions in order to obtain the necessary information from the candidate), closing (signaling the end of the interview) and reporting (drafting a report about the interviewee).

3. Research methodology

This section is focused on a research proposal to be conducted in the English Business Communication courses and seminars, in the future academic year 2023-2024, with students enrolled in Economic Sciences.

As they represent important stages in the employment process, job interviews should be inserted within the ESP curriculum, and students should be provided adequate knowledge and practice in this regard, in order to enhance their chances of success on the labor market. Moreover, the student's communication abilities would enhance, as they learn how to present in a clear and efficient way their knowledge, experience, skills and assets, in order to convince the potential employers to hire them.

Being an interactive process, the job interview involves the creation of a communication bridge between the parties involved in this process, which facilitates dialogue (Macan, 2009). These communication abilities are also useful in one's professional life, in general. Another advantage of inserting knowledge about job interviews in the ESP curriculum is represented by the fact that students would be able to better understand the employer's expectations, which would enable them to prepare adequately for the interviewer's questions, to highlight their abilities and experience relevant to the respective job and to exhibit their potential in connection to the organization culture and values.

Since knowledge about the features of various types of job interviews (i.e., individual interviews, group interviews, structured interviews, unstructured interviews, competency-based interviews, etc.) should also be tackled, students would better understand the specific tasks associated with each type of interview and be better prepared. Furthermore, the adequate training for job interviews could contribute to the decrease in the students' stress level, as they would feel more confident and have a positive attitude, being thus able to handle tense situations successfully. Students would also understand better the selection process and its stages, which would help them prepare in advance; they would know what to expect and would be prepared for, and familiarized with every stage of the employment process. Furthermore, on this occasion, their knowledge gaps can be identified and their abilities can be amplified as they receive constructive feedback with regards to their strengths and weaknesses, in order to improve their future performances.

Thus, the research hypothesis proposed by this article regards the connection between the insertion of the topic of job interviews in the ESP curriculum (in Business Communication course and seminars) and the advantages it brings in terms of the enhancement of the students' ESP knowledge and skills, increasing thus their employment chances on the labor market.

The research methods that will be employed in order to verify the validity of the hypothesis are the observation ("a complex research method because it often requires the researcher to play a number of roles and to use a number of techniques, including her/his five senses, to collect data", Baker, 2006, p. 172) and the experiment ("the backbone of good research", which orchestrates "data collection, defines the statistical analysis of the resultant data, and guides the interpretation of the results" – Knight, 2010, pp. 98-99). By means of the observation method, pieces of information about the students' attitudes and reactions during the ESP courses and seminars will be collected, in connection to the introduction of the topic of job interviews and to the tasks they receive. The experiment is designed to assess the influence that the topic of job interviews has on the students' ESP skills, in general, and on their communication skills, in particular. For this purpose, the students' ESP and communication skills will be assessed before and after the teaching stage (focused on job interviews). The results from both tests will be compared in order to establish whether there is any possible evolution of the students' skills and if the research hypothesis can be validated.

4. Findings

First of all, students should learn about the main objectives of job interviews, i.e., collecting information about the applicants and their needs, motivation and interests, assessing/ exploring their knowledge, skills, professional path and behavioral abilities connected to the job, providing additional pieces of information about the vacant position (e.g., tasks, rules, collaborators, benefits, payment, career prospects), etc. (Hamdani et al, 2014).

The scholars in the field suggest a series of activities and strategies that can be implemented in the ESP courses and seminars, in the teaching stage of the experiment, in order to teach students about job interviews; such activities and strategies include roles and interview simulations, analysis of real interviews, analysis of CVs and cover letters, research projects and presentations, writing and revision exercises, vocabulary exercises on the topic of job interviews, discussions with specialists from the field, online resources and authentic materials.

Roles and interview simulations, where students can play the roles of job applicants (as interviewees) and employers (as interviewers), allows students to practice various types of job interviews (e.g., one-to-one interviews, group interviews), to formulate questions and answers typical of such contexts, to develop their communication skills and confidence, and to receive feedback from both the ESP teacher and their colleagues (see Razali and Ismail, 2017; Tompkins, 1998). In addition,

teachers can also create specific job interview scripts, by providing students with specific interview questions or by setting a specific context (i.e., interviews focused on certain jobs from the students' field of study).

Students should be aware that interviews also represent an opportunity to collect as much reliable information as possible about candidates and that a good and relaxing atmosphere diminishes their anxiety. They should also pay attention to the paralanguage (e.g., nodding/ shaking one's head, grinning, smiling, body position, etc.) employed by both the interviewer and the interviewee and to the meanings conveyed by it (e.g., approval, disapproval, attention, lack of attention, restlessness, anxiety, etc.) (Derous et.al., 2016).

By analyzing and discussing real (recorded) interviews selected by the teacher, the students can learn about the answer strategies used by interviewees, and they can comment upon the strengths and weaknesses of the respective candidates. Moreover, students can be asked to identify the interviewer and the interviewee's objectives and to check their fulfilment degree in the respective interviews. For instance, as far as the interviewer is concerned, students can check whether s/he has identified in the candidate the job profile features, his/ her weaknesses and strengths, his/ her motivations and knowledge about the respective job; they can also try to determine if the interviewer has established whether the candidate is suitable for the job, if s/he is willing to fill in the respective position and/ or if the interviewer intends to/ has managed to employ the respective candidate (see Hamdani et al, 2014). As regards the interviewee, students can be required to establish the following: whether the candidate is truly interested in the respective job and if s/he has proved that s/he is the right person for the job; if the candidate has impressed the interviewer in any way, if s/he has met the interviewer's expectations and furnished appropriate and pragmatic pieces of information; if the candidate has collected more information about the job and if it has met his/ her expectations; if the candidate will be employed within the respective company. Thus, the analysis of job interviews can teach students several elements that otherwise cannot be measured or noticed, and highlights the importance of the information it provides (see Hamdani et al, 2014).

Students can also be provided with examples of CVs and cover letters and asked to analyze them. They can also be asked to perform various tasks involving the preparation for interviews, solving exercises related to the content and structure of CVs and cover letters. They will thus be able to apply the acquired knowledge in their own future job interviews and they will better understand the structure and content of efficient and interesting CVs and cover letters.

Teachers can encourage their students to conduct research about job interviews in their field of study and prepare presentations about them, either individually or in small groups. On this occasion, they can explore the various types of questions used in interviews, they can become acquainted with the wide array of techniques and strategies employed by interviewers, and they can also draw their own list of practical pieces of advice and tips. Students can share and discuss these presentations with their colleagues, the exchange of information contributing to the development of their skills.

The teacher can ask students to complete various writing tasks involving the formulation of certain answers to questions typically encountered in job interviews, to draft their CV or a cover letter (for more details on writing activities see Giesen, 2001). Furthermore, vocabulary exercises and materials focused on typical interview questions can also be employed (for more details on vocabulary activities see Peery, 2021; Zipser, 2013). For instance, students can be required to ask or answer certain job interview questions, to solve exercises involving knowledge of the adjectives used in order to describe personal or professional skills or verbs employed in order to talk about one's professional experience, achievements and abilities. The feedback to these tasks can enhance the students' writing and speaking skills.

By inviting various specialists professing in the students' field of study and discuss about the employment process and job interviews, teachers can furnish their students an opportunity to ask questions in this regard. In addition, they also extract valuable pieces of information from real experiences and obtain practical pieces of advice from the specialists in the field, with a real and fresh perspective upon the job interviews and the expectations of the employers from the respective field.

Authentic materials and online resources (e.g., videos about job interviews, blogs, articles) can familiarize students with the topic of job interviews and boost their knowledge on this topic (see Berardo, 2006; Kilickaya, 2004). These materials can be discussed in the ESP seminars in detail, in

order to deepen the students' knowledge.

It is noteworthy that the above strategies and activities should be adapted in accordance with the students' English proficiency level, their needs, objectives and field of study.

Therefore, by integrating job interviews in the ESP classes, students will be granted the opportunity to learn and apply practical knowledge and skills, being thus better prepared for their future careers. Moreover, this also represents an efficient and relevant way of developing their ESP vocabulary and communication skills in real-life contexts. It is therefore expected that the research hypothesis be validated by the post-teaching test results.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, learning about employment interviews is important because it provides students with the skills, tools and knowledge required for the success on the workforce market. This knowledge implemented in ESP courses and seminars helps them prepare adequately, develop their ESP skills and communication abilities and understand the employers' expectations, enhancing thus their chances of finding the right job. Thus, they are granted both practical and psychological advantages, which contribute to their personal development and to the achievement of a successful career.

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