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TEACHING MASTER STUDENTS:
COURSE TOPICS' COMMUNICATIVE EFFECTIVENESS

This article delves into the critical realm of teaching master students and, particularly, the communicative effectiveness embedded within the chosen course topics of «Communication Course for Master Students in Linguistics». The research is based on the questionnaire which elicits students' evaluation of topics and text genres studied. The results of the study demonstrate that certain topics resonated more profoundly with students than others. Notably, the topics of «Tying the Knot» and «Parenting» emerged as the most highly rated, indicating a heightened level of engagement among the master's students. Topics such as «When something went wrong» and «Getting through» garnered comparatively lower ratings, shedding light on potential areas for improvement or reconsideration in the curriculum. A further analysis reveals that the second year of the course received more positive feedback from students. The topic «Artificial Intelligence» stood out received the highest overall ratings among the diverse range of subjects covered in the course. This observation suggests a keen interest and appreciation for contemporary and cutting-edge themes among master's students in linguistics.

Among the various text genres employed in the course, short stories emerged as the most captivating for discussions. Following closely behind were articles, poems, book chapters, and novel extracts, each contributing to the multifaceted tapestry of the students' learning experience. Students may lean towards complete short stories due to their preference for engaging, creative activities associated with literary analysis. Surprisingly, poems also garnered positive feedback, possibly because of the inventive tasks involved, like translation and responsive poem writing, fostering quick comprehension and facilitating discussions. This contrasts with more complex literary analysis, aligning with students' interest in freely conversational topics found in articles.

Keywords: communication course; communication skills; course topics; master students; survey; text genres.

INTRODUCTION

Communication has always been a crucial factor in teaching master's students, and the development/acquisition of communication skills in Linguistics courses appears to be even more significant. The intersection of pedagogy, teaching techniques, and communicative strategies becomes particularly vital for university professors in shaping a comprehensive

teaching/learning experience for these advanced learners. Master's education represents a unique phase where students not only deepen their understanding of their chosen field but also receive training to contribute significantly to course development by providing constructive feedback about the courses they study.

The 21st century brought the necessity of changes in education, changed approaches to teaching and learning (Churchill, et al., 2016). Speaking about higher education, there have been «dramatic changes since 2000». The Bologna Process shifted the focus of attention to national qualification frameworks in order to outline learning outcomes at various levels; outcomes-based teaching learning (OBTL) was adopted (Biggs & Tang, 2011; Smith, et al., 2021). Contemporary higher education in the digital age has changed significantly (Elkana & Klöpper, 2016; Okoye, et al., 2022).

While teaching different grades of students every teacher faces the problem of stimulating students' discussions and developing their speaking skills. A wide range of aspects is in focus of attention, which emphasizes the complexity and importance of the issue, so different aspects are taken into account: variety of speaking tasks; topic preferences (Chrysler & Van Auken, 2003) and topic modelling (Rolim, et al., 2019); different approaches in teaching speaking – communicative, pragmatic, etc. (Anita, et al., 2023), technology-based teaching approach (Thu, 2020); teacher-centered approach, learner-centered approach; a variety of strategies for teaching speaking (Annisa, et al., 2023) in small groups and large classes (Bhutto, et al., 2023); a wide number of methods (collaboration, cooperative learning) and techniques; individual tasks and group activities to motivate students; assessment and grading; online and offline learning; teaching speaking while using Zoom Video Conferencing (A'isy, et al., 2023); various problems EFL teachers face (Seraj, et al., 2016) including the study of different contexts and cultural differences.

While teaching communicative skills in both small groups and large classes a teacher should choose and «modify» necessary vocabulary, account for context and cultural differences (Bhutto, et al., 2023). Students can benefit from the pragmatic approach as they «practice language structures by understanding practical conditions that involve factors beyond language, which provide meaning» (Anita, et al., 2023).

Online learning format promoted the study of the influence of «learner-learner, learner-content, and learner-instructor interactions; internet self-efficacy; and self-regulation on student course satisfaction». «Learner-content interaction» and «learner-learner-interaction» turned out to be the most significant factors to influence student satisfaction (Pham & Nguyen, 2021) which proves the importance of communication and interaction in different formats. Moreover, a positive classroom environment can boost students' engagement, develop their speaking skills and «willingness to communicate» (Wu, 2023).

The Conversation Analysis Tool (CAT) is one of the techniques which «improves students' learning outcomes and enhances their English language proficiency» and «fosters a beneficial communication-oriented educational setting» (Kokhan, et al., 2020), (Fagan, 2012). Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is in the focus of attention worldwide (Savignon, 2005).

In addition to cultivating a communication-oriented educational environment, regular student feedback is crucial for effective language acquisition and overall student success (Bawadi, 2007; Sakkir, et al., 2021). Seeking input from students provides valuable insights into the effectiveness of teaching methods and syllabus creation, which shows a commitment to adaptability and responsiveness to diverse students' needs.

Thus, **the aim of this research** is to identify which topics and text genres stimulate more discussions during sessions and consequently enhance communicative skills.

RESEARCH METHODS

An online questionnaire with mixed methods has been chosen for the research. It consists of a combination of structured (quantitative) and open-ended (qualitative) questions within a questionnaire format. There is a set of questions with controlled, structured answers (such as rating scales or predefined options), as well as open-ended questions where respondents can provide more detailed and subjective responses. A Google form questionnaire has been the tool for survey administration.

The research method involves surveying 29 master's students who are in their 1–2 years of study in «Communication course for Master students in Linguistics». Participants are asked to rate the effectiveness of various discussion topics on a scale from 1 to 10, where 1 is the least effective and 10 is the most effective. The topics are taught during the first and second year of study so the first-year students have been evaluated their future syllabus. The topics include «Tying the Knot», «Parenting», «When Something Went Wrong», «Getting through (Contacts)», «Nomen est omen (Names)», «Artificial Intelligence», and «In Search of Time». Participants are asked to evaluate the engagement level of different text genres which are the following: a complete short story, an extract from a novel, articles, a poem, and a book chapter. Response options comprise «most», «very», «rather», «not very», and «least». For topic effectiveness, the average scores for each topic have been calculated to determine overall effectiveness.

The next stage presupposes to figure out students' literary genre preference, so they are asked to provide the name of the literary piece they consider most engaging in discussions and to explain why. Here, the distribution of responses has been analyzed in order to identify patterns and preferences among the participants, which therefore has enabled to explore master students' perceptions of discussion topics and text genres, providing valuable insights for further development of successful syllabi.

RESEARCH RESULTS

The first year of study includes four topics: «Tying the Knot», «Parenting», «When something went wrong» and «Getting through». These topics have been carefully selected for inclusion in the syllabus of the «Communication Course for Master Students in Linguistics», with the intention of catering to the interests and intellectual development of Master's students. They delve into the complexities of interpersonal relationships from various angles, providing different perspectives and insights. By exploring themes such as commitment, parenting dynamics, overcoming challenges, and navigating through life's complexities, these topics aim to stimulate critical thinking and foster a comprehensive understanding of human interactions. The diverse nature of these subjects encourages students to engage with the material, offering a rich and multifaceted exploration of interpersonal relationships throughout the Master's program, contributing to development/improvement of communication skills.

The results of the research (see Tab. 1) demonstrate the following:

• the topics «Tying the Knot» and «Parenting» received the highest overall ratings, with over 80% of respondents giving them a 9 or 10;

• the topic «When something went wrong» received moderate ratings, with around half of respondents giving it an 8 or higher;

• the topic «Getting through» received the lowest overall ratings, with only 27.6% of respondents giving it a 9 or 10.

Table 1

Students' evaluation of topics for discussion

Topic	Rating of 9 or 10	Rating of 8	Rating of 7	Rating of 6 or lower
Tying the Knot	82.7%	10.3%	3.4%	3.4%
Parenting	82.8%	10.3%	3.4%	3.4%
When something went wrong	69%	17.2%	6.9%	6.9%
Getting through	27.6%	3.4%	3.4%	75.6%

Developed by the author

The high ratings for the topics «Tying the Knot» and «Parenting» suggest that students find them to be relevant and engaging subjects for discussion as topics cover either a wide range of issues related to marriage and relationships or it is a universal experience that most students can relate to and it can explore a variety of parenting styles, challenges, and rewards.

The moderate ratings for the topic «When something went wrong» and the low ratings for the topic «Getting through» suggest a potential need for further adjustment of the course material.

The second year of study includes three topics: «Nome nest omen», «Artificial Intelligence» and «In search of Time». The results are presented in the following figures (see Figures 1–3).
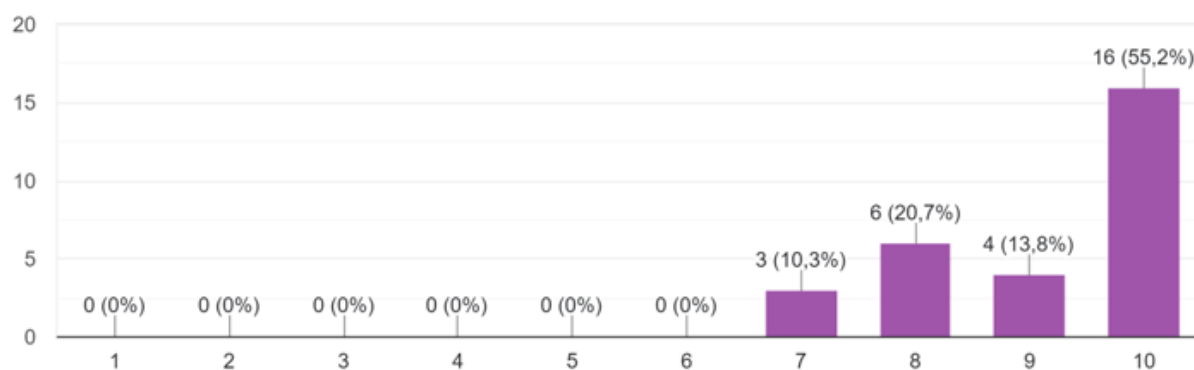

Figure 1. **Students' evaluation of «Nomen est omen (Names)»**
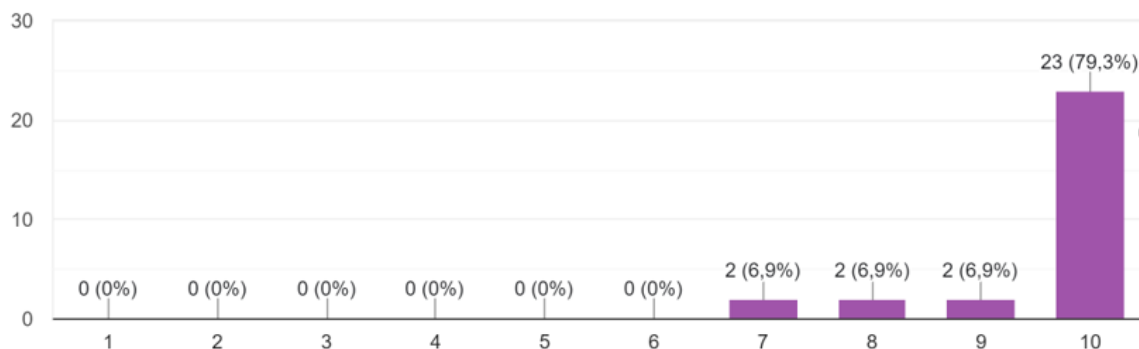Developed by the author

Figure 2. **Students' evaluation of «Artificial Intelligence»**
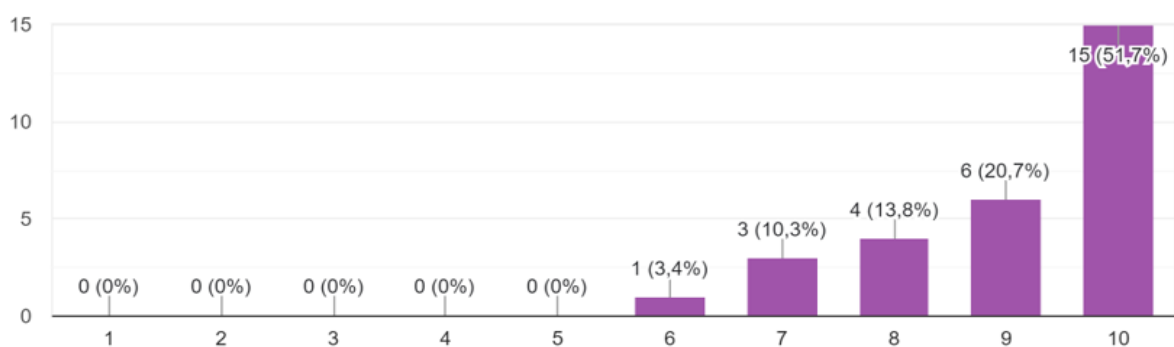
Developed by the author

Figure 3. **Students' evaluation of «In Search of Time»**

Developed by the author

Thus, the topic «Artificial Intelligence» received the highest overall ratings, with over 85% of respondents giving it a 9 or 10, while the topics «Nomen est omen» and «In Search of Time» received moderate ratings, with around half of respondents giving them an 8 or higher.

It proves that for the students, the topic «Artificial Intelligence» is timely and relevant in today's world as it covers a wide range of issues related to technology, society and ethics, reflecting the present digital age. In contrast, the topic «Nomen est omen», exploring famous and influential people in the world, might require additional contextualization or a refreshed approach to resonate more effectively with the students. The topic «In search of time» is devoted to time management and it explores the perception of time throughout the history of humanity. Addressing crucial aspects of managing time effectively, time-related themes and understanding its significance across different historical contexts, it proves to be underscored by students and requires further enhancement of the course content.

Considering results (see Pic. 4) for the question «How engaging are the given text genres?» with controlled answers, we received an unexpected feedback, which is presented in detail further on.
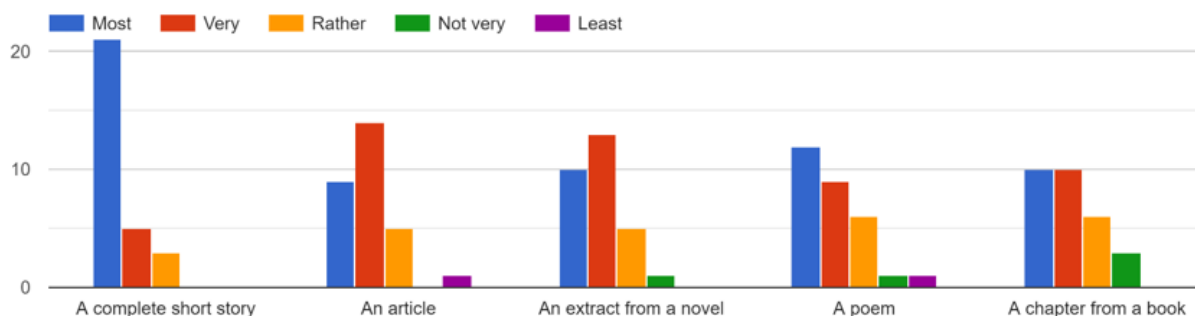
Figure 4. **Bar-graphs illustrating students' preferences in text genres**
Developed by the author

Complete short stories are perceived by the Master students as the most engaging text genre for discussions, with 21 respondents selecting «Most» and 14 choosing «Very». This suggests that the genre's concise narrative, clear plot and character development create a solid foundation for vibrant and profound discussions. The richness and completeness of short stories within this genre significantly enhance their suitability for pair or group discussions. The narrative structure, marked by a well-defined plot, characters, and resolution, provides an immersive and stimulating experience for master students encouraging them to delve into the nuances of the narrative during discussions.

Other text genres – articles, poems, book chapters, novel extracts – show a high percentage of positive responses («Most» and «Very»), indicating their potential to spark engaging discussions, with articles exhibiting the highest overall positive response rate (79%), and novel extracts following closely with a 73% positive response rate, highlighting their ability to stimulate discussions about plot development, characters, and writing style. Hence poems and book chapters have slightly lower positive response rates (72% and 70% respectively), but still demonstrate their effectiveness in fostering engaging discussions. Articles have the most «Very» responses while poems have the highest «Most» responses of these four text genres.

While pointing out their preferences to particular literary pieces, students named the following stories, articles, biographies and added the explanation of their choice:

COMPLETE SHORT STORIES

- «The Robot Who Wanted to Know» by Harry Harrison: *This story is very touching and tragic, since the robot turned out to be more sensitive than a human, but could not cope with the factory settings, although it was close to this;*
- «A Family Supper» by Kazuo Ishiguro: *This text left us with a lot of questions unanswered, as the ending seems to be open. Also, the story itself is interesting and since the ending is an open one, each of the students can interpret it in their own way;*
- «The Way up to Heaven» by Roald Dahl: *It shows us a strong hidden psycho-emotional conflict between wife and husband;*
- «The Little Girl» by Katherine Mansfield: (1) *Because this is a deep topic about the relationship between parents and children. It is always interesting and provokes different opinions. Such stories show different family situations, which is quite interesting;* (2) *This story resonated with me deeply because it vividly captures the mix of fear, longing, and eventual understanding in a child's relationship with their parent. The little girl's struggles with her father reminded me of my own childhood challenges, and now, as I'm an adult and*

have a younger brother, I'm trying my best to be a caring elder brother. The moments of the little girl's father anger made me anxious and worried, as if she was my own sister. I suppose, the story highlighted the feeling of my unconditional love to my brother and the desire to help him achieve and get everything best in his life. The story reinforces the importance of empathy and patience in navigating complex family dynamics. It also serves as a reminder of the multifaceted nature of parenting and the potential for both difficulties and moments of connection and love;

- «Trip-Trap» by Ian Rankin: *It is short and intriguing intrigue is also created by this story being divided into 2 parts. The end makes you think about the reasons for it and rethink the lives of characters.*

ARTICLES

- Margaret Thatcher's biography: (1) *It was interesting to read about the Iron Lady and analyze her character traits, life and find out who had the greatest influence on her career*; (2) *This text made me do more research on this historical figure, which led me to find out more information about her. I now feel more informed about this topic*;
- «People: Who needs them?» and «The attraction of solitude»: *these texts revealed the true nature of our feelings and emotions. While reading, you experience a sense as if you have found answers to your personal questions*.

The students' responses reveal their keen interests in the material offered, they exhibited a thoughtful and appreciative engagement with the complete short stories and articles. In their analysis of the short stories and articles, they highlighted emotional depth, narrative complexity, and the potential for personal reflection.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The selection of topics for master students in the syllabus of the «Communication Course for Master Students in Linguistics» has been carefully considered and is regularly monitored. This ensures the provision of interesting and relevant subjects, actively engaging students in discussions.

The systematic monitoring of students' preferences for topic choices yielded results that defied our initial expectations. Specifically, the topic «Parenting», initially perceived as possibly less student-related, emerged as the surprise standout in the rankings. Contrary to our assumptions, a remarkable 69% of students bestowed it with the highest ranking of 10 points. So, it requires a reevaluation of our preconceptions. Rather than replacing the topic, we are planning to pay a closer attention to it, acknowledging students' resonance with it.

Our anticipation was that short stories, novel extracts and book chapters would receive similar ratings, given their close nature as text genres. Conversely, articles were expected to be the most productive for discussions. The objective and factual nature of articles can provide a solid foundation for structured discussions and debates in class. Additionally, we considered that articles can be written in various styles, ranging from formal and academic to conversational and lighthearted. This versatility appeals to students' different reading preferences and discussion styles, thereby giving articles a leading position as stimulators for discussions.

Another point for consideration is based on the idea that the usual goal of reading a piece of fiction is to foster an in-depth analysis of literary elements or character development, stylistic means and expressive devices, making novel extracts or book chapters more appropriate for that purpose. In contrast, if the aim is to encourage structured debates on current issues or controversial topics, articles can be a better choice. In our view, students

might be more interested in freely conversational topics that articles provide, and they may tend to avoid more complicated things such as literary analysis.

The results obtained in this research surprisingly demonstrated students' preference for complete short stories over other text genres, with poems receiving a lot of positive evaluation despite the limited number of poems included in the course material. One possible explanation for the students' choice is the activities used in class while working with poems. Tasks related to poems tend to be more creative, such as translation or writing a poem in response to a given one with further discussions. Additionally, poems are typically shorter than stories or articles, enabling quick reading and easier digestion of the content, which makes them more accessible for initiating discussions.

The questionnaire offered to the students lacked a section which can elicit their proposals of particular stories and articles to be added to the syllabus. We see it as a variable section in every Module Topic in the syllabus. We think it will allow to model communicative situations and implement newer techniques and strategies for teaching speaking and involve students into the process of interaction.

A study focused on students' preferences for writing tasks holds potential for future research.

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КОМУНІКАТИВНА ЕФЕКТИВНІСТЬ ТЕМ ДЛЯ ВИКЛАДАННЯ НА МАГІСТЕРСЬКОМУ КУРСІ

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Статтю присвячено навчанню магістрів, зокрема сфокусовано на вивченні комунікативної ефективності обраних тем для курсу практичної англійської мови для магістрів-лінгвістів. Дослідження ґрунтується на опитуванні, мета якого виявити оцінку студентами тем та жанрів текстів, що вивчаються протягом двох магістерських курсів. Результати дослідження показують, що деякі теми викликали у студентів більш глибокий резонанс, ніж інші. Так, теми «Tying the Knot» та «Parenting» отримали вищі бали, що свідчить про підвищений рівень зацікавленості до цих тем і, як результат, вищу залученість у дискусії серед магістрів. Такі теми, як «When something went wrong» та «Getting through», набрали порівняно нижчі оцінки, що окреслює потенційні області для вдосконалення або перегляду навчальної програми. Подальший аналіз показує, що другий рік магістерської програми отримав більш позитивні відгуки від студентів. Тема «Artificial Intelligence» виявилася найбільш високо оціненою серед різноманітних тем, що охоплюються курсом. Це спостереження свідчить про великий інтерес до сучасних технологій серед магістрів лінгвістики. Серед різних жанрів текстів, що використовуються в курсі, короткі оповідання виявилися найбільш захоплюючими для обговорення. На другому місці – статті, вірші, розділи книг та уривки з романів. Студенти віддають перевагу повним коротким оповіданням через їхню схильність до цікавих, творчих занять, пов'язаних з літературним

аналізом. Вірші отримали позитивний відгук через винахідливі завдання, такі, як переклад і написання вірша у відповідь на заданий, що сприяє швидкому розумінню тексту та полегшує обговорення.

Ключові слова: *жанри тексту, комунікативні навички, курс з комунікації, опитування, студенти-магістри, теми курсу.*