ENRICHING ENGINEERING GRADUATES' HARD AND SOFT SKILLS TO INCREASE THEIR EMPLOYABILITY IN AN UNSTABLE JOB MARKET

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Abstract. *In today's tough competition for jobs in the domain of engineering in a rather volatile type of economic and social context, young graduates should be equipped with better and more diversified hard and soft skills in order to get first employment in their field as soon as possible after graduation. It is then paramount that all educational factors of concern involved in training them should improve the quantity and quality of their students' professional and personal skills portfolio. Therefore, the paper advances a range of complementary tasks, starting from an authentic input source text about the launch of a new type of software item, making it the pretext for diversifying the task chain proposed to engineering students in tertiary education within the framework of an ESP practical course. The range of task requirements proposed is meant to involve the learners in a series of activities that will get them out of the classroom, in a flexible manner, based on collaborative work within a project, by asking them to cross the borderline towards the real world in order to solve tasks such online searches for information, creating product presentations, organizing a marketing and advertising campaign, designing instruments to carry out economic surveys and so on.*

Keywords*: ESP course, authentic innovative tasks, hard skills, soft skills*

Motto:
"Soft skills get little respect but they will make or break your career."
Peggy Klaus - author of *The Hard Truth about Soft Skills*, 2008

I. Paper background and aim

In recent years the competition for jobs, especially upon first employment, has become a real challenge for university graduates who wish to start out on a successful rewarding career. This is particularly true for young engineering higher education graduates, as the case in the educational setting presented in this study.

The recent economic recession, difficulties encountered by most countries and economies worldwide, have made it difficult for employers to spend important amounts on in-house soft skills training. Therefore, it is expected from newly hired employees to already have an array of important skills, both of the hard and soft types, in order to cope with the increasingly complex tasks of the workplace.

Moreover, if they aspire to reach the top managerial echelons, then the expectations in terms of the type of skills they are supposed to have become even higher. The question then arises naturally: Who should be in charge and assume responsibility for the future graduates in the field of engineering, in terms of providing them with a skills repertory that would make them capable to operate at the expected parameters in the real-world economic activity?

The answer, as far as we are concerned, can be only one, viz. the academia, that should focus their attention on reshaping their curricula in order to accommodate the teaching and learning of a number of skills, against any form of constraint that might still exist, such as: time limitations, prejudice that it is the hard skills (strictly professional/technical ones) that should be the object of attention in technical universities, lack of especially trained teachers to design and provide soft skills oriented courses and so on.

Against this background, it is this paper aim to suggest a manner of including soft skills oriented training within the foreign language class, as a form of ESP, or rather CLIL

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(Content and Language Integrated Learning) education. Thus, a range of appropriately sequenced tasks are proposed, on the basis of an authentic input source text.

They reproduce the kind of actions that engineers should be able to perform in their jobs, whether this implies manufacturing, sales, marketing and advertising etc. operations – if not at the level of a professional in each specific area, at least as a specialist able to discern and make appropriate decisions, at managerial level, as far as such operations are required by their position in the company.

The language element is also of significance, as each such action is prepared by tasks ensuring that the learners be comfortable in terms of lexical, grammatical and functional input necessary in order to carry out the task requirements, hence the double objective of the proposed approach. The requirements in the task chain go in a logical parallel with what may really happen in a company in terms of expectations from a young engineer, which gives the module proposed a flavor of authenticity, that has the role to contribute to enhancing the commitment of the trainees in solving the tasks as well as they can, and to assume increasing responsibility for their learning process.

It is a form of blending individual and collaborative work, on a project that asks the students to implement activities specific to those in a real economic organization, for instance: *product design and presentation, doing market research to analyze competitors, creating advertorials and other marketing and advertising materials for their products, irrespective of their type, organizing a product launching campaign, dealing and/or using social media and influencers, or becoming some influential voices in the world of the Internet in order to promote their companies' activity*, as well as *developing the appropriate linguistic and communication skills* in general, in order to perform such activities at a high level and in a successful manner.

The main *framework of principles* underlying the proposal advanced here comprises several fundamental ideas. Here are the main ones:

- it is no longer enough to get the students to carry out tasks of the purely linguistic type, such as reading a (sometimes artificially amended/simplified) technical or scientific text, to solve lexical problems and then to assign homework to them. Such phases should not be disregarded, of course, but major changes have to turn all this into more challenging types of activity, guiding the trainees towards the real world that is waiting for them, i.e. bring *authenticity* of both the texts and the tasks into the language class;
- *diversity* is the second important paradigm alongside which the instructional process should be molded, we maintain, as the expectations of the students are nowadays a bit blurred by the unexpected element, with a world that is rather unstable economically and socially, with new trends and directions of action occuring and coming to the fore of the professionals in a quite unanticipated manner, since the emergence of the new technologies covering a planet that is prone to globalization at a fast pace – all these changes in the *status quo* of the economic world – and not only! – require that any professional be able to handle various inputs such as social media, online searches a.s.o. in an efficient manner, both individually and in a collaborative way, playing a leadership role or acting as a team member, as well;
- another feature that should be developed in the trainees is *flexibility* - which requires engineers to possess not only a blend of hard and soft skills, but also a new type of mentality and attitude, irrespective of the dry prescriptions and requirements in their strict job description, which is the only way they could successfully face the complex conditions of today's world.

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II. Soft skills - theoretical viewpoints

The need for soft skills introduced in the curricula of technical universities has been around for some time now, with various approaches proposing different manners of embedding soft skills training in the more technically oriented type of education provided to the future engineers.

In general, there has been full agreement lately that soft skills should indeed be introduced in the curriculum, as everybody seems to have realized that this is a good way of enhancing the graduates' chances of better and faster employability. However, the manner in which this is done varies considerably, and each experience shared in the literature might offer useful hints to the teacher willing to go along these lines.

Thus, the first aspect to be discussed is what skills are meant to increase young graduates' chances of finding a job. Interesting answers (Rao 37) are given in a substantial work focused on the dilemmas as to which are the most important skills in terms of employability – hard or soft ones?! A solution provided is that of embedding soft skills, such as: communication skills, conflict management skills, building successful teams, motivating oneself etc. within what the author calls "entrepreneurial" skills, i.e. whatever could help one approach and develop one's career better.

The real world of employers and experts in recruitment, as well as that of statisticians and other professionals reflecting on the issue of employability today, make public real cascades of testimonials and statistical data proving that lack of soft skills today equals almost null employment chances at any stage in the job search process at any age, but particularly more so at first employment. Consequently, the literature (Challa 2), having listed failure cases for lack of soft skills of the candidates – mainly referring to "communication, listening, negotiation, etiquette, language skills"- builds an impressive 60-item soft skill list that "play a vital role for professional success".

We would comment that not all the skills mentioned in the rich list given in the quoted study can be taught within the frame of the language class or by the foreign language teacher, for that matter; for instance, items such as *(Advanced) Math, Knowledge of fractions* or *Use of rulers and calculators* are obviously outside the scope of the soft skill-oriented language ESP or CLIL course. On the other hand, there are certain entries on the list that are, in our opinion, a matter of personal background of the candidate, such as the following ones: *Good work history, Work experience,* or *Being drug free*.

Nevertheless, there is a spate of skills in Challa's list that are indeed quite useful and difficult to find among first job candidates, and which are rather "scarce" in general, although they are the ones that in the highly competitive corporate world will "help you stand out", and which can be included, in a selective manner, based on objectives and specific needs, in the skill oriented training in an ESP class. Here are some of the most relevant ones – we have grouped them into several main categories, as, in our opinion, there are some subskills that can naturally go under the same category:

1. language and communication skills - *grammar, writing skills, reading and comprehension, communication skills with public, fellow employees, supervisors, and customers*,
2. learning focused – *flexibility, self-supervising*,
3. attitudinal – *cooperation, reliability, good attitude, eye contact, work ethic, common sense, willingness to be accountable, to take instruction and responsibility, follow rules, willingness to be a good worker and go beyond the traditional eight-hour day*,

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4. personal – *personal energy, personal chemistry, critical thinking,*
5. team spirit - *ability to relate to coworkers in a close environment,*
6. general savoir-faire - *understanding what the world is all about.*

Starting from such a comprehensive skill list, it is certainly useful to compare views to be found in the field literature, in an attempt to identify the most frequently mentioned skills that are in demand with recruiters for important companies today, whether they are called *soft*, or *professional*, or *personal* skills – and even *generic* skills.

What really matters, in our opinion, is that they should be carefully analyzed and included in the teaching content of the ESP or CLIL course. According to the literature (Copeland 3), a huge analysis of 2.3 million LinkedIn profiles showed that nearly 58% of employees were hired over one year precisely due to their portfolio of soft skills, such as: *problem solving, adaptability, dependability, self-motivation* and *leadership skills*. Moreover, a set of personal skills that are highly valued in the job market today will point, among others, to the following entries: *adaptability, problem-solving, loyalty, self-confidence, self-motivated, leadership, multicultural sensitivity, planning and organization, teamwork.*

It is perhaps useful to note at this stage that there are authorized voices (Sharatkumar 3) who point out to the fact that there are not ready-made solutions that should be applicable to all types of educational profiles in terms of soft skills: "there is no 'one size fits all' solution for managing soft skills".

In the case of higher education *engineering* training, there are several specific aspects that should be taken into consideration when a teacher designs a soft skills focused type of course, namely:

- as it is rather unlikely to apply similar training solutions to a variety of educational settings, it is highly recommendable that time is given to analyzing the features of each context and decide upon the package of skills that are most necessary for the trainees;
- similarly, time is also of importance in providing numerous opportunities for the learners' development in this respect, with the teacher/course designer trying to shape up the students' mentality, personality and attitudes in such a manner as to make them meet the high expectations of the working places aimed at by the new graduates;
- according to research, it seems that engineers "tend to be less endowed with soft-skill" training than other categories of students, a situation that has been lately under focus, with much effort being put in including "compulsory objects that address soft skills" in the new curricula, as well as other "co-curricular avenues" reinforcing such skills;
- the main areas of instruction in this respect include, among other components, "self- management, tips for an engineering manager", but also "elements of professional ethics".

The literature of the first years of this century (Kwok 2) emphasized that there was still much to be done in order to fully understand the concept of *soft skills teaching and learning* in engineering higher education organizations; moreover, the students themselves still used to "lack the awareness to articulate" them, or transfer them to the working places conditions.

A possible solution was advanced, viz. that of integrating what he called "employability skills". The trainer was viewed as the one able to implement "effective teaching practices", such as (i) promoting "active learning", and (ii) using "multiple strategies", with a view to increasing the skill development process of the students.

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Recent proposals (Lynch 5), however, identify innovative solutions of inserting soft skills in the curriculum. One such concept is represented by what the author calls "blending hard and soft skills". He advocates passing from the "STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math)" hard skills only core, towards integrating the soft skills "of liberal arts" in a model named "STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Art, and Math)", thus balancing the skill set in a manner that would answer the real needs of the learners at this moment. This will certainly generate a series of significant changes in the manner secondary and tertiary education should be reshaped.

There are authors (Saunderson 2) that point to the fact that there are serious differences between the way in which hard and soft skills, respectively, can be taught and learned, with a focus on the fact that, if hard skills, being "specific, teachable abilities that include technical proficiencies and are easily defined and measurable" are "relatively easy to learn", soft skills are "less tangible and harder to quantify". He emphasizes that the reason for this is the human characteristics of the latter, and that "whenever you're dealing with people, nothing is straightforward or easy".

However, as, according to research he quotes (viz. "a 2014 Career Builder Survey"), 77% of professional recruiters consider soft skills "to be as important as hard skills" today, a recommendable manner of approaching the teaching/learning of soft skills could be by means of "situational learning", which "puts soft skills to the test by actively using them in new situations that come by dealing with people in the workplace".

We fully agree that the elements of *authenticity* brought about by approaches based on "mentoring, group activities, game-based learning" and the like can enhance the trainees' feeling of immersion in the world outside the classroom, thus substantially contributing to the development of their soft skills repertory.

As far as language teachers and their role in soft skills education are concerned, the answer to the question whether they could act in the direction of embedding and teaching soft skills within the language course, be it ESP or CLIL, there are affirmative answers (Nor 167). With a new focus on molding "undergraduates into more balanced individuals" by introducing what is called "generic skills" at university, an effort to "instill" soft skills via the language course gets confirmation in terms of its usefulness and efficiency.

The concept of "generic skills" (Nor 175 cited Khairi Izwan) itself tries in fact to place under the same umbrella the array of useful skills for a future engineer "upon entry into their profession", whether they refer to "qualities, knowledge, abilities" and to other elements that could contribute to attaining academic and professional success.

The approach to teaching generic skills within the language course (Nor 175) resulted in (scientifically investigated and reported) substantial improvement with the students in terms of their *inquiring mind, ethics, communication skills, integrity, critical thinking* and *leadership skills* – and in general, professedly "more business-oriented". Such results are indeed encouraging for any language teacher who decides to embark upon equipping the students with soft skills within the language courses.

III. The proposed approach – rationale and main stages

In what follows, an approach to the teaching of soft skills within the ESP course is presented, together with the main components of the educational setting for which it was designed and taught.

The *students* are bachelor level second year ones, having English as the medium of tuition, and studying Computer Science in multicultural groups, comprising at least 3 – 4 such countries/cultures of origin. Their declared objective is to get employment in multinational corporations upon graduation.

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The *teacher* is a foreign language one – English – who has developed both ESP and CLIL types of courses, including the teaching of scientific and technical communication in English, English for academic study skills for engineers and English for Science and Technology in her portfolio, which points to an awareness of the need to go beyond the strictly linguistic sphere of competences, and an effort to develop professionally in order to cope with the expectations of the main stakeholders (students, management of the university, potential employers, parents etc.) in the educational context described.

The *teaching/learning context* is that of the second year bachelor level EST course (term two, 14 weeks, two hours per week), whose main objectives are basically those typical for an English for Computer Science kind of course, based on an eclectic approach, having at its core the communicative approach to the teaching of the language, but being allowed to amend the course syllabus for research purposes up to around 35% of its content. There is a course book that represents the common material for a number of teachers, faculties and groups, out of which some selected units are taught, with massive amendments, generally directed towards updating the input, adding and/or deleting parts that have proved to be less challenging for the new generations of trainees etc.

The *framework of pedagogical principles* underlying the course allows the modular flexible insertion of an innovative original project as the one briefly sketched here, embedding soft skills in a chain of tasks that are sequenced in such a manner as to replicate, in an authentic way, by means of authentic text input and task requirements, the kind of situations requiring that an IT engineer be able, among others, to approach reading and/or listening texts in a comprehensive manner, to explain and advertise for their products, to do market research for competitors, to handle social media and influencers, to launch an advertising campaign or select most appropriate authors to hire for creating one, and to design client questionnaires – i.e. precisely what newly employed engineers of today and tomorrow are expected to be able to do at their workplaces.

The range of activities passes smoothly from controlled practice towards free production, with the teacher and students assuming new roles and sharing responsibility in the process. The chain of tasks follows the logical flow, from receptive reading and/or listening skills and towards productive ones - speaking and writing, but, at the same time, it reproduces the stages in a complete cycle in the professional activity of an engineer who has such duties and responsibilities nowadays.

Obviously, each teacher can stress one or another of the tasks, in a manner that is related to the timing available, the perceived needs of the trainees in terms of language skills and/or soft skills.

Certainly, the module comprises *preparatory tasks of the linguistic type*, meant to facilitate the trainees' language skills level development; thus, they are asked to analyze the input texts lexically and in terms of grammatical and functional structures, to identify templates and/or models for the more creative tasks, to write advertorials, to speak about their products and to describe their work – all this done either individually, but in general on a collaborative basis, that is also analyzed at the conclusive stage of the project.

The starting point – the *input text* (Horsey 1) comprises about 250 words; it is an article that deals with the launching of a new IT product on the market, and it sends the reader to a video demo of about two minutes, and then to an advertising page, thus opening up new vistas which can be exploited in an authentic manner in the language class. The text is accompanied by two exploitable from the didactic viewpoint photos, one presenting the product itself, and the other one placing it in a longer series, in order to point out to the fact that the newly launched IT product is the smaller in its range, which is an important advantage.

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The *task chain and the rationale* for each of them is sketchily given in what follows. It might be useful to underline at this point that the sequence of tasks should be selectively implemented, in a flexible manner, in function of the time available, the course main objectives and the specific features of the particular educational setting in which the project is applied.

Task 1 – the requirement is that the students, who are given only the photo of the tiny IT product next to a coin, which emphasizes its reduced dimensions, should decide which title, out of a given list of about 4 - 5 proposals, is the most appropriate for a text to be found on a site named Geeky Gadgets (Copyright 2007 - 2018 Geeky Gadgets). The students have to discuss in pairs/groups about the photo and its meaning, and to associate that meaning to the most appropriate title in the list provided.

The *rationale* is multiple, with a rich hidden agenda, as follows. Firstly, the speaking activity in a group helps the students to improve team working skills. Then, it is a challenge, asking the trainees to resort to their previous knowledge – and in the described context the students do have access to reading on the Internet, although they do not spend too long with such activities in their academic life – and make associations of ideas between visual input and textual one. Thirdly, it represents an opportunity for the teacher to give a follow up activity on the topic of headings of articles online and/or in the printed media, and compare them to those in the audio/video media, as well as to get the learners to discover the rules of writing such headings in a specific manner for each medium where they appear. The linguistic information for this task is also included. Finally, as "a picture is worth 1,000 words", as they say, one point of the class discussion can be the skill of choosing the appropriate image to a text in function of situation, objectives etc. – which may be an asset for the future engineer, as well.

Task 2 – The text input is given as a reading subskills development support element, with tasks that can ask the students to: (i) fill in lexical gaps by choosing the ONE appropriate answer in multiple choice format, focused either on technical terms or on general language ones, depending on the group level and needs, (ii) reorder jumbled texts by arranging fragments into a coherent whole, thus encouraging guessing from context as a primary objective, but the task is more complex, with the students having to develop subtler text analysis skills, at a fast pace if possible, by making use of strategies that they can thus practice and improve.

Task 3 – The article incorporates a video input, which is basically a product presentation, with a great capacity of being exploited didactically without any changes, as the film is short, of only two minutes, well divided into sections presenting the product in its range, its components and so on. The video input can be exploited in a traditional manner, viz. with or without subtitles, with or without sound, for note-taking while watching, explaining in the learners' own words how the product operates and so on, but what matters is that such activities should be followed by developments in the line of soft skills.

Some proposals in this respect are the following. Firstly, after the detailed analysis of the input film structure as a type of audio/video template specific to a product presentation on a site, the requirement could be that, having thoroughly searched for similar examples on the net, the students should work in pairs to identify the typical recurrent elements of such a template, in order to make a checklist of points to be observed whenever an engineer wants to create such a product presentation on video support for the readership of a site.

With IT students, as the case is in the described educational context, it is even possible to ask them to create a video themselves, presenting a product, real or imaginary, of their own. It is a manner of getting the learners to look for examples outside the class, on the Internet, evaluate their qualities and weaknesses, try to extract key elements, and then apply

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the conclusions drawn to creating their own project proposal – all this representing subskills that can be useful to them in their career, where the patterns of communication and the environments differ from those provided by the classroom artificiality.

Moreover, should the course time frame permit, it may be interesting to go beyond the product presentation template, and enlarge the search for key elements towards designing tutorials, and, as a follow up stage, to get the students to create a (mini) tutorial, either for a product they have designed, or for one available on the market – a discussion of ethics at work, in terms of avoiding the somehow frequent tendency of the learners to plagiarize from Internet resources could be inserted at this phase, by pointing out to the risks of such fraudulent approaches. What is more, it could help the students to be able to make a clear-cut difference between genres, such as a presentation film text of the advertorial type, and a tutorial, respectively.

Similarly, it is certain that, by such tasks, the future engineers' soft skills of making selections from the offers of the market in terms of advertising campaign products will become more refined and educated, as they would have acquired the necessary abilities to discern between low and high quality proposals from professional advertising agencies.

In the same vein, they will have internalized more experience in handling social media of various types, and in discerning between truth and fake in the numerous postings of influencers and the like. With a view to deepen the students' grasp of what is indeed valuable or not in the online environment, an interesting follow up could be to get them to create and/or participate in a forum, blog or WhatsApp type of discussions on a connected topic, thus enlarging the soft skills array they need in real workplaces.

Task 4 – This is an extension and/or alternative activity to the one presented in Task 1 above, based on the second photo provided in the input text, which represents a ruler given in order to compare qualities of all the previous seven products in the proposed series, which are more and more reduced in size, and that have better and better technical parameters. The students are required to do the following: (i) describe the photo; (ii) write a technical comment explaining the input in the photo, after they have searched on Google for similar text templates, with a contest being organized in order that the most appropriate text produced by the students be selected by open vote of the colleagues, thus stimulating the skill of analyzing qualities of texts, comparing samples and deciding in an educated manner on the best proposal, voted against a list of evaluation criteria, either given by the teacher, or, even better, designed by themselves in advance.

The soft skill components embedded in this task relate to developing team work, an ability to evaluate products against clearly stablished (by themselves) indicators and/or criteria, thus ensuring that the would-be engineers will be able to knowledgeably select advertising campaign proposals and choose appropriate visual aids for each intention of an input text in an optimal manner, that would fully reflect and emphasize the main intentions of the author.

Task 5 – It represents an extension of the previous one, with the learners being asked to firstly analyze one of the previous products in the series given in the photo of the entire range, with a view to designing an advertising brochure for an international fair. As in all stages, the linguistic part will be included, with the necessary models of texts exploited for reading and writing purposes, and only then will the trainees be asked to produce their own projects.

Alternatively, time permitting, a small-size "marketing campaign" for the chosen product can be organized as a general frame, against which several products are to be designed by the students working in groups: an advertorial, an article as an entry on a presentation site, an advertisement for a certain type of media, either the printed or the

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electronic one, with the cycle connecting logo – brand name – slogan – copy ideas – visual aids created in such a manner as to emphasize the most important commercial and technical qualities of the product that is advertised. Certainly, for the students to generate all these types of texts, linguistic preparation is included, and model analysis is required before the stage of free production by the students. Thus, the entire cycle simulates a context in which having the kind of abilities expected from an engineer whose soft skills repertory contributes to a successful career has lately become a must.

As a follow up, we propose some activities focused on learning how to: do market research, analyze the competitors' strong and weak points, and convince the potential clients by charismatic, well-structured and delivered presentations. By performing such tasks, there are good chances that the engineering students could develop an ability of making prompt but appropriate decisions whenever, in their workplace, they are supposed to "probe" the market for a product and to select from among a range of different advertising offers the one that best suits their purpose.

Task 6 – As the input text appeared on a site that has several other sections of interest for the IT students in the educational setting discussed here, such as *Apple, Android, Gadgets, Gaming* etc., they will be asked to analyze the entire site (perhaps even by comparing it with at least two other similar ones, in terms of format, quality of texts, visual attractiveness and so on), and then to draft an article of about 200 words, on a topic appropriate to one of the sections. This will give them an opportunity to go out of the class and into the Internet, identify formats and styles, reflect on differences in terms of readership and client profiles, and develop a capacity to easily and flexibly adapt their professional approach to a variety of contextual paradigms.

Task 7 - A choice of two potential situations is provided to the learners, who should work in groups of three, in order to (i) either write an exchange of email messages whose topic is to jointly develop an IT product/service and advertise for it, or (ii) to collaborate with a view to writing a scientific paper in their field of professional interest. An opportunity is thus created to develop soft skills, such as communicating in written forms in a professional context, taking into consideration cultural diversity and social conventions that are acceptable worldwide etc.

IV. Open conclusions

The proposed approach has been taught integrally or partially with some groups in the described educational context, therefore it is quite possible to try to draw some (interim) conclusions at this point.

Firstly, it has become clear that within the language classes there is room for developing soft skills in engineering tertiary education, as a form of blending, focused on those generic skills that are the most relevant and expected by the employers.

Pedagogically, this should be done on the basis of authentic input and task types, in mixes and simulations that are selected by means of a careful needs analysis, and in a flexible manner, taking into consideration the specific features of the students' profile, their priorities and – necessarily – the local constraints.

Moreover, although at first sight embedding soft skills training into the language course may seem quite time-consuming, it is in fact an economical manner of contributing to the students' development, as they are interested in topics taken from their area of scientific interest, perceiving that such an approach could help them to cope with the expectations from them upon first employment – and not only.

So far, in fact, the students' response and feedback has been a positive one, especially with those groups where the tasks were accompanied by explicit discussions on the kind of

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skills they could develop by solving them. Some students clearly pointed out to the fact that such a course can increase their employability.

The course type that includes such an approach to the teaching of soft skills within the language one becomes more of a CLIL, than a typical ESP one, as there are not only linguistic and communication input elements embedded in it, but also elements of business, team work, management components etc., specific to authentic professional environments today.

The language teacher's roles thus become more complex, as they should take the "hats" of course designers, teachers, organizers of activities, and even sources of information – all this implies self-training, collaborative work with peers, and an open reflective attitude in terms of personal development, which is not easy against sometimes suffocating teaching loads, but which can be conducive to attaining the important objective of endowing the trainees with a complex skill repertoire.

That soft skill oriented activities will not immediately yield visible results is a matter of common knowledge; we should maintain here that they require cyclic recurrent approaches, with the taking into account of the multicultural components of the groups, and other specific traits in each context.

However, even if the results remain at the level of an awareness raising exercise on such aspects, it is worth trying, as there are good chances that the learners may further pursue the suggested lines of action, at individual level, at the post-course stage of their activity, as well.

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