

Experimental Work on Testing the English Language Teaching Model for Tertiary-Level Music Majors

Экспериментальная работа по проверке модели преподавания английского языка для студентов музыкальных специализаций высшего уровня

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Аннотация

Актуальность исследования обусловлена растущей интернационализацией высшего музыкального образования и возрастающим спросом на академическую, исполнительскую и профессиональную коммуникацию с использованием английского языка. Профессиональные музыканты должны владеть английским языком на уровне, позволяющем участвовать в международных мастер-классах, сотрудничать с зарубежными коллегами и эффективно взаимодействовать в мультикультурных творческих коллективах. Однако существующие программы обучения английскому языку в консерваториях и на музыкальных факультетах преимущественно ориентированы на общеакадемический английский и не учитывают специфику профессиональной коммуникации музыкантов, характеризующуюся мультимодальностью, высокой контекстуальной зависимостью и тесной интеграцией вербального языка с жестами, звуком и демонстрациями. Это создает устойчивое противоречие между коммуникативными потребностями студентов-музыкантов и содержанием языковой подготовки. Цель исследования – экспериментально проверить эффективность модели преподавания английского языка, разработанной для студентов музыкальных специальностей высшего уровня в рамках концепции английского языка для специальных целей. Ведущим методом является педагогический эксперимент с использованием квазиэкспериментального дизайна с контрольной и экспериментальной группами, включающий диагностический, формирующий и постэкспериментальный этапы. Данные собирались с помощью тестов на общую языковую компетентность и коммуникативных заданий, моделирующих аутентичные сценарии музыкального образования: взаимодействие на мастер-классе, переговоры на репетициях, составление программных заметок и устное представление репертуара. Основные результаты свидетельствуют о статистически и педагогически значимых улучшениях профессиональной коммуникативной компетентности в экспериментальной группе по сравнению с контрольной. Размер эффекта по композитному индексу профессиональной коммуникативной компетентности составил Cohen's $d = 1,50$. Теоретическая значимость исследования заключается в расширении теории английского языка для специальных целей в область высшего музыкального образования посредством разработки и экспериментальной валидации дисциплинарно-специфичной инструкционной модели. Практическая значимость состоит в предоставлении эмпирически обоснованной модели, применимой при проектировании учебных программ, разработке материалов и инструментов оценки в консерваториях и музыкальных университетах.

Ключевые слова

английский язык для специальных целей, высшее музыкальное образование, профессиональная коммуникативная компетентность, педагогический эксперимент, дисциплинарно-ориентированное обучение, мультимодальная коммуникация, задачно-ориентированное обучение

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Abstract

The relevance of this study stems from the growing internationalization of higher music education and the increasing demand for academic, performance, and professional communication using English. Professional musicians must have a level of English proficiency that allows them to participate in international masterclasses, collaborate with international colleagues, and effectively interact in multicultural creative groups. However, existing English language programs at conservatories and music departments are predominantly focused on general academic English and do not take into account the specifics of musicians' professional communication, which is characterized by multimodality, high contextual dependence, and the close integration of verbal language with gestures, sound, and demonstrations. This creates a persistent contradiction between the communicative needs of music students and the content of language training. The aim of this study is to experimentally test the effectiveness of an English language instruction model developed for advanced music students within the framework of the concept of English for Specific Purposes. The leading method is a pedagogical experiment using a quasi-experimental design with control and experimental groups, including diagnostic, formative, and post-experimental stages. Data were collected using tests of general language competence and communicative tasks simulating authentic music education scenarios: interaction in a master class, negotiations at rehearsals, writing program notes, and oral presentation of repertoire. The main results indicate statistically and pedagogically significant improvements in professional communicative competence in the experimental group compared to the control group. The effect size for the composite index of professional communicative competence was Cohen's $d = 1.50$. The theoretical significance of the study lies in extending the theory of English for Specific Purposes to the field of higher music education through the development and experimental validation of a discipline-specific instructional model. The practical significance lies in providing an empirically grounded model applicable to curriculum design, materials development, and assessment tools in conservatories and music universities.

Key words

English for Specific Purposes, higher music education, professional communicative competence, pedagogical experiment, discipline-oriented learning, multimodal communication, task-based learning

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Введение / Introduction

English functions as a primary medium of academic exchange and professional interaction in contemporary higher education, including such specialized fields as music performance, composition, conducting, musicology, and music pedagogy. In higher music education, students increasingly encounter English not only as a subject of study but also as an operational resource for interacting with international artistic communities, accessing disciplinary literature, participating in masterclasses, and communicating in multilingual ensembles and project groups. As J. Knight [1] notes, the internationalization of higher education is defined as the integration of international, intercultural, and global dimensions into the goals, content, and methods of post-secondary education. In practice, this process is manifested in the expansion of academic mobility programs, joint educational projects, international competitions, touring formats of education, and the growing role of English-medium instruction at universities. M. Macrae [2] points to the difficulties of adaptation for international students when disciplinary communicative norms remain implicit and are insufficiently supported pedagogically.

Within music education, the relevance of English is further enhanced by the discipline's specific communicative ecology. Musical training relies on internationally recognized repertoires, multilingual reference materials, and standardized terminology used in music theory, analysis, rehearsal interaction, and performance practice. Professional trajectories in music typically require the ability to communicate in English during auditions, festivals, competitions, and collaborative projects, as well as to interpret instructions from guest performers and teachers in masterclasses. Research by Y. Dai and C. Wu [3] on the use of English in music masterclasses shows that such interactions are characterized by high contextual dependence, time pressure, and close integration of verbal language with gestures, demonstrations, and sound. Consequently, the communicative demands placed on music students differ significantly from those encountered in traditional academic classroom discourse.

Despite these realities, the provision of English language instruction for music students in higher education is often limited to general English courses or English for Academic Purposes (EAP) modules. Although EAP plays an important role in the development of general academic literacy, its standard implementation prioritizes skills that may not correspond to the professional communicative practices of musicians, as noted by K. Hyland [4]. The concept of English for Specific Purposes (ESP), developed by H. Basturkmen [5] and T. Hutchinson and A. Waters [6], is based on the principle that language instruction should be determined by the actual academic or professional needs of students, and the content and methods of the course should be determined by the communicative situations in which students will operate in their target areas.

Recent needs analysis studies of music students confirm the relevance of these provisions. E. Harmandaoglu Baz [7] showed that students perceive general English courses as insufficiently relevant and express a clear demand for instruction that includes musical content, terminology, and authentic professional tasks. A. Fidianingsih [8] documents similar results, demonstrating students' preference for authentic materials from professional music discourse and a desire for integrated skill development that combines listening and speaking practice with reading and writing tasks.

The research problem arises from the persistent contradiction between the professional communicative needs of music students and existing teaching practices. Music disciplines represent specific discourse communities with their own genres, interactional norms, and communicative goals, as shown by K. Jewitt [9] and E. Wiley [10]. When these disciplinary

features are not reflected in language instruction, students may demonstrate formal language competence while remaining insufficiently prepared for authentic professional interaction. An additional aspect of the problem is related to the limited empirical validation of ESP models specifically developed for music education. T. Dudley-Evans and M.J. St. John [11] systematized the principles of developing specialized courses, but their experimental testing in the context of music education remains rare.

The aim of the study was to experimentally test the effectiveness of an English language teaching model developed for advanced music students.

To achieve this goal, the study addresses the following objectives: to conceptualize a discipline-oriented teaching model based on the principles of ESP ; to develop an experimental teaching structure with clearly defined learning goals, procedures, and assessment criteria; to conduct an experimental study with control and experimental groups; to evaluate the impact of the model on professional communicative competence; to analyze the results using quantitative and qualitative methods.

Scientific novelty is determined by the fact that the study proposes and empirically validates a music-specific model that integrates linguistic, cognitive and professional-musical components, and also introduces experimentally tested criteria for assessing professional communicative competence.

Обзор литературы / Literature review

The theoretical foundations of this study are formed at the intersection of several scientific traditions. Central to this is the concept of ESP , which has consistently evolved from a narrowly terminological approach to the comprehensive design of educational courses. H. Basturkmen laid the foundation for needs analysis, proposing systematic procedures for identifying students' communicative requirements [12].

T. Hutchinson and A. Waters complemented this conceptualization by proposing to distinguish between objectively required competencies, subjective preferences, and the gap between current and target levels of language proficiency [13].

T. Dudley-Evans and M. J. St. John developed this model by systematizing the defining characteristics of ESP as a discipline-oriented approach [14].

K. Hyland in a modern review emphasizes the movement of ESP in the direction of increasing contextualization, which directly determined the methodological basis of our research – the design of an educational model based on real communicative situations of music education [15].

The second significant direction was the methodology of task-based language teaching (TBLT). C. Wang formulated the fundamental principles of this approach, emphasizing the organization of training around significant communicative tasks [16].

R. Ellis demonstrated that task-oriented and task-supported learning ensures more sustainable development of competence compared to grammar-oriented learning [17]. This principle defined the procedural component of our model, built around master class scenarios, rehearsal, and self-presentation.

Along with this, G. Kress's research on multimodality formed the understanding that in music education verbal language functions in close interaction with gesture, sound and demonstration [18].

D. Sheldon empirically confirmed that participants in musical communication simultaneously use several semiotic modes to achieve mutual understanding [19]. These data determined the inclusion of a multimodal component in the model.

Recent international studies have created an empirical basis for integrating language learning with musical content. C. Fernandez de Cañete García and colleagues [20] developed the concept of “Music as a Learning Tool,” demonstrating the simultaneous development of musical and linguistic abilities. B. Torras Vila [21] and C. Sundrarajuhn [22] investigated the use of CLIL in a musical context, confirming its positive impact on motivation. K. L. Marunzelu and colleagues [23] emphasized the multidisciplinary nature of ESP in music. W. Komori-Glatz and W. Smith [24] identified the active use of multimodal repertoires in higher music education. S. Un-Udom and colleagues [25] demonstrated the effectiveness of communicative learning in a musical context. Previously, M. Snow and D. Brinton [26] substantiated the theoretical principles of integrating content and language. The combination of these works defined the substantive component of our model.

Among recent domestic studies, several areas stand out that have directly influenced our work. A.L. Morozova and colleagues substantiated the effectiveness of ICT in teaching foreign languages, which determined the inclusion of a technological component in our model [27].

N. Doronina and colleagues proposed an approach to organizing material on cognitive complexity based on Bloom’s taxonomy, the principle of which we adapted for the progressive complexity of communication tasks [28].

S. E. Tsvetkova, O. A. Mineeva and D. A. Kaznacheev developed a model of profile-oriented content for teaching foreign languages for bachelor’s degree programs [29].

E. I. Bazhenova, K. A. Kuzmina, and I. A. Tkacheva developed and experimentally validated a linguodidactic model for the formation of a secondary linguistic personality in professionally oriented foreign language teaching [30]. This study confirmed the possibility of systematic modeling of language training in specialized universities.

I. G. Kondratieva and A. V. Fakhrutdinova studied the activity-based approach to teaching a foreign language in the context of a university of culture and arts, confirming its effectiveness for the development of foreign language speech activity [31].

M. V. Zakharova analyzed the rational and emotional aspects of the digitalization of English language teaching in Russian universities [32].

Thus, the synthesis of the reviewed studies demonstrates that ESP provides a methodological basis for contextualized course design; TBLT provides tools for organizing learning around authentic tasks; and international and domestic studies confirm the effectiveness of integrating language instruction with disciplinary content. However, a significant gap emerges: controlled experimental studies testing the effectiveness of integrated models specifically in music education are virtually nonexistent. This study aims to fill this gap.

Методологическая база исследования / Methodological base of the research

The study was conducted at the China Conservatory of Music (Beijing), a public institution of higher education offering programs in performing arts and music education. English is taught as a compulsory subject in the first years of study and is traditionally offered in the format of General English or General English for Academic Purposes. The intervention was integrated into the regular curriculum and did not require additional contact hours.

A quasi-experimental design with a control group (CG) and an experimental group (EG) was used. Group assignment was based on existing study groups; thus, random assignment at the individual level was not possible, as is typical for classroom interventions. To reduce selection bias, the equivalence of baseline data was verified during the diagnostic phase. Participation was voluntary; all participants provided informed consent, and anonymization procedures were applied to all collected data.

Table 1

Participants' profile		
Parameter	Control group (CG)	Experimental group (EG)
N	26	26
Average age (years)	19.4 (SD 0.8)	19.2 (SD 0.9)
Course of Study	2nd year of bachelor's degree	2nd year of bachelor's degree
Specialization	instruments / vocals / conducting / pedagogy	instruments / vocals / conducting / pedagogy
Experience in studying English (years)	8.6 (SD 1.9)	8.4 (SD 2.1)
CEFR Basic Level	A2-B1	A2-B1

The experimental study was conducted in three stages: diagnostic (pre-experimental), formative (intervention), and control (post-experimental). This structure ensures transparent measurement of changes explained by the intervention and is consistent with established approaches to evaluating educational innovations.

At baseline, both groups completed (1) a general language proficiency test and (2) a set of discipline-relevant communicative tasks assessing professional communicative competence (PCC) in music-focused scenarios. Baseline data were used to confirm group comparability and identify initial difficulties in the target genres and interactional practices.

Over the course of 10–12 weeks (two lessons per week, 80–90 minutes each), the experimental group received training using the proposed ESP -based model. The training included task-oriented professional scenarios simulating authentic communicative events: feedback exchanges at a masterclass, negotiations at a rehearsal, and self-presentation in an audition format. Authentic musical texts were used to develop genre awareness and pragmatic control. Role-playing communicative tasks included multimodal elements reflecting empirical data on the nature of communication in English-language music education. The control group continued training using the existing program, covering comparable levels of language complexity and total number of contact hours.

Following the formative phase, both groups completed parallel versions of the competence test and the PCC tasks. The post-experimental tasks retained the same constructs but used different stimuli and materials to reduce memory effects.

General language competence was measured by a CEFR -aligned placement test focusing on grammar, vocabulary, and receptive skills. Professional communicative competence was assessed by three tasks: (1) interaction with feedback in a workshop–students responded to brief feedback from the teacher, asked clarifying questions, and formulated an action-oriented response; (2) negotiations in a rehearsal–students discussed interpretive decisions (tempo, articulation, balance), proposed changes, justified decisions, and reached agreement; (3) program note and oral presentation–students wrote a short program note (150–200 words) and delivered an oral introduction (60–90 seconds) to a non-specialist audience. A rubric-based approach based on L. Kasper’s model of communicative competence [33] was used for assessment.

Scores for the tasks were summed to obtain a composite PCC index (the maximum score depends on the number of criteria applied per task). All oral presentations were recorded and independently rated by two raters calibrated on a common set of anchor samples. Inter-rater reliability was assessed using the intraclass correlation (ICC).

Quantitative analysis included descriptive statistics, testing of equivalence of baseline data, comparison of increments, and estimation of Cohen 's effect size d [34]. Depending on

the distributional assumptions, the t -test for independent samples or nonparametric alternatives were used, as well as ANCOVA to compare post-experimental results while controlling for baseline differences. Reliability was ensured by triangulation with qualitative data, which is consistent with the standards of mixed design in educational research. The multimodal perspective took into account the approaches of B. Harley and colleagues [35].

Table 2

Evaluation rubric		
Criterion	Indicators	Scale
Completing the task	Completion of communication steps; compliance with task conditions	0–4
Domain relevance	Use of music-specific functions (description, rating, suggestion)	0–4
Lexical control	Accurate and sufficient musical vocabulary	0–4
Grammar control	Accuracy maintains meaning; errors do not hinder understanding.	0–4
Discourse and coherence	Logical sequence; cohesive devices; clear references	0–4
Interactive management (oral)	Clarification, sequencing, reactivity, correction strategies	0–4
Intelligibility (oral)	Pronunciation and prosody enable understanding during interaction	0–4

Результаты исследования / Research results

Initial comparisons revealed no statistically significant differences between the control and experimental groups in terms of overall competence and the composite PCC index at the pretest stage.

Table 3

Initial comparison (pretest): competence and PCK

Indicator	CG Mean (SD)	EG Mean (SD)	Test / p
Competence (CEFR, 0–100)	52.1 (7.8)	52.9 (8.1)	$t \approx 0.36, p > 0.05$
Composite PCC (0–84)	38.6 (6.4)	39.1 (6.2)	$t \approx 0.29, p > 0.05$

In addition to numerical equivalence, a qualitative review of the original performances revealed similar patterns in both groups: a limited repertoire of clarification strategies, frequent use of vague evaluative adjectives (e.g., "good," "beautiful") instead of discipline-specific descriptors, and reduced coherence in short program notes. Students in both groups tended to use verbatim translations from their native language when describing musical phenomena and struggled to formulate clarifying questions in response to instructor feedback.

After the formative phase, the experimental group demonstrated greater improvements in the PCC composite index and in each task component. The control group showed smaller improvements, primarily in the areas of general competence and limited aspects of written production.

Table 4

Comparison of pre – and post-experimental scores, gains, and effect sizes in the control and experimental groups

Indicator	CG Prev. (SD)	CG Post. (SD)	Weight gain	EG Prev. (SD)	EG Post. (SD)	EG increase	Intergroup difference	Effect size (Cohen's d)
Competence (0-100)	52.1 (7.8)	57.9 (7.4)	+5.8	52.9 (8.1)	62.4 (7.2)	+9.5	+3.7	≈0.50 (average)
Composite PCC (0-84)	38.6 (6.4)	44.7 (6.1)	+6.1	39.1 (6.2)	55.8 (6.5)	+16.7	+10.6	≈1.50 (large)

The pattern indicates that the model produced a significant benefit in discipline-relevant communicative performance, exceeding what would be expected from a general language intervention. Presenting effect sizes is critical, as statistical significance can depend on sample size, while effect size provides an assessment of the practical importance of the findings.

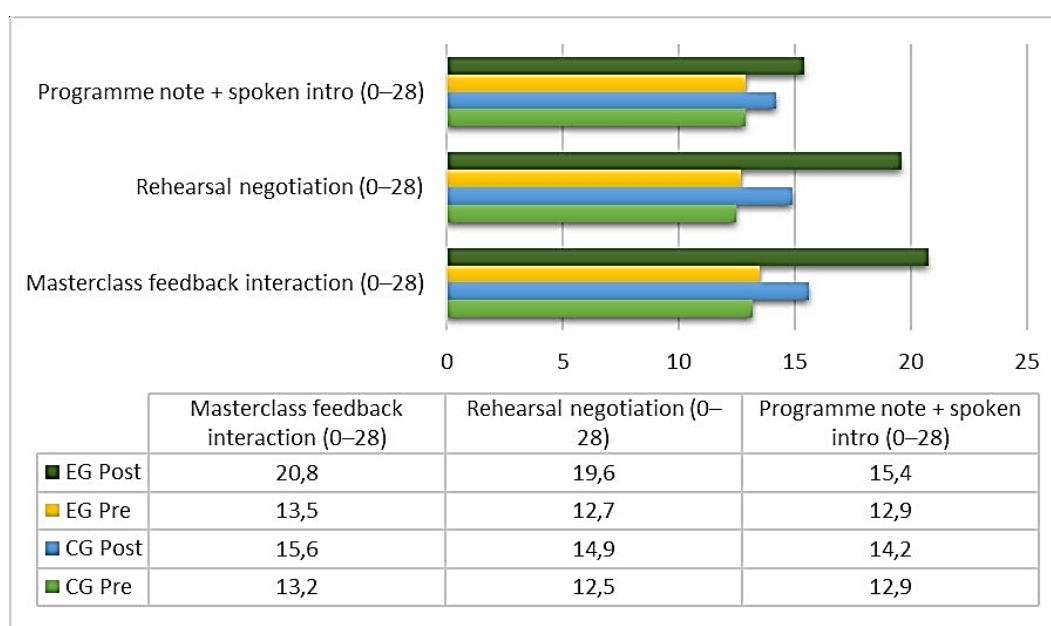


Fig. 1. Task-level results

Task-level dynamics showed the greatest improvements in interactive oral tasks, which were most directly addressed by the role-playing and scenario components of the model. For the task "Interaction at a Master Class," the experimental group's scores increased from 13.5 to 20.8 (an increase of 7.3), while those in the control group increased from 13.2 to 15.6 (an increase of 2.4). For the task "Negotiations at a Rehearsal," the experimental group showed an increase from 12.7 to 19.6 (an increase of 6.9), while the control group's score increased from 12.5 to 14.9 (an increase of 2.4). For the task "Program Note + Oral Presentation," the experimental group's score increased by 2.5, while the control group's score increased by 1.3. The smallest gap in the last task is explained by the fact that the written component is less dependent on the interaction skills developed by role-playing scenarios.

A qualitative analysis of the transcripts of oral assignments, written program notes, and observation protocols revealed three major shifts in the experimental group.

Firstly, students began to use clarification and correction strategies significantly more often: request for repetition (" Could you clarify what you mean by the balance in the second phrase ?), confirmation of understanding (" So you 're suggesting I bring out the inner voice more ?"), paraphrasing the teacher's feedback. At the initial stage, such strategies were practically unobserved; students typically nodded silently or responded in monosyllables.

Secondly, instead of vague evaluative adjectives, students began using functionally specific language to describe their interpretive choices. Instead of "I will play it better," statements using professional terminology emerged: "I'll adjust the dynamic shaping in bars 12–16 to create a stronger crescendo" or "I suggest we lighten the articulation in the development section." This demonstrates an improved connection between linguistic means and professional tasks.

Third, the written works demonstrated a clearer rhetorical structure. While at the initial stage, program notes consisted of a chaotic listing of facts, after the intervention, students in the experimental group began to use a three-part structure: contextual frame (historical and biographical background) → description of the work (formal organization, key musical features) → interpretive frame for the audience (what to listen to, what emotions to expect). Addressee focus also improved: students began to differentiate between writing styles for specialized and general audiences.

The control group showed more limited qualitative changes. Improvements were observed primarily in grammatical accuracy and general vocabulary, but the development of task-specific interaction behavior was less consistent. Students in the control group continued to gravitate toward general academic discourse and struggled to respond quickly to professionally oriented feedback.

Заклучение / Conclusion

The study achieved its stated goal of experimentally testing the effectiveness of an English language teaching model for music students. The experimental group demonstrated statistically and pedagogically significant improvements in professional communicative competence compared to the control group. The most significant improvements occurred in performance interaction tasks (feedback during masterclasses and negotiations during rehearsals), which represent key communicative events in music training but are often overlooked in generalized English for Academic Purposes programs. The results are consistent with current evidence on the multimodal nature of communication in music education and support the need to integrate verbal and nonverbal components in language instruction.

The findings also align with ESP theory , which emphasizes needs-based design and aligning instruction with the practices of the target discourse community. The tasks were designed to simulate authentic professional scenarios, and the assessment criteria focused on communicative adequacy rather than isolated linguistic proficiency. The results extend the needs analysis data into an experimentally validated instructional approach and contribute to the contextualization of ESP in new disciplinary contexts.

The research's scientific novelty is supported by empirical data: unlike descriptive needs analyses or isolated pedagogical initiatives, this study integrates theoretical principles of ESP with controlled experimental validation, thereby extending the existing scientific foundation of ESP to the field of higher music education. The use of performance-based tasks and agreed-upon assessment criteria strengthens the construct validity of language performance assessment in music-oriented contexts.

The practical significance of the model lies in its applicability to conservatories and music universities. The proposed model can inform the design of curricula, the development of materials, and assessment practices aimed at enhancing the professional communicative readiness of music students. The results can also be used to support institutional decisions regarding the integration of English language instruction into internationalized music education programs.

However, the study has several limitations. Its quasi-experimental design prevents the influence of individual differences between participants from being completely excluded. The relatively small sample size ($n = 26$ in each group) limits the generalizability of the results. The study was conducted at a single educational institution, making it difficult to extrapolate to other institutional contexts. Furthermore, the duration of the intervention (10–12 weeks) precludes assessing the long-term sustainability of the observed effects.

Further research could focus on longitudinal studies of the results to assess the sustainability of acquired competencies; comparative analysis of the model's effectiveness in various institutional contexts and cultural environments; expanding the sample to increase statistical power and generalizability; developing and validating standardized instruments for assessing musicians' professional communicative competence; and investigating the model's impact on students' motivation and autonomy in the long term.

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