



University Students' Motivation for Acquisition of the English language (Based on the Example of Survey among Students in Novosibirsk)

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ABSTRACT

In developing socio-economic relations, labour market requirements imposed on specialists also undergo changes. Priority is given to such competencies as prompt analysis of professional information in foreign languages, first of all, in the English language, universally recognised as a global language. Teaching staff at higher education institutions are in a constant search for motivational factors to provide more productive acquisition of the English language. International pedagogical experience in developing motivation in non-language major students for foreign language learning is reviewed in the article. Students' self-assessment regarding their command of the English language, formedness of their interest for language learning, demand for such kind of education, prediction of their future professional status and career evolution with the development of this non-technical competency are analysed based on the example of an applied sociological survey among university students in Novosibirsk. Thanks to analysing the sociological survey results, the authors make a conclusion that the availability of foreign language learning resources, various interactive forms of teaching classes in a course of the English language, as well as teaching the way of working with literature in a foreign language in the professional sphere of activity are sufficient for motivating most of the students in foreign language acquisition across the curriculum. However, authors emphasise that competency development of prompt analysis of professional information in foreign languages should take place continuously during the whole period of study in a higher school, within other educational disciplines, primarily, those of the professional cycle, ensuring a sustainable formation of the competency under consideration.

1. Introduction

Renewal of higher education system in a number of European countries is connected with the transition to two-tier system of education, proposed to all Bologna declaration member countries. Modernisation of Russian higher school is also conducted in accordance with these guidelines. Curricula undergo changes, while competency-based approach is being introduced in teaching. Such competency as "command of a foreign language" plays a special role, as it makes it possible for students not only to participate in international

academic mobility programmes, but also expand their professional network, as well as scientific sophistication. At the present time seller's market of English language education is quite saturated. Besides, Russian system of education presupposes quite a long-term study of a foreign language at school with two more years at a university. Nowadays, assessment models not only of students' knowledge but also of competencies gained in the educational process are actively introduced in Russian higher school, which is predetermined by the place and role of the English language in the competency model of Bachelors and Specialists in non-language majors. It would be interesting to scrutinise how well students manage to acquire the knowledge of a foreign language before they graduate from university, how they are motivated for learning a foreign language, so as to form a system of motivating factors, capable of ensuring the development of the "command of foreign languages in the professional activity" competency. The given task can be solved within an applied sociological study, as sociological research methods allow one to evaluate students' satisfaction with English language learning.

2. International experience of motivational interaction in teaching foreign languages (literature review)

It goes without saying that motivation plays an extremely important role in teaching foreign languages, including English. It is especially important to mark out motivational factors for students of non-language majors, since it is normally not considered as a bias subject in their curriculum.

The problem has been thoroughly studied by various authors. It can be analysed through the prism of different approaches; e.g. Canadian researchers Robert C. Gardner and Wallace E. Lambert utilised the framework of social psychology as early as 1970s (Gardner, Lambert, 1972). They came to a conclusion that motivation for foreign language acquisition is determined by a number of factors, including attitude and integrative components. Z. Dörnyei conducted a more "education-friendly" research, marking out three corresponding levels, namely "Language Level", "Learning Level" and "Language Situation Level" (Dörnyei, 1994). Later, E. Ushida extrapolated this methodology to online language learning, emphasising that the role of teachers even in the technology-driven era is growing more and more important (Ushida, 2005). Based on their research conducted in the educational institutions of Lebanon, K.A. Shaaban and G. Ghaith demonstrated that effort, valence and self-esteem were some of the factors affecting students' motivation for learning the English language (Ghaith, Shaaban, 2000). J. Vibulphol carried out a survey among Thai students, which showed that it is imperative to concentrate on students' internal motivation (Vibulphol, 2016).

As far as Russian realities are concerned, A.A. Khristolyubova mentions critical thinking as one of the possible strategies for structuring classwork, which can enhance students' motivation (Khristolyubova, 2016). Blended (or hybrid) learning can also represent one of the ways of enhancing students' motivation (Petrovskaya, Rymanova, 2014). N.A. Chernova and T.V. Kalinina claim that getting passed in the discipline acts as a major motivation for college students in learning a language (Chernova, Kalinina, 2014), and it becomes a problem for the professors. At that, instructors' main task is creating pedagogical and psychological milieu to make language learning comfortable for students. In this situation, not only external motivation factors will play an essential role, but also internal ones. Most importantly, the authors prove that students' motivation for acquiring a foreign language is closely interconnected with their self-assessment.

3. Research methodology and techniques

The aim of the applied sociological study was to analyse self-assessment of university students with non-language majors in terms of involvement in the English language learning. We chose questionnaire survey as a sociological tool. To develop the questionnaire we singled out the following blocks of indicators: 1 – self-

assessment of the command of the English language; 2 – apprehension of the “command of the foreign languages” competency relevance in their future professional activity; 3 – motivational factors for English learning; 4 – personal initiative in the “command of foreign languages” competency development.

When forming indicators and indices we proceeded from the following assumptions:

1. Self-assessment of the command of the English language was made by the students on a scale from one to five (1 – extremely poor, 2 – poor, 3 – intermediate, 4 – quite good, 5 – very good). Self-assessment was differentiated based on different activity levels and comprehension of information in a foreign language. For this purpose, it was necessary to provide a differentiated self-assessment taking into account various types of activity and their difficulty.

2. Students’ involvement in the English language learning depends on their conviction that command of a foreign language can help them obtain a prestigious job and will be in demand in their future professional activity.

3. Motivation for English learning is stimulated by the opportunity to interact with a native speaker, interestingness of learning session forms, informedness of international academic exchange programmes, one of the requirements for which is the command of the English language at a sufficient level.

4. Motivation for English learning is connected with personal efforts each student expends in the language learning process, as well as depends on the incentive of learning, be it personal development or passively following mandated rules of the educational process.

When processing the survey data we used **SPSS** Statistics (short for Statistical Package for the Social Sciences).

4. Results of the survey and discussion

The sociological survey was conducted among university 309 students in Novosibirsk. 58% female students and 41.1% male students took part in the given survey. According to the obtained data, most of those surveyed are first-year students (35.1%), next comes the group of fourth-year students (22.4%); second-years account for 20.2% of those surveyed; 14.5% are third-years; 3.5% are fifth-year students; 3.5% are graduate students and 0.9% are postgraduate students.

In the investigation, we took special notice of the subjective self-assessment of the students’ command of English as a foreign language, in various aspects: reading, writing, speaking and listening comprehension (Fig. 1–4).

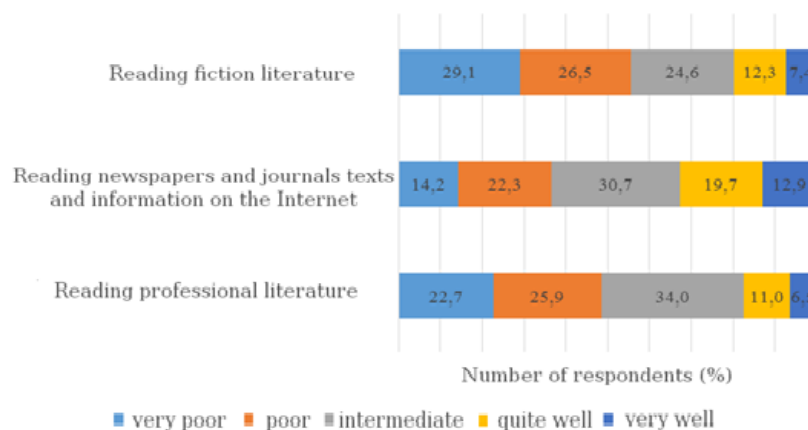


Fig. 1. Level of command of the English language: reading

Evaluating their level of the command of the English language in the reading aspect, most of the respondents marked “reading fiction literature” as their weakest skill. “Reading professional literature” manifests itself moderately, whereas the strongest side marked by the students in this aspect is “reading newspapers and journals texts and information on the Internet”.

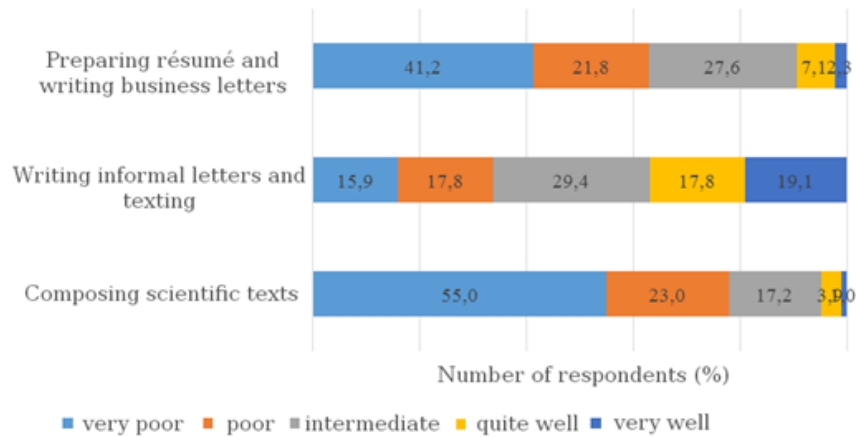


Fig. 2. Level of command of the English language: writing

As far as English writing skills are concerned, 55% of the respondents admitted that their skills of composing scientific texts are “very poor”. They also have poor résumé preparation and business letter writing skills. However, the situation concerning writing informal letters and texting is a lot better: 29.4% claim that they can do it at an intermediate level, and 19.1% claim they can do it “quite well”.

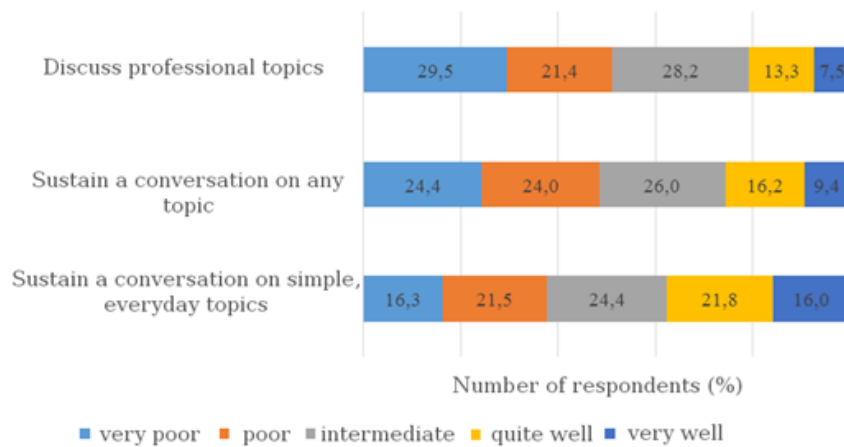


Fig. 3. Level of command of the English language: speaking

The data obtained demonstrate that the respondents can “discuss professional topics” worst of all (29.5% claimed that they have “very poor” skills in this regard); respondents can “sustain a conversation on simple, everyday topics” best of all in this case (the option “very well” was marked by 16%).

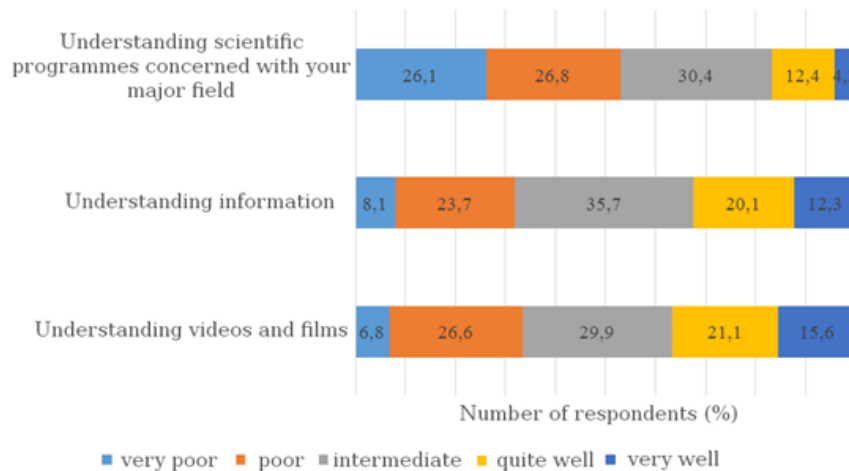


Fig. 4. Level of command of the English language: listening comprehension

As for listening comprehension in the English language, the respondents noted that they can understand “scientific programmes concerned with their major field” worst of all (26.1% – “very poor”); “intermediate” level refers to understanding information (35.7%); best of all students can understand videos and films (15.6% – “very well”).

The analysis of the responses to the given questions shows that command of the English language in the professional sphere is not valued highly by the students in general. However, the task of the higher school primarily consists in teaching the students to work with professional scientific literature and have the opportunity to perceive the professional information in a foreign language in immediate contacts and using means of information and communication technologies.

As 54.3% students mentioned that they are interested in learning the English language at university, we suppose that this relatively low self-assessment as to the level of command of English in the professional sphere is connected not with the drawbacks in teaching English language but with the low level of their motivation for learning professionally oriented foreign language. Only 39.8% of the surveyed students assumed that command of the English language will be useful (or supposedly useful) for them in their future profession (Fig. 5).

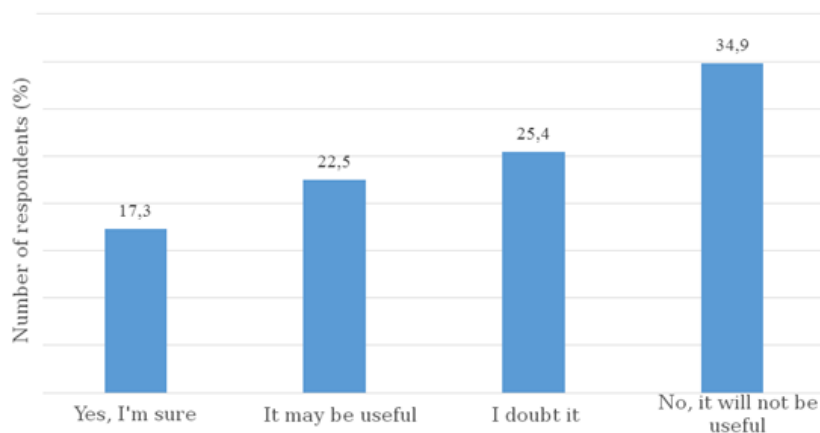


Fig. 5. In your opinion, will the command of the English language be useful for you in your professional activity?

On the other hand, 37.6% students indicated that they study the English language because they hope to get a prestigious job in the first place (Fig. 6), i.e. they are assured that such competency as “command of a foreign

language” increases their employment opportunities. In our opinion, the contradiction in the students’ answers that a foreign language, on the one hand, improves their employment chances, on the other hand, will not be useful in their professional activity, consists in the following. Very often some organisations form their requirements for potential employees with an extended list of competencies, thus choosing the best of the best. Further on, in practice the employees do not need all the competencies stated by the employer in their immediate work.

It is necessary to mention that in practice one quarter of the respondents learn a foreign language only because the discipline is included in the curriculum. Such an approach cannot presuppose a high level of motivational component.

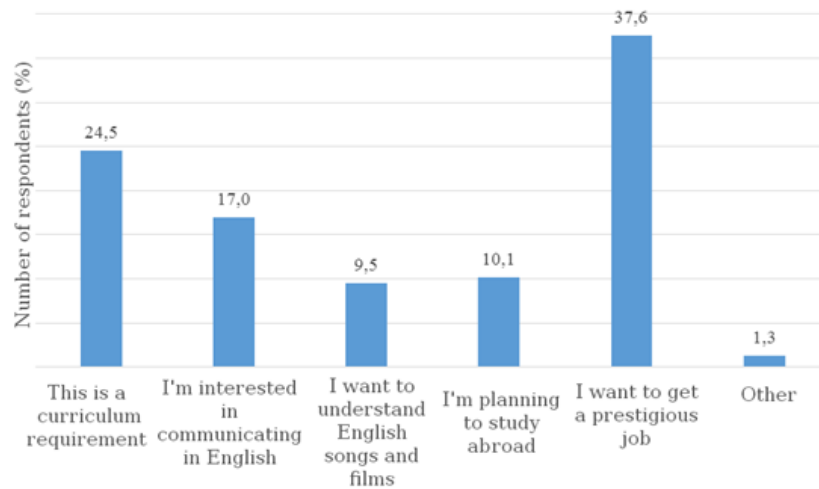


Fig. 6. You learn the English language primarily because...

Other stimuli for learning the English language are the following: 17% of those surveyed are interested in communication in the English language, 9.5% want to understand songs and films in English, 10.1% plan to continue their studies abroad.

As for the experience of communication in the English language with native speakers or foreigners using English in conversation, most of the respondents claim that they have had such an experience in their lives. As such, 13.6% mentioned that they often use English when communicating with their friends, acquaintances, relatives etc.; 59.5% had this experience “a couple of times” (Fig. 7).

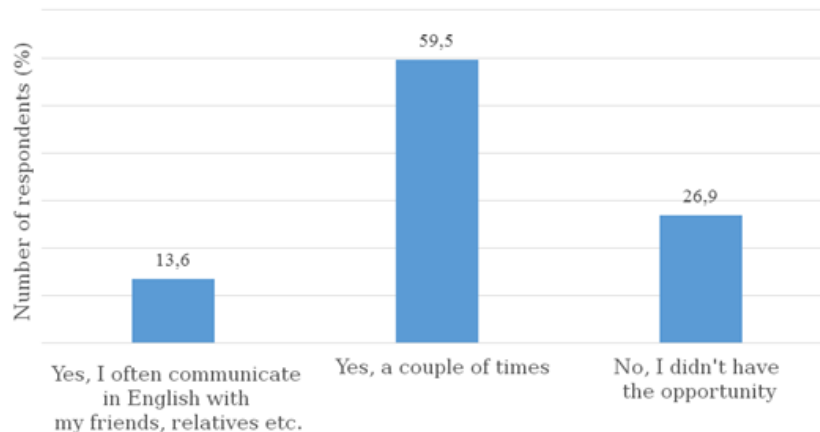


Fig. 7. Have you had experience of communication in English with native speakers or foreigners using English in conversation?

The ways of studying the foreign language can also indirectly witness how strong students' motivation for learning is (Fig. 8).

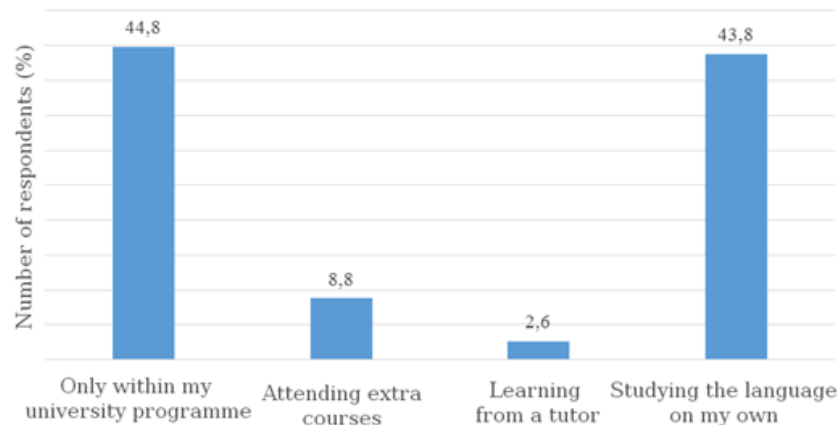


Fig. 8. How do you learn the English language?

In accordance with the results obtained, 43.8% of the students who took part in the survey, learn the English language on their own, i.e. expend additional effort to learn the language. 44.8% of the students limit themselves to the curriculum. 8.8% attend extracurricular language courses, and 2.6% work with a private tutor.

An opportunity to take part in an international academic student exchange programme can be a motivating factor for learning the English language at university. But the question is, are students aware of such information and are they interested in it (Fig. 9)?

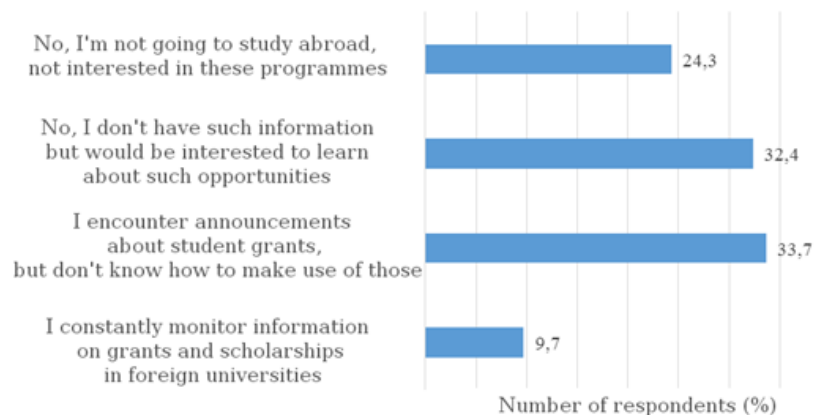


Fig. 9. Do you have the information regarding education opportunities in other countries?

As to the information regarding the education opportunities in other countries, most of the respondents noted that sometimes they “encounter announcements about student grants, but they do not know how to make use of those” – 33.7%; also a large amount of those surveyed mentioned that they “do not have such information but would be interested to learn about such opportunities” – 32.4%. Only 9.7% of those surveyed constantly monitor information on grants and scholarships in foreign universities. One can make a supposition that increasing the level of students' informedness on the opportunities for participation in the international student mobility programmes could stimulate the motivation for learning a foreign language. All the more so, 40.1% of the students were either planning to start learning other foreign languages or were already doing so (Fig. 10).

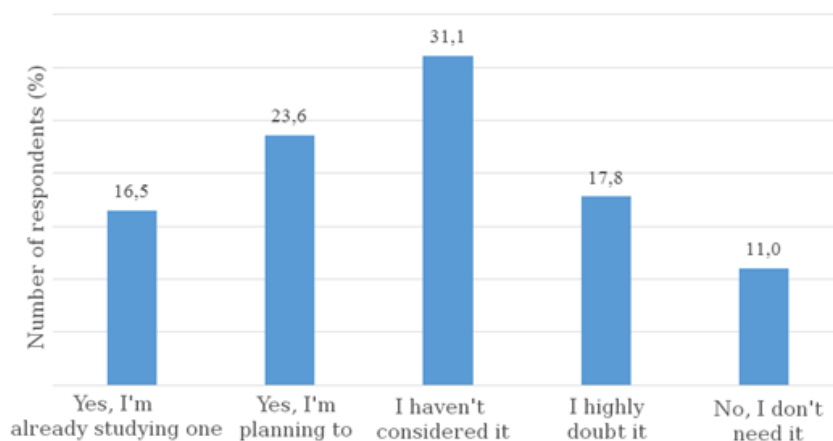


Fig. 10. Are you planning to study other foreign languages in near future?

5. Findings and recommendations

1. Analysis of the survey results showed that command of a foreign language in the sphere of professional activity is the “poorest” aspect in the self-assessment of students’ level of “command of a foreign language” as a competency. Consequently, this component should be enhanced in the curriculum in terms of learning English as a foreign language. Special attention is to be paid to writing scientific texts in the English language and vocabulary of the professional scientific programmes.

2. It is necessary to incorporate advances of the modern information technologies into the teaching process, creating the opportunity for students’ communication in a foreign language in the professional sphere of study. For that end, it is crucial to initiate student online seminars and conferences together with other foreign universities. Such forms of students’ activities are not costly in terms of financial resources and are quite acceptable within a single class.

3. Participation of students in international academic mobility can be an important motivating factor. For this, it is necessary to single out the need, possibilities and limitations of such participation for students, as well as the level of their informedness with regard to the opportunities available. This direction can be developed as a new sociological study.

4. We defined that students are sufficiently interested in learning the English language at university. However, to increase students’ motivation for learning English as a foreign language, having a high level of teaching foreign language courses and using interesting forms of classroom work are not enough. A student has to distinctly comprehend prospects of applying the given competency in the future. Within a university, this problem can be solved by including the English language into all stages of student training. In this study, this question was not touched upon but it can become an independent subject of research, which can allow one to define the extent to which the English language is currently used in teaching other disciplines and how the “command of a foreign language competency” is formed in special disciplines oriented towards the future profession.

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