

THE ROLE OF ENGINEERING STUDENTS' MOTIVATION FOR FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING*

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Keywords: engineering majors; language interference; communicative competence; motivation.

Abstract: The authors analyzed the works of domestic and foreign scientists, and theoretically justified the role of motivation for foreign language learning for engineering students. The results of the survey to identify the level of motivation for learning a foreign language were described.

The main goal of higher professional education modernization is training of qualified specialists able to work within international standards, ready to improve their professional level, having high level of social and professional adaptation, able to speak fluently three languages – Kazakh, Russian, and English. Mastering a foreign language gives plenty of opportunities to gain knowledge about new achievements in science and technology, to establish professional contacts with foreign partners, etc.

The main indicator of linguistic level is a communicative competence. One of the methods of developing a communicative competence is acquiring language skills through the development of students' understanding of the role of language proficiency and raising their interest in learning a foreign language and turning it into an effective intercultural communication tool.

The problem of motivation has been widely discussed in literature, and a variety of research methods has been used to study its essence, nature, and structure (B. G. Ananyev, S. L. Rubinshtein, P. M. Jacobson and etc.). Domestic psychologists in the sphere of motivation research focus on the unity of dynamic and meaningful aspects of motivation. The development of this

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approach is connected with the research into human communication system (V. N. Myasishev), meaning and content relation (A. N. Leontiev), integration of motives and their essence (S. L. Rubenshtein), person-centered and behavioral dynamics (L. I. Bozhovich, V. E. Chudnovsky), etc.

Motivation is generally understood as a source of activity; however, there are different interpretations of motivation. Researchers consider it as certain motive, as a whole system of motives, and as the entangled and interconnected area of necessities, motives, purposes, interests. According to A. N. Leontiev, understanding of motivation as a “substantivized necessity” gives an opportunity to define an inner motive as a constituent element of the structure of activity [1, p. 7].

The role of motivation for foreign language learning was emphasized by N. I. Gez [2, p. 15], P. B. Gurvich [3, p. 78], I. A. Zimnyaya [4, p. 15] and other scientists. Like any kind of motivation, motivation for learning is determined by a number of factors. Firstly, it is determined by education system, and educational institutions; secondly it depends on the organization of the learning process; thirdly it is determined by student’s personal qualities (age, gender, intellectual development, abilities, degree of personal aspiration, self-assessment, and relationship with other students); the fourth factor is personal qualities of a teacher, his / her attitude to students and the job; the fifth is the specifics of the subject.

To understand the importance of the problem of motivation it is necessary to investigate the area and structure of educational process of engineering students’ training from the following perspectives: improvement of foreign language teaching process; improvement of foreign language learning process; raising interest in foreign language learning; enhancement of foreign language learning by increasing students’ motivational level; development of relevant educational policy and strategies.

In order to study the sources of students’ motivation for learning a foreign language we conducted action research and prepared a questionnaire. One hundred and eighty-two students of engineering majors from Karaganda State University participated in the survey. The gender composition of the participants was as follows: 116 students of Kazakh group and 66 students of Russian group, 68 (37 %) males and 114 (63 %) females. The insufficient level of motivation for learning a foreign language can be explained by the following factors:

- high academic load of core curriculum;
- insufficient number of hours for learning a foreign language;
- students’ uncertainty about using foreign language skills in their future professional career.

The research combined quantitative assessment of students’ learning demands, their motives, goals, emotions, interests in the learning process and qualitative assessment. For gathering quantitative information we used the questionnaire findings of the survey of the students of Karaganda State University. For gathering qualitative information we conducted personal and group interviews.

The results of the research showed that 52 % of participants are guided by external motives for learning a foreign language and the rest 48 % take into account internal motives.

The questionnaire findings showed that foreign language learning is not important for the students of Kazakh groups: 33.2 % of the participants believed that foreign language learning was “a duty”, 28.9 % of the students treated it as “a necessity”, 24.2 % of the participants considered this subject as “an opportunity for the future”, and the rest 13.7 % of the surveyed enjoyed the learning process. The findings proved that internal motivation encouraged students to study the language. However, 3.0 % of participants believed that learning a foreign language was not important.

The survey of the students from the Russian groups showed totally different results. The findings were as follows: 29 students out of 66 were sure that a foreign language was an “opportunity for the future”, 21 participants considered it as a “necessity”, 9 students enjoyed learning a foreign language, and the rest 5 people treated learning a foreign language as a “duty”. Only 2 participants considered learning a foreign language “useless”.

The comparative results of the survey depicted raising motivation of the students from Kazakh and Russian groups of engineering majors (Figure 1).

As for the level of interest in learning a foreign language, the findings were as follows: 43.3 % of participants demonstrated a “low” level of interest, 9.2 % had “minimal” level of interest, and nevertheless, 26.6 % participants demonstrated “high” interest level and 20.9 % had a “very high” level.

Similarly to these results, 43.9 % students of the Russian groups had a “very high” level of interest, 30% participants demonstrated a “high” level, 21.9 % of students had a “low” level of interest, and 4.2 % had a “minimal” level of interest.

The comparative analysis of the level of interest of students from Kazakh and Russian groups is presented in Figure 2.

According to the survey findings, high and very high levels of interest of engineering students were related to the following factors:

– the desire of students to get high scores in midterm examination and national examination;

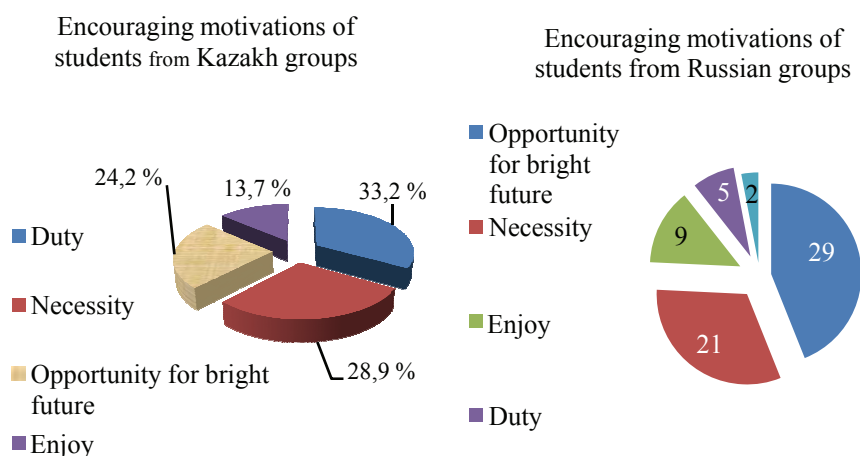


Fig. 1. Source of motivation for foreign language learning

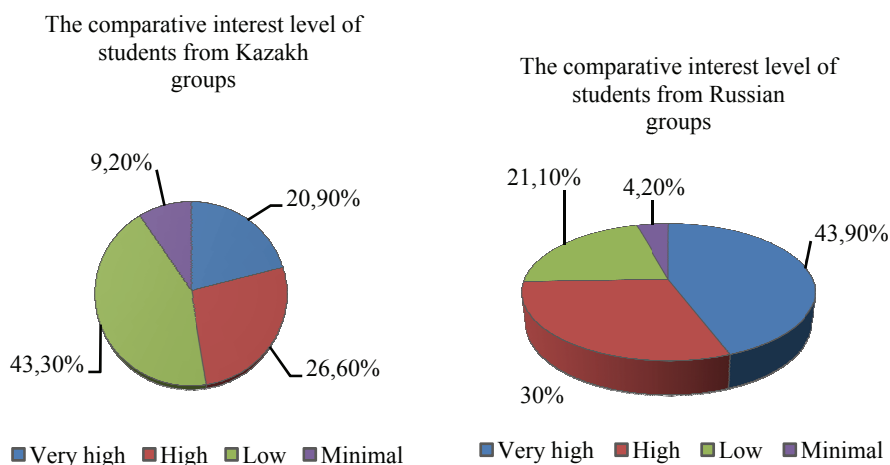


Fig. 2. The interest degree of students from Kazakh and Russian groups in foreign language learning

- the need to get an opportunity to continue their study in master and postgraduate programs;
- the need to communicate with students from foreign countries;
- interesting teachers' methods during the lesson and exciting topics in textbooks;
- the importance of foreign language for future professional work.

Moreover, some students noted that they studied a foreign language to improve their "rankings".

Most participants, namely, 52.5 % demonstrated low or minimal interest in foreign language learning. It can be explained by the following factors:

- they do not know or understand the role of a foreign language in their future professional work;
- they do not have interest in continuing their study in international scholarship programs, in foreign countries, academic mobility programs;
- they lack language environment and conditions for foreign language communication.

Raising motivation for learning a foreign language develops a positive attitude to the learning process. However, the structure of motivation area is changing, with the emergence of new constituent motives. In this regard, we shouldn't define only the predominant motive; moreover, we should take into account all motivational area of an individual. Overcoming difficulties in the course of learning is one of the most important conditions of developing interest in the learning process. The complexity of learning materials and learning objectives is effective only when they are sufficient for the students' level; otherwise, students' interest decreases rapidly.

The analysis of the problem of students' motivation for learning a foreign language, and the data obtained through the sociological survey have brought us to the following conclusions. Non-linguistic students have quite a low level of motivation for learning a foreign language. It causes the necessity of finding the ways of increasing their interest through the use of authentic materials, exciting

methods and learning tools. At the same time, it is necessary to eliminate the imbalance between the students' desire to master a foreign language and insufficient scientific and methodical support of the process of teaching a foreign language.

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Роль мотивации в обучении иностранному языку студентов инженерных специальностей

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Ключевые слова: инженерные специальности; интерференция языка; коммуникативная компетенция; мотивация.

Аннотация: Проанализированы труды отечественных и зарубежных ученых по исследуемой проблематике, теоретически обоснована роль мотивации в процессе обучения иностранному языку студентов инженерных специальностей, представлены результаты социологического опроса по выявлению уровня мотивации к изучению английского языка.

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