

Factors affecting the foreign language teaching quality for the students of the Russian non-linguistic higher educational institutions

Larisa P. Pilat¹, Olga V. Solomintseva¹, Elena M. Shevchenko¹, Irina A. Svintorzhitskaja¹, Larisa I. Ermakova²

¹North Caucasus Federal University (branch) in Pyatigorsk, 40 let Oktyabrya Str., 56, Pyatigorsk, 357530, Russia

²Pyatigorsk State Linguistic University, Kalinina Str., 9, Pyatigorsk, 357530, Russia

Abstract. The processes of integration and internationalization of virtually all areas of human activity, the Russia's entry into the world community and the European educational space, and the need to develop and implement the effective bilingual education programs have made it necessary to know the foreign languages as a factor that increases the opportunities of self-fulfillment for the modern man, and, as a consequence, increasing the importance of "Foreign Language" subject in the Russian higher education system. However, despite the relevance of this academic subject some new negative phenomena and tendencies are saved and appeared, and they prevent the quality learning of foreign languages for the students of non-core (non-linguistic) higher educational institutions. In this article, we are considering the factors affecting the foreign languages teaching quality and the opportunities to make the foreign languages training more effective.

[Pilat L.P., Solomintseva O.V., Shevchenko E.M., Svintorzhitskaja I.A., Ermakova L.I. **Factors affecting the foreign language teaching quality for the students of the Russian non-linguistic higher educational institutions.** *Life Sci J* 2014;11(11s):34-38] (ISSN:1097-8135). <http://www.lifesciencesite.com>. 8

Keywords: State Educational Standard, communicative competence, School System's models, language proficiency, intensification, optimization, motivation, teaching quality, computerization

Introduction

Over the last ten years the authors of many publications on the foreign languages teaching in the non-linguistic higher educational institutions [1, 2, 3, 4, 5], mark the increase in needs of professionals to know a foreign language, due to the integration of our country into the World Economic Community and the European educational space, as well focus their attention on the relevance of the education quality issues.

A combination of social factors gives rise to the social order of society and the State towards the language education. Currently, the goal of learning a foreign language is understood as the student's personality formation, which is able and willing to participate in communication on the intercultural level. The achievement of this goal assumes an interconnected communicative and social and cultural development of students by means of a foreign language, all that defines the specific and general objectives of the course.

After analyzing the State Education Standards for the 32 directions of bachelor degree, approved by the Ministry of Education of the Russian Federation in 2009 and 2010 years and implemented in the Higher Educational Institutions of non-linguistic profile, we have made the following conclusions:

1) according to the State Standard the Bachelor shall be prepared to use a foreign language in his professional activity. During his professional activity a specialist will search, process and storage

information for its further use, i.e. performs the information activity, which is one of the structural components of his professional activity. Accordingly, depending on the specific conditions the informational activity in a foreign language both may be unclaimed or will require the reference to the literature in a foreign language, in this case we should place the learning to read in a foreign language to the forefront. Such requirements of Standards as "Foreign language skills at the level of professional communication" and "At a level not lower than Conversational", require the training of communicative competence in accordance with the Program, where it is specified that "the main objective of the course shall be to improve the beginner level of language skills achieved at the previous stage of education, students mastering in the necessary and appropriate communicative competence to solve the social and communicative problems in different areas of household, cultural, professional and scientific activities when dealing with the foreign partners, well as to the further self-education" [2];

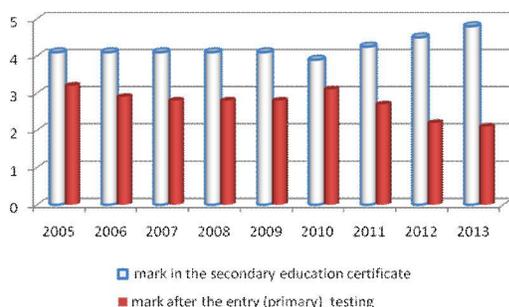
2) the significant differences between the "desired" and "actual" were revealed, i.e. between the requirements of time to a level of language skills and the number of hours allocated to study the "Foreign Language" subject in the non-linguistic higher educational institutions (thus, in the curricula for 2013-2014 academic year the hours spread for the base foreign language course is between 4 and 14

credits at 55-60% of the total number of hours for the independent work).

Concern for the quality, a desire to participate in the implementation of social order of the society in the field of training specialists encourage the foreign language teachers of the higher school to actively discuss the teaching problems, new methods, ways to improve the motivation for learning and teaching the subject. The analysis of publications, the content of the participants' performances in the conferences held annually by the Educational and Methodological Association on linguistic education in the Moscow State Linguistic University allows us to determine the factors affecting the quality foreign language teaching quality of students in the non-linguistic Higher Educational Institutions in conditions of multi-level higher education system. In our opinion, the main of them are the following:

1. Modern student audience is heterogeneous. Firstly, the students of non-linguistic Higher Educational Institutions have different levels of language skills; secondly, the students are different in their relation to studying a foreign language.

Since 2005 the Foreign Languages Department of the Pyatigorsk State University of Humanities and Technology (since 22.08.2012. the "North Caucasus Federal University" branch in Pyatigorsk) has been conducting the monitoring the beginner level of language skills among students. All students enrolled on the first course shall pass a test based on materials of the Unified State Exam (USE), in order to determine the actual level of initial language skills.



It's obviously: 1) the overall level of the initial language skills in the main mass of students under test is quite low; 2) the marks stated in the Secondary Education Certificate are different from the results of the entry testing.

Such a situation can be explained by a number of reasons, the most significant of which are the different school education models, providing a different number of hours spent learning a foreign language, and hence a different volume of knowledge to the final control, the objective personnel

difficulties, experienced by the secondary schools in areas remote from the big human settlements, the fact that the USE in a foreign language is not mandatory, the absence of entrance exam in a foreign language in the Higher Educational Institutions of non-linguistic profile.

It is generally known that learning a foreign language in the Higher Educational Institution is continuing with a chain link "school – university", respectively, the number of hours is not intended of the fact that training will start with "the basics", and is designed to "increase the initial level of language skills achieved in the previous stage of education" [3], i.e. based on the school base knowledge. In addition, we can see both students in the training groups indifferent to study a foreign language, and students who are willing and ready to have a perfect command of English. It is confirmed by the results of the annual survey of 1st year students of all specialties (951 people), that was conducted by the Foreign Languages Department in October 2010 - 2013 in order to identify the students' attitudes toward the "Foreign Language" subject within the development of measures to improve the teaching quality.

The survey results showed us that, in general, students don't get an extra language training before enrolling in the Higher Educational Institution, estimate their ability to learn a foreign language as a "medium" and, although they recognize the need to use it in the professional activities, but mostly they are not ready to spend a lot of time preparing for the lessons and independent work on studying a foreign language. There is a positive, in our view, dynamics – with each passing year more and more students don't mind to increase the number of hours on the "Foreign Language" subject. Definitely, the inevitability of bilingual education, and the implementation of bilingual education programs will play its part in motivating students to learn foreign languages and, in accordance with the principles set forth in the statements of the Council of Europe, will exclude "a foreign language learning as a regular subject" [4].

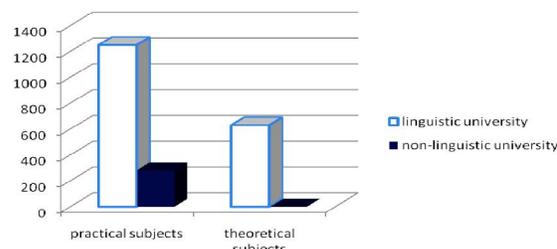
While in the majority of non-linguistic universities in one language subgroup there are students with different initial levels of language training, different attitudes to studying a foreign language, and the different levels of motivation to study it.

2. The number of hours allocated to study of the subject "Foreign Language" for the higher educational institutions of non-linguistic profile, The number of hours allocated to study of the "Foreign Language" subject for the higher educational institutions of non-linguistic profile is not enough to

meet the growing needs of professionals in the foreign language proficiency, as well as the modern requirements to the proficiency in a foreign language as a means of intercultural communication.

It is generally known that the majority of graduates of the linguistic profile universities know a foreign language at a high level, the students already achieve “a sufficient level of communicative competence to solve the social and communicative tasks” after the second year [5], and in accordance with the Federal State Educational Standards of higher professional education of a new generation the students of non-linguistic profile universities shall achieve it, but in the majority they don't. The reasons are obvious: different levels of initial language training, different starting level, different level of motivation, dissimilar possibilities of differentiated education and training through the technical means. The students, who entry the universities of linguistic profile, have the strong basic knowledge, are required to provide the results of the USE in a foreign language, undergo the additional testing for grouping, homogeneous with respect to the knowledge, ready to overcome all the difficulties associated with the foreign languages studying, plus the language laboratories in different variants of complete sets are mandatory for the linguistic universities. The students, who entry the universities of non-linguistic profile mostly have a middle basic knowledge, in the majority are not ready to overcome the challenges of the foreign language studying, because they do not consider it as the most important subject fairly; while the number of hours allocated to the "Foreign Language " subject, respectively, is strikingly different.

To achieve the competence in communicating in a foreign language (oral, written, dialogue, monologue, creation and perception of the text; knowledge and observance of traditions, rituals, etiquette; cross-cultural communication; business correspondence; documentation management, business language; communicative tasks, exposure levels towards the recipient, etc.) the students of non-linguistic profile universities (according to the curriculum for 2012-2013 and 2013-2014 academic years.) have from 54 to 280 of classroom hours for two years training (analysis result of the curriculum of 27 directions of bachelor degree), and students of linguistic profile universities, who have the best starting conditions, have 774 classroom hours and more (analysis result of the curriculum for the direction 035700.62 “Linguistics”), without counting the hours on such theoretical linguistic subject as "Lexicology", "Stylistics", "Translation Theory", "Typology", etc., which to a large extent help to raise the level of foreign language skills:



3. Material and technical base of some higher education institutions may not provide the required level of computerization of the educational process, which prevents the introduction of the latest information technologies, the expense of which the intensification and optimization of foreign languages teaching process is carried out.

In terms of a small number of hours of practical classes for the "Foreign Language" subject in the non-specialized higher educational institutions the most optimal way to reduce the negative influence of the above factors on the foreign languages teaching quality is to attract the new educational technologies, allowing to optimize and intensify the learning process; to use the technical means stimulating the independent work of students and providing the differentiation and individualization of education. Computer training and monitoring programs are becoming an integral part of educational and methodical complex for the foreign language education. Here, the main problem may be the material and technical base of the higher school. Regardless of whether the higher-education teaching personnel itself develop the textbooks, tests, computer programs and tasks for the audio and video materials or the university will buy the original textbooks, that in themselves are the teaching materials and contain all: from the textbook to the tasks for the interactive whiteboard – in any case, in order to conduct lessons according to the modern requirements and using the modern technologies we need a sufficient amount of appropriately equipped classrooms. Unfortunately, some Technical universities of the country still can't afford the required level of computerization for the successful use of the newest technologies.

4. Increase of students' motivation to learn foreign languages is also important part in the struggle for the education quality.

It is obvious that, apart from the ability to learn a foreign language, a key component in learning is the motivation. A lack of motivation and interest in the lesson may be considered as one of the most important destructive signs at the foreign language lesson. Motivation is always object-oriented. It expires, when the goal is achieved, and reduces, if the

goal becomes difficult to achieve, or the motivation does not arise at all, if the goal is not defined. Until now the majority of students didn't have the proper motivation to study the foreign languages.

As it was already noted above, the expansion of international contacts puts before the university graduates the task of studying a foreign language as a tool of professional activities. Foreign language skills are already considered as an index of qualification level for the specialist, as the essential factor of professional and social career. In Russia the work is focusing on entering into the European Educational Space "without borders", when education received in one State guarantees its continuation in another, when the document confirming education gives you the right to receive the appropriate workplace and to continue your education in any country in Europe. For this purpose the work is underway to harmonize the structures, standards, financial and legal support, curricula and programs, document forms for certification, etc. A key process component for the unified European educational and scientific space formation is an academic mobility that provides the access to the education and research programs of different countries, the experience and knowledge sharing, the qualitatively new labor resources formation.

The growth of academic mobility in the spheres of higher professional education provides a high motivation to study the foreign language among the tertiary students, who are ready for the bilingual education programs implementation. The bilingual education allows the student feeling comfortable in a multilingual world, expands the boundaries of thinking, and teaches the art of analysis. The bilingual programs allow a person to not be afraid of misunderstanding the foreign language barrier and make students more adapted to the study of other languages, expand their vocabulary, and develop the speech culture. The studying in several languages at the same time promotes the development of communication skills, memory, makes students more mobile, tolerant, flexible and self-disclosure, and hence more adaptable to the difficulties in the multifaceted and complex world.

In order to bilingual programs work correctly, it is important not only their presence, but also the professionalism of teaching. The bilingual programs may be accompanied only by those universities, where the administration is ready to pay the great attention to studying the foreign languages and foreign cultures, where they seek the way to create the conditions for the maximum immersion into the intercultural language environment. Otherwise, the future professionals will not know any foreign languages or subjects taught in foreign

languages, and therefore will not be able to compete in the global labor market.

To increase and preserve motivations of foreign language learning we should consider the following factors:

- motivation through the setting of realistic learning goals (European Language Portfolio, testing and determination of training level, self-assessment, planning the mastering volume of linguistic material, and learning process intensity);
- motivation through the educational material on the student choice (development of individual learning paths, thematic modules, selection of authentic texts, video and audio materials together with the learner and the professionals from the leading department);
- motivation through the interactive methods of teaching and learning (role-playing games, interviews, competitions, rankings, students conferences, project learning);
- motivation through the active use of information technology (presentations, electronic dictionaries, projects, video films, video records, video chats, Skype training, videoconferences, etc.);
- motivation through the establishment of optimal pedagogical conditions (availability of multimedia teaching tools, comfortable rooms, availability of computer classes, teacher who has the information technology skills as a generator of motivation) [6].

However, we should recognize that the teachers' efforts only are not enough to improve the foreign language teaching quality at the Higher School Institutions and the students' motivation to study it. Without any support from the side of the higher educational institutions' management it's impossible to take such measures as:

- introduction of mandatory beginner level testing of students' knowledge, followed by distribution in groups to provide the differentiated approach;
- increase the number of hours on the "Foreign Language" subject, depending on the desired model of language training;
- ensuring the computerization level that takes advantage of the latest technologies in the educational process;
- support the students' motivation to learn a foreign language through the internships in the language-speaking countries and participation in the bilingual education programs.

Authors of the concept of total quality management, Deming and Juran, well as their followers in the field of quality management in the Schmoller University, Lewis and Seymour, believe

that namely the interest and active participation of senior officials in the quality matters is a critical success factor. The quality is impossible without changes at the strategic management level, and it means that the leadership belongs to the people, who held the central management positions and have in connection with this a broad authority in the decision-making sector. The quality is impossible from the bottom up, it is only possible from the top down, because it requires changes in the system, and only the management has a power to change something in the system. And if at the level of senior management the decision "quality to be" was made, then you shall create such conditions for the team in which the quality is possible, in order to have the right to demand this quality later. If the staff is poorly trained and not motivated, and the workplaces are not suitably equipped, the management can't realize their bold ideas and introduce the modern technologies, even if they are available [7].

In conclusion we can make the following findings:

- the current situation demands from the university graduates to know the foreign language to the extent necessary for the professional activity and communication on an intercultural level;
- there are several factors that negatively affect the teaching quality of foreign languages in the non-linguistic higher educational institutions;
- a real increase of the foreign languages teaching quality is only possible as a result of the joint efforts of the Universities' administration and teachers.

Corresponding Author:

Dr. Pilat Larisa P.
North Caucasus Federal University (branch) in
Pyatigorsk
40 let Oktyabrya Str., 56, Pyatigorsk, 357530, Russia

References

1. Trim, I.L.M., 1992. Language teaching in the perspective of the predictable requirements of the twenty-first century. *AILA Review*, 9: 23-31; Syrja,
2. Rachel Carrillo, September 2011. *How to Reach and Teach English Language Learners: Practical Strategies to Ensure Success*, pp: 272;
3. Beales, Mark, May 14, 2012. *Teaching English: How to Teach English as a Second Language (ESL)*. MAGB Publishing;
4. Davis, Bonnie M. (Marie), July 2012. *How to Teach Students Who Don't Look Like You: Culturally Responsive Teaching Strategies*. Edition 2. SAGE Publications;
5. Boltatova, T.A., 2013. Teaching students of language faculties of communication through the web. *Scientific opinion*. No. 3, pp: 31-32.
6. "Foreign Language" Program for the non-linguistic Higher Educational Institutions and faculties. 2011. M.: Ministry of Education and Science of RF. Scientific and methodological board for foreign languages, pp: 4.
7. "Foreign Language" Program for the non-linguistic Higher Educational Institutions and faculties. 2011. M.: Ministry of Education and Science of RF. Scientific and methodological board for foreign languages, pp: 3.
8. O'Riagen P. and G. Lyudi, 2003. "Bilingual Education: key strategic goals". Project, the Council for the Cultural Cooperation, Education Committee, Department of Language Policy. Publishing House: Moscow State Linguistic University.
9. "Foreign Language" Program for the non-linguistic Higher Educational Institutions and faculties. 2011. M.: Ministry of Education and Science of RF. Scientific and methodological board for foreign languages. pp: 5.
10. Bogdanova, N.V., 2012. *Izvestiya Journal of the Russian State Pedagogical University named after A.I. Gertsena*, Edition 150. Participants' motivation of the Academic Mobility Programs during the language training. pp: 171-178.
11. Seymour, D., 1992. *Causing Quality in Higher Education*. Macmillan Publishing Company, pp: 128.

6/26/2014