

ESP/EMP: ARE STUDENTS PREPARED FOR IT?

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Abstract. *ESP is considered the best choice in tertiary education context as it meets the students' needs and consequently boosts motivation. However, the results of needs analysis applied while designing the course and the students' awareness of their needs when using the language in professional communication may differ. The survey of 1st year students conducted at Sechenov University (Moscow, Russia) between 2014 and 2019 revealed only partial awareness of the needs. The possible solution may be either creating 'first-hand' experience (students' exposure to the situations where they have to use respective ESP skills), or 'second-hand' experience (students' exposure to communication with professionals in their prospective sphere of employment who are regularly using ESP skills).*

Key words: *medical education, professional communication, ESP, motivation*

1. INTRODUCTION

Students' motivation as a factor of successful second language acquisition is receiving perpetual attention worldwide. Inspired by Robert Gardner and Wallace Lambert, who developed basic classification of motives for second language learning back in 1959, motivation research in the perspective of SLA has extended to English for Specific Purposes. Researchers look at a variety of aspects of motivation, some theoretical, some more practically oriented, such as motivational evolution (Dörnyei 2005), specificity of academic content and motivation (Dudley-Evans, St. John 1998), motivation and learning environment (Bier 2013, Lavinal, Décuré, Blois 2006), students' emotions during the lesson (Waninge 2015), students' orientations and incentives while taking an ESP course (Katsara 2008), motivational aspect of methodology (Viana 2014), insufficient motivation (Houbad 2016), etc.

The authors generally agree that students' motivation while doing an ESP course is mostly extrinsic, in R. Gardner's terms, or instrumental, which basically means that they are goal-oriented and see foreign language skills as a useful tool to perform extra-linguistic tasks ranging from getting a better-paid job to going abroad to learn, to tourism surprisingly (Katsara 2008). ESP course is beneficial both for the students, as unnecessary parts are not included into the course, and for the university, as it adds efficiency to teaching and learning and makes the course cost-effective.

However, the aspect that stays beyond consideration is how aware the students are of their own needs. It comes to the forefront when the students are relatively young, have no

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experience in the specialist area they have chosen, have an EGP background and have to quickly switch to ESP. The discrepancy between their expectations about the course and the real classroom situation may have long-term implications for their interest in the subject.

2. SETTING

Sechenov University has a long tradition of educating healthcare specialists in a variety of spheres ranging from General Medicine, Nursing and Stomatology to related spheres, such as Clinical Psychology, Pharmacy, Biotechnology, etc. For any of the degree programmes, Foreign Language is compulsory and forms an integral part of training. It is strictly aimed at professional communication and not bound to any level of reference. Vast majority of students in Russia choose to learn English bearing in mind its undoubtedly leading role in international communication.

Unlike similar programs in European Union universities, learning a foreign language in Russia is an absolute must. In terms of the curriculum, it is an indispensable part of future qualification. In terms of actual needs, it fills the gap left over from secondary education, where the attention to the subject is insufficient. Although Foreign Language is a compulsory subject at school, the exam in it is taken only if required by the university the applicant is joining, i.e. if they apply for a course in Philology or Modern Languages. As a result, first-year students of a medical university make up a group with skills in foreign language ranging from zero to Intermediate.

First introduced as a single 2-year-long module, Foreign Language has developed in time together with the National Curriculum. Until recently, oral communication has not been recognized as a major goal of training and the course was restricted to basic grammar, text comprehension, summarizing, and translating it into Russian. It built on the issues studied in Human Anatomy, Physiology and Pathology – the courses taken in Year 1 and Year 2.

The current version of National Curriculum requires that graduates should be able to communicate orally and in writing in Russian and a foreign language while tackling professional tasks. This requirement has stimulated a rethinking of the syllabus and introduction of a number of elective courses, such as Oral and Written Professional Communication, Professional Competences in Non-Russian-Speaking Environment, Business Communication in Foreign Language and Foreign Language for Academic Purposes, which are to accommodate for the needs inspired by international academic environment: taking an internship abroad, participating in academic events and international research projects, publishing articles in international journals, teaching international students etc.

Thus, the list of “communication formats” taught at Sechenov University includes:

- *communication in academic setting* (listening to a lecture, reading a textbook, note-taking, identifying, understanding and expressing the main idea, supporting details, comparison and contrast, stance, arguments, references, cause and effect, applying for participation in a research conference, writing and submitting research articles, reading and summarizing articles in a foreign language,) – 70 per cent of instruction time;
- *clinical communication, which includes: doctor-doctor communication* (participating in clinical and research conferences, understanding and completing hospital charts,

understanding and writing letters of reference, discharge letters, etc.) – 20 per cent of instruction time; *doctor-patient communication* (taking a history, examining the patient, discussing diagnosis, explaining investigations, treatment, effects of medication, etc.) – 10 per cent of instruction time.

Time allocation is based on the probability of the graduates' future involvement in retrieving (most probable) or sharing (less probable) professionally relevant information from foreign language sources or providing care for non-Russian-speaking patients (the least probable). The probability was drawn from the results of an anonymous survey of 348 respondents (faculty members, medical practitioners at university and municipal hospitals, dispensaries and out-patient clinics, pharmacists based at community or hospital pharmacies and pharmaceutical companies) performed in 2011-2012 as part of needs analysis for a new ESP/EMP course for graduates (Марковина, Шириян 2012). In the survey, 47 per cent of respondents admitted the need for a foreign language to read professional publications, 20 per cent – to take part in academic conferences, and 11 per cent – to go on a short-term assignment abroad.

3. AIM

The logical chain adopted from numerous works on motivation seems to lack an important final link overlooked in the majority of cases - that *the students know what exactly they need*. Without this awareness, needs analysis, however carefully performed it might be, does not serve the purpose of motivation.

ESP is motivating because of its relevance for the students



It is relevant for the students because it is based on students' needs,

Therefore, the aim of this study is to reveal students' awareness of professionally relevant goals at the beginning of an ESP course.

4. MATERIALS AND METHODS

To obtain the data required, we developed a questionnaire for the students of Year 1 of Sechenov University, which, alongside with the questions about age, gender, and the degree programme they were taking, included the questions "Why did you decide to join Sechenov University?" and "How do you see the role of the English language in your professional career?" We surveyed the students enrolled for General Medicine, Stomatology, Pharmacy, Paediatrics, and Clinical Psychology programmes. The students were asked to complete the questionnaire in their first class of the English language. The questionnaires were completed in Russian (the students' mother tongue). Between 2014 and 2019, 1561 completed questionnaires were returned. We grouped them according to the leading reason for joining Sechenov University verbalized by the students surveyed. The descriptions of the role of the English language in the professional career offered by the students were analyzed using content analysis method.

5. RESULTS

We grouped the students into 5 categories according to the reason for entering Sechenov University they stated in the questionnaire:

‘Altruists’ – 561 (36 per cent) – wrote that they chose career in medicine, psychology or pharmacy “to help people/sick children/patients”.

‘Enthusiasts’ – 493 (31 per cent) – named a particular field of study (cardiology, oncology, radiography, etc.) or a sphere of application (I want to open a pharmacy/to produce new-generation prostheses).

‘Dreamers’ – 251 (16 per cent) – answered that being a doctor was “the dream of their childhood”.

‘Professionally oriented’ – 168 (11 per cent) – admitted following a family tradition or continuing professional development (had already worked as nurses).

‘Fatalists’ – 88 (6 per cent) – answered that they “had been led here by God/fate/life trajectory”.

The students surveyed named the following six goals of learning the English language. In general, they focus on:

- immediate communication (communicating with foreign colleagues, communicating with foreign patients and communicating with foreign citizens) – here the students write “I need the English language to talk to...” and name the counterpart. In goals focusing on participation, education and employment communication is only implied or indirect, i.e. ‘reading’ is communication but it is mediated; ‘sharing knowledge’ is definitely communication, but its form and the counterpart are not specified;
- participation (participating in conferences, sharing practices);
- education (taking an internship, reading publications, getting education, learning abroad, sharing knowledge, improving the quality of knowledge, acquainting with foreign equipment);
- employment (getting a job abroad);
- personal development (self-improvement, having new opportunities, widening one’s horizons) .

These goals are unevenly distributed among the groups (Table 1).

Table 1 Distribution of stated goals among student groups

Goals stated in questionnaires	Altruists	Enthusiasts	Dreamers	Professionally oriented	Fatalists
communicating with foreign colleagues	+				
communicating with foreign patients				+	
communicating with foreign citizens			+		
taking an internship		+		+	
participating in conferences		+		+	
reading publications	+			+	
sharing practices	+	+			
getting a job abroad	+	+			
getting education	+				
learning abroad			+	+	
sharing knowledge			+		
improving quality of knowledge			+		
acquainting with foreign equipment				+	
self-improvement					+
having new opportunities					+
widening one's horizons	+				

As we can see from the table, when asked about the role of a foreign language in their career, **altruists** specify that it is necessary “to get a job abroad”, “to communicate with foreign colleagues”, “to read publications”, “to share practices”, “to widen one’s horizons”, “to get education”.

Enthusiasts mention “getting a job abroad”, “taking an internship”, “taking part in conferences” and “sharing practices”. In this group, in contrast to the altruists, there are also stand-alone answers like “every educated person has to master a foreign language”.

Dreamers see the goal of learning a foreign language at the university as “learning abroad”, “sharing knowledge”, “improving the quality of knowledge”, “communicating with foreign citizens”.

Professionally oriented ones state that learning a foreign language will help them “read medical publications”, “go abroad to learn”, “take an internship abroad”, “take part in conferences”, “talk to non-Russian-speaking patients”, “acquaint themselves with equipment produced outside Russia”.

Fatalists name “self-improvement” as the main goal of learning a foreign language and hope “it will give new opportunities” without specifying which ones.

6. DISCUSSION

6.1. Is language really a means of communication?

The phrase ‘language is a means of communication’ has become a truism of Linguistics. However, its habitual character does not downgrade the truth of it. The ultimate goal of learning a language is using it in communication. From this viewpoint we looked at the ways in which communication is mentioned in the students’ answers and who they refer to as their probable counterparts. Here, we did not take into account such answers as “get a job abroad”, “take an internship abroad”, “go abroad to learn,” as they are related to communication in an indirect way: to become a candidate for University sponsorship the student needs a certificate rather than skills.

Altruists name three spheres of communication: communicate with foreign colleagues, read publications and share practices.

Enthusiasts – take part in conferences, and share practices.

Dreamers – share knowledge, communicate with foreign citizens.

Professionally Oriented students – read publications, take part in conferences, talk to non-Russian-speaking patients, acquaint themselves with equipment produced outside Russia.

Fatalists – communication is not mentioned.

As probable counterpart in communication Altruists and Enthusiasts see **colleagues**, Dreamers – foreign **citizens** or **co-eds** (share knowledge) - which does not necessarily imply professional communication, and Professionally Oriented – **patients**.

Thus 94 per cent of students surveyed show awareness of at least one sphere of professional communication they will be involved in. The majority – 78 per cent – are aware of future involvement in communication with colleagues, 16 per cent are aware of involvement in communication in educational settings, but do not mention communication with colleagues, 11 per cent mention doctor-patient communication alongside with communication with colleagues, 6 per cent do not show awareness of formats of professional communication. Furthermore, the same 6 per cent of respondents do not name or even imply communication as the goal of learning the language either. Not a single respondent named all formats of communication. Nor could we find the full list of formats when analyzing the answers through the groups. Professionally oriented students show the best understanding of using foreign language skills in professional setting: their answers are usually longer than in other groups and include no less than 3 items. This may be explained by a better perception of the future sphere of employment due to their educational, professional or family background. This means that they have first- or at least second-hand experience in the professional sphere.

6.2. What are you?

Content analysis of the students’ questionnaires gives exciting information of their L2 self image, i.e. learners’ visions “of what they might become, what they would like to become, and what they are afraid of becoming” (Dörnyei, 2009: 11). Seventy eight per cent of the respondents – **altruists**, **enthusiasts** and **professionally oriented** see themselves as future professionals regularly updating their skills through reading, sharing practices, taking internships, familiarization with new technologies and equipment, involved in research, building a business, seeking a job abroad, looking after patients. This is a self image of an adult, independent, career-oriented person. Sixteen per cent of the respondents – **dreamers** – see themselves as people who ‘learn’, gain and share

'knowledge', i.e. they verbalize the self image of a student. Their answers never go beyond this point to what they are going to do after they have completed the course. Learning for the sake of learning can be associated with intrinsic motivation, where knowledge or a particular skill is acquired because the student loves the subject or finds the process of learning exciting. Being in itself a powerful instrument in learning, purely intrinsic motivation is more associated with the attitude of a secondary school student than a career-driven university student. The reference to 'childhood' and 'dream' made by this group when naming the reason why they joined Sechenov University suggests that they may see tertiary education in general as prolonged childhood with its absence of responsibility and the necessity to think about the material aspects of life. Still another L2 self image is evident from the questionnaires of **fatalists** (6 per cent of respondents). The students in this group identify with 'people of culture' with 'broad opportunities', which rather refers to a social group than professional environment. Their motivation may be described as integrative since self-improvement can hardly be considered a professional goal.

7. CONCLUSION

Learning a foreign language makes up an indispensable part of education in General Medicine, Pharmacy and related professional spheres. ESP/EMP facilitates students' cognitive skills necessary to familiarize with and utilize professionally relevant information, provides for self-education, participation in research, develops communication and intercultural skills, and improves employment opportunities. Moreover, it is one of the few humanities left on the curriculum in the medical university. Given its importance combined with the limited amount of instruction time, we need the students to stay focused on every single skill and every single portion of the language they are going to learn, which is unavailable without a clear understanding of how and where they are going to use it.

The survey showed that the first-year Russian medical students (Sechenov University taken as an example) are not quite aware of the skills they need to acquire while doing an ESP/EMP course. Twenty two per cent of the students are unaware of their needs in ESP/EMP, 78 per cent of the students show partial awareness of the needs. The best awareness of needs comes from first- or at least second-hand experience in the professional sphere. First-hand experience can be obtained either through workplace learning, which starts when the ESP course is already over and usually does not involve communication with non-Russian-speaking colleagues or patients, or through previous employment in the sphere of healthcare. Second-hand experience means having family or friends employed in healthcare. This is true about only 16 per cent of students surveyed.

With this in mind, the professionally relevant goals of ESP/EMP course need careful explanation. It can be provided in a number of settings, e.g. introduction of a special module into career education programme in subject-oriented education classes in secondary high school, or an orientation session before the start of the ESP/EMP course at university arranged by language teachers in collaboration with healthcare professionals speaking to emphasize the role of the English language in their career. In a broader context, the study of students' expectations about a language course at university can have implications not only for the practice of teaching, focusing and motivating the group. Their expectations may be culture-specific, specialty-specific, they may change with time, and these aspects need further research that would be inter-university and international.

Search engine results give links to a wealth of ESP information ranging from journal articles, books, research papers, to teacher's resources and online language lessons, but to our knowledge do not reveal a platform for communication aimed at university ESP teachers. Such platform could help resolve organizational issues of international ESP teacher collaboration and could be used not only to inspire and design ESP research but also to facilitate online communication among teachers, sharing best practices and learning from others. It would be also beneficial for university ESP students who would share their experience at using the English language as a *lingua franca* in their professional sphere. There, they could come across 'first-hand experience' which gives a focus to language learning and definitely fosters motivation.

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