

RUSSIAN RESEARCHERS NEED TO BE FLUENT IN ENGLISH

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Abstract. *The paper addresses one of the issues of Russian higher education: the English language course efficiency at postgraduate level. The small scale research explored to what extent the postgraduate English language syllabus is currently capable of meeting the demands of the Russian government and the expectations of postgraduate students. The paper presents some evidence (government acts and syllabus statement analysis together with the postgraduate students' survey) which proved that the current English language syllabi are failing to assist universities in fully meeting the expectations of the government and the demands of future researchers and scientists. Suggestions are made regarding the improvement of syllabus statement in the light of the most recent ELT methodology and syllabus design, which is necessary for the overall improvement but not sufficient. To make it all sufficient there has to be an educational change managed - planned and implemented - at each university level in order to bring about the desirable educational change, to be later evaluated through the success indicators suggested. The overall conclusion of the paper is that an effective English language training at postgraduate level can make an important contribution into facilitating the depth and the speed of postgraduates integration into the world's academic and research community by enabling them to publish high citation research papers in English and to lecture and teach in English both inside and outside Russia.*

Key words: *educational issues, internalization of education, globalization of education, needs analysis, linguistic auditing, postgraduate studies, English syllabus and course design, language training program, English for Specific purposes, English for Academic Purposes.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Russian research and development have changed a lot in the Internet era: most of the national research has been merged with an English-language global science and has become part of the global source. And yet Russian science still remains alarmingly separated from global science. Russian Academia retains a strong national identity, with most of the national research still conducted only and exclusively in Russian and not published internationally. Even though Russian science has made many essential contributions to world science in many areas its current position globally is still surprisingly weak. One obvious reason behind that is: Russian research remains almost “invisible” (Marginson, 2014) to the global scientific community due to low global publication and citation rates. Hence the country's weak performance in research rankings. “Between 1995 and 2012, international co-authorship of journal papers increased by 168 per cent at the world level –

and grew by a factor of ten in China – but the number of internationally co-authored papers rose by only 35 per cent in Russia” (Marginson, 2014).

In the age of globalization in all spheres including science and research Russia has struggled to integrate into the world’s academic and research community with various degrees of success. Its overall achievement and speed of integration have not been sufficient so far to ensure the presence of Russian research in the international academic arena. Due to their lack of English language proficiency, many Russian scientists and researchers lack the ability to merge with the international academic and research community. They do not receive full access to global science knowledge and cutting-edge expertise, nor can they meaningfully contribute and feed into the global science development. The lack of English language proficiency will not allow the Russian researchers to build international networking that facilitates their mobility. Sadly, Russian scientists lack international profile and presence within the growing web-based publishing in English and, being somewhat disengaged from the global science, they are bound to fall behind. “No single country, regardless of its size, can develop all important new knowledge on its own...; there are too many other sources of new ideas” (Marginson, 2014).

English has truly become the “lingua franca” of the global science and research, hence the need for top-quality language training in Academic English oral and written discourse at all stages of higher education beyond the bachelor’s degree level. When it comes to language learning, it cannot be a sprint, it should be a marathon because there is a need for a systemic growth of language proficiency throughout higher education in Russia so that postgraduate students can massively demonstrate potential to be fluent and active in English, the global language of science, technology and innovation. The English language proficiency can tremendously facilitate joint authorship, international research project work and student and faculty mobility.

The English language courses offered to postgraduate students are widely considered by educators and scholars to be so inefficient that some of them even argue that there is no need for a foreign language course and that acquiring language proficiency should be postgraduate students' responsibility. Some convincing evidence can be found in the public discussion of the leading Russian scholars who took part in the 3d International Regional IGIP Conference that was published (Educational Studies, 2013, N6, p.132-157). The Panel discussion “Postgraduate course curriculum” took place on 20 March 2013 as part of the III International Conference IGIP and methodological seminar “Innovative pedagogic technologies in the education of engineers” in which the leading educators discussed and debated a wide range of the postgraduate education problem areas. Among other things it was suggested that foreign languages should not be among the postgraduate curriculum taught disciplines because all the postgraduate students are expected to demonstrate the adequate language proficiency for the future academic or research career. The language proficiency of the major postgraduate student population across the universities and across the research areas ranges from A2 to B2 at the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR), with students at C1 level being a rare exception. Postgraduate students massively demonstrate C1 level only in a limited range of fields such as philology, linguistics, management and international relations. There have been voices against the English course being part of the taught postgraduate curriculum. The main argument advocating the English course was the following: the current level of the postgraduate students is low and far below the required language proficiency for a modern researcher, who needs to access global science, collaborate internationally, publish/co-publish in English and possibly teach

in English as well. Whenever there is a postgraduate student with advanced language proficiency it is most likely to have been achieved outside university. A postgraduate student, according to the higher education standard, should be well-prepared for international research, industry and academic career. Young scholars should be well-equipped to work on research projects both inside and outside Russia as part of international team of researchers; to work for a research laboratory of a multinational corporation or industry and to teach and lecture in English for an international body of students in any university in the world.

Multiple alarming indicators of postgraduate English language syllabi being neither efficient nor popular among postgraduate students can be found in any Russian university. Widely discussed evidence such as low attendance rates, low profile of the English language course, quite unimpressive outcomes and low customer satisfaction suggests that the offered English language training is generally perceived as not quite useful or helpful by the target audience. Unfortunately, this point of view is widely shared by postgraduate students' supervisors, who manifest this kind of attitude through their low motivation to collaborate with the English language teachers: subject teachers do not lend themselves to co-teaching and/or co-teaching where there is a need, e.g. consulting the English language course designers, taking part in conferences and seminars delivered in English, approving the specific glossary terminology selection, oral and poster presentations content assessment, etc. These observations are based on our own experience and also on multiple discussions with the participants of various training events focused on the issues of teaching English for Specific Purposes across university curriculum disciplines and across a wide range of the Russian Federation regions.

Consequently, a widely shared disappointment with the unimpressive outcomes of the English language training programs at postgraduate level is evoking primarily two kinds of reaction: the English language course being part of the postgraduate taught curriculum is being questioned or there is a need and a call for a change. This paper is for those who are searching for ways of innovating postgraduate English language training programs in the direction of raising their value and enabling future scientists and young researchers to become competitive on the international academic and research market both as researchers and university lecturers and professors.

The article offers a small-scale baseline study, postgraduate student needs analysis, a micro roadmap to innovation required postgraduate student progress and achievement metrics and implemented change success and efficiency indicators.

2. AN OVERVIEW OF THE CURRENT SITUATION: A BASELINE STUDY

The overall aim of this research has been to explore if the English language training offered to postgraduate students effectively meets the stakeholder's expectations and needs. "But with respect to higher education, there are different categories of customers representing distinct stakeholders. For instance, from the standpoint of students the quality of higher education refers to what happens in the classroom. The same holds true for the authorities of institutions, although they may focus on other aspects as well. But quality has a different meaning from the perspective of employers, who look for graduates as sources of manpower, but also for governments that are the main funders of higher education. In addition, quality may have a different meaning at different moments in time or in distinct geographical regions. Taking all these considerations into account, Harvey and Green [1993] have grouped the

widely differing conceptualizations of quality into five discrete but interrelated categories—quality can be viewed as exception, perfection, fitness for purpose, value for money, or transformative. Consequently, determining criteria for assessing quality in higher education requires an understanding of different conceptions of quality that inform the preferences of stakeholders. In this respect, employers may focus on exception, governments on value for money, students and authorities of institutions on fitness for purpose, starting thereby from descriptors for undergraduate and graduate programs and learning outcomes.” (Eric de Corte, 2014) “Fitness for purpose” is primarily being scrutinized in this paper.

This small-scale investigation searches for an answer to the three research questions:

1. How effectively do the Russian universities respond to the current government’s commission through their post-graduate English language syllabi?
2. Do the universities respond to their post-graduate students’ needs and expectations through their English language syllabi?
3. What needs to be done to improve the situation for the better and to increase the efficiency of the English language syllabi at the postgraduate level?

The suggested hypothesis is that the English Language syllabi fail to meet the demands of the recent Russian government acts and the established priorities for the post-graduate level of higher education as well as to deliver on the expected objectives. Consequently, the syllabi do not adequately respond to the post-graduate students’ needs and expectations.

This study explores the current situation in the light of the previous research in the area of syllabi examination and student needs analysis. Although the study cannot impact educational outcomes, it can serve as a model for future studies in this area.

2.1. Postgraduate education’s mission, aims and objectives in the light of recent Higher Education Acts and government expectations

Russia has been working on the meaningful participation in the Bologna Process since 1995 and the Administration of the President of the Russian Federation asked for proposals and recommendations concerning the formation of the Common European Space in Science, Education and Culture. The Bologna process challenged Russia as the country recovering from isolation and stagnation would not want to jeopardize its national education tradition and the integrity of Russian schools, traditions and methods. Russia would neither blindly follow the external standards nor allow for anything to be externally imposed.

The Russian higher education system has to face new challenges like internalization of higher education, increased competition on the global market for educational services and the emergence of the growing sector of educational business, including online learning and franchising of academic programs and the Emergence of Information Society. There is a demand for international academic mobility too. Russia has clearly been making an effort to become part of the global educational and research space following the founding documents of the Bologna process: Magna Charta Universitatum (1988), the Sorbonne Declaration (1998) and the Bologna Declaration (1999). By comparing these documents to the Russian Law on Higher Education (1996) one can easily discover that the Russian higher education system is still rather conservative and inert and, unfortunately, still plagued by corruption (a widely discussed quality of fee-paying PhD degrees, etc.) And, unlike many other EU member states, Russia insists on Bologna process being a two-way street, a give-and-take game and mutual accommodation. While the 4-year baccalaureate

has already been established in Russia, and the Master's degree has been promoted all over the country by now, postgraduate studies have not been moving away from the present Russian system of Candidate and Doctor of sciences towards a standard Ph.D.

The role of the Ministry of Education and Science has declined and the role of the Academic and Methodological Departments of the Universities (UMO) has increased. Consequently, the ratio of the regulated parameters concerning the contents of higher education in Russia (the so-called Standards) is falling and allows for greater academic mobility. Academic leadership will invariably be granted to the most prominent Russian universities which enjoy special federal status and a greater degree of autonomy in their own policy making. The cooperation between Russian and foreign universities can also be a powerful forum for creating the European Higher Education Area and the most promising and far-reaching form is a joint educational programs featuring guest-lecturing, joint course design, program planning, assessment procedures and criteria development. Perhaps, the most challenging areas of cooperation are quality assurance and administrative effectiveness in facilitating student mobility.

In 2013 the president of Russia announced the "5-100-2020" program according to which there should be five Russian universities in the global top 100 by the year 2020. Government funding has been allocated to the selected 15 universities in order to achieve this ambitious goal. The President's ambition is that Russia with all its intellectual potential should compete for the leading position in the global research and development. One obvious educational issue is the problem of accreditation of the higher education establishments by an independent agency, which would be open, transparent and easily accessible to the Western educational experts. OECD Science, Technology and Innovation Outlook 2014 publication presents global overall innovation performance and policy trends and national strategies for STI. According to this report national innovation hubs are increasingly connected to global networks and engaged more in international cooperation. The OECD section on the Russian Federation reports on one of the hot issues for our country: "Russia has few internationally renowned universities and its researchers publish little in high-impact international Science and Technology journals." (p. 408)

Moscow State University is the 80th in the Academic Ranking of World Universities and the 190th in QS ranking. St Petersburg State University is only among the 400 in ARWU and not rated by QS. Therefore, according to the No. 211 Decree of the Russian Federation government dated 16 March 2013 an international Council on competitive growth of leading Russian universities has been set up, headed by the minister of education and science D. Livanov. The goal of the Program "5-100-2020" is to ensure that by 2020 not fewer than five Russian universities will be in the top 100 of leading world universities QS World University Rankings. 15 universities of Russia have been selected on a competitive basis to get the Ministry of Education and Science funding (\$ 2 billion or RUB 40 billion within 2014-2016) for the purpose of their competitive growth among leading world research and educational institutions. The competition was one of the measures taken to implement provisions of the Decree of the Russian Federation President "On education and science national policy implementation" of 7 May 2012.

Every selected university has developed a Road map of the program "5-100-2020" to ensure among many other things: recruitment of executives having experience in leading foreign and Russian universities and scientific institutions; bringing young scientists with experience in leading foreign universities and research institutions; intensified academic mobility of scientists and teachers at the international level; introduction of educational

programs that are being co-certified together with the leading foreign universities; bringing students from leading foreign universities to study in Russian universities; scientific research work on fundamental scientific studies in the Russian Federation, including involvement of leading foreign and Russian scientists for their supervision; applied scientific research and development projects together with Russian and international high technology organizations.

Key success indicators for the leading Russian universities which have been selected to take part in this national project are the following: statistics of joint publications, international academic mobility, visiting professors, international research projects and international research and educational excellence centers.

One important criterion of QS world university rankings is citations per faculty which is growing due to every faculty member Hirsh index. The above mentioned Decree of the Russian Federation President “On the measures to implement national policy in education and science” required that Russian research share in the Web of Science increase to 2,44% by 2015. This means that internationally published papers by Russian researchers have to be in English, which makes academic writing skills development one of the top priorities among the Russian research community. There are three most widely used success indicators: citation index, Hirsh-index and impact factor.

The top priority aims and objectives set at the national research and development policy level are already strong indicators of quite low level of the Russian government satisfaction with the current position of Russia on the global STI arena and the higher education outcomes. There is a clear task for the leading universities to respond to this need in the nearest future. The low language proficiency is one of the many good reasons behind the described situation and therefore there is a need to have a critical look at the foreign language component of the postgraduate curriculum, namely the English language syllabi.

In the independent external experts’ view Russia also has to improve the language ability of its promising researchers: “Language ability is the key to international research collaboration, which is where much of world science is moving. Between 1995 and 2012, the total number of journal articles with international co-authors rose by 168 per cent, much faster than journal articles as a whole, which rose by 47 per cent—another sign of the growing weight of the globalization of knowledge in the single world science system. In East Asia, joint publishing grew by anywhere from 8–12 times, depending on the country, as Table 8 shows. In Russia, the number of jointly published articles rose by just one-third. It is another sign of the remarkable lack of global engagement that characterizes intellectual life in Russia. Despite the opening up of Russian society in the late 1980s at the end of the Soviet period and the twenty years of relatively open international travel and communications since 1992, the science system remains surprisingly closed” (Marginson, 2014, p.20).

Having analyzed the interim results of over five-year operation of targeted universities, of the national university program and of the first phase of international laboratory activities under the 2020 Project, Frumin and Salmi concluded that the chosen strategies (university merges, selective funding of “the chosen few”, etc.) had low impact on promoting Russian universities in global rankings. Frumin and Salmi’s paper gives a detailed description of the initiatives implemented over the past fifteen years in Canada, Denmark, Finland, China, Hong Kong, Japan, Australia, Norway, South Korea, Germany, Spain, Israel, France and other countries of the world. According to the authors international experience convincingly demonstrates that “projects designed to make Russian universities more competitive should

have the following objectives: a) active development of multidisciplinary centers of excellence and postgraduate programs in major universities; b) targeted funding to support promising young researchers; c) internationalization of education; d) reformation of the management system” (Frumin and Salmi, 2013).

By internalization of education Frumin and Salmi mean the explosive growth of web-based international publications, extensive educational exchange, attracting talent and bringing the research elite back to take the leading positions in universities, introducing courses in English, making English the medium of instruction, design and delivery of academic programs in partnerships with the leading universities and launching international research projects. Salmi in his research paper “Road to Academic Excellence” (2014) suggests the two factors which can facilitate any university short term growth: firstly, by strengthening the university teaching staff through attracting the ex-patriots back, and, secondly, by introducing English as a medium of instruction. Among the ARWU top 100 universities there are 11 universities which offer courses in English (which is not the official language of the country), these countries include Denmark, Finland, Israel, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden and Switzerland.

All the above-mentioned studies make it crystal clear that one of the most effective short term strategy for any university to improve its rating is internalization and language training in English - an international language of global research and development – is essential. Competently designed syllabus - needs-based and goal-oriented – should be the starting point to re-examine and innovate the English language training program that will effectively provide the shortcut to the destination.

2.2. Postgraduate students’ needs, wants, lacks and expectations

Many of the postgraduate students at St Petersburg State University are not fully prepared to meet the rigorous challenges of either speaking or writing about their research in English. Those few who have published internationally or have spoken at international conferences or have been part of international projects have to do a lot of extra work on top of their English course. Many of the postgraduate students do not consider any international opportunities due to the limitations in their foreign language proficiency. A number of the students are not even aware of the whole world of opportunities outside their universities. Quite often their lack of English language proficiency does not allow them to be competitive on the labor market and to compete for the unique professional opportunities on the international academic and research arena.

Postgraduate students are the target population of this small-scale research and its overall aim is to explore their perceived needs in the form of a survey. The postgraduate students’ needs analysis has been carried out in the form of a questionnaire with the suggested list of their possible needs for them to indicate the ones which they view as their top priority and with an open item for them to add what is possibly missing on that list. The scope of this research has been limited to the postgraduates of the Institute of Chemistry and the Physics Department of St Petersburg State University. There are about 90 postgraduate students at each faculty and only two thirds of the overall number of 90 postgraduate students have responded. So, 62 respondents have been surveyed and, hopefully, this number can be considered as representative enough for the planned needs analysis.

The survey list of postgraduate students' needs is represented in the table 1 together with the statistics of their responses.

Table 1 The survey statistics

Suggested needs	Statistics	
	Number (out of 62)	%
<i>Oral communication in the global educational and research community within the scope of your area of specialization and research:</i>		
Prepared talk or presentation	54	87%
Unprepared spontaneous interactive speech, e.g. responding to questions, panel discussion, round table, academic debate, etc.	46	74%
Lecturing in English	11	18%
Average:		60%
<i>Working with academic texts:</i>		
Abstracting	53	85%
Editing and self-editing	28	46%
Synopsis writing	23	37%
Reviewing	13	21%
Average:		47%
<i>Academic writing:</i>		
Research paper writing for publication	58	94%
Self-editing a paper according to the editor's/reviewer's feedback	23	37%
Academic report writing	44	71%
Average:		67%
<i>Integrating into the global research community:</i>		
Grant proposal and research proposal	56	90%
Blogging and networking	9	14,5%
Membership in international associations and societies	7	11%
Effective professional communication (negotiations, information exchange, socializing, etc)	52	84%
Scholarships/fellowships/internships/post-doctoral positions application	54	87%
Competitive educational exchange programs	37	60%
Average:		58%
<i>Language research:</i>		
Research of the stylistic features of the target academic texts	9	14.5%
Research of the lexical and grammatical features of the target academic texts	28	46%
Making a glossary of the key terminology of the specialization areas	39	63%
Average:		41%
<i>Please, add what is missing in this list:</i>		
International examinations preparation (IELTS, TOEFL)	8	13%
Conversational skills	4	6%

The survey participants were asked to mark only those things which they would need to perform in English and in the very last open section they were encouraged to add what in their view was missing from the list. The survey findings are presented in the table in two columns: the one represents the number of respondents who chose this item and the other gives the percentage, which is often helpful in the process of data analysis.

The survey as a research method has provided a representative sample of the target population needs analysis and has given sufficient amount of evidence to allow for some reliable generalizations and valid conclusions.

One obvious finding is the perceived top priority needs of postgraduate students ranging from 80% to 100%. The following needs are on the top six postgraduate students' perceived needs: research paper writing for publication (94%); grant proposal and research proposal (90%); prepared talk/presentation (87%); scholarships/fellowships/internships/postdoctoral positions application (87%); abstracting (85%); effective professional communication (84%). If we define the government as the ordering/paying customer and consider postgraduate students to be consuming customer then we can discover a high degree of correlation between their demands and expectations, which is the most essential finding because it means that the spread or bracket between them is minimal and there is a strong chance to satisfy both kinds of client with one and the same strategy.

Interestingly, postgraduate students show more motivation for all the research-related needs compared to the academia-related needs. For example, only 11 postgraduate students indicated "lecturing in English" as their need which shows that this is not a perceived need. It means that the universities will not see a lot of motivation among the university teachers to lecture in English. It means that the universities clearly need to think about the provision of some special incentives for teaching in English.

The following needs make the second priority group of needs ranging from 60% to 80%: unprepared spontaneous speech (74%); academic report writing (71%); making glossary of the key terminology (63%); competitive educational exchange programs (60%). These perceived needs of the consuming customer or the consuming client show high correlation with the ordering client's requirements. This correlation makes our task to satisfy both ordering and consuming client needs and expectations quite feasible.

It seems useful to compare and contrast the various survey sections and their average percentage (highlighted in the table in red) and apparently three sections come to the top of the list: academic writing section (67%); oral communication in the form of a prepared talk/presentation (60%) and integrating into the global research community (58%). This evidence clearly indicates the desirable shift towards the speech production and the productive communication skills. It definitely has important implications for the English language syllabus design and its primary focus on academic discourse and academic writing.

Finally, it would be worthwhile to focus on what was added the students themselves. Eight respondents (13%) mentioned international examinations preparation with a specific reference to IELTS and TOEFL. This request can be meaningfully linked to the perceived need to apply for international scholarships, fellowships, internships and post-doctoral positions. The postgraduate student with ambitions to compete for these opportunities have already explored the requirements and have discovered that in many universities the international language qualifications are part of applicants' pre-requisites and often with a certain score required. Hence, the demand for international examinations preparation and IELTS remains the world's proven test widely accepted by more than

9,000 organizations in over 145 countries. IELTS enjoys respect not only among the universities and other tertiary institutions but among professional and industry bodies, government departments and agencies and multinational companies due to its high quality controls and its score reliability. So, this survey has provided an opportunity for postgraduate students to voice their perceived needs and, hopefully, their voices will be seriously considered.

2.3. Postgraduate English language syllabi and reality: state of the art

An important part of this small-scale research was also to analyse a number of readily available post-graduate syllabi with a special focus on the following aspects: the overall approach to syllabus design, the content selection, the teaching methods and assessment practice. Initially, the idea was to examine the English language postgraduate syllabi of those Russian universities which had been selected by the Russian Government as the strongest candidates to take part in the “5-100-2020” and to find out if there have been any innovations in English instruction at postgraduate level. Unfortunately, it has not been feasible to trace any syllabus statements in the web-based sources.

Another idea was to search for the syllabus statements of the 10 leading Russian universities (Marginson, 2014: source Scimago, 2014):

World rank on volume	University	Total volume of papers 2007-2011	Normalized Impact NI (average – 1,00; Harvard U = 2,40)
115	Lomonosov Moscow State U	20,151	0,63
660	St Petersburg State U	5404	0,61
1207	Novosibirsk State U	2609	0,58
1509	Ural Federal U	1872	0,51
1567	Moscow Engineering Physics Institute	1771	1,11
1592	Southern Federal U	1726	0,36
1698	Moscow Institute of Physics and Technology	1547	0,60
1698	Kazan Federal U	1547	0,45

When it comes to internationally co-authored journal papers in the period of 1995-2007, the three leading positions belong to China, Singapore and South Korea, which have seen the number of their publications soar. Russia has got the seventh position. It is useful to know that a key aspect of China’s success has been its focus on publishing in English. So, this paper research was aimed at discovering the syllabus statements of the top 8 Russian tertiary level institutions to find out if they had been educating and training academic writing skills at the postgraduate level. Unfortunately, there has been no open and easily available evidence that any innovative methods of teaching academic English had been used in any of those institutions.

So, the scope of the planned research was bound to be limited to the readily available through the Internet surfing syllabus statements. Among the 17 syllabi found available only 2 were selected according to the criterion of the year of publication. All the publications of earlier than 2012 were rejected. Perhaps this number is not convincingly representative, but the two important reasons behind it can be identified. Firstly, the 2

syllabi under scrutiny are the most recently developed ones: between the years of 2012 and 2015. Secondly, both syllabi have been developed in the leading universities with hugely positive reputation all over the country and with a special status granted by the Ministry of Education allowing for a greater autonomy in the policy making: St Petersburg State University (SPSU) and Tomsk Polytechnic University (TPU).

Experientially discovered challenge of this kind of research is the apparently quite low degree of openness among the universities and one possible reason behind that is the higher education environment becoming more and more competitive. Many universities are clearly insecure about their practices and the leading universities are more open due to their being more confident about their best practices. So, in order to increase the value of this investigation it has been decided to include a case study which can exemplify a fairly typical situation and offer some useful insights. Being part of the foreign language department at the faculty of Physics at SPSU has made it possible to present in this paper some insider's perspectives and insights which might add to an overall picture and offer additional support to the evidence presented. The hands-on experience might also strengthen the researcher professional credibility.

A critical analysis of the 17 English language syllabi for postgraduate students allows us to make the following generalizations:

- Skills-based approach to syllabus design (in most cases there are 4 skills and in a few cases there are 5 including translation)
- Clear emphasis on the receptive skills, particularly reading is viewed as the key one
- Knowledge about the language is emphasized with a rule-driven learning of the language and traditional grammar practice resulting in the "I know about"
- "Real" content (English) is described with little or no attention to the "carrier" content (sciences and research areas), hence the lack of intellectual challenge of the course content (not matching the intellectual level and ambitions of the target audience)
- The teacher role is that of a language instructor and informant and the postgraduate students are again back to language learning as "learning the subject" with "you tell me and you give me" attitude and expectations
- Authenticity of the course materials is emphasized and there is a lot of evidence that the currently used materials are quite valid and reliable data for the students to be exposed to and learn from
- Assessment procedures are the least described section and we move on the assumption that a norm-referenced approach is being widely used, which naturally leads to the learning outcomes depending on every year's cohort of students' entry level
- Indirect assessment formats prevail due to the centrally developed final examination format (but locally administered and marked, hence the lack of widely shared assessment criteria and marking descriptors)
- No or very little evidence of "gate-keeping" procedures allowing one to monitor the postgraduate students' entry language level
- The syllabi describe the content of the contact 100 academic hours with no or very little evidence of extensive use of the individual tutorials, learning management systems (LMS) and mobile learning as an opportunity to expand learner autonomy and their ability to independently solve language problems

The above mentioned characteristics unfortunately do not allow us to opt for the needs and to meet the demands and expectations described in sections II.A and II.B of

this paper. The currently built-in limitations do not allow for the required breakthrough. The current syllabi inefficiency is quite obvious and the majority of university teachers working with postgraduate students do not seek the reasons behind that in the syllabus design or their classroom practice, but rather in the limited number of contact hours and the low entry level of the postgraduate students. Teachers and university managers often prefer to look for excuses rather than search for ways and solutions.

A closer look at the most recent and the most advanced syllabi – SPSU and TPU - has demonstrated that the syllabus designers who approached this task in the light of recently revised educational standards of 2011 have already introduced some significant changes:

- A better balance between the receptive and productive skills (clear emphasis on speaking and writing)
- The top priority demands have taken the form of the suggested tasks (academic paper writing, glossary of terms, conference presentation, grant proposal, etc.)
- Academic focus has been achieved (critical thinking skills, academic debating culture, etc.)
- Can-do approach (“postgraduate students should be able to...”)
- Laudable attempts to suggest methods and techniques (the suggested classroom techniques, modern educational technologies and even classroom interaction patterns)
- An increase in intellectual level of the suggested topics for discussion (research ethics, academic publications requirements, mental and ethical standards in modern society, etc.)
- Suggested ways to foster learner autonomy in language learning
- The TPU syllabus statement claims to have 210 academic hours for the English language Syllabus which is 140 academic hours more than the national standard offers (a powerful indicator of the university management support)

It has to be mentioned that the above-described syllabi have been developed by the leading professionals in the leading universities with a wide professional outlook and huge teaching experience. This is clearly the avant-garde of the profession and the leading team of the Russian Academia. The syllabus designers of that caliber enjoy respect and authority at university level and get extra special support of the university management, I mean opportunities and resources. They are certainly “the movers and shakers” and the change agents, who initiate change in their universities, and the syllabus statement is surely one obvious “tool” to implement the university policy with the main national trends in view.

At the departmental level the syllabi are generated by the practicing teachers who have not been trained in syllabus design and often have not been given enough of support to competently work on this task. So, naturally the syllabi designed locally at the departmental level are of various standards. The case study was aimed at investigating the current situation at one of the departments (the Foreign Languages Department for the Physics and Chemistry students of St Petersburg State University) from inside to discover, in what way the real classroom practice is rooted in the syllabus statements. The term ‘syllabus’ means just an English language course for postgraduate students and should not be confused with the term ‘curriculum’ which stands for all the taught courses at the postgraduate level. The curriculum is centrally developed, approved by the Ministry of Higher Education and implemented by each university. The syllabus

statements are typically developed by the faculty members teaching these courses and can even be a collective effort. The most proficient faculty members are typically considered to be the best candidates to design syllabus and they bring their hands-on classroom experience and their familiarity with the target student population into this task. Working to the best of their ability the practicing teachers are not always aware of the national trends and even the university policy and agenda, hence, the limitations of the practicing teacher generated syllabus. It is well known that the more proficient the teachers are the more they are “past success – oriented”. The most experienced teachers in every department are heavily relying on their previous success stories and show a higher degree of scepticism towards the recent trends and feel insecure and threatened. This is why the inertia and resistance go together with every educational change. What is feeding this resistance and inertia? There are several serious reasons behind that:

- An average syllabus is never detailed enough and leaves the practicing teachers with a lot of course planning work
- There are very few published course books which can equip the teacher with sufficient course materials at the postgraduate level and, therefore, teachers face an enormous amount of materials’ generation
- Lack of motivation and drive due to low pay and the need to have extra part-time jobs, resulting in a lack of time for lesson preparation, the latter often being a combination of course design and materials generation
- As the postgraduate student groups are very mixed, there is a need to tailor the syllabus to a wide range of language proficiency and the syllabus designed by the experienced teachers is often an attempt “to fit all with one size”, hence the lack of focus
- Sometimes the stagnated repertoire of teaching techniques blocks the course efficiency. The revised materials are necessary but not sufficient to bring about the necessary change and extensive teacher training is required
- An important limitation to the overall success of any postgraduate language course lies in the fact that the language teachers are not involved in the academic research and are not meaningfully engaged in any kind of research (perhaps language teachers with Russian and international research qualifications are better candidates to teach the young scientists and researchers)
- Lack of cooperation with the postgraduate students’ supervisors and lack of team effort with the faculty professors is another hot issue as language syllabus designers almost certainly need to be consulted and advised by the faculty professors to have a fair chance to design a well-balanced syllabus consistent with the overall faculty aims and objectives at postgraduate level

There is a certain limit to any research and analysis of the current situation, especially in such a vast country like Russia and in the rapidly changing reality. So, it is quite a challenge to draw any conclusions on the basis of quite limited data and subjective methods of data gathering and data analysis have certain risks. Therefore, there are very few conclusions offered in this section:

- The currently used syllabi are so very new that they have not been fully implemented and have not had an impact to be measured yet
- The majority of the English language postgraduate syllabi do not have potential to meet the demands and requirements of the paying/ordering client

- There is low correlation of the target group needs and the course aims and objectives in the majority of syllabi
- The most innovative syllabi have a better chance to meet both kinds of customer expectations but those can be described as centers of excellence rather than the state of the art
- Even the most competent centrally developed syllabus statement can be misinterpreted at the faculty level and there can be a huge gap between what is centrally planned and locally implemented within one and the same institution
- The powerful backwash effect of the final postgraduate English language examination is extremely harmful and is currently blocking the required change

The issue of the final examination format and its harmful backwash effect is the key one as it is centrally designed and approved by the Ministry of Higher Education and even those strategically important universities with a special status and a higher degree of freedom have not been granted the right to change the format and the content of the final postgraduate examination in any discipline as it has always been the Ministry of Higher Education privilege and responsibility. And it all comes back to the level of freedom and independence that is given to universities by the state. Higher education policy is being made centrally and implemented locally. Consequently, university management is traditionally playing safe and waiting for the Ministry guidelines to make any moves, particularly introducing innovations and managing educational change. Hence there is quite low teacher motivation to respond to the currently emerging needs and some choose to be victimized and others choose to try to experiment with the feeling that they are stepping on the grass where the sign says you shouldn't. The postgraduate students appreciate it when teachers make an effort to meet their perceived needs and yet at the same time most of them want to be highly graded at their final English exam and as the examination time is looming up they are more inclined to be extensively trained in the exam format tasks. So, the professional community and the university management have to wait and see. The worst scenario will result in the revised format of the final examination in English blessed by the Ministry of Higher Education. The best scenario will result in the global rethinking of the overall approach and assessment philosophy at the postgraduate level moving away from the well-staged final examination show towards a researcher portfolio of achievements directly demonstrating research and academic competencies. This will be a long-awaited breakthrough and, hopefully, part of a bigger picture of transforming the Russian postgraduate course (locally called "aspirantura") into a doctoral program leading to an international PhD degree.

3. INNOVATION REQUIRED: A NEED FOR A CHANGE

This research is aimed at discovering the hot issues and the most serious limitations of the currently used English language syllabi at the postgraduate level. The hypothesis is that very deep changes are required not just cosmetic ones. Deep changes will include the approach to syllabus design, needs analysis, teaching philosophy and methods, course content selection, materials generation, teacher role in making such a syllabus truly tailor made and teaching cadre quality.

All the above mentioned decisions can be made by the competent English language professionals on the basis of the centrally established goals and objectives in the light of

the education policy at all-country level either in the direction of replacing the Russian postgraduate course with a “kandidatskaya” degree with an international doctoral program format leading to an international PhD degree or in the direction of further modification of the Russian national academic tradition of “aspirantura” with its “kandidatskaya” degree which is neither easily translated nor widely recognized by the global science and research.

3.1. Changing the approach to syllabus design

Over the last twenty years there has been a healthy variety of different approaches to syllabus design which suggested various ways of selecting and sequencing of the specified language content. Most of the approaches to syllabus design have also been exemplified in a variety of published course books and the rationale behind the course could have been easily identified by examining the content page or the map of the course. Synthetic approach to syllabus design is product-oriented and embraces the structural or grammatical and functional types of syllabus which represent the deductive approach (Nunan, 1994; White, 1988). Analytic approach is more process-oriented and includes the content-based (often called topic-based or theme-based and situational syllabus) (Yalden, 1995) and task-based types of syllabi (Willis, 1996) and are of an inductive nature. Functional-notional approach to syllabus design has been favored by the communicative language teaching (Hutchinson and Waters, 1993). ESP and EAP syllabi together with Business English are predominantly skills-based with a possible emphasis on professional skills, soft skills, language skills and even cross-cultural communication skills. The Lexical syllabus is being designed according to the Lexical approach principles (Lewis, 1993).

The English language syllabus at postgraduate level should definitely look like and be a course in Academic English with some advanced elements of English for specific purposes. The description of the course content should almost certainly be task-based as this kind of backbone of the course will enable all the course beneficiaries to clearly see their needs and what they will be able to perform in English. The English syllabus should also follow process-oriented approach as opposed to product-oriented approach as it will add value to the direct contact hours in the group format and convincingly explain how the learners will benefit from it.

Another important requirement to the English language syllabus at postgraduate level is to adopt an inductive approach which should be very close to every researcher’s heart because it offers the language as another research area and encourages learners to discover language for themselves, to raise their language awareness, to analyze and generalize while exploring the language data and to be arriving at data-driven conclusions about the target language.

If the postgraduate English language syllabus is designed along the lines of the task-based approach it should also follow the classical step by step syllabus design: defining educational context, articulating beliefs, assessing target population needs, formulating goals and objectives, organizing the course, developing materials and designing an assessment plan (White, 1988). The most recently suggested linguistic auditing is a wider concept than the traditional needs analysis and implies the investigation of the target language situations, wider range of the professional needs with an overview of all the factors ensuring efficiency of multicultural professional communication in a foreign

language (Belyaeva, 2006) So, the explored target language situations are the source of the tasks simulating the real life situations and, therefore increasing their authenticity.

Task-based approach to syllabus design enables one to make a list of tasks apriori while the language focus work will depend on the learners' lacks and problems and the language work clearly cannot be planned beforehand, so the language work will then be a posteriori component of the syllabus design and will have to be within the practicing teacher responsibility. Clearly the task-based syllabus requires teacher involvement in the process of generating learner-centered and learning-centered syllabus following the real learners' lacks and challenges shaping the tailored component of the syllabus achieving a truly client oriented approach to serving the postgraduate students' immediate needs. At this level of higher education working for the future academics and researchers it is highly recommended to offer them a meaningful opportunity to negotiate syllabus and shape the course bending it to their top priority needs at the beginning as well as throughout the course. The English postgraduate course should be flexible enough to allow for learners' active involvement in the shaping the course content and given that it works the syllabus can be categorized as the negotiated one. This approach places huge responsibility upon the course teacher and calls for proficient teachers.

The modern and up-to-date syllabus should rely on the rapidly developing mobile learning technologies and to employ the available IT opportunities at personal and institutional level to the maximum use. The value of the online teacher-less resources is difficult to overestimate in fostering learner autonomy and leading students to become not only competent language users but also competent and independent language problem solvers.

A significant innovation required is a very detailed and competent description of the instruction including the description of the methods and techniques to be used in the classroom practice and the revised teacher role in working with postgraduate students. The required syllabus methodology and classroom practice section should be able "to instruct and educate" teachers to implement successfully the suggested ways of working with the language learners towards the course aims and objectives. The role of the methods and the repertoire of techniques confidently and competently used by teachers have an important impact upon the overall efficiency of the course and are able to change the direction of learning together with the philosophy behind classroom activities.

3.2. Changing the philosophy behind the English language training methods and approaches

In the table below there is an inventory of all the suggested shifts in the philosophy behind the classroom practice. This is not to suggest that all that is mentioned in the left column is of little value – not at all and just the opposite. The idea is that we need to carefully preserve all the well exploited and widely and effectively used ways without any risks of losing anything or throwing the baby away with the water. On the contrary, the suggestion is to keep it all and on top of all that to emphasize and strengthen the suggested moves and shifts to what is mentioned in the right column. Most of the issues are quite self-explanatory and the table format should make it more schematic and transparent.

Table 2 A paradigm shift in methodology of teaching postgraduate students

A move from:	A move towards:
Receptive skills	Productive skills
Knowledge-based	Competence-based
Lack of intellectual challenge	Stimulating degree of challenge
Teacher as educator/informant	Teacher as trainer, coach and consultant
Language competent user	Language competent user and problem solver
English is a burden	English is a bonus
Skills-based syllabus	Competence-based syllabus
Course outline agenda	Student-led, needs-based
Needs analyses	Academic auditing
Authenticity of texts	Authenticity of tasks
Norm-referenced assessment	Criterion-referenced assessment
Indirect assessment	Direct assessment
I-know approach	Can-do approach
Attention to real content only	Better-balanced approach to real and carrier content
Learning a language	Researching a language
Rule-driven learning	Data-driven learning
You tell me	Discovery learning
Traditional grammar practice	Language awareness

It can be a very different extent of a paradigm shift and the landscape of change depending on every teacher beliefs and values but the starting point is definitely to work on attitudinal level. Teachers need to question the suggested change first and to intellectually and professionally adopt or adapt the suggested changes. What the teachers have agreed with will show in their professional action and classroom practice.

3.3. Assessing progress and measuring achievements of postgraduate students

The Russian tradition of syllabus design is quite permissive regarding the assessment procedure and differs from the western educational tradition which only accepts a syllabus together with the assessment description. In Russia the syllabus design could allow for very brief and insufficient information on the assessment philosophy, approaches and techniques. The reason behind this discussion is rooted in the fact that the final assessment procedure for postgraduate level of higher education has been centrally designed, developed and approved separately from the syllabus text body. The syllabus is the national standard oriented and so is the final assessment. As the final assessment has a powerful backwash effect, there is no good reason to innovate the syllabus statement in the absence of the final assessment procedure revision because it will not work this way. The final assessment procedure approved by the Ministry of Education has no less power than a syllabus statement and often it has more influence upon teachers and upon students as this is an undoubtedly high-stake examination.

Clearly a change in the final assessment procedures at postgraduate level is no less important than improving the syllabus statement. In order to minimize the risk of overlooking this key factor the discussion of the suggested assessment ways has been given a special focus.

Assessment approach needs to be informed by the national language policy. In the absence of any policy guidance there is an opportunity to discuss the ideal assessment practice which should:

- Lead to a beneficial backwash effect
- Directly test the postgraduate students' skills simulating for the test takers the target language situations allowing the testers to make valid judgments about their performance
- Test competencies and not just knowledge be a proficiency test not directly linked to a course book or a course but to test if the test takers can do in English what they should be able to do in a specific area such as physics or academic study or research
- Complement the specific focus of the target area which is not covered fully in the widely used international examinations like IELTS as a proficiency test in academic English
- Be pass/fail grading and not a score/grade system
- Be criterion referenced with an established criteria of the expected language proficiency
- Be related to the international CEFR system
- Play a significant role in facilitating the planned change
- Be valid and reliable
- Be practical and reasonably easy to manage
- Be a combination of continuous assessment in a form of a portfolio and final assessment in a form of a final examination leading to a qualification

4. IMPLEMENTING EDUCATIONAL CHANGE AND MEASURING ITS EFFICIENCY

It is necessary to ensure successful implementation of the innovated syllabus and make the change sustainable. Innovating the syllabus statement is necessary but not sufficient as the power of any document within the university culture is quite limited in the absence of the quality assurance and quality control systems in place. Therefore, it is essential to consider all that needs to be done to ensure the desirable improvement of the overall English language training efficiency.

What are the most powerful factors of introducing change aimed at the quality improvement? There are many important factors in play but speaking about any university curriculum change the most powerful will be the following:

- Any curriculum change should be supported and "blessed" by the university top management articulating and verbalizing the rationale behind the planned change, the expected outcomes and the timeline
- Syllabus statement clearly and transparently defining the aims and objectives, the philosophy and approach, methods and techniques, principles of the materials selection and generation
- Assessment procedure which can positively influence the classroom practice and attitudes through beneficial backwash effect
- The combination of the top-down and bottom-up approaches to implementing the planned change supported by the university management (top-down) and initiated by the movers and shakers among teachers (bottom-up)

- Clear statement of the teacher requirements like international language and methodology qualifications, degrees, publications record, international conference experience, target scientific areas background, research skills, etc.
- Ensuring the required teaching cadre through a number of ways: selecting teachers meeting the requirements, offering an induction course to the teaching team, in-service teacher training and development programs and events, getting student feedback on teacher ratings and student surveys, exam results analysis and statistics as teacher performance indicators
- Managerial quality monitoring and control should be implemented through the teaching outcomes (exam results), the level of learner satisfaction and the agreed success indicators
- Resistance and inertia are most likely to be expected and to facilitate the planned change there can be ways of motivating teachers to accept it: financial motivation, teacher training and development opportunities, publications and conference presentations, leading positions and career opportunities, classroom research, appreciation and respect within the professional community, etc.

What should be the success indicators of the postgraduate English language course? In the light of the most recent trends the following success indicators could be suggested to measure the efficiency of the English language syllabus at the postgraduate level:

- Research papers published in the leading top-ranked academic journals
- Conference papers accepted at the international conferences
- Successful applications for the scholarships and internships
- Successful research proposals leading to getting research grants and funding
- Participation in international research projects
- Participation in post-doc programs on an international arena
- Active networking within international academic community of their specialization

The above list suggests the qualitative approach in the first place so that the major focus is the quality of the academic papers, conference presentations, project proposals, etc. However, the quantitative dimension is paramount and, needless to say, there should be a reliable statistics gathering system of the postgraduate students' international publications in English, international conference papers, talks and presentations, international research projects, successful internationally-funded research proposals and also successful grant-hunting as well as the statistics of the postgraduate students' successful applications for scholarships, fellowships, internships and post-doctoral positions outside Russia.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The ultimate goal of this research is to identify what in the current English for postgraduate students syllabi needs to be revised, re-thought and changed to improve the current situation and to suggest the ways of innovating the current practice so that the renewed syllabus will give Russian universities a better chance to respond to their clients and beneficiaries' demands – the client who is funding the state postgraduate programs – the government – and the client who is supposed to benefit from this program directly – the postgraduate students and the future researchers and scientists. The challenge is how

to serve both the lords and masters of higher education and the most direct beneficiaries of this sophisticated level of higher education in the best possible way and to the best of our abilities.

The practical outcome of this small-scale research should be the prototype of a revised syllabus (forthcoming) which can serve as the back bone for any postgraduate English language syllabus at any Russian university regardless of the scientific field or specialization. Another useful outcome of this research is a set of guidelines for the practicing teachers who can influence the postgraduate English language syllabus content and format in a very powerful way to help their universities meet the expectations of both the Academia and the future researchers.

Clearly, there is a serious need for the national policy and decision making at the federal level on the future scenario of the postgraduate studies which will guide and shape further development of the English language training in every university in the light of the centrally made decisions on the expected outcomes, assessment philosophy and success indicators. Centrally developed vision will have to be the starting point for the educators involved in curriculum development, syllabus design, assessment procedures validation and overall program evaluation. For an educational change to be successful in Russia it absolutely has to take a top-down approach and it works well if the implementation is delegated to the competent professionals.

This paper has attempted to persuade the reader that English language training as part of the postgraduate curriculum should enable postgraduate students to write academic papers and co-author articles to be published internationally, to give presentations and talk at international forums, to be able to teach and lecture in English, to be able to collaborate on the international research projects, to effectively network and successfully compete for the internationally available education and research opportunities. The most effective short-term strategy to improve the university world ratings is to increase the total volume of internationally published papers and to introduce English as the medium of instruction in a wide range of disciplines and this is what the postgraduate English language training should prepare them for. Young Russian scientists and researchers need to be fluent and active not only in their national languages but in English, which is the international language of global science and the role of the English language proficiency is difficult to overestimate when it comes to breeding the new generation of Russian researchers, fully prepared to improve the Russian university ratings and to bring Russia closer to the leading position in the global science. Russia has a long way to go and there is no time to be wasted.

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