DEVELOPMENT OF STUDENTS' FOREIGN LANGUAGE COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE IN CONTEXT OF INTERNATIONALISATION AND INFORMATISATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION

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The paper investigates the processes of development of students' foreign language communicative competence at universities under the conditions of informatisation and internationalisation. The hypotheses of our research: 1) in the conditions of internationalisation of higher education, the level of students' knowledge of foreign languages influences the intensity of their participation in international educational projects; 2) internationalisation of higher education creates effective motivators for more thorough study of foreign languages; 3) informatisation is a powerful tool for improving the quality in foreign language teaching at universities. The authors developed a questionnaire including 11 questions (closed and open). Respondents were 245 fourth-year students of Chernihiv National University of Technology (Ukraine) of humanitarian and technical specialities. The majority of respondents (89%) expressed their desire to participate in international educational projects with trips abroad; 44% of respondents identified the unsatisfactory level of foreign language skills as the main barrier to participation in such projects; 67% noted that the latest methods of teaching foreign languages should be introduced at their institution. On the basis of the results of the research, the authors suggest a set of innovative interactive teaching methods using information and communication technologies. The research results will allow increasing the students' level of interest and motivation to study foreign languages and, accordingly; will provide the improvement of existing pedagogical approaches to the development of foreign language communicative competence of future specialists at universities.

Keywords: foreign language communicative competence; institution of higher education; internationalisation of education; international educational project; information economy; information and communication technologies (ICT); interactive methods of teaching foreign languages.

Introduction

Modern higher education faces two challenges: informatisation of the economy and the internationalisation of the educational area (Bennell & Pierce, 2003; Knight, 2003, 2012; Scott, 1998, 2000; Wit, Hunter, Howard & Egron-Polak, 2015). Under the new conditions, higher education transforms as well, focusing on the formation of professional competences that can be applied at the labour markets. The formation of the information economy actualises the role of the development of students' ability to quickly master and effectively work with innovative information, communication and computer technologies. In the context of total economic globalisation, business needs specialists capable of communicating with foreign partners (Byram, 2013). In turn, this requires the foreign languages acquisition at a high level; and, accordingly, the increased attention of universities to the development of foreign language communicative competence among students.

The urgency of developing students' foreign language communicative competence is growing in the conditions of internationalisation of higher education (Killick, 2015; Kramsch, 2014; Choudaha & Wit, 2014; Gulovich, 2012). Ukraine's progress towards integration into the world scientific and educational area is possible only on the basis of modernisation in the educational system. Nowadays foreign languages acquisition refers to basic professional skills of professionals, along with the ability to use a computer. In the XXI century, it is transforming from a separate speciality to one of the key requirements of employers to employees.

Taking into account all the above-mentioned, we state the importance of increasing attention of universities to the development of foreign language communication skills of future specialists, as under the conditions of internationalisation and globalisation they will determine the level of competitiveness of university graduates in the national and global markets.

Literature review

The problem of development of the foreign language communicative competence of future specialists within institutions of higher education is in the focus of attention of a number of foreign and Ukrainian scholars. The analysis of research and publications made it possible to distinguish the main aspects: the target orientation of teaching foreign languages for specific purposes (Berbenets, 2009); the importance of professional orientation of the foreign language teaching at universities (Neustroieva, 2010); effectiveness of communication in a foreign language (Artemenko& Lipko, 2009); ensuring the readiness of future specialists to conduct business oral and written negotiations in foreign languages (Bykonia, 2006); the peculiarities of foreign languages usage in various socially determined situations (Hez, 1985); psychological aspects of foreign languages usage (Zymnia, 1985); methodology of teaching foreign languages (Nikolaeva, 2013) etc.

Scientific literature explores the peculiarities of the formation of global competences of students in the age of globalisation and internationalisation of the educational area (Killick, 2015; Choudaha & Wit, 2014). Some studies focus on the study of the specifics of teaching foreign languages in the era of globalisation. (Kalamarz, 2014). The study of the internationalisation of Ukrainian universities with the focus on English language was conducted by Rod Bolito and Richard West within the framework of the project of the British Council in Ukraine, "English for Universities". This study provided an evaluation of the level of proficiency in foreign languages of teachers, students and managers of 15 Ukrainian higher education institutions. The conclusions formulated in the report are concentrated on increasing the level of proficiency in foreign languages (Bolayto & Richard, 2017). However, the authors do not pay enough attention to the usage of interactive methods and modern information technologies in teaching foreign languages.

Various aspects of informatisation of the educational process are revealed in a number of scientific publications, including e-learning and multimedia approach (Jung & Lim, 2014; Kalamarz, 2014; Rennie & Morrison, 2013; Stavytska, 2017). Thus, most of the existing publications are concentrated either on the training of specialists competitive in the globalised economic environment or on issues of improving the approaches to teaching foreign languages with the use of the latest information technology. In our opinion, attention should be also paid to the comprehensive study of the development of foreign language communicative competence of students, determined by the factors of internationalisation and informatisation of higher education.

The aim of this article is to study the processes of development of students' foreign language communicative competence at universities in the conditions of informatisation and internationalisation of educational area. **The hypotheses** of our research are: 1) in the conditions of internationalisation of higher education, the level of students' knowledge of foreign languages influences the intensity of their participation in international educational projects; 2) internationalisation of higher education creates effective motivators for more thorough study of foreign languages; 3) informatisation is a powerful tool for improving the quality in foreign language teaching at universities.

Methods

To achieve the purpose of the article, a complex of general scientific and specific research methods were used. When studying the degree of elaboration of the studied problem, they are the methods of analysis, synthesis, generalisation.

In the course of the confirmatory stage of the pedagogical experiment, the methods for questioning and interviewing respondents were used. The questionnaire developed by the authors is anonymous; consists of 11 questions, including 3 general questions (faculty, course and gender of respondents) and 8 closed and open questions: *Have you taken part in international projects with travelling abroad? If you participated in foreign projects, what was their purpose? Would you like to participate in international projects with a temporary departure abroad and why? What do you think are the main barriers to the participation of students in foreign projects? Evaluate your foreign language skills. What, in your opinion, should be improved in the teaching of foreign languages?*

Questioning, testing, interviewing were conducted at Chernihiv National University of Technology during the first semester of 2018-2019 academic year (September-December 2018). The respondents were 245 4th-year students of the Faculty of Economics and Finance (76 persons), Faculty of Accountancy and Economics (57 people), Faculty of Electronic and Information Technologies (72 persons), Faculty of Social Technologies, Health Improvement and Rehabilitation (40 people).

When forming a group of respondents, we distributed students as following:

– involvement of representatives of humanitarian (future specialists in finance, banking, auditing, taxation, social work) and technical (future specialists in information technology, cyber security, computer systems, software engineering, physical rehabilitation) specialities;

– 4th-year students, as they potentially had a number of opportunities for participation in international projects (they completed the adaptation period at the university, acquired professional knowledge and skills, integrated into the research process of the international activity of the university, expanded their own horizons, established contacts and communication with the International Relations Office of the University);

– undergraduate students who wish to enrol in a Master Degree programme (for such a category of students it is necessary to study a foreign language – for admission to the master's programme);

– 4th-year students, as they are able to compare, evaluate and formulate their own judgments about teachers' teaching methods and technologies (in particular, in the teaching of foreign languages).

The processing of the results of the pedagogical experiment was carried out using the methods of aggregation, as well as a graphical method.

Results

The research is based on the leading Polish experience; Chernihiv National University of Technology (Ukraine) was chosen for a pedagogical experiment due to the high dynamics of development and international activity and, accordingly, the high relevance of the development of foreign language communication competence of its students. The positive results of the study are planned to be extrapolated to Baku Slavic University (Azerbaijan).

The conducted confirmatory stage of the pedagogical experiment showed the following results:

1. Participation of students in international projects with travelling abroad: only 8% of the total number of respondents had such experience. It is worth noting that the obtained result correlates with the general university indicators (Fig. 1). At Chernihiv National University of Technology, there is clearly a positive tendency in the number of students participating in the international scientific and educational area – 27 in 2017 compared to zero in 2010. However, in percentage terms of the student body of the university, the outlined numbers are low, especially taking into account the current trend of active internationalisation of higher education.
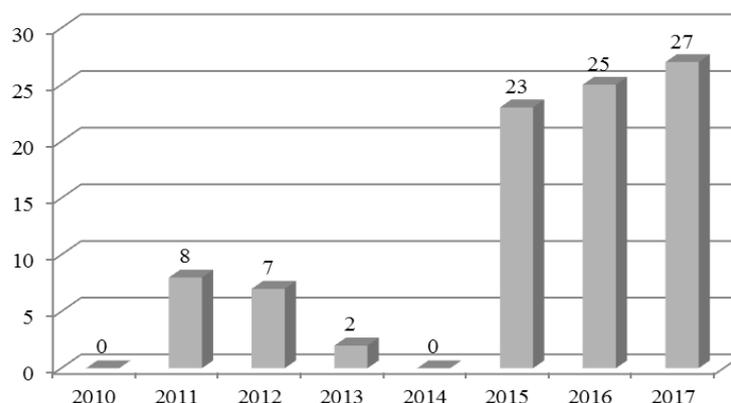
Figure 1. Dynamics in the number of students of Chernihiv National University of Technology participating in the international scientific and educational research, persons
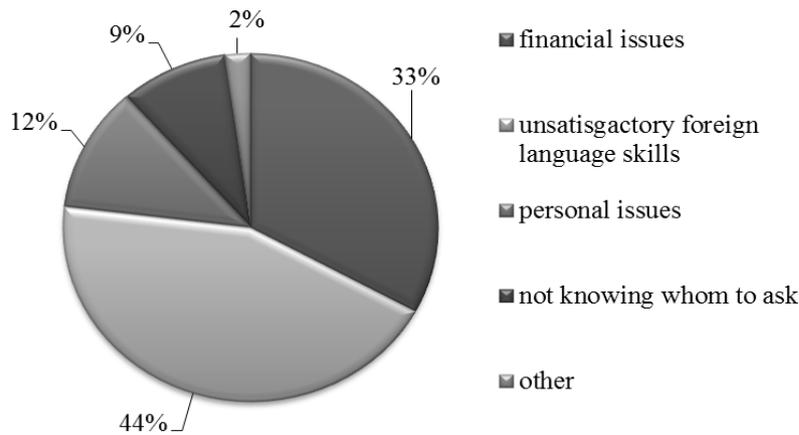Source: author's development based on a questionnaire conducted in September-December 2018 at Chernihiv National University of Technology

2. Direction (target and geographic) of international projects with the participation of students. The vast majority of students (60%) surveyed stated travelling abroad as the main reason for participating in international projects. The geographic structure is represented by the following countries: Austria, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bulgaria, United Kingdom, Spain, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Poland, Slovenia, Sweden. Funding for students' academic mobility was carried out at the expense of partner institutions, international organisations and funds (for example, within the framework of the international programme Erasmus + etc.).

3. Motivation of participation in international projects with temporary departure abroad showed 89% of respondents. Their motives in most cases are: development of a foreign language communicative competence, intercultural communication; expansion of the horizons, gaining new experience; the opportunity to travel; self-realisation; prospects of employment abroad.

4. Barriers to engaging in international projects, according to the interviewed students are (Fig. 2): 44% – unsatisfactory foreign language skills; 33% – financial issues (in particular, expenses for registration of documents for travelling abroad, for accommodation, meals, transport, for the purchase of educational and reference literature, payment for Internet and communication services, which is not covered by grants of

some international educational projects); 12% – personal issues (family problems, unwillingness, laziness etc.); 9% – not knowing whom to ask about participation in international projects; 2% – other barriers.
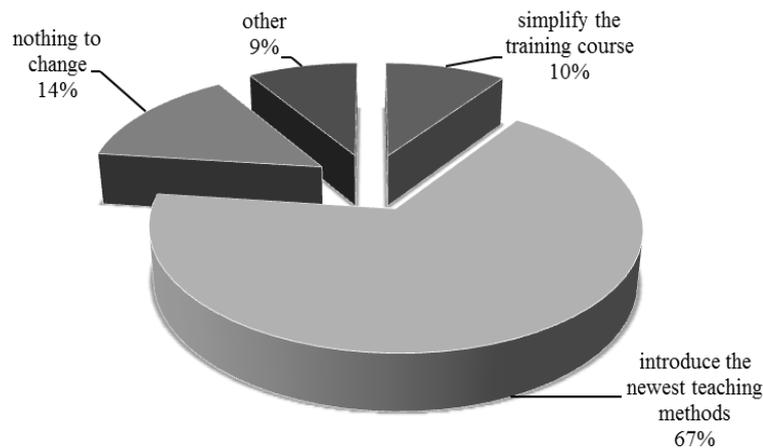

Figure 2. Distribution of respondents' opinions about barriers to student participation in international projects

Source: author's development based on a questionnaire conducted in September-December 2018 at Chernihiv National University of Technology

5. Level of proficiency in foreign languages. Only 5% of the students questioned assessed their own foreign language skills as high, i.e. they noted their ability to communicate freely, the absence of difficulties in writing their own thoughts and reading literature in a foreign language. 31% of respondents indicated that they have a low level of a foreign language – only with a dictionary. Most students (64%) noted the average level of fluency in foreign languages and the presence of certain difficulties in writing or verbally formulating their thoughts. In the context analysed, it should be emphasised that according to the results of our survey, the largest share of participants in international projects was observed among students of the Faculty of Electronic and Information Technologies (20% of the respondents are from this faculty).

6. Directions of improving the teaching of foreign languages. In the course of the survey, students noted the wish for the implementation of the newest methods of training (67% of respondents) and simplification of the foreign language course (10%), see Fig. 3. In addition, the students expressed the wish to increase the number of classes for studying foreign languages and reducing the number of students in groups developing their foreign language communicative competence.

Figure 3. Distribution of respondents according to the response to the question "What do you think should be improved in teaching foreign languages?"

Source: author's development based on survey results obtained in September-December 2018 at Chernihiv National University of Technology

A survey of students after the approbations described above has shown an increase in the level of motivation of students to study foreign languages. The share of students who assess their level of foreign language proficiency as low was reduced by 13% (from 31% at the beginning to 18% at the end of the experiment); as the average level – increased by 7% (from 64% at the beginning to 71% at the end of the

experiment); as a high level – increased by 6% (from 5% at the beginning to 11% at the end of the experiment). This allows us to talk about the prospect of disseminating this experience at the university level in general in the long run. Thus, in our opinion, the formation of foreign language communicative competence among young people is possible only on the basis of an optimised combination of the above-mentioned methods and tools, the use of e-learning and mobile (m-learning) education. As a result, it will facilitate the internationalisation (academic mobility, participation in international educational projects etc.), self-realisation and increase of competitiveness in the conditions of globalisation and informatisation of the economy. In our opinion, the internationalisation forms effective incentives for students to study foreign languages, opens up opportunities for them to study abroad and expand the network of contacts with foreign employers. An effective tool for improving the effectiveness of teaching foreign languages at universities is informatisation, which means the introduction of innovative information and communication technologies (ICT) and interactive teaching methods in the educational process.

Discussion

Thus, the results of the conducted confirmatory stage of the pedagogical experiment indicate that unsatisfactory foreign language skills constitute one of the key limiting factors for students' participation in international projects of Chernihiv National University of Technology. However, students show increased interest in international educational projects. The obtained results approve that traditional methods in foreign languages teaching are becoming less efficient (67% of respondents emphasised the need to introduce the latest teaching methods).

The results of the pedagogical experiment proved our hypotheses. First of all, to meet the requirements of the XXI century, students should have developed foreign language communicative competence. It influences both students' participation in international educational projects and students' competitiveness. Secondly, students demonstrated a high level of interest in the participation in international projects. We came to the conclusion that the internationalisation of higher education forms new motivators for students to study foreign languages. Thirdly, informatisation is becoming a powerful tool for improving foreign languages teaching. The combination of multimedia approach and interactive methods in foreign languages teaching could raise the level of students' interest, their motivation level, and develop the level of students' foreign language communicative competence (see Fig.4)
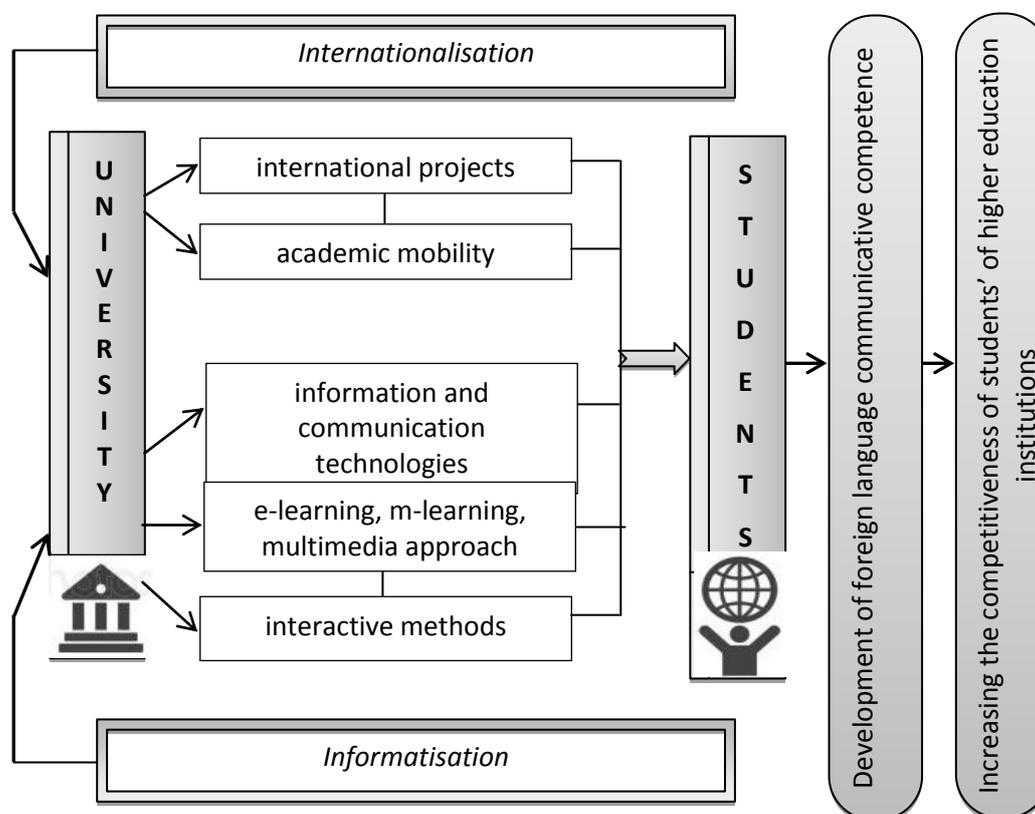
Figure 4. The development of foreign language communicative competence of university students in the context of informatisation and internationalisation of higher education

Source: Own work

Increasing the level of interest and motivation in students to study foreign languages can be achieved under the following conditions:

1) modernisation of educational process, updating of educational content;

2) the use of interactive teaching methods. The analysis of the methods suggested in the publications (Baldwin, 2016; Khairnar, 2015) showed that their set should be widen (e.g., by the following interactive methods: brainstorming, role-playing games, story-telling, open discussions using the technologies of "World Café", "Aquarium", "Puzzles", "Cluster", group work). In our opinion, it could raise the adaptation level of the educational process to the demands of modern generation of students;

3) ensuring the professional and practical orientation of foreign language training (including case-study method);

4) introduction the elements of a training;

5) using ICT, such as mobile technologies, iPods, etc. For example,Kalamarz (2014) devised an e-learning course and incorporated it in his English teaching practice at university. The e-course allowed to achieve some good results in developing students' foreign language competence. We also agree with Jung & Lim (2014) on combining e-learning with a multimedia approach.

6) the introduction of multimedia approach (web-cases, web-quests, webinars, on-line tests etc.). Stavytska (2017) suggests some interesting ideas to implement this approach with students of engineering specialities. But the approach suggested by Rennie & Morrison (2013) seems to us more applicable in view of its versatility;

7) use of facilitation technologies in teaching foreign languages (prerequisites of application: equal rights and trust between teacher and students, openness and availability of information, creativity of participants, possibility of a non-standard solutions for various tasks);

8) training and coaching elements in foreign language training;

9) changing teacher's role of – from coordinator and controller to tutor, facilitator, mentor or coach.

Within the framework of the conducted research, two interactive methods "World Café" and "Aquarium" in the teaching of foreign languages were tested.

Technology "The World Café" presupposes knowledge sharing, generation of ideas, and further discussion in a microgroup using multimedia presentations. The "Aquarium" technology is a form of open debate in discussing two often antagonistic ideas where the participants are allowed to change the roles. The mentioned above technologies were chosen for approbation as they involve open discussions, including group work, creative thinking, where the teacher acts as a facilitator.

It should also be noted that the process of teaching foreign languages at the Chernihiv National University of Technology corresponds to modern trends of informatisation: teaching materials are presented on the MOODLE platform; tests in foreign languages are available online; webinars are organised on a regular basis involving professors from partner foreign universities. We have also developed and tested the web-quest program and posted it on MOODLE platform. In micro groups tudents trained their spoken English skills, prepared creative essays, searched information on English-language websites. When evaluating the results of the web-quest, we took into account the qualitative (grammatical, spelling, lexical, stylistic mistakes) and time (the speed of execution of each block of the web-quest) parameters.

Limitations. We consider it appropriate to emphasise that the results of the questionnaire survey are subjective and are largely tied to psychological factors (the level of self-esteem of respondents).

The formulated in the article recommendations on the development of students' foreign language communicative competence are based on the best Polish practice. Approbation of these recommendations at Ukrainian institutions of higher education proved their effectiveness. So the recommendations are promising in the context of their implementation at Azerbaijani University. At the same time, the conducted experiment raised a new research question. Particularly, in our opinion, the prospects for further research in this area are the development and testing a structural and functional model for the development of foreign language communicative competence of university students in the conditions of internationalisation and informatisation of educational area.

Conclusions

Thus, the conducted pedagogical experiment confirmed the hypotheses formulated at the beginning of our study. With the internationalisation of the educational area, the scope of student mobility and the extent to which students are involved in the implementation of international projects are rising. The lack of experience in foreign internships, studies at foreign universities or participation in international events among graduates of higher education institutions adversely affects their level of competitiveness in employment. One of the objectively existing barriers to the participation of students in international

educational projects with travelling abroad is the low level of applicants' foreign languages acquisition. The conducted survey allowed us to find out the reasons for the above: curriculum overload; insufficient number of foreign language classes; excessive number of students in groups; obsolete methods of teaching foreign languages (mostly passive) that do not motivate students to effectively master new teaching material.

As a result, the authors formulate recommendations on the prospects of using interactive methods in teaching foreign languages (brainstorming, case study, role-playing games, training sessions, story-telling, group work, open discussions using the technologies of "World Café", "Aquarium", "Puzzles" etc.). Higher education informatisation transforms the learning process, in particular towards the introduction of e-learning and m-learning, based on the use of ICT. Such transformations will increase the level of interest and motivation of students to study foreign languages and, accordingly, will provide the improvement of existing pedagogical approaches to the development of foreign language communicative competence of future specialists at universities.

Acknowledgements

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