

## Weaknesses in the Process of English Language Teaching

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### Abstract

*The purpose of this study is to identify the weaknesses in the Process of English language teaching at the Faculty of World Economy and International Affairs in National Research University Higher School of Economics Moscow. Quantitative and qualitative methods were employed in the study. The findings indicate that the process of English language teaching faces three main weaknesses: student involvement in business problem solving, their motivation to work unsupervised and to acquire more organizing skills. The weaknesses could be transformed into strengths to help students of the first year integrate into inclusive environment where they could develop professional skills.*

**Key words:** higher education, survey, unsupervised work, weaknesses, professional vocabulary, language background, motivation

### I. Introduction

National Research University Higher School of Economics (HSE) is integrating in the international academic community. The aim is to become one of the scientific university centers. To achieve this ambitious target the university needs to assess and modify its strategy and policy in teaching along with other aspects of education. As in business we use SWOT analysis to decide what should be altered in approach of teaching English at the Faculty of World Economy and International Affairs. This paper is devoted to Weaknesses. **The research aim is** to find out what the weaknesses in the process of English language teaching are. A **method** we used is a survey research.

### II. Review of Literature

We use SWOT analysis which is used in business to disclose all the weaknesses in the process of English language teaching as education system being a division of the public sector has to be efficient as business has to be (Mike Bottery, 1989). This approach helps us identify weaknesses in teaching English language and apply new methods to transform them into strengths. The efficiency of education is measured in professional skills acquired by the students. Some specialists consider that students' success is correlated with study conditions, intrinsic and extrinsic motivations. Extrinsic motivation with self-learning encourages students *'to be more engaging in an activity that will bring great benefit to'* them. Students could plan, organize and evaluate their learning (Mohd. Arif Ismail<sup>2</sup> & Mahdum<sup>1</sup>, 2013). The more students are motivated the more they are involved in problem-solving (June Henton, Ramona Marotz-Baden, Dianne Kieren, 1976). Students' involvement in business environment depends among other factors on their experience at the university and their professional expectations (Josep M. Masjuan and Helena Troiano Source, 2009).

### III. Research methodology

197 students of the 1<sup>st</sup> year of the Faculty of World Economy and International Affairs in National Research University Higher School of Economics Moscow were offered a questionnaire in June, 2013. They answered open questions:

1. How much time did they spend on their preparation for English lessons at school?
2. How much time did they spend on their preparation for English lessons at the Higher School of Economics?
3. Are they satisfied with their results (with their final mark for the course)?
4. If they were not satisfied what were the reasons to this?
5. What difficulties did they have to cope in studying?

#### **IV. Survey Results**

We found out that 50% of the students spent a great deal of time on learning English at school (from 7 to more than 20 hours per week). Some of them attended private lessons in English. These results are shown in table 1.

Schoolchildren in Russia value knowledge of English language. They consider language background provides them with higher social status in a student group at the university and then (after graduating from the university) in companies when they join them. They are sure that good marks in English at the school exam help them enter the prestigious faculty of the HSE.

The survey revealed that students did not follow the same tactic at the university to improve their knowledge in English. We stated the fact that they were not ready to work hard as they did at school. The results are presented in table 2.

31% of the students of the first year spent the same amount of time on learning English at the HSE (from 7 to more than 20 hours per week, including four academic hours per week at the university). The number of students spent time on learning English (from 7 to more than 20 hours per week) decreased significantly from 50% to 31% (the difference is 18%).

The survey revealed that 50% of the students were satisfied with their results (final mark) and 50% of the students were dissatisfied with their results for the academic year. Students named a lot of reasons of their dissatisfaction. They wrote that they were too busy to prepare homework. They had to attend a lot of seminars. They could not organize their time properly. Sometimes they were too lazy and very often they wasted time. Some of the students had an inferiority complex.

#### **V. Research Findings**

We discuss the findings of this study with respect to the research questions.

A decrease in the number of students spent time on learning English at the Faculty of World Economy and International Affairs in comparison to the number of students spent time on learning English at school is 18%. It is explained by some reasons. We divide them into two groups: objective and subjective reasons.

The first group of reasons relates to schedule:

1. Students have to attend too many seminars and lectures;
2. The schedule is inflexible.

The second group deals with personal attitude to the educational process and its results:

1. Goals. It is a common view: the more prestigious university in Moscow you enter the better social position you will occupy after graduating from it. NRU HSE is considered to be one of the prestigious universities in Russia. When a student became a member of the HSE his/her goal was achieved and perspectives are obvious;
2. Results. Students consider that their language background provides them with good results at the university.
3. Plans. They do not consider their studying as a long-term project. So they are not ready to invest significant amount of their time and efforts at the university in making this project the success. The economic situation in the country is changeable. For students there is no clear picture what skills will be required in four years.

Expert opinion of John P. Round (an Associate Professor at the Faculty of Sociology and a Senior Research Fellow at the Center for Advanced Studies) indirectly confirms our results. In the interview (September, 2013) to `The hse look` he specially noted that he faced a problem at the university: the courses he taught had a relatively small number of listeners. In his opinion students considered that the information offered was not valuable for them.

50% of the students were dissatisfied with their results due to a lot of reasons.

We divided them into two groups: external and internal:

External reasons are related to educational environment. Students think that:

- the course of English language is too intensive
- they have to learn huge vocabulary
- they lack time for private work
- they need more English lessons at the university

Internal reasons are considered to be personal ones:

- their vocabulary is restricted
- they work without diligence
- they lack skill of time management
- they lack skill of presenting information logically
- they have complex of inferiority

Analysis of reasons shows that external (environmental) and internal (personal) reasons are interrelated. Students have to cope with challenging problems: the need to enrich professional vocabulary, to manage time, to perform unsupervised work. A half of the students felt inferior to others because of the lower level of English (language background of other students in the group was better). They consider that burden is too heavy on them. In order to be integrated into university competitive environment they are not used to working intensively without assistant of private tutors and parents.

On the other hand students wrote that they were ready to get involved in creative work: organizing presentations, working on projects with minimal supervision from teachers. They are interested in programs of academic mobility. It's common knowledge such tasks require extensive vocabulary, organizing skills and a great deal of unsupervised work.

## VI. Conclusion

Analysis of the survey results lets us discover some discrepancies: students have a limited professional vocabulary, are not ready to enlarge it themselves, cannot manage time, need more lessons per week but on the other hand they are interested in creative tasks and academic mobility to enter business environment. Discrepancies are the causes of the weaknesses in the process of English language teaching at the faculty of World Economy and International Affairs. We give discrepancies in table 3.

The weaknesses in the process of English language teaching at the faculty of World Economy and International Affairs are: *students are not involved in problem solving of business situations, they are not motivated by them to work unsupervised and to acquire more organizing skills.*

Teachers of English language do cope with the weaknesses. They have to use new approaches to teaching English language. They need to decide if the weaknesses could be transformed into strengths and in what ways to help students of the first year integrate into inclusive environment where they could develop professional skills.

This study opens the door for further empirical researches to be conducted: what are the strengths, opportunities and threats (according to SWOT analysis) in the Process of English language teaching at the Faculty of World Economy and International Affairs of National Research University Higher School of Economics.

**Table 1: Time spent on learning English at school**

<i>English lessons per week (hours) at school</i>	<i>Number of the students</i>	<i>Number of the students (%)</i>
<i>&lt;1hour</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>2</i>
<i>1-2</i>	<i>12</i>	<i>6</i>
<i>3-4</i>	<i>40</i>	<i>20</i>
<i>5-6</i>	<i>44</i>	<i>22</i>
<i>7-8</i>	<i>43</i>	<i>22</i>
<i>9-10</i>	<i>28</i>	<i>14</i>
<i>11-13</i>	<i>11</i>	<i>6</i>
<i>15-20</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>3</i>
<i>&gt;20</i>	<i>9</i>	<i>5</i>

**Table 2: Time spent on learning English at the HSE**

<i>Free work per week (hours)</i>	<i>Number of the students</i>	<i>Number of the students (%)</i>
<1hour	2	1
1-2	22	11
3-4	67	34
5-6	46	23
7-8	24	12
9-10	18	9
11-13	8	4
15-20	7	4
>20	3	2

**Table 3: Discrepancies**

On the one hand	On the other hand
students	
desire to enter business community	lack clear goals what learnable professional skills they need
have a limited professional vocabulary	lack motivation to enrich professional vocabulary
want to be more supervised (require more English lessons per week); cannot manage time	lack self-organizing skills

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