

## **Strengths in the Process of English Language Teaching**

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### **Abstract**

*The purpose of this study is to identify the strengths 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 has three main strengths: academic environment created by the university; learning environment created by the teachers; curriculum support materials for students.*

**Keywords:** higher education, survey, strengths, motivation, educational environment, curriculum support materials

### **1. Introduction**

The status of National Research University Higher School of Economics (NRU HSE/ HSE) in educational environment is very high. It is considered to be one of the top ranked universities in Russia. As an educational organization HSE competes with other universities, institutions in the educational market for limited resources. So as in business we use SWOT analysis to decide what gives competitive advantages to HSE (the Faculty of World Economy and International Affairs) in the market. This paper is devoted to Strengths. **The research aim** is to find out what strengths in the process of English language teaching at the Faculty of World Economy and International Affairs provide NRU HSE with the leading position among other universities operating in the same field. **A method** we used is a survey research.

### **2. Review of Literature**

There are opposing views on the motivational factors which stimulate people to take an action. Self-determination theory (Deci *et al.*, 1991) assumes that the difference between two types of motivation: intrinsic and extrinsic (Ryan and Deci, 2000) lies in the goal-setting. Intrinsic motivation is oriented at personal achievements as themselves. Extrinsic motivation is oriented at personal achievements combined with social status of an individual. The core of self-determination theory is an assumption that people make decisions without interference of any external factor. Individual goals are more valuable to be achieved than other goals. Extrinsic motives are to be internalized (transformed) into personally endorsed values. Extrinsic motivation arises from external factors (Hutchinson, 2003). In other words social factors influence individual motives (Muller *et al.*, 2006). Self-determination theory has been developed into different types of goal theories. Linnenbrink and Pintrich (2000) stated that people are mainly encouraged by achievement goals. Other scientists (Molden and Dweck, 2000; Harackiewicz *et al.*, 1997; Elliot, 1997) distinguish that mastery goals and performance goals are in priority. They consider that students are more interested in becoming the best at one particular task or in their outcomes. On the contrary, Badawy (2008) believes that motivation is a `state of mind`. People are more motivated by themselves than by external environment. Innate motives determine students` goals. The implication is that the role of social factors in taking a decision is neutralized. A socio-educational model (Gardner *et al.*, 1991) distinguishes two types of motives: integrative and instrumental. Integrative motive relates to the language itself: students try to get to know more about the language and as a result about target community. Instrumental motive realizes in utilitarian usage of a foreign language that is what benefits the language brings to the learner (in the case of getting a job or getting a competitive advantage in the labor market, grades).

One of the important components of this model is students' attitude towards the language environment (university, teacher, course, textbooks). It is termed 'integrativeness' (Gardner, 2001).

Students of the Faculty of World Economy and International Affairs are career-oriented. They are conscious that in the era of knowledge-based economy graduates with the proper level of qualification and professional skills acquired at the university get more opportunities to benefit from them in the labor market. Bell D. (1973) proves that educational credentials define people's positions in the labor market. It is easier for them to compete and to get a higher social status, to take part in upward mobility (Esping-Andersen, 1993). The more effort students make to learn the more valuable as human resources they become. Human capital theory (Becker, 1975, 1994) considers human resources as an outcome of investments. Investments are more substantial and long-term if expected returns on them are high. Investments are exchanged for increased earnings, power, and occupational status (Rosenbaum, 1986; Becker, 1993; Paulsen, 2001). Human capital theory distinguishes two types of human capital: general and firm-specific. General human capital implies acquiring skills and knowledge that are valuable for potential employers. This type is produced by formal education. Firm-specific capital implies skills and knowledge that are valuable for *the* employer. These assumptions are used in the concept of lifelong learning. Lifelong learning provides enhancement of people's qualification and as a result improvement of human capital (Korsgaard, 1997).

One of the strong extrinsic motivational factors for students is multi-cultural environment at the university and in multinational companies which they plan to join. Cultural awareness becomes a crucial part of effective communication for them. Students benefit from cross-cultural communication. 'Being exposed to different cultures' they are aware of both values and beliefs of their own culture and values and beliefs of other cultures' (Lindsey, 2005). Such type of communication helps students tolerate opposing viewpoints that increases their openness to diversity (Clarke *et al.*, 2009). In its turn diversity of students stimulates personal growth and expands functional knowledge (Ingraham and Peterson, 2004; Sutton and Rubin, 2004). Being aware of cultural characteristics young people could establish interpersonal relations based on empathy to other nations and are oriented towards international cooperation (Carlson *et al.*, 1990). In other words this integration into educational multi-cultural environment develops students' individual responsibility for what they think, say, how they have to behave as citizens of the world. They begin to better understand similarities and differences of people from different cultural backgrounds (McCabe, 1994). The awareness of cultural differences accompanied with qualification gained brings tangible benefits to graduates. Cultural awareness has an influence on their ability to communicate with people from different cultural backgrounds (Warner, 2008), because 'communities and workplaces reflect a growing diversity of cultures, attitudes and values' (Green, 2002). Due to this graduates become more employable (Archer and Davison, 2007; Brooks, 2012). Students can develop their cultural competencies at the lesson and as a result to enhance their cultural awareness (Devore and Schlesinger, 1996; Sue D.W. and Sue, D., 1990, Colvin-Burque *et al.*, 2007).

Communication is a platform for effective team-work. In the era of globalization professionals must be team-players. They have to cooperate, collaborate and communicate with specialists come from different backgrounds. To communicate successfully people need to develop communication skills. It is common knowledge that communication skills are developed in discussions. Students consider the more developed communication skills they have the more higher position (both in the society and company) they could occupy. At the lessons students could practice how to round the corners, to demonstrate their emotional intelligence (they could manage their emotions), to establish the other position, to try to adopt local ways of thinking and behaving. Being involved in class discussion students could acquire and practice these skills. To what extent they 'fit into the flow and progress of the discussion' defines 'the quality' of their contributions to the debate (Dallimore *et al.*, 2008). Some specialists (Henning, 2005; O'Connor and Michaels, 1996) consider that students' are encouraged to take part in discussions by three ways: first, framing; second, moving from practical thinking to clear thinking; third, creating atmosphere which provokes a discussion. A framework is offered to students to help them cope with challenges arisen in the area of cultural misunderstanding. The question arises: who is mainly responsible for framing, students' thinking and their involvement in discussion. The answer is on the surface – a teacher. There must be the balance between teacher guidance and student engagement: teacher acts proactively in order to maximize student involvement into discussion, which is democratic by nature (Redfield, 2000). A teacher develops motivational strategies to produce an effective discussion and adopt them to the students' needs.

Such an approach gets students to think like economists to substantiate their positions (Santos and Lavin, 2004) in the discussion and fits the issue debated into the whole picture i.e. in the context of other economic issues (Johnston *et al.*, 2000; Marton and Saljo, 1976). The role of teacher is significant in establishing academic requirements (framework); in management of students' participation (involvement) in educational process and their clear thinking. Agents of the process are interconnected: a teacher sets requirements; students try to meet them putting some effort. Recent research reveals the tendency: 'the higher the track of the class, the more effort students exerted' (Carbonaro, 2005). Collaboratively the participants of educational process pursue their goals: teacher evolves a set of requirements, students have to satisfy new ones. Both sides benefit from this progress. Teachers build a 'flexible and scale-able model' (Alsford, 2012) whereas students become 'active subjects instead of silent listeners' (Shulruf *et al.*, 2008). McCulloch (2009) considers students as 'partners in the production of the knowledge and skills that form the intended learning outcomes'. Students' achievements are positively correlated with their motivation (Ginsberg, 2005). Motivation by-turn depends on the teacher quality (Rivkin *et al.*, 2005; Goldhaber *et al.*, 1999; Hanushek, 1997). The higher the instructor's rating the higher students perception of learning, the more they could achieve (Stapleton and Murkison, 2001). So the better teachers understand the process of motivation the more effective motivational methods they can employ to encourage students' learning (Ginsberg, 2005).

Being the leader and a guider in a group teacher needs some support in order to motivate students work intensively and develop their professional skills. Wilson (2013) suggests a number of contributing factors to teachers' professional development: educative curriculum materials for teachers and students, collaborative work, strong principle support, student-centered learning environment. Teachers are responsible for the environment where such principles as tolerance for opposing views, elimination of prejudice against people and their beliefs, mutual respect are maintained. These settings stimulate students to participate in class and share responsibility for the outcomes with teachers. Teachers and students become co-partners. It results in a shift of students' status from consumers of educational process to active participants in the educational process. Other researchers assume that team teaching (co-teaching) is the most effective technique in getting and controlling student interest (Dugan *et al.*, 2008). Two teachers share responsibility for the student's outcome. Students benefit from this technique as the inputs of two guiders are more significant and variable than the contribution of one teacher. Teachers could integrate different relevant materials in one course (Aschbacher, 1994). Co-partner status obliges students to take responsibility for self-assessment (Stiggins *et al.*, 2005). Assessment is considered to be one of the components of quality learning. It assumes, that students can answer six questions: what they learn, why they learn it, how they do it, when they do it according to the plan, and where they get. Assessment is used 'as a vehicle to deepen the learning and to reveal to students their developing proficiencies' (Stiggins *et al.*, 2005; Heritage, 2009). Some researchers found out a positive correlation between students' self-assessment and their achievements (Pintrich, 2000; Zimmerman and Schunk, 2004). If students assess their outcomes they could develop their individual strategies, and choose individual paths to achieve the goals. In other words they could be more self-regulated in the process of learning (Valtcheva, 2009). It provides both teachers and students with expected outcomes and techniques available to attain them (Munoz *et al.*, 2012; Suskie, 2004). To what extent students are satisfied with the course in particular and higher education in general depends on different factors. Elliot and Healy (2001) assume that students' satisfaction depends on study courses. It is 'a short-term attitude based on an evaluation of their experience with the education service supplied' (Elliot and Healy, 2001). Hartman and Schmidt (1995) have another view on students' level of satisfaction. They consider that it depends on the academic internal environment created by the institution. Research of A. Garcia-Aracil (2009) confirms that students are satisfied with their study expectations.

### **3. Research Methodology**

166 students of the 2<sup>nd</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, 2014. They answered three open questions:

1. What motivates you to study foreign language?
2. What skills help you learn English?
3. What is in your opinion positive in the process of teaching English?

#### 4. Survey Results

Students of the Faculty of World Economy and International Affairs are highly motivated to learn foreign languages because they plan to join multinational companies after graduating from the university and seek challenging positions. Students are carrier-oriented. 95% of respondents rate carrier benefits first. They are highly motivated by an extrinsic factor. According to self-determination theory carrier motive is transformed into personally endorsed value. Students associate personal academic achievements with their future occupational status. Our results coincide with the results of Uguroglu and Walberg (1979). They found that 98% of the direct correlation between motivation and students' achievement was positive (Uguroglu and Walberg, 1979; Ginsberg, 2005). According to Human capital theory firm-specific capital implies skills and knowledge that are valuable for the employer. So the motive of our students to learn English according to a socio-educational model is mainly instrumental. Students are interested in utilitarian usage of English language. They think that the language brings them some benefits when they either get a degree or enter a labor market. The learners try to acquire more professional skills not only relevant to their future professional capacities but are more valuable for the employers. These skills help them gain competitive edge in the labor market in order to join a lucrative business. Students consider that a position in a progressive company provides them with job and financial security. To pursue this goal students work out their own educational strategies. They include: to develop professional skills (communication skills, cross-cultural communication skills in order to interact with people from different cultural backgrounds and others), to progress in studying English, to take part in academic events at the university, to improve English skills and establish relations with potential employers. One of the important components of this model is students' attitude towards the language environment (university, teacher, course, textbooks).

The Higher School of Economics creates a multi-cultural environment. It is provided by two ways: first, reputable scientists, professors from foreign universities are invited to teach students, to involve them in scientific researches; second, more and more students from other countries with different cultural backgrounds are studying with Russian students. Classes are becoming international. The university offers a wide range of mobility programs from summer, semester programs to year-long exchanges with partner institutions. Students of the university participate in these mobility programs. Participation in scientific researches opens a door for students to international scientific community. All students could gain international experience through both mobility programs and international scientific collaboration. They get an opportunity to communicate with students from linguistically and culturally diverse backgrounds. Academic mobility is one of the extrinsic motivational factors to study English. Archer and Davidson (2007) proved that academic experience gained by students abroad increases graduates' employability in the future. According to our survey results 42% respondents are sure that studying overseas makes them well-rounded. It, firstly, develops their cultural communication skills; secondly, contributes to their self-development. They could build a network which is important for their future education and career.

Research proves that students of the Higher School of Economics are more motivated by extrinsic factors to study English. But intrinsic motivational factors are also important for 48% of students. Results reveal that they are motivated by English language itself. Respondents write that they like to study English with a great interest. They learn more about English culture, conventions, etiquette, national characteristics and interesting facts from people's lives at the lessons. The students of the Faculty of World Economy and International Affairs are satisfied with the progress made in class thanks to their teachers. 93% of students recognize the role of teacher as the leader and a guiding force. The role of teacher was rated second after the language in acquiring and enhancing professional skills. It makes students' motivation challenging for teachers. Learners high appreciation of the role of a teacher proves that: first, teachers' objectives match students' needs, all participants of the educational process pursue the same goals; second, strategies worked out by teachers are long-term and winning, methods applied are modern; third, teachers and students are copartners, this equality in status provides positive cooperation, which makes the atmosphere at the lesson creative and forces students to actively participate in discussions. All these internal factors contribute to students' motivation and progress in English. Our results are supported by other research findings (Eccles *et al.*, 1995; Gardner, 1985). There is a cyclical correlation between students' achievements and their motivation to learn English: on the one hand, the higher their achievements are the more motivated they become; on the other hand, the higher the track of the class, the more effort students exerted (Carbonaro, 2005).

The course of English at the faculty of World Economy and International Affairs focuses on developing communication skills. Students (97%) give priority rank to discussions at the lessons. They value this type of class activity, because it stimulates them to express their own views, articulate expert opinion, stand for a particular point of view. They need to demonstrate content acquisition, knowledge of grammar; practice communication-based skills. They have to lead, make arguments, reach compromise and respect other opinions and sets of value. The results of one research (Dallimore *et al.*, 2008) reveal two types of connection in discussion: first, between students' preparation and participation; second, between preparation and number of participants. Students' level of preparation for a discussion influences their frequency of participation in it. These in turn have an influence on the number of participants who feel themselves more confident in discussion. In our research these two connections were disclosed. Students' participation in discussion is defined by what they could contribute to it. They are taught to become good team-players. As a result discussion is considered to be a crucial motivator for student learning. From lesson to lesson more and more students take part in discussions. Teacher stimulates students to get to know more about the issue discussed and involves them in deep learning (Johnston *et al.*, 2000; Marton and Saljo, 1976). It provides close relationships between the questions arisen at the lesson and current problems in the economy.

'Discussion is democratic by nature' (Redfield, 2000). No one could force a student to take part in it. On the other hand, the role of teacher in discussion is crucial. A teacher encourages students to take part in discussion through framing thinking and conducive atmosphere. The teacher offers challenging questions for a discussion; defines logical structure of it and requirements for an expression; direct students' critical thinking; create positive atmosphere. Discussion is a challenge for teacher. Survey results show that teachers of the faculty cope with this challenge. We get the same research results as Koichiro Otani, B. Joon Kim and Jeong-IL Cho (2012) in the recent survey. 97% of our respondents value teachers of English at the faculty of World Economy and International Affairs for clear explanations, creative learning environment, time-management (effective use of class time) and stimulating course materials. It is explained by the fact that English teachers of the faculty are highly qualified specialists. 64% of teachers has a doctorate in Linguistics, Pedagogy and Sociology, 64% of them are assistants of professor. They are engaged in scientific researches, informed about progressive methods in different areas of Linguistics, Pedagogy and Sociology. Their educational background and professional background result in modern and effective techniques applied to stimulate students to learn English. 68% of students write that a teacher explains a new material in a clear way. If there is a personal need a student is consulted by either the teacher or another one out of his/her class time. Students get an easy access to all teachers and get assistance from the teaching staff. They write that they could discuss everything with a teacher at any time. Students appreciate this because they take part in academic events so it is important for them to ask questions, to get some professional advice on a report, presentation prepared for example for a conference or G-200 summit. Such an access is provided by one of the most effective methods of teaching: the model of collaborative (team/ cooperative teaching) (Murawski, 2005). Two or three teachers (first-year student is given two courses: General English and Business English; second-year student is given three courses: General English, Business English and Mass Media) work in one student group. Educators work in one domain but specialize in different areas. It is challenging for students to operate successfully in all areas. Survey shows that they benefit from the integrative course of English. It broadens their mind, stimulates them to enrich vocabulary. Getting an opportunity to ask the same question two or three teachers students consider the issue discussed from two or three sides. Due to this students build the whole picture and understand how to fit into it in order to, for example, analyze the economic situation or solve a political problem. Survey results found that both team-teaching and teacher availability to students are contributions into positive teacher-student relationships and students' academic performance. The same results were got by Wilson and Martin (1998).

Teachers on the one hand benefit from team-playing. They could get support from the colleagues at any time. It creates a spirit of a team. On the other hand they have to set and maintain the same evaluation standards to pursue two targets: first, improvement of students' learning; second, transparency of assessment to make standards clear to students. Clear criterion scale is developed by English teachers at the faculty of World Economy and International Affairs. All participants in assessment process share vision of outcomes. Assessment plays the role of 'a vehicle to deepen the learning and to reveal to students their developing proficiencies' (Stiggins, Chappuis, 2005). Students could regulate their process of learning with the help of educative curriculum materials.

Our research reveals that 62% of students of the faculty of World Economy and International Affairs appreciate curriculum materials. Respondents wrote that materials are on contemporary issues in economy and policy, interesting, new, diverse, multi-leveled and thought-provoking.

### **5. Research Findings**

We discuss the findings of this study with respect to the research questions. The key strengths 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 are: academic environment created by the university; learning environment created by the teachers; curriculum support materials for students. They have a significant impact on the students' motivation to study English for professional purposes, their development and satisfaction of the process of learning English at the university. The two agents of the language environment: university and a teacher help students integrate into inclusive environment, provide students' involvement in educational process and make them equal participants of it.

The established relation between extrinsic and intrinsic motivational factors was found. Our results show that the students of the Faculty of World Economy and International Affairs are motivated by both extrinsic and intrinsic motivational factors. Extrinsic factors were accounted for 52% whereas intrinsic motivational factors were accounted for 48%. The results of our survey don't coincide with the results of research conducted by Comfort Pratt (Comfort P. *et al.*, 2009). According to their research motivational factors were accounted for 55.7 % and 70.89% respectively. In our research extrinsic motivational factors take precedence over intrinsic motivational factors, but the difference in figures is insignificant. Marginal difference in figures proves the importance of both motivational factors for students. It discloses that all agents of the educational process at the Faculty of World Economy and International Affairs (university, teachers and students) pursue compatible goals. Students rely on teachers' guidance, expertise and support since 97% of our respondents value teachers of English for establishing creative learning environment, effective time-management, 68% - for clear explanations and 62% - for stimulating course materials. Students trust teachers so they are highly motivated to follow them. Due to these trustful relations between participants of the educational process both learning skills (developing memory, developing learning strategies, self-assessment, reflecting on feedback, understanding text, reporting information, summarizing, organizing and prioritizing, thinking logically, critically, creatively) and professional skills (presenting information, advocating, leading, persuading, making arguments, respecting other opinions, other sets of value, communicating, collaborating, negotiating, networking, reaching compromise, turning problems to opportunities, finding solutions) acquired by students at the lessons and from work with the curriculum materials help them reach tangible academic achievements and in the future 'fit the global picture'.

### **6. Conclusion**

Analysis of the survey results lets us discover three strengths in teaching English language at the Faculty of World Economy and International Affairs of National Research University Higher School of Economics which provide a competitive advantage for NRU HSE in the educational market. They are: creative academic environment at the university; effective learning environment at the lesson; standard-based and conventional curriculum support materials for students. Contributions of the two agents (university and teachers) of the educational process in the students' intrinsic motivation to study English language and diversity of their skills acquired are crucial. They produce valuable human resources and make this labor capital firm-specific. It is proved by the research results: 96% of the respondents plan to join the quinary sector of the economy. This sector is a knowledge-based part of the economy which is characterized by the highest level of decision-making. Students' educational outcomes have a significant impact on graduates position in the society and business; their social, job and financial security.

This study opens the door for further empirical researches to be conducted: what are the 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 (weaknesses have already been covered). The research in this area should be replicated with students of the third year and fourth year to determine if similar results are achieved.

## 7. References

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