

Volkova Olena

Senior Teacher

National Technical University of Ukraine
“Igor Sikorsky Kyiv Polytechnic Institute”

***Summary:** The article highlights the principles and stages of students’ needs analysis for the effective development of courses, curricula, syllabuses and further teaching methodological support materials in teaching professionally oriented foreign languages at technical universities. The place of students’ needs analysis and various approaches to its application in the process of designing programmes and content selection have been described on the basis of the conducted comparative research.*

***Key words:** students’ language needs, course designing, language programs, professionally oriented foreign language, professional requirements.*

ANALYSIS OF STUDENTS’ LANGUAGE NEEDS IN COURSE DESIGNING

The perception of students’ needs is a prerequisite for the designing of a course, curriculum and syllabus in the system of higher education in many countries. A student in a modern education system is considered as a ‘client’ or ‘consumer’. And the process of pre-planning and planning a language course requires from programme designers not only a good understanding of how language items interconnect with each other, how to choose topics, and develop a series of tasks, but also they should have a clear understanding of students’ needs, wants and expectations.

The objective of the article is to analyse the place, principles and stages of students’ needs research in the effective development of a course, curriculum or syllabus and their further teaching methodological support materials.

The analysis of specific language needs of students who study foreign

languages has been considered in the literature on the methodology of teaching foreign languages for a long time. This issue has been discussed in scientific works of L. Alekseeva, S. Burgess, A. Davies, T. Dudley-Evans, J. Harmer, K. Head, T. Hutchinson, M.J. St John, S. Kozhushko, O. Tarnopolsky, A. Waters, and J. Yalden.

In foreign literature, the idea of analysing specific language needs of students originated and spread in the field of teaching foreign languages and was denoted by the term 'needs analysis'. In 1998 T. Dudley-Evans and M.J. St John published their research work 'Developments in English for Specific Purposes' that is dedicated to the problem of identifying specific language problems. According to the authors of this book, such research should include the gathering, processing, and analysis of students' language needs. And in the course of research of language needs, the full range of target situations and contexts that require the use of a foreign language should be identified as fully as possible [7]. They also state that preplanning and planning stages of course development involves determining: 1) the purpose of studying ESP by students and 2) how the interaction/communication in a foreign language will be realized by specialists in the future (by telephone, in personal contact, in correspondence) [7, pp. 121-140].

S. Burgess and K. Head suggest that course designers should also consider, before planning a course, the number of students in the class, their age, language and cultural background, specific linguistic and cultural factors, their language level and purpose of taking a course [5, p. 15]

The researchers L. Alekseeva, S. Burgess, K. Head, T. Hutchinson, S. P. Kozhushko, O. B. Tarnopolsky, A. Waters, and J. Yalden argue that the analysis of students' language needs directly affects and plays an important role in course planning and content selection, and it should be conducted before the development of a programme [1, 3, 5, 9, 10]. Whereas A. Davies and J. Harmer offer to analyse student language needs not only before designing a program, but

also during the process of teaching students, and after the completion of the course by students. On the basis of the collected information, programmes of study should be evaluated in order to improve them [6, p. 10; 8, p.368].

In accordance with the current English language program for professional communication [2, p. 6], the content selection of the ESP syllabus should be carried out on the basis of the analysis of data that can be obtained by 1) a survey of students, professionals, employers, lecturers of major courses and ESP teachers; 2) testing the level of language proficiency of students; 3) conducting interviews and analysing job descriptions; 4) conducting the pre-project research of a foreign language for professional communication. Moreover, the syllabus content should [2, p. 6]:

- be based on the international levels of language proficiency in the Common European Framework;
- consider the previous experience of students, their requirements, wants and needs for language learning;
- have well-defined objectives and learning outcomes;
- take into account professional and educational skills;
- cover professional, academic, situational and pragmatic content;
- correspond to the industry standards, national educational and qualification characteristics and programs;
- be modular in its organization.

Teaching a professionally oriented foreign language to future specialists will be effective providing the content, structure, and organization of the course of study will be most closely approximated to the real needs of students and their future profession [1, p. 9]. The main attention should be given to mastering the language of a definite future specialty of students, their professional communication skills with the use of this language [3, p. 10]. Therefore, the distinctive and specific feature of professionally oriented language teaching is that each professional sector or special discipline may have its own foreign

language training course, developed in accordance with professionally meaningful goals and objectives, and characteristic only of this branch or discipline [1, p. 14].

Some scholars [1 c. 14; 4, p. 23] believe that content-based second language instruction is a leading and effective way of optimizing and intensifying the teaching of a professionally oriented foreign language to students, and they offer an interdisciplinary design of a course in a foreign language study, the content of which may reflect different subjects of specialty. In addition, the analysis of students' needs should be used only at the stage of selecting topics for the content of teaching. The selection of the remaining components should be conducted by methodologists and linguists, following a scientifically grounded procedure.

Considering the issue of research of students needs for using a foreign language in a professional context, it is necessary to mark the main stages of such research:

- detection of language needs of students;
- assessment of language knowledge, skills, and abilities of students;
- analysis of the obtained results.

The first stage is connected with the diagnostics and analysis of the spheres of the professional interaction of specialists in a foreign language and the identification of the specifics of their language needs.

The second stage is based on the diagnostics of existing phonetic, lexical and grammatical knowledge of a foreign language, as well as the identification of the level of language proficiency in all kinds of speech activities, both receptive (reading and listening comprehension), and productive (speaking and writing). At this stage, the quality of language tests used to define the level of language proficiency is of paramount importance.

The final stage is an objective assessment of diagnostics and research of specific language needs which should include all the key information necessary

for the development of a training program and the further development of teaching materials for its implementation. A foreign language training program has to be developed on the basis of the results of students language needs research, taking into account the specifics of the industry that influences and often defines a number of decisions regarding the content, forms, methods of teaching, and the expected results of teaching/learning activities.

It is important to emphasize that in the analysis of language needs, the focus is on students, and the analysis of language needs is considered as one of the stages of teaching/learning a specialized and professionally oriented foreign language. The analysis of student language needs should be based on data and information collected through subjective and objective sources: questionnaires, interviews, observations, and test methods. The obtained data influence the choice of techniques, methods, and means of teaching, language material, and are also used in the development of programs in higher educational establishments, in particular, programs for teaching foreign languages.

In the system of national education, insufficient attention has been traditionally paid to the research and analysis of students' needs. Although, during the planning and designing of education programs, it is recommended that students should be interviewed in order to find out their wishes regarding the course content and methods of teaching. In practice, such studies are not always carried out. In the National Technical University of Ukraine 'Kyiv Polytechnic Institute named after Igor Sikorsky', the attempts are made to objectively evaluate and take into account students' points of view. Over the past several years, anonymous surveys of students of all courses have been conducted to determine the appropriateness of the language programs to the needs of students. However, overall, the surveys are more focused on the assessment of teachers' qualifications and their attitude towards students, rather than on the questions regarding the applied methods and content of teaching.

The research, conducted to determine the language level, and practical experience show that, firstly, the level of students' writing skills is still very low, while the demand for these skills is rather high. Secondly, most students are still experiencing difficulty in perception and understanding a professionally oriented foreign language. This should be taken into account in the development of programs and the selection of teaching resources in order to provide the necessary amount of audio and video materials and help to increase the speed and the quality of perception of professionally oriented information, and the effectiveness of professional interaction in a foreign language.

Thus, the effective development of a professionally oriented foreign language course, curriculum or syllabus, and their further teaching methodological support materials is based on a thorough study and analysis of general professional requirements and language needs of students. The success and quality of teaching a foreign language largely depend on the effectiveness and quality of such research. Comprehensive research of language problems on the scale of the whole industry or field of professional knowledge will allow course designers to write a more appropriate program of study of a specific professionally oriented foreign language, taking into account the whole spectrum of knowledge, abilities, skills, and situations in the field of professional foreign language communication.

References

1. Алексеева Л. Е. Методика обучения профессионально ориентированному иностранному языку. Курс лекций : [метод. пособ.] / Л. Е. Алексеева. – СПб.: Филологический фак-тет СПбГУ, 2007. – 136 с.
2. Програма з англійської мови для професійного спілкування / [колектив авторів : Г.Є. Бакаєва, О.А. Борисенко, І.І. Зуєнок та ін.]. – К.: Ленвіт, 2005. – 119 с.
3. Тарнопольский О. Б. Методика обучения английскому языку для делового общения: учебное пособие/ О. Б. Тарнопольский,

- С. П. Кожушко. – К.: Ленвіт, 2004. – 192 с.
4. Тарнопольский О. Б. Навчання через зміст, змістовно-мовна інтеграція та іншомовне занурення у викладанні іноземних мов для професійних цілей у немовних вишах / О. Б. Тарнопольский // Іноземні мови – 2011. – Вип. 3. – С. 23-27.
 5. Burgess S., Head K. How to teach for exams / Sally Burgess, Katie Head. – Essex : Pearson Education Limited, 2005. – 156 p.
 6. Davies A. What do learners really want from their EFL course? Retrieved from:<http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.476.5760&rep=rep1&type=pdf>
 7. Dudley-Evans T., St John M.J. Developments in ESP. A multi-disciplinary approach. – Cambridge: Cambridge university Press, 1998. – 301 p.
 8. Harmer J. The practice of English language teaching / Jeremy Harmer. – [4th ed.]. – Essex : Pearson Education Limited, 2007. – 448 p.
 9. Hutchinson T., Waters A.. English for Specific Purposes: A learner-centred approach. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997. – 183 p.
 10. Yalden J. Principles of Course Design for Language Teaching. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996 – 207 p.