

## MOTIVATION OF TECHNICALLY-ORIENTED STUDENTS TO LEARN ENGLISH FOR SPECIFIC PURPOSES

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**Abstract:** The submitted paper discusses motivation towards foreign language learning, specifically motivation of university students towards learning English for specific purposes at the Technical University in Zvolen. In addition, it presents results of questionnaire survey on the mentioned topic. We can conclude that the students perceive the necessity of learning the English language and are aware of its importance in their future career. Furthermore, they believe that the number of lessons of English for specific purposes provided currently in their study is not satisfactory.

**Keywords:** English for specific purposes, motivation, questionnaire, statement

### 1 Introduction

One of the key skills of the graduates from technical universities in Slovakia is mastering English or one other foreign language. However, English as the Lingua Franca is preferred in all spheres of science. Main subjects and sciences they deal with during their university studies are complemented by the courses of foreign languages – especially languages for specific purposes. Mastering professional languages extends their possibilities of finding and obtaining interesting job proposals at the labour market. Due to the international tendency and preference, English is taught as the first foreign language in Slovakia. Therefore, this language is the most preferred one at technical universities in Slovakia, where mainly as English for Specific Purposes (ESP) is taught.

The submitted paper is focused on the motivation of technical university students to learn English and especially ESP. The courses are part of their curricula and language exam is a compulsory part of their (predominantly) technical and practice-oriented studies. Our attention was paid to their attitudes, opinions and motivation for learning ESP. In the first part of the paper, essential information on the learner motivation is presented, approaching the importance of internal, as well as external sources of motivation. The second part deals with the results of a short survey carried out at the Technical University in Zvolen, bringing particular outcomes and conclusions.

#### 1 Motivation as a key factor in every language learning (not only for specific purposes)

Learner motivation represents a key factor in foreign language learning, since it determines the learning process and affects indirectly the quality of foreign language knowledge (Jurišević – Pižorn, 2012). It has a great impact on creating and the rate of creating memory traces (Škoda – Doulík, 2011). Therefore, it is an element that ESP teachers have to take into consideration when planning their courses.

Petty (1996) mentions seven reasons why learners want to learn:

- The things I am learning will be beneficial for me – for university students this reason is considered crucial.
- The qualification I will achieve in the study will be beneficial – for students it is important to understand the short-term as well as long-term significance of the curriculum.
- Good study achievements and success increase my confidence – according to Petty, this factor is the strongest one and it is the driving force of the entire learning process. However, it can be also demotivating. Experiencing

success or failure is similar to going around in circles. If the learner experiences success, it evokes satisfaction and brings about self-confidence. Subsequently also the motivation increases leading to further success. Nevertheless, if a student experiences failure, they encounter criticism and the self-confidence and motivation decrease. For every student to experience success it is inevitable to know what to do and that they always can turn to the teacher for advice. Tasks that the learners receive should be manageable and challenging at the same time. This is the reason for establishing the standards very carefully since appraisal for a very easy task will not be appreciated. In this aspect it is crucial to assign tasks according to students' individual skills. This way the teacher creates favourable conditions also for weaker students to succeed.

- When my achievements will be good, the teacher and peers will respond positively – it is natural that the learners want to feel appreciated by the teacher and peers and more successful than the others. However, the competition has to be tackled very carefully since it can lead to decreasing the motivation and self-assessment of other students. The teacher must not tolerate demonstration of superior acting of the more successful students over the less successful ones.
- When I will not study, the consequences will be negative – negative consequences are usually in the form of a low grade. A test announced in advance can have a strong motivation character. When the students know that the teacher “checks” on them regularly, they will do their best and pay attention in the classes. Nonetheless, it is also important to keep in mind the factor of success and failure.
- Things that I learn are interesting and evoke my curiosity – this factor is closely associated with the above mentioned factors.
- I find the classes interesting – when preparing the classes the teacher should keep in mind students' interests, they will find the curriculum much more interesting.

Learner motivation in foreign language teaching and identifying the factors that affect the learning process was discussed for the first time by the Canadian psychologist Gardner (1985, 2001). Within his studies, Gardner designed a socio-educational model of learning foreign languages with four main factors affecting the foreign language teaching:

- The influence of the outside environment,
- Individual differences among the learners,
- The environment and context where the foreign language teaching and learning takes place,
- Achievements in foreign language learning.

Later studies into motivation of foreign or second language learning indicated that the character of Gardner's model had some drawbacks (Dörnyei 2001, Oxford – Shearin 1994) as the model was focused mostly on the general components of motivation linked to the social environment, not to the specific environment where the foreign language learning and teaching takes place. In addition, Gardner's model missed a more closely specified cognitive aspect of motivation towards learning. Following various motivational studies in learning various languages, in various contexts and in various age groups Dörnyei (2001) stated that the specific character of social and pragmatic dimension of motivation towards foreign or second language learning always depends on who, which language and where they are learning the language. Following this conclusion, he designed a concept of foreign language learning motivation comprising three levels:

- Language level (various aspects associated with the specific language, such as culture conveyed by the language; community

where the language is spoken and potential usefulness of proficiency in that language);

- Learner level (need for achievement, self-confidence);
- Learning situation level (course-specific motivational components, teacher-specific motivational components, group-specific motivational components).

ESP teachers are well aware of the difference of the methodology between teaching General Purpose English and English for Specific Purposes. According to Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998), the ESP teacher sometimes becomes more like a language consultant, enjoying equal status with the students who have their own expertise in the subject matter. ESP is designed to meet specific needs of the learner. ESP teaching should reflect the methodology of the disciplines and professions it serves and it is centred on the language, skills, discourse and genres appropriate to these activities (Dudley-Evans - St. John, 1998, 4-5). All these particularities of ESP teaching and learning should be considered when thinking about the students' motivation to learn ESP.

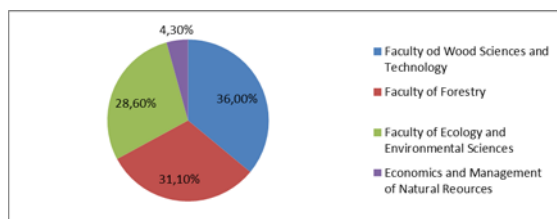
## 2 Results of the questionnaire survey

The survey was conducted of the students of the Technical University in Zvolen, Slovakia. The main aim of a short questionnaire was to find out students' opinions on the necessity of mastering ESP for their studies, as well as future career. The importance of ESP and especially the source of motivation to study ESP was asked for.

### 2.1 Characteristics of the respondents

The questionnaire was filled in by 161 students (62% of them were men, and 38% were women) from the following faculties of the Technical University in Zvolen, Slovakia:

- Faculty of Forestry (50 students, i.e. 31.1 % of the respondents);
- Faculty of Wood Sciences and Technology (58 students, i.e. 36 % of the respondents);
- Faculty of Ecology and Environmental Sciences (46 students, i.e. 28.6 % of the respondents);
- University study programme Economics and Management of Natural Resources (7 students, i.e. 4.3 % of the respondents).



Graph 1: Division of the respondents according to the faculties.

Students of the Technical University in Zvolen have a possibility to study ESP during several semesters, in several courses. However, the number of courses depends on the study specialisation, but all the students can enrol for compulsory and elective ESP courses.

### 2.2 Assessment of the students' responses

The questionnaire contained the following questions:

1. How many hours a week do you spend reading professional texts in English (except for university lessons, i.e. free time reading)? Please, select one of the options:

- a) 0 – 1.0 hour
- b) 1.1 – 2.0 hours
- c) 2.1 – 3.0 hours
- d) 3.1 hours and more

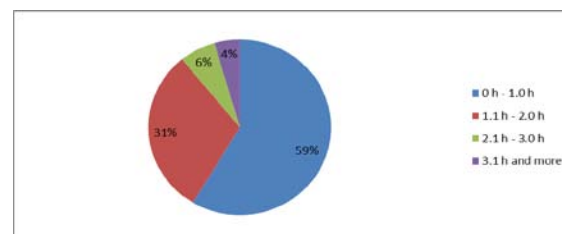
2. Assess the following statements on the scale from 1 to 5.

(Legend: 1 – strongly disagree, 2 – disagree, 3 – unsure, 4 – agree, 5 – strongly agree)

- a) Mastering ESP is very important.
- b) I will benefit from mastering ESP when writing my final thesis.
- c) Mastering ESP will be necessary for my future job.
- d) During my university studies, there were enough ESP courses.

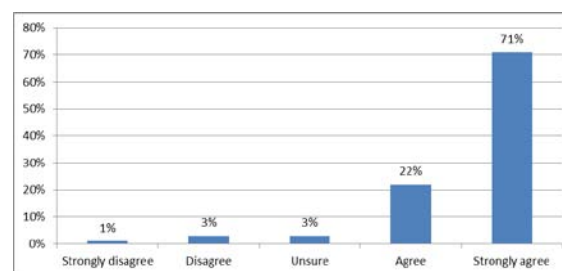
3. What motivates you to study ESP? Please, specify.

To answer the first question "How many hours a week do you spend reading professional texts in English (except for university lessons, i.e. free time reading)?", the students could choose from four options. The majority of the respondents chose the first option, i.e. they read less than one hour in their free time. 31 % of the students read more than one hour but less than 2 hours. More than 2 hours long reading is quite rare, only 10 % of the asked students spend their free time reading professional texts for more than 2 hours a week.



Graph 2: Answers to the question "How many hours a week do you spend reading professional texts in English?"

When assessing the second question, we came to quite positive conclusions. First of all, we wanted to find out if mastering ESP is important for the students, so if they understand the necessity of knowledge of professional or technical language. We were pleased to find out that majority of the respondents (71%) strongly agreed that mastering ESP is very important for them. It means that they understand the potential ESP has for them. Therefore, we can suppose that their motivation to study ESP is higher, since they understand importance of the ESP courses. 22 % of the asked students agreed with the statement. In a nutshell, 93 % of the students consider acquiring ESP an important part of their studies. More detailed evaluation of this statement by the students can be seen in the Graph 3.

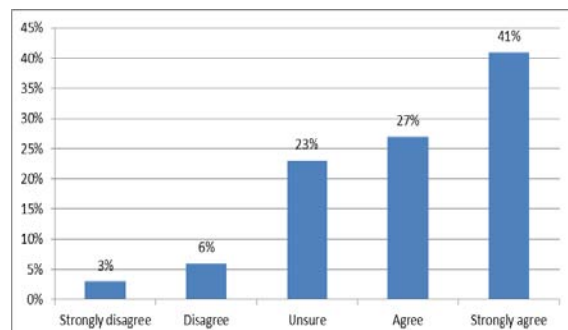


Graph 3: Do you agree with the statement "Mastering ESP is very important"?

The following statement is linked to the previous one. We asked the respondents if they agree with the sentence: "I will benefit from mastering ESP when writing my final thesis." This statement was aimed at finding out if they consider mastering ESP important for their university studies. The majority of the students (totally 68%) can see the benefit of mastering ESP for the preparation of the final thesis. This is a very important point, because it means that students use the professional language (e.g. reading scientific literature and searching for new and significant information). Thus the ESP is not only a goal of ESP courses, but it is also a tool to gain and apply information. This is the

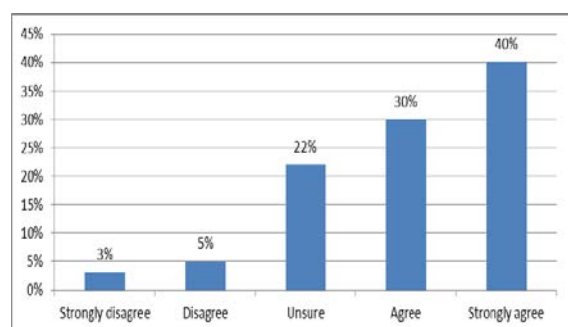
skill students will most probably use at their future job positions and university studies allow them to train it.

23 % of the students were unsure about the usefulness of ESP related to their final thesis. We assume that those were the students of the first or second year of the university studies and are inexperienced so far with final thesis preparation.



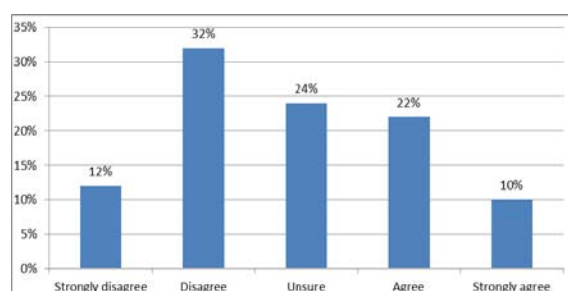
Graph 4: Do you agree with the statement "I will benefit from mastering ESP when writing my final thesis"?

We supposed that next statement "Mastering ESP will be necessary for my future job" would be probably clearer to assess for the students who are in the last year or next-to-last year of their studies. However, majority of the students (including the students from the first years of university studies) already considers the necessity of mastering ESP as something that can help them to find better work positions at the labour market in the future and can be an important part of their career. As we can see from the following graph (Graph 5), 70 % of the respondents agree with the statement, while 40 % of them even strongly agree.



Graph 5: Do you agree with the statement "Mastering ESP will be necessary for my future job"?

Assessment of the last statement "During my university studies, there were enough ESP courses" brought important information for us, teachers of ESP. From the students' responses we can conclude that the number of courses should be higher, since nearly 44 % expressed their disagreement with the statement. To sum up, students are aware of the necessity of studying ESP.



Graph 6: Do you agree with the statement "During my university studies, there were enough ESP courses"?

The last question of the questionnaire ("What motivates you to study ESP? Please, specify.") was the open one. We left the

space for the students to express themselves freely and openly. We read carefully all their answers and tried to divide them into basic categories we created for this purpose. The most common response, given by almost 75 % of students, was that the strongest driving force for them is the necessity to master the English language for their professional career. The second most often mentioned motivation driver was the teacher of the foreign language, with almost 48 % of students claiming this. Eventually, the third most often mentioned reason, with approximately 6 % of responses, was represented by teachers of other professional courses.

### 3 Conclusion

The assessment of the answers from the short questionnaire, circulated to the students of the Technical University in Zvolen, brought us to several conclusions. Technically-oriented students come into contact with foreign languages, especially with ESP, during their university studies, and ESP is a goal for them, as well as a useful tool for the acquisition of the latest information from foreign authors. They can see clearly the necessity of mastering ESP for their successful studies, as well as future career after graduation. We believe that their inner motivation to study ESP is well-based.

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### Primary Paper Section: A

### Secondary Paper Section: AM