

DOI 10.36074/logos-19.07.2024.040

THE PROBLEM OF STUDENT AGENCY IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING FOR ECONOMICS MAJORS

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Abstract. *This article explores the critical role of student agency in foreign language learning for economics majors, highlighting its impact on learner autonomy and motivation. A survey conducted among economics students from their first to fourth years of study reveals significant engagement with digital language learning tools and language exchange platforms, though a reluctance towards reading in English persists. The findings underscore the importance of integrating interactive language applications and multimedia resources into the curriculum to enhance language proficiency and meet the demands of the globalized job market. The study concludes by suggesting pedagogical strategies to foster student agency and proposes avenues for future research to address existing challenges and further optimize language learning outcomes for economics majors.*

The significance of investigating the phenomenon of student agency in foreign language training within higher education institutions is contingent upon a multitude of factors pertaining to the ever-evolving landscape of the modern economic realm. The intensifying globalization of the economy, the mounting competition in the labor market, and the necessity for effective communication with foreign partners have collectively elevated the standards for the proficiency of economic professionals in foreign languages. In view of this, the provision of high-quality foreign language training for students majoring in economics has become an essential responsibility for higher education institutions in Ukraine. The graduates of such institutions are anticipated to play a significant role in the development of the state and the growth of the economy.

Modern domestic and foreign scholars show considerable interest in the potential and peculiarities of the personality development of a future professional

SECTION 20.
PEDAGOGY AND EDUCATION

in the field of economics and the problems of foreign language training in particular. Thus, the problem of the training of future economists were investigated by O. Khomenko, O. Maksymenko, L. Maksymchuk, K. Matveieva, I. Nesterenko, H. Bondar, A. Ryzhkova and others. The peculiarities of foreign language training were highlighted in the works of N. Aristova, O. Malykhin, V. Bezliudna, O. Zabolotska, S. Konovalchuk, K. Kugai, I. Makhovych, O. Yashchuk and others.

The Higher Education Law, Law Number 1556-VII, adopted on 1 July 2014, aims to train competitive human capital for the country's development and meet societal and labor market needs. Ukraine supports international cooperation in higher education, including exchange programs and participation in international educational and scientific initiatives [5]. This reflects the state's recognition of the need for specialists with deep expertise, effective communication in foreign languages, and the ability to establish international business contacts.

In the context of foreign language learning for economics majors, the concept of student agency is of paramount importance. Empirical evidence indicates that fostering student agency has a significant impact on learner autonomy and motivation. In modern domestic and foreign psychological and pedagogical literature, there are different interpretations of the concept of motivation.

As defined by S. Honcharenko, motivation is "a system of motives or incentives that drives a person to specific forms of activity or behavior. Motives can include perceptions and ideas, feelings, and experiences that express a person's material or spiritual needs. One and the same activity can be carried out for different reasons." [4, p. 217]

Leading American scientist H. Heckhausen, while studying motivation, identified a key motive that drives a person to take action. He viewed motivation as a dynamic process where a person chooses from a set of available actions the one that, in his opinion, will lead to the achievement of the desired state clearly defined by this motive. This process is accompanied by a steady pursuit of the chosen goal [2].

According to N. Aristova, motivation can be considered "a systemic formation of external and internal motives, the hierarchy and interaction of which is formed under the influence of certain factors". The scientist notes that "motivation occupies a central place in the structure of the personality and is one of the main concepts used to explain the driving forces and direction of its activities and behavior." [1, p. 14]

Analyzing the essence of the concept of "learning motivation", we should mention the cognitive activity that takes place during the formation and development of a personality from an early age to the student years inclusive.

The research of foreign scientists on learning motivation is largely based on the work of the prominent American psychologist E. Thorndike. In his book *Human*

Learning, he described numerous experiments and studies aimed at exploring this complex phenomenon [6]. Thorndike focused on the psychological aspects that affect the memorization of numbers and individual movements, thus seeking to reveal the individual components of motivation.

The necessity to encourage future economic specialists to learn foreign languages is due to the fact that knowledge of languages provides access to a wider range of information and resources. A significant amount of valuable economic information is derived from authentic sources. Therefore, by speaking foreign languages, economic specialists can access this information and utilize it in the decision-making process, which in turn increases the competitiveness of such specialists in the labor market.

O. Khomenko defines foreign language training as a synthesis of "foreign language education" with its procedural aspects and their components and "foreign language teaching," which the scientist sees in the educational aspect of foreign language education. The scientist emphasizes that foreign language training, which integrates not only language learning but also the formation of communicative competencies, and general educational and educational knowledge, is a key factor in the adaptation of a young specialist to the modern information and globalized world. By acquiring proficiency in foreign languages, students not only gain the ability to communicate effectively in a new language but also become immersed in a different system of values and worldviews, expanding their own worldview. This, in turn, prepares them for effective intercultural communication and harmonious interaction with the globalized information and technological society, which is a prerequisite for successful professional development [3, p.57].

Student agency empowers learners to assume responsibility for their learning process, enabling them to set goals, make decisions, and engage actively in their language acquisition journey. This proactive role not only cultivates a deeper understanding of economic concepts in a foreign language but also fosters critical thinking and problem-solving skills essential for future professional contexts. Understanding and promoting student agency in this context is crucial for optimizing learning outcomes and preparing economics majors to navigate globalized professional environments effectively.

Existing research on foreign language learning for economics students highlights several challenges unique to this discipline. Economics majors often face difficulties in mastering specialized economic terminology and concepts in a foreign language, which are crucial for effective communication and analysis in global economic contexts. Moreover, they require strong language proficiency to interpret and critically evaluate economic theories and data presented in diverse

SECTION 20.
PEDAGOGY AND EDUCATION

linguistic settings [7]. These challenges underscore the importance of targeted language instruction that integrates economic content, thereby bridging the gap between linguistic competence and subject-specific knowledge.

However, a notable gap in current research pertains to the exploration of student agency, specifically within the context of foreign language learning for economics majors. While there is recognition of the benefits of learner autonomy and motivation in language acquisition overall, studies focusing explicitly on how economics students can harness their agency to enhance language learning outcomes remain limited. Understanding how agency influences the learning strategies and engagement of economics majors in foreign language acquisition could offer valuable insights into optimizing instructional approaches tailored to their disciplinary needs. Addressing this gap could lead to more effective pedagogical practices that empower economics students to excel in both linguistic proficiency and economic understanding in an interconnected global landscape.

It is of the utmost importance to encourage student agency in foreign language learning among economics majors in order to enhance their proficiency and to address the demands and exigencies of the globalized job market. By enabling students to assume an active role in their own learning, educators can foster greater autonomy and motivation, which are crucial elements for sustained linguistic development [8, p. 169]. The available evidence indicates that when students are encouraged to set learning goals, make decisions regarding their study methods, and engage critically with course materials, they exhibit higher levels of language acquisition and retention.

For economics majors, this approach not only facilitates the mastery of specialized economic terminology and concepts in foreign languages but also cultivates essential skills such as intercultural communication and adaptability, which are vital for navigating diverse and interconnected professional environments [9, p.95]. Therefore, implementing instructional strategies that prioritize student agency not only enhances language proficiency but also equips economics majors with the competencies necessary to thrive in the globalized economy.

The study employed a survey method to investigate the role of student agency in foreign language learning among economics majors. Participants consisted of students across various academic years (1st to 4th) from a selected university. The survey focused on gathering quantitative data regarding students' use of language learning applications and platforms such as Duolingo, Babbel, Memrise, Beelinguapp, Mondly, as well as their engagement with language exchange platforms like italki, HelloTalk, and social media communities on platforms like Facebook and Telegram. Additionally, qualitative insights were

gathered through open-ended questions to understand students' attitudes towards different language learning activities, including their preferences for watching TV shows and films in English rather than reading.

The survey revealed that economics students exhibit significant engagement with various digital language learning tools and platforms to enhance their language proficiency. A notable finding was the widespread use of apps like Duolingo and Babbel for continuous language practice. Moreover, platforms such as italki and HelloTalk played a crucial role in facilitating speaking and texting practice with native speakers, thereby enhancing students' communicative skills in English. However, the reluctance of students to engage in extensive reading in English emerged as a noteworthy challenge.

These findings align with existing research highlighting the efficacy of digital tools and language exchange platforms in promoting student agency and autonomy in language learning. They underscore the importance of integrating such tools into foreign language pedagogy for economics education to foster active learner participation and proficiency development. However, the aversion to reading in English suggests a need for targeted pedagogical strategies that promote reading comprehension skills and cultivate a deeper appreciation for textual analysis among economics majors. Addressing these challenges through tailored instructional approaches could optimize language learning outcomes and better prepare students for the linguistic demands of the globalized job market.

Based on the findings from the survey of economics students, several targeted strategies can be proposed to enhance student agency in foreign language learning. Firstly, integrating and promoting the use of interactive language learning applications such as Duolingo, Babbel, and Memrise can be encouraged within the curriculum. These tools not only provide structured language practice but also empower students to personalize their learning paths based on individual preferences and progress. Secondly, fostering partnerships with language exchange platforms like italki and HelloTalk can facilitate real-world language applications through speaking and texting practice with native speakers. Thirdly, incorporating multimedia resources such as English-language TV shows and films with subtitles can cater to diverse learning styles while promoting cultural immersion and improving listening skills. Lastly, to address the reluctance towards reading in English, educators could introduce engaging and relevant reading materials aligned with economics content, thus promoting both language proficiency and subject-specific knowledge acquisition. Implementing these strategies can effectively promote student agency, enhancing both linguistic competence and readiness for global professional environments among economics majors.

SECTION 20.

PEDAGOGY AND EDUCATION

Conclusion. The study examined the role of student agency in foreign language learning among economics majors through a survey of students across various academic years. The findings indicate a high prevalence of digital language learning tools, such as Duolingo, and engagement with language exchange platforms, such as italki. This suggests that students are actively pursuing language proficiency. Nevertheless, a reluctance towards reading in English was identified as a potential obstacle. It is evident that student agency in language learning is of paramount importance, as it fosters autonomy and motivation, which are essential for navigating globalized professional environments.

Student agency remains a pivotal factor in foreign language learning for economics majors, enabling them to tailor learning strategies, engage actively with diverse linguistic resources, and develop critical communication skills. This proactive approach not only enhances linguistic proficiency but also cultivates adaptability and intercultural competence, which are vital for success in the interconnected global job market. Future research could explore effective pedagogical approaches to mitigate challenges like reading reluctance and further enhance student agency through innovative educational technologies and cross-disciplinary collaborations. By addressing these areas, educators can better prepare economics majors to excel in both linguistic fluency and economic expertise in a globalized context.

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