



DYNAMICS OF THE INTEREST FOR LEARNING FOREIGN LANGUAGE IN UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

The high level of proficiency in a foreign language is increasingly important for the successful professional realization of graduates. Employers' expectations for the level of language training of specialists are constantly increasing. The disclosure of the change in the attitude towards the foreign language as a result of the conducted training and the dynamics of the individual motives of the students are important guidelines for improving the quality of the foreign language training. The aim of the presented research is to follow the dynamics of interest in learning a foreign language among university students. The research toolkit is a questionnaire with Likert-type answer scales, organized in three modules. The results show a positive dynamics of motivation to learn the language in terms of intrinsic motivation - spontaneous interest in the foreign language, and the instrumental motivation - chances of finding a job, family insistence, the usefulness of working with computers, opportunities to use information and get closer to the developed nations. The practical applicability of the results: The established dependencies are heuristic guidelines for teachers in their work with student groups to increase the effectiveness of teaching.

Key words: foreign language learning, dynamics of interest, instrumental motivation, intrinsic motivation.

INTRODUCTION

The study of the dynamics of students' interest in learning a foreign language is provoked on the one hand by the claims of employers for the level of language proficiency of the specialists working with them, and on the other hand by the commitment of the university professionals. The quality of professional training is the main goal of the education of specialists in economics, agriculture and veterinary specialties of Trakia University, who study English, German, French and Russian. In all previous studies, employers give relatively lower assessments of the level of language competence of specialists, compared to their technological training. This requires continuous research on the dynamics of students' interest in learning a foreign language, in order to

stimulate motivation to learn by increasing the quality of language learning through the use of more effective forms of learning.

The aim of the study is to establish the dynamics of students' interest in learning a foreign language in the first and second year of university, through the intensity of their motivation to learn, the attitude to language learning in two consecutive courses and the dynamics of their subjective assessments for the most useful forms of teaching a foreign language.

The tasks of the research are: to perform comparative analysis of the motives for learning a foreign language, the main components of interest in language learning and the subjective assessments of the usefulness of different forms of teaching in two consecutive courses of university education.

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The methods used include a survey conducted in the academic year 2019-2020, among first and second year students of agricultural, economic and veterinary specialties at Trakia University - Stara Zagora, Bulgaria. Of the respondents, 46% are women and 54% are men, aged. The research tool is a questionnaire containing 34 items, some of which are composed of sub-items. The questions are built on Likert-type scale. The questionnaire is constructed in 3 modules: motives for learning the language, descriptors of the language learning process and forms of learning.

Statistical processing of the results was performed with the SPSS statistical analysis package (Nursis, 1986). The main statistical analyzes used in the study are dispersion analysis (ANOVA), Pearson correlational analysis, etc.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Globally, much of the concepts and research on language acquisition have been developed in the context of learning the language as the second language. This article discusses language learning is a type of process influenced by a complex network of factors that include the social context of learning, the relationships between those who communicate and attitudes toward the new culture. Learning a foreign language has a strong social character. According to Crooks, Oxford [1988, in Williams and Burden, 1997] this is 'learning to be a different social person', learning to identify with the foreign language community and in some cases adopting a different culture and new behaviors, the motivation to master the language as foreign and the dynamics of interest in learning it among students. Dörnyei [1996] describes the multifaceted nature of motivation to learn a foreign language, because language is both (a) a coded communication system that can be taught as a school subject; (b) an essential part of the individual's identity, and (c) is the connection of the social organization with the culture of the community where the language is used. Therefore, the motivation to learn a foreign language will have social and personal dimensions.

Gardner's foreign language learning process:

Gardner and Lambert [1972] were the first scientists to study the relationship between motivation and second language learning. The results of their research have a great influence on the further development of motivation to learn a

foreign language. The ideas of Gardner and Lambert [1972], subsequently discussed by Z. Dörnyei, & R. Schmidt, 2001, are related to the social and psychological aspects of language acquisition. The results of all the research they conduct show that a positive attitude towards language learning increases motivation and achievement. As a result of the research [Gardner and Lambert 1972, 1985], they were the first who distinguish two main types of motivation: instrumental and integrative. The first is associated with pragmatic reasons for learning a foreign language such as: fulfillment of educational requirements, social recognition, economic benefit and others. In these cases, language is seen as a tool that can help to achieve these goals. The second is typical for those who want to master the language in order to become part of a different cultural group, ie. they are driven by the motive of integrating as members of a language-speaking community. The people who identify themselves positively want to look like members of the community, to understand their culture, to be able to participate in it. According to Gardner [1985], Noels, K. A. (2001) integrative motivation is better because it supports and justifies the aspiration needed to master a language. However, Dörnyei [1990] argues that the meaning of integrative fits well with a bilingual community (the language being studied is second) and is not appropriate for learning the language as a foreign language. At a later stage, Gardner [1985] made a distinction between people who develop language in a bilingual environment with those who study it only in the classroom, but integrative motivation continues to dominate at the center of his research interest. According to Ely [1986], Ryan, RM & Deci, EL (2000)., Yashima, T., Zenuk-Nishide, L., & Shimizu, K. (2004), it is sometimes difficult to distinguish between integrative and instrumental motivation. They believe that both the overall and the instrumental type of motivation are positive factors for the strength of motivation. This fact is confirmed by the research of other theorists [Au, 1988; Horwitz, 1990, Crookes and Schmidt, 1989 quot. in Oxford, 1992; Lamb, M. (2004)., who describe the process as polymotivated, so that a single type of motivation cannot fully explain language learning. In Bulgaria, students have limited

opportunities to communicate in a foreign language except in the classroom. And in the context of learning the language as a second in a real environment, the result is a natural acquisition of the language, compared to the results of literary learning, which are realized in the classrooms in Bulgarian schools. Since learning a foreign language, especially English, is absolutely necessary due to the current global trend of its use as an international one, it can be assumed that Gardner's model is of practical importance in modern times because it emphasizes integrative motivation, which different authors (37)(8), (1) compare with intrinsic motivation (7). Because successful foreign language acquisition requires efforts and responsibility, which must be maintained over a long period of time if students' interest and development are enhanced through satisfying contacts and interactions, integrative motivation proves to be more effective than instrumental in learning attitudes (1). According to Clement et al. [1994], students who have a positive attitude towards a foreign language speak a foreign language and share the values of the community are more likely to be able to master the language than those with a less favorable attitude. On the other hand, instrumental motivation can be just as effective especially in the process of teaching foreign languages to students (1). Dörnyei [1994] considers these two types of motivation as two subsystems that overlap in foreign language learning. In England, for example, many foreign families choose to learn English, not because of some initial inner interest in the language itself, but because they understand that without knowledge of the language, they are isolated from the environment and will not be able to understand and support their children during the time of their educational, social and psychological development. This shows that involvement in the language learning process affects the strength and level of motivation (36).

Interest in learning in the context of foreign language teaching

Other authors focus on aspects of motivation in the context of learning a foreign language. Skehan [1989], Kleiner, Lipps & Ferrez, (2015), for example, expand the scope of research on the actual interdependence between language learning ability and motivation. As a result of these judgments,

Skehan puts forward the idea that the motivation to learn a foreign language can be generated by various sources. If students' behavior is determined by an innate interest in learning, motivation can be defined as inherent. If the behavior is determined by the amount of success experienced, motivation can be considered as effective as motivation for achievement (16),(34). According to Oxford and Shearin, motivation 'reflects the power to achieve a certain goal, which in turn influences the orientation of motivation' (40)(16). The internal motivation for activity is influenced by internal factors arising from the content of the activity (29);(35). Characteristics of inner behavior include interest in the language itself, personal need for achievement (strength, accession, applicability), expectation of success or failure, and rewards. External behavior includes attention, consistency over time, and maintaining a high level of activity (40). Certain behavior may also result from the application of sanctions or the giving of rewards. According to Brown [1987], Clement et al. [1994], motivation can explain students' success or failure if it is related to self-esteem as a factor influencing human behavior. Linguistic self-confidence includes anxiety about poor language skills, and strongly influences motivation. With a lower level of anxiety, students can rate their knowledge higher, be more confident. Those who are ashamed of their language skills lose their self-esteem and lower their motivation to learn. It is the teacher who must create a safe, non-threatening and a comfortable learning environment (41). During the foreign language learning process, it is necessary to provide a creative atmosphere in the classroom where individuals feel good, which would allow them to be more motivated to use the foreign language.

Thus, motivation is a combination of needs, goals and result (16); (28). The goal needs to be clearly formulated, and the feedback should be based on the goals and when the individual achieves his set goals, it should be really encouraged. Realistic feedback leads to perseverance and more effort and a sense of self-control over the end result (40),(26). Until the 1980s, many researchers, in their attempt to link the concepts of motivation in the field of pedagogical psychology with those in the field of foreign language learning, focused mainly on its socio-cultural dimensions. It is believed that the social dimension is not the only important component of motivation to learn a foreign language, 'in fact, from a pedagogical point of view, it may not even be the most important' (37).

It is important to distinguish between the different leading types of motivation, because this allows individual approaches, content, tools and learning materials, focused specifically on relevant vocabulary, grammar, and to develop reading, writing, etc. holistic skills, approaches in language teaching.

The assessment of the learning environment is also essential, which includes (1) unity of the group of students, (2) the qualities, personality and style of teaching of the teacher (competence, enthusiasm, involvement in the learning process) and (3) English language classes, attractiveness, practical applicability, difficulty) (42).

Pedagogical approach to motivation for learning a foreign language

Dörnyei [1994] identifies three key factors influencing the motivation to learn English as a foreign language: interest in the foreign language, culture and people; desire to expand the worldview; desire for new incentives and striving for challenges. According to him, the social pragmatic dimensions of foreign language learning depend on who learns what language and where (43). He divides the motivation to learn a foreign language into three levels: the level of the language, the level of the student and the level of the learning situation. The level of language includes motivating factors related to the culture and community of the foreign language, the potential advantages and values that are associated with the language. The author suggests using socio-cultural components such as video, music, books and others in the target language to support the overall development of knowledge, and to find the similarities and differences between the cultures of the two communities. This level can include 'the student's contacts with the speakers of the language being studied and the students' instrumental motivation to develop'. The student's level includes the individual characteristics that the student introduces into the learning process. This includes factors such as anxiety, perceived competence in the foreign language, past experience, self-esteem, self-confidence and more. According to Dörnyei [1994], creating a supportive, non-threatening learning environment may involve setting achievable goals. The third level in the context of foreign language learning comprises three subcomponents that are related to different aspects of foreign language learning in the classroom (43). These are specific

motivational components of the subject (curriculum, teaching materials, teaching methods, learning tasks); the defined teacher (the relationship between teacher and students, teacher behavior, sharing ideas between teacher and students and between students themselves, providing positive feedback); the defined group (support for collaboration, goal orientation, norms and reward system, group cohesion and class goal structure as a whole). Dörnyei recommends that students' independence be encouraged by giving them a real choice of alternative ways to achieve a goal, involving students in the organization, preparation and presentation of time-flexible activities. Tasks should stimulate internal motivation while accepting external. The division of motivation to learn a foreign language into three levels is based on the findings of Clement and his team [1994], which determine the existence of three main determinants of motivation to learn a foreign language: integrity, linguistic confidence and assessment of a classroom as learning environment. The difference is that Dörnyei expands the range of each individual component. Later Dörnyei and Otto [1998, 2000, 2001] further developed a concept of motivation by adding the element of time - a 'procedural (methodological) model of motivation to learn a language'. The model reflects the dynamic characteristics of motivation: i.e. motivation cannot be seen as a sustainable feature of learning that remains constant for months or years. It varies due to a number of factors, such as the period of the school year, the type of study activity or the phases in which different motives dominate. In the preliminary phase, known as motivation for choice, it is necessary to generate motivation so that the individual can choose a goal to achieve. A real, active phase is known as performance motivation, is applied in the classroom and is considered to be the need to actively maintain and protect motivation. The phase after the real one is a retrospective motivation. It is associated with a retrospective assessment of how things happened. The way in which students make sense of their past experiences during this phase determines the type of activities they will be motivated to perform in the future Dörnyei (8). A similar theory is presented by Williams & Burden (1997). Therefore, it can be concluded that the motivation of students actually changes according to different conditions, requirements and needs. The influence of the time factor on motivation can be checked by confirming the results with tests for deferred knowledge testing. In the field of psycholinguistics, the concept is

included that the process of language acquisition is both complete and gradual. In this way, motivation can be perceived not as a product, but as a process - a feature that can influence the concept of approaches to language teaching. It can be summarized that motivation is formed not only by internal, personal factors such as the need for expression, desire, willingness to learn, perseverance, interest, pleasure from lessons, striving for encouragement, but also from external ones such as teaching, interaction with peers, the overall requirements for the implementation of the tasks and the learning environment in general. In this sense, knowing the types of motivation that move students to master the language and constructing a learning environment that enhances

this motivation is an important pedagogical problem. Essential for increasing the motivation to learn a language, for example, is that the material and tasks are non-threatening, exciting, practically applicable, appropriately challenging and presented in an understandable way, allowing the stimulation of successful performance by students.

This is a way to change any negative attitudes and stereotypes that may harm students' motivation to learn a foreign language. Whatever the definitions and approaches to motivation are.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The data from the study show the following dependencies:

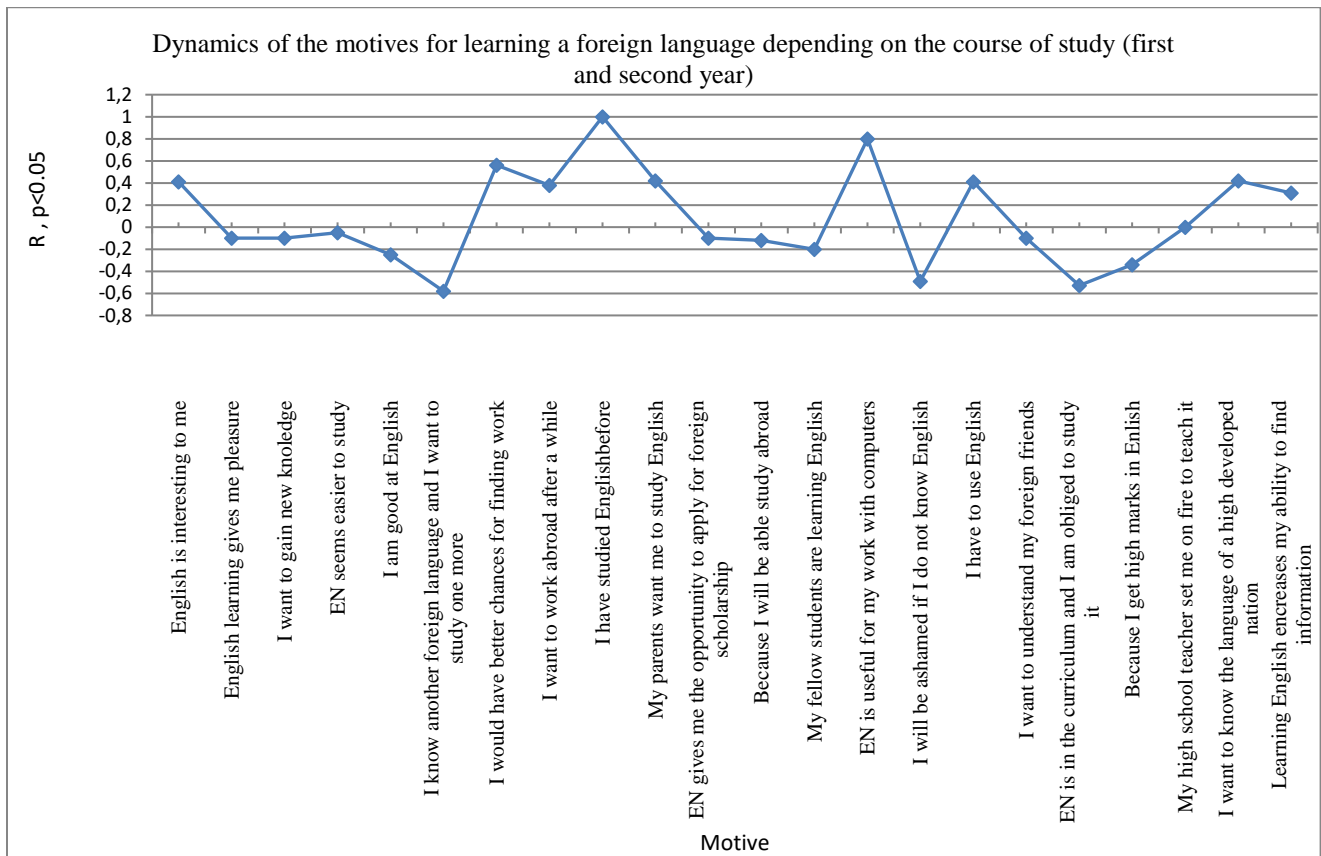


Figure 1. Pearson correlations reflecting the dynamics of the motives for learning a foreign language depending on the course of study (first and second year)

Negative correlations and negative dynamics of motivation for language learning are observed for the motives:

- Strong negative correlations, negative dynamics and therefore decreasing intensity of motives (R from -0.5 to -0.6; p <0.05) - students indicate that they already know another language and want to

master another one because they will be ashamed if they do not know a foreign language, and because the language is present in the curriculum and students are required to learn it.

- medium negative correlation (R from -0.4 to -0.2; p <0.05) is observed for the motives - students indicate that they are given to learn a language,

because their friends and fellow students also learn the language, and because they receive high marks in the language.

- A low negative correlation is observed for the motives (R from 0 to -0.2; $p < 0.05$) Respondents indicate that they will be able to apply to study abroad, receive foreign scholarships, as well as get along with their foreign friends. Low development of motivation is also seen because studying a foreign language gives pleasure to them, because they like to gain new knowledge and because it seems easy to learn.

It is evident that the administrative coercion as a motive becomes less and less important in the course of the training, as well as the dependence of the self-assessment on the assessments in the training. The final conclusion should be tested in future studies, as it somewhat contradicts the hypotheses of studies by Moskowitz [1978] and [Kichukova and Taneva, 2021].

In general, the results confirm the theory of Dörnyei and Otto [1998, 2000, 2001] and Williams & Burden, (1997) on the influence of the time factor on the motivation to learn a foreign language.

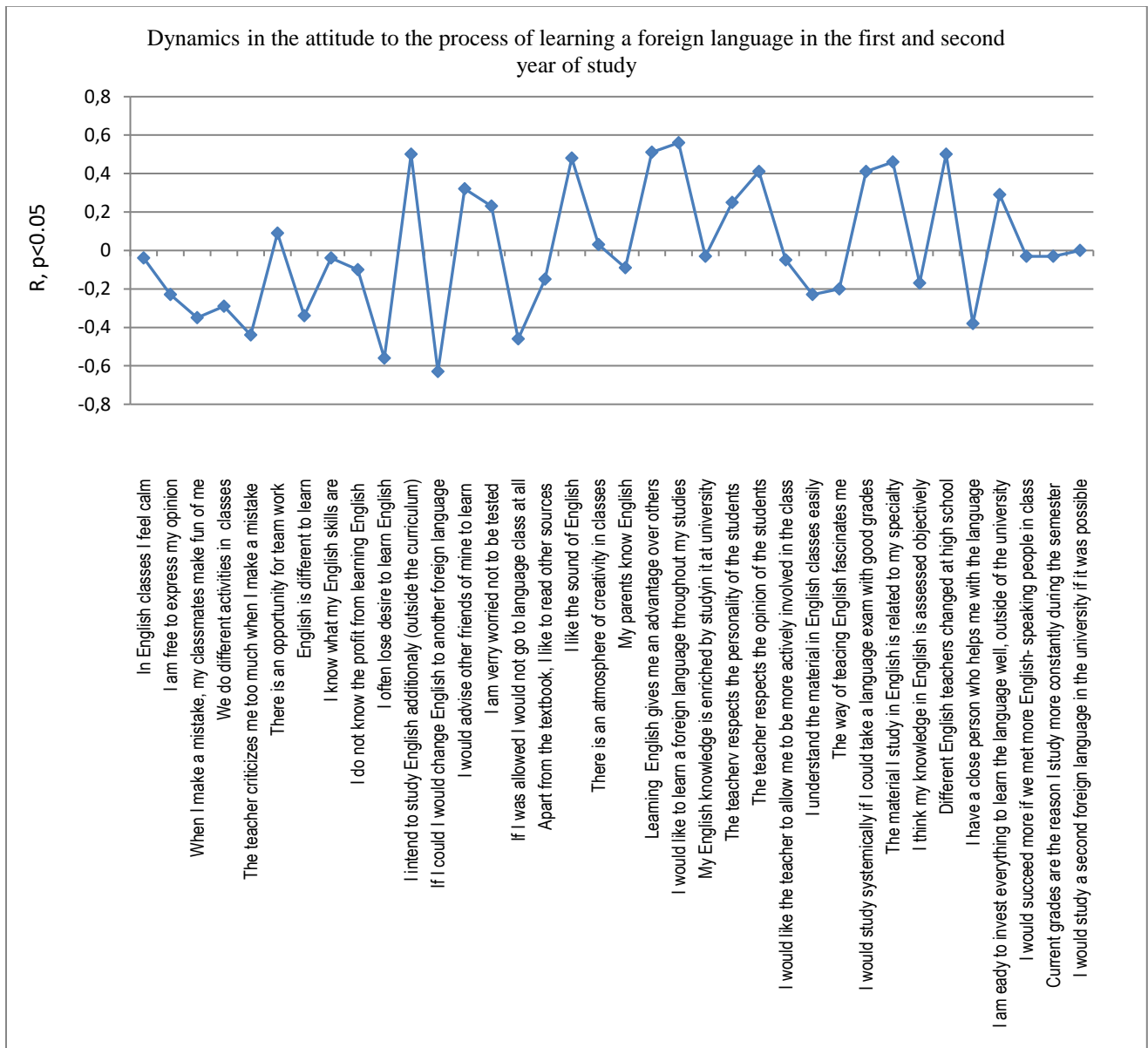


Figure 2. Dynamics in the attitude to the process of learning a foreign language in the first and second year of study

According to the students' answers about their attitude to learning a foreign language, different opinions are received.

- The biggest positive dynamics in the course of study are the statements of the students: that their knowledge is assessed objectively, that they like learning the language, they like the sound of the language, they are interested in learning the language during their entire studies at Trakia University and because they believe that language competences give them an advantage over others, that the material they study in a foreign language is related to their specialty and statistically significant they think to learn the language additionally (outside the curriculum). In the higher courses, students attach more importance to the fact that in high school, language teachers have changed frequently.

- Medium correlations with the course of study are established for the statements: they would advise their other friends to learn the language. It is growing the anxiety they will not be tested in

class, the teacher respects the students' personality, and they would study even more if they had the opportunity to be exempted from exams with good current grades.

- The least dependent on the course of study is that in foreign language classes there is an opportunity for teamwork and there is an atmosphere of creativity.

As the course continues, in the process of their studies, students are statistically significant less often think that the teacher criticizes them too much when they make a mistake in class, that they would change the language they are learning, and less and less often if they were allowed to, they would not enter a foreign language class at all.

It can be summarized that in the course of training students' interest in learning a foreign language increases statistically significantly, and the alienation from training statistically significantly decreases.

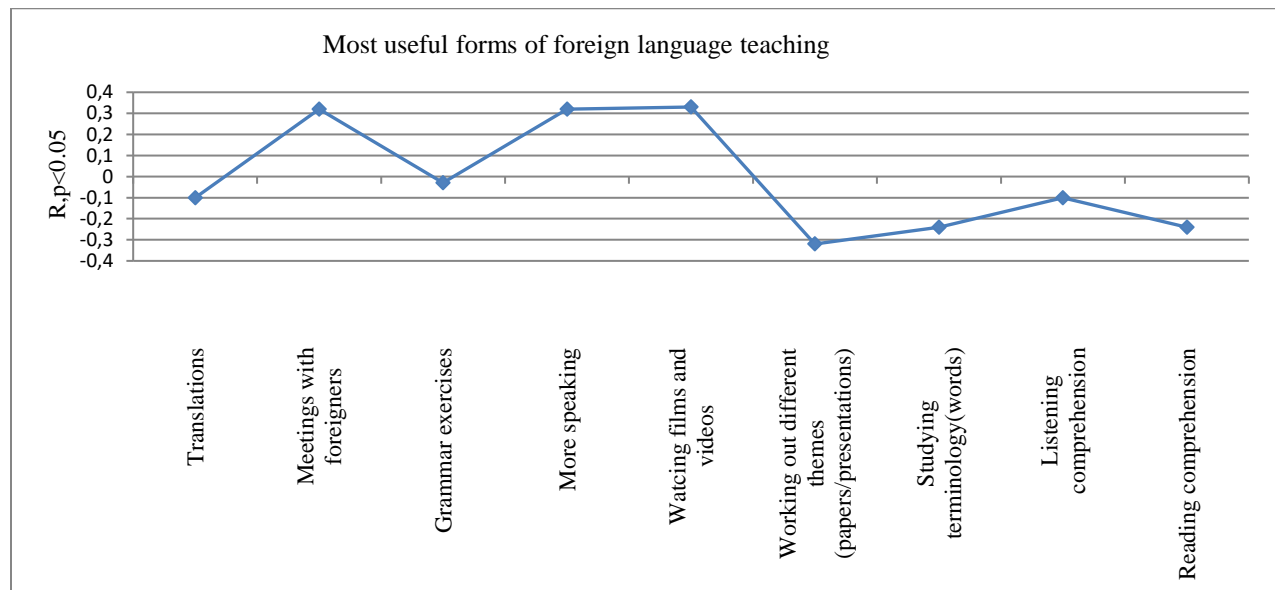


Figure 3. Dynamics in the opinions for most useful forms of foreign language teaching in the first and second year of study

According to the research conducted in the course of language teaching, there is a dynamic in the assessment of the most useful forms of foreign language teaching. As the course progresses, students make more and more useful meetings and communication with foreigners, speaking and watching movies and videos, but they find the

benefits of developing specific topics (reports and presentations), listening and reading comprehension diminishing as well as learning terminology. In the learning process, students find interactive forms more and more useful, but traditional forms of learning less and less useful.

The results of the study confirm the existing experience in the field of social and psychological aspects of language acquisition.

With the continuation of training of the higher education, there is a positive dynamics in the attitude to language learning and in the motivation for learning.

The intensity of the pragmatic motives, which are components of the instrumental motivation, increases, but also the internal motivation, expressed in the increased spontaneous interest in the language. Low motives are the administrative compulsion to learn the language, as it is included in the curriculum, as well as the importance of self-assessment for the language level and assessments in education.

An interesting fact is that in the course of studying the language assessment becomes a lower motive, but the anxiety from the test itself increases in the higher course. Therefore, it is not the assessment as an abstract measure of language competence that is related to self-confidence, but the self-presentation of language opportunities to other colleagues as a basis for self-confidence is the growing motive.

The results provide grounds for increasing the opportunities for developing incentives and pedagogical approaches for easier perception of the foreign language and for achieving the goals of specialized foreign language learning. Based on the research, the way of teaching can be changed with an emphasis on enhancing foreign language speaking in interactive forms in order to train listening comprehension, speaking skills and crossing the barrier to start a conversation in the language. The introduction of non-traditional teaching methods such as foreign language videos satisfies the interests of students and can improve learning outcomes. Interactive forms of learning are increasingly preferred with the growth of the training course among young people, with positive dynamics in the preference for learning through interaction and cooperation, building cognitive - communicative and social skills. It is increasingly necessary to adapt the educational process to individual needs of students, as well as the incentives for conscious perception of the foreign language.

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