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Improving student motivation for the development of language and speech competencies with training and digital learning platforms

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Abstract
Particular attention today is paid to the search for new methods in foreign language teaching that provide high proficiency in a foreign language for professional purposes. An effective way to achieve this goal is the use of digital platforms, which increase motivation in the study of a foreign language for scientific communication. This study investigates the influence of digital platforms on motivation for academic foreign-language communication among students in technical specialties. The pedagogical experiment conducted demonstrated a significant improvement in motivation in the experimental group (EG) compared to the control group (CG). Specifically, students in the EG exhibited a 10.4% increase in high motivation levels post-experiment compared to the CG's 2.2% increase. These findings highlight the efficacy of the Moodle platform in enhancing students' academic foreign-language communication skills.

Keywords
English; academic foreign-language communication; motivation; digital learning platforms; Moodle.

Oportunidades das plataformas digitais de aprendizagem para aumentar a motivação dos alunos no desenvolvimento do conhecimento do idioma e das competências de fala

Resumo
Atualmente, é dada atenção especial à busca de novos métodos de ensino de idiomas estrangeiros que proporcionem alta proficiência em um idioma estrangeiro para fins profissionais. Uma maneira eficaz de atingir esse objetivo é o uso de plataformas digitais, que aumentam a motivação no estudo de uma língua estrangeira para comunicação científica. O estudo tem como objetivo investigar a influência das

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plataformas digitais na motivação para a comunicação acadêmica em língua estrangeira entre alunos de especialidades técnicas. O artigo descreve os pré-requisitos para o uso de plataformas digitais de aprendizagem (DLP) para aumentar a motivação dos alunos para a comunicação acadêmica em língua estrangeira. O experimento pedagógico conduzido demonstra que o uso da plataforma digital Moodle como parte do curso prático de comunicação científica estrangeira aumenta a motivação dos alunos para a comunicação acadêmica em língua estrangeira.

Palavras-chave

inglês; comunicação acadêmica em língua estrangeira; motivação; plataformas de aprendizado digital; Moodle.

Oportunidades de las plataformas digitales de aprendizaje en la mejora de la motivación del alumnado para el desarrollo de los conocimientos lingüísticos y las competencias del habla

Resumen

Hoy en día se presta especial atención a la búsqueda de nuevos métodos en la enseñanza de lenguas extranjeras que proporcionen un alto dominio de una lengua extranjera con fines profesionales. Una forma eficaz de lograr este objetivo es el uso de plataformas digitales, que aumentan la motivación en el estudio de una lengua extranjera para la comunicación científica. El estudio pretende investigar la influencia de las plataformas digitales en la motivación para la comunicación académica en lengua extranjera entre estudiantes de especialidades técnicas. El artículo describe los requisitos previos para el uso de plataformas digitales de aprendizaje (DLP) con el fin de aumentar la motivación de los estudiantes para la comunicación académica en lengua extranjera. El experimento pedagógico realizado demuestra que el uso de la plataforma digital Moodle como parte del curso práctico de comunicación científica extranjera aumenta la motivación de los estudiantes para la comunicación académica en lengua extranjera.

Palabras clave

inglés; comunicación académica en lenguas extranjeras; motivación; plataformas digitales de aprendizaje; Moodle.

1 Introduction

Economic welfare is closely connected with the level of production and the technology that leads to the practical utilization of technical and technological innovations and collaborative scientific and applied developments (Gapsalamov *et al.*, 2020). In this context, the ability to communicate in foreign languages, especially English, plays an important role in fostering innovation and knowledge sharing (Cogo, 2012). For technical students, mastering English is not just a skill but a professional necessity, as it enables participation in global scientific discourse and enhances their competitiveness in the

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workforce. Since university education envisages preparation for professional practice and scientific work, there is a need to stimulate the development of students' readiness and ability to communicate in a foreign language in the academic environment (Akhmetshin *et al.*, 2021). Students often lack the motivation to master the knowledge and skills for academic (scientific) foreign-language communication (Safonova, 2022). This is why the teacher needs to use psycho-pedagogical approaches, techniques, and technologies to promote students' motivation to acquire knowledge, skills, abilities, and competencies required for academic communication in a foreign-language environment (Aziyev *et al.*, 2024).

In this context, digitalization is the key trend in contemporary education (Abduvakhidov; Mannapova; Akhmetshin, 2021). Digital learning platforms (DLPs) like Moodle have become particularly valuable, enabling accessible, personalized, and interactive learning experiences that cater to the needs of both educators and learners (Kindria, 2022). There are new opportunities for universities, as they have started to introduce distance education systems based on modern digital platforms, the advantages of which are obvious both for students (accessibility of materials at any time, objectivity of knowledge assessment due to independence from the teacher, etc.) and for teachers (easy to keep students' records, often with the possibility of their personalization and differentiation of access rights to educational materials, convenient and fast creation of online courses, facilitating knowledge control through automated test results delivery, etc.) (Arnó-Macía, 2012).

It is expedient to create the most advanced concepts for teaching and motivating students to learn English in scientific and technical communication. For this purpose, it is relevant to introduce information technology and modern digital learning platforms (DLP) into the process of English teaching to ensure the satisfaction of the needs of the teaching position by the teacher as the presenter of information and the students as listeners. The use of DLP gives the learning process a tremendous boost and motivates students to study the foreign language more diligently, bringing significant benefits in this field.

2 Literature review

Practicing teachers understand that the results of learning activities depend not only on the pedagogically organized learning environment and the application of modern

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technologies but also on students' motivation. The issue draws the attention of psychologists, sociologists, human resource and organizational management specialists, teachers, etc.

Modern scientific studies into motivation are based on classical approaches to its essence, manifestations, classification, etc. and are covered in the works of leading scholars. In recent years, increasing attention has been paid to the educational and educational-professional motivation of students in higher education institutions (Denisova *et al.*, 2023).

There is a growing number of studies on students' motivation in foreign language learning. The methods to increase motivation in learning English are covered by E.I. Zamotina and E.V. Krekhtunova (2015) and Zh.A. Kaskataeva, G.N. Omarova, G.T. Smagulova (2016). Among the factors that have a negative effect on learning English, I.V. Soloveva (2010) mentions the use of obsolete teaching methods, incorrect understanding of the functions and role of the teacher and the student, lack of practice, etc. Based on an experimental study, Z.R. Lazareva (2014) developed a program for enhancing the learning motivation of students of technical specialties in English classes.

A significant number of studies cover the application of digital technologies, information and communications technology (ICT), and DLP in learning a foreign (English) language. Digital learning is defined as the process of applying digital technologies, ICT, and DLP, which can allow students to more quickly and fully grasp educational concepts, skillfully connect theory and apply it, and improve teaching methods, using the teacher's time effectively and facilitating broad knowledge exchange (Cai, 2012). In the last decade, the application of DLP in the study of foreign languages has demonstrated significant advantages.

DLP is defined as a personality-oriented Internet resource or information network that contains training material in one or more areas and provides it to users on some terms (Rymanova, 2013). The teaching material presented on the DLP can be both the main and additional source of teaching and learning materials used in learning English to effectively organize the educational process. In contrast to the traditional method of teaching English, working with DLP involves constant monitoring of educational activities.

The key aspects that contribute to success in learning English in a digital environment and based on a DLP, especially on the Internet, include 1) institutional

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support with relevant technology to support students' need for an environment to study English (e.g., requirements to software and hardware, high-speed Internet) (Ovezova; Vagner, 2017); 2) specific instructions and training to provide continuous learning (e.g., technological software, ability to correct mistakes) (Ovezova; Vagner, 2017); 3) authentic digital opportunities for verbal interaction between students (Salcedo, 2010); 4) training and support of students for troubleshooting software and hardware technologies (Salcedo, 2010).

The most significant DLP in university English learning are distance learning platforms, or software that enables the use of distance learning pedagogical and information technologies by automating the educational process (Cheng *et al.*, 2010). In terms of English learning, all distance learning platforms provide ample opportunities for the effective organization of the learning process. These platforms can be used for the effective development of speaking skills.

The most popular are free distance learning platforms (ATutor, Claroline, LAMS, Sakai, Moodle, ILIAS, Google Classroom), the main advantages of which are that they require no payment for installation and further use, have significant geographical coverage, are available all over the world, and can be modified.

The existing studies indicate constant attention to the issue of increasing student motivation in learning foreign languages and the use of digital platforms in foreign language education. However, the analysis of psychological, pedagogical, and methodological scientific developments shows that little attention has been paid to students' motivation for foreign-language scientific communication using digital platforms.

Thus, the purpose of this paper is to investigate the impact of digital platforms on the motivation of students in technical specialties in academic foreign-language communication.

3 Methods

An experimental study of the possibility of increasing the motivation of students in technical specialties for academic foreign-language communication using a DLP was carried out using a pedagogical experiment.

During the experimental work, we pursued the following objectives:

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- to analyze the initial level of students' motivation for academic foreign-language communication;
- to plan and conduct classes as part of the practical course of foreign scientific communication based on the introduction of the Moodle digital platform into the educational process;
- to compare the results of the control (CG) and experimental groups (EG) to determine the dynamics of students' motivation for academic foreign-language communication;
- to elaborate prospects and recommendations based on testing the effectiveness of Moodle tools in the educational process.

At the first stage of the pedagogical experiment, the statistical hypotheses of the study were defined. The pre-experimental level of motivation for academic foreign-language communication was assessed based on the student survey results. The application of Moodle to increase motivation was substantiated.

The statistical hypotheses tested in this study are as follows:

- the empirical distributions of students in the CG and EG by the levels of motivation for academic foreign-language communication after the experiment do not differ (H0);
- the empirical distributions of students in the CG and EG by the levels of motivation for academic foreign-language communication after the experiment differ (H1).

The pedagogical experiment involved a total of 108 students, of which the CG included 55 people (two academic groups) and the EG – 53 people (two academic groups).

The level of student motivation for academic communication in a foreign language was determined using a student survey including two items – "Importance of academic foreign-language communication for future professional practice" and "Interest in academic foreign-language communication". The items were assessed by the level of agreement with the statement on a Likert scale, where on the importance scale "1" corresponded to the minimal value ("not important at all") and "5" to the maximum ("very important"); on the scale of interest "1" denoted minimal interest ("not interesting at all") and "5" – the maximum ("very interesting").

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As part of this study, we established three levels of motivation for academic foreign-language communication: low, average, and high (Table 1).

Table 1 – Levels of motivation for academic foreign-language communication

Level	Average score across two scales
High	4.5-5
Average	3.0-4.0
Low	0-2.5

Source: Prepared by the authors.

At the second (experimental) stage, the practical course of foreign scientific communication developed using Moodle was implemented in the EG. The CG was trained according to the usual curriculum.

At the third stage, the final (post-experimental) assessment of the motivation for academic foreign-language communication was conducted using the same questionnaire, and its results were systematized and summarized.

To assess the effectiveness of the digital platform in increasing student motivation for academic foreign-language communication, survey results from before and after the experiment were mathematically processed with Pearson's χ^2 test, which assesses the reliability of differences between the percentages of survey results in two samples. The empirical value of Pearson's χ^2 test was calculated in SPSS Statistics.

4 Results

After the completion of the practical course of foreign scientific communication using Moodle, a repeated assessment of students' motivation for academic foreign-language communication was conducted. Using SPSS Statistics software, a comparative analysis was conducted between the groups and between pre- and post-experimental results, evaluating the dynamics of the development of motivation for academic foreign-language communication.

Positive shifts in motivation for academic foreign-language communication were observed in the CG and EG (Table 2).

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Table 2 – Assessment of the level of motivation for academic foreign-language communication

Level	CG, %		EG, %	
	At the start of the experiment	At the end of the experiment	At the start of the experiment	At the end of the experiment
High	8.2	10.4	7.5	17.9
Average	75.6	74.7	75.7	76.6
Low	16.2	14.9	16.8	5.5

Source: Prepared by the authors.

Comparative analysis of pre- and post-experimental assessments showed an increase in motivation for foreign-language communication in the EG.

Pearson's χ^2 test was applied to establish reliable changes in the level of motivation for academic foreign-language communication after completing the practical course of foreign scientific communication on Moodle. The p-value for the comparison of high motivation levels in the EG before and after the experiment was $p = 0.003$, indicating statistically significant improvement. No significant changes were observed in the CG, with p-values exceeding the threshold for significance ($p > 0.05$)

A matrix comparing the distributions of the CG and EG by the development of motivation for academic foreign-language communication is provided in Table 3.

Table 3 – Comparison of the distributions in the groups based on Pearson's χ^2 test

Groups	CG at the start of the experiment	CG at the end of the experiment	EG at the start of the experiment	EG at the end of the experiment
CG at the start of the experiment	-	$\chi^2_{emp} = 3.08 < \chi^2_{cr} = 9.21$	$\chi^2_{emp} = 2.79 < \chi^2_{cr} = 9.21$	$\chi^2_{emp} = 21.35 < \chi^2_{cr} = 9.21$
CG at the end of the experiment	$\chi^2_{emp} = 3.08 < \chi^2_{cr} = 9.21$	-	$\chi^2_{emp} = 1.68 < \chi^2_{cr} = 9.21$	$\chi^2_{emp} = 17.85 < \chi^2_{cr} = 9.21$
EG at the start of the experiment	$\chi^2_{emp} = 2.79 < \chi^2_{cr} = 9.21$	$\chi^2_{emp} = 1.68 < \chi^2_{cr} = 9.21$	-	$\chi^2_{emp} = 19.24 < \chi^2_{cr} = 9.21$
EG at the end of the experiment	$\chi^2_{emp} = 21.35 < \chi^2_{cr} = 9.21$	$\chi^2_{emp} = 17.85 < \chi^2_{cr} = 9.21$	$\chi^2_{emp} = 19.24 < \chi^2_{cr} = 9.21$	-

Note: Level of significance $p = 0.05$. Source: prepared by the authors.

According to the calculations, the empirical value of χ^2 falls within the range of significance ($p < 0.05$). This fact refutes the H0 hypothesis and confirms the H1 hypothesis for the EG. Therefore, the empirical distributions of EG and CG students by the levels of motivation for academic foreign-language communication after the experiment differ.

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5 Discussion

Motivation is an important component of the learning process because it greatly determines its results. Our survey showed that all of them understood the importance of knowing English closely tied to professional training while learning with a DLP offers additional opportunities to gain knowledge and develop foreign-language communication skills. Studying at the university provides academic training, including specialized knowledge. A component of high-quality academic training in technical specialties is the developed language knowledge and speech competencies necessary for effective information exchange in the scientific community (Björkman, 2011). It is necessary to improve students' competencies in listening, speaking, reading, and analyzing scientific literature, acquiring knowledge and developing the ability to use scientific terminology.

As a result, students should be able to understand the main ideas and recognize relevant information during discussions, debates, reports, talks, and lectures related to the topic of study and specialty; clearly express and argue their own views and opinions on current topics in the academic environment (at seminars, conferences, meetings); give individual presentations on a wide range of professional topics; understand authentic texts related to their training and specialty from scientific literature, popular and specialized journals, and Internet sources; write abstracts on the basis of authentic scientific literature in the specialty; prepare and produce academic correspondence (reports, technical documentation, technical instructions, scientific articles, abstracts, etc.); find and translate the right meaning of polysemous words; know the specific ways of translating some forms and constructions related to sentence restructuring; translate complex sentences; and know the functioning of the texts of different types of scientific and technical literature (technical book, monograph, article from a technical journal, technical description, patent, technical reference book, catalog) and the features of using auxiliary literature, especially specialized dictionaries and reference books. These results can be achieved with the introduction of the practical course of foreign scientific communication using a DLP.

Students are interested in scientific work and ready to engage in it but are unsure if they can properly participate in international scientific conferences, use the potential of foreign scientific libraries, and communicate in the scientific environment. Therefore, it is a pedagogical task to create an educational environment that contributes to the

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acquisition of relevant knowledge and the development of academic competencies and ensures students' ability and readiness to communicate in a foreign language in an academic environment. This will motivate students to study a foreign language for foreign-language academic communication. As a result, graduates are expected to reach the B2+/C1 proficiency level necessary for effective foreign-language communication in the academic environment (Jenkins, 2014).

Some students have a preconceived notion that the B2+/C1 level is too challenging and impossible to achieve. This makes it necessary to target such students and apply additional means of motivation primarily to increase their self-esteem and inspire confidence in their abilities. The survey showed that all students realize that new scientific research cannot be done without international scientific achievements published predominantly in English. Thus, proficiency in this language is a mandatory professional competency. This is an important motive for gaining the knowledge and skills of foreign-language scientific communication. This also encourages the improvement of competencies in listening, speaking, reading, and analyzing scientific literature.

In our investigation of the research problem, we discovered that foreign-language scientific communication has its features. It implies not only a specific scientific environment, but also mastery of scientific terminology, the ability to use it, exchange opinions, substantiate and argue one's position, and listen and highlight important information (Safonova, 2022). For this reason, both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation is important in mastering foreign-language scientific communication. Students expect to obtain knowledge of the language and develop the skills to use it in the scientific environment in specific situations. The development of language knowledge and speech competencies is ensured by the use of modern methods, tools, and digital technologies.

Foreign-language academic communication has two components – oral and written communication. It is important to build the ability to communicate directly or remotely in a foreign language in an academic environment, which requires professional scientific vocabulary and the ability to establish and maintain communication, conduct business correspondence in English, write theses and scientific articles, review papers, etc. The teacher's task is to use the forms, methods, and technologies that provide knowledge and skills and motivate the student's learning activities.

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Any activity, including learning, implies achieving goals – short-, medium-, and long-term. The primary goal is defined in the syllabus of the discipline – the development of language knowledge and speech competencies necessary for effective communication in the academic scientific environment. A task facing university graduates is to conduct scientific research and prepare a final qualification paper, which is impossible without processing relevant scientific, including foreign, literature, communicating in the academic scientific environment, and participating in scientific conferences, forums, round tables, etc., including foreign ones. This fact serves as one of the motives for mastering a foreign language for scientific purposes (Lazareva, 2014).

Scientific research suggests that effective motivators of learning for adults are not only their goals and aspirations but also the forms of organization of educational activities and their methods and technologies. An increase in motivation can be provided by group learning technologies. In the process of working in small groups, students can compare their level of proficiency in a foreign language for academic purposes with that of their colleagues, borrow some elements of teaching experience, realize their potential, improve their listening and speaking, enrich their vocabulary with scientific terms, express and argue their views, and improve their self-esteem and self-confidence (Zamotina; Krekhtunova, 2015).

Research indicates that an important motivating aspect for students is the presentation of specific practical tasks that require both knowledge of vocabulary and grammar and the ability to work with scientific and technical information retrieval systems and different types of scientific and technical literature: technical books, monographs, technical journal articles, technical descriptions, patents, handbooks, technical catalogs (Kaskataeva; Omarova; Smagulova, 2016).

6 Conclusions

Our findings prove that the application of modern digital educational technologies to improve student motivation for the acquisition of the knowledge and competencies required for academic foreign-language communication should rely on the following basic provisions: considering the features of adults' learning activities and their characteristics; combining training with students' participation in scientific activities that require

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knowledge of a foreign language for research purposes; ensuring cooperation between the teacher and the student; a focus on achieving personal results; choosing technologies based on the expected learning outcomes. These principles will ensure a high level of foreign language communication competence.

The motivation of future specialists to master foreign language competency is a pressing issue. It becomes even more acute when it comes to students in technical specialties. Our research shows that the specifics of the university educational process enable the use of DLP to increase the motivation of students in technical specialties to develop language knowledge and speech competencies crucial for effective communication in the academic environment.

While the sample size was limited to 108 students, which may restrict the generalizability of the results to other educational contexts or disciplines, the insights gained are still valuable. The results provide a robust starting point for understanding how digital tools can effectively address motivation challenges in language education, particularly in technical fields where foreign-language proficiency is crucial for academic and professional success. A promising and topical avenue for further research is a more in-depth study of the individual needs of students in technical specialties in mastering the knowledge and competencies needed for foreign-language scientific communication in the academic environment.

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