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Student Feedback on the Implemented Language Learning System of Professional Higher Education Institutions in Estonia

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Introduction

Student feedback study conducted in 2020-2022

Institutions

Estonian Academy of Security Sciences (EASS)
Tallinn University of Applied Sciences (TUAS)
Tallinn Health Care College (THCC)

Languages taught

Estonian, English and Russian languages for specific purposes

Rationale

- challenges in the labor market
- the need for professionally competent specialists (incl. foreign language skills)
- the need to revise and improve the quality of language teaching

The methodological tools of the research

Research tasks

- to compare the language teaching systems of the three institutions of professional higher education
- to analyze student feedback
- to identify the development areas of language learning systems
- to make a list of recommendations to the language teaching systems

Sample and data

EASS – 83 students
TUAS – 161 students
THCC – 48 students

January-June 2021

Research methods

- questionnaire survey (self-fill-in form) – 45 questions
- combined qualitative content analysis and quantitative (statistical data analysis) method (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Denscombe, 2010)
- interpretative phenomenological analysis (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009)

The results of the study

How satisfied are the students of the three professional higher education institutions in Estonia with the LSP teaching system in their institution?

Category I: Benefits of professional language learning

- learning professional vocabulary: 94% THCC, 88% TUAS and 85% EASS
- gaining experience in international communication: 10% TUAS, 16% EASS, 17% THCC
- importance of linguistic competence: 77% THCC, 73% EASS and 71% TUAS
- importance of the ability to maintain conversation on professional topics: 63% EASS, 58% TUAS and 60% THCC
- valuable LSP courses (possibilities to learn professional vocabulary, practical value in learning a professional language)

The results of the study

Category II: Motivation of learners

- highly necessary: EASS 76%, TUAS 69%, THCC 69%

Estonian language: EASS 92%, THCC 59%, TUAS 54%, 7% little motivation

- importance of having a sufficiently good command of Estonian
- necessity to speak Estonian at least at C1 level
- need to cope with future work-related situations and communication
- intention to be competitive on the labor market

English language: 60% EASS 5 out of 5, 27% as 4; 51% TUAS - very high, 34% high; THCC 47% and 45%; 2% TUAS and THCC low motivation

- use in work-related situations
- improving professional knowledge and language skills
- to communicate on an international level and in everyday work
- reading professional literature
- self-development

Russian language: 26% 5 on the scale of 5, 40% as 4, and 11% extremely low; TUAS 33% highly motivated, 27% motivated and 7% unmotivated; THCC 35%, 39% and 4%

- practical need to use Russian at a sufficient and good level in work-related situations

The results of the study

Category III: Comparison of teaching methods

„Yes!“

- professional vocabulary games
- vocabulary learning applications (e.g., Quizlet)
- online environment
- interactive activities
- pair work
- discussion
- simulation
- grammar in depth
- home reading
- peer teaching

„Rather no!“

- project writing
- role-playing
- traditional teaching methods (i.e. filling in worksheets on texts)
- grammar in depth
- home reading
- peer teaching
- report writing
- video-related tasks
- using smartphones

The results of the study

Category IV: Barriers to student motivation

Motivation

- fear of speaking in a foreign language and making mistakes
- insufficient language skills
- lack of interest in the language and students' own laziness
- excessive study workload

Teaching methods

- lack of up-to-date and boring study materials
- unmotivating assignments
- excessive focus on grammar
- teaching materials used tend to be designed for students with a higher language proficiency

Learning environment

- heterogeneous level of language skills in the classroom
- overly large language groups
- ineffectiveness of distance learning in language learning
- irregularity of the timetable

Role of the learner and the teacher

- communication skills of the lecturer
- unfriendly communication of the lecturer and the excessive demands on students
- lecturers' lack of involvement of all students
- lecturers are not sufficiently prepared for the class

Conclusion

Overall satisfaction with the language learning system is above average in all institutions: 72% EASS, 84% TUAS, 54% THCC

Students had benefited most from learning professional vocabulary, professional language skills, competency of self-expression in a foreign language in professional topics

The motivation of students to study **Estonian**: EASS 92%, at THCC 59% and at TUAS 54% (professional duties and the desire to be sufficiently attractive on the labor market)

The motivation to learn **English**: 87% EASS, 85% TUAS and 92% THCC (daily life, self-development, communication on an international level)

The motivation to learn **Russian**: 66% EASS, 60% TUAS and 74% THCC (to use Russian at an independent user level in professional communication)

Conclusion

Factors hindering learners' motivation

- fear of speaking in a foreign language and of making mistakes
- insufficient language skills
- lack of interest in a particular language
- laziness and excessive workload
- 'boring' and not up-to-date learning materials
- unmotivating tasks
- learning materials that are not appropriate for the language level
- heterogeneous language level of learners in the classroom
- large language groups
- distance learning
- the fast-paced learning
- unfriendly communication and excessive demands from the lecturer

Conclusion

Students:

- see the practical value of LSP
- appreciate the institutions' contribution to the training of professionals but make suggestions for improving the language learning system
- expect a more homogeneous classroom, less distance learning, a more varied choice of foreign languages, more sustainable language learning process throughout their studies, and more language courses at different levels

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Thank you!