



THE PROBLEMS FACED BY NON-SPECIALIST STUDENTS IN LEARNING A FOREIGN LANGUAGE AND WAYS TO OVERCOME THEM

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Abstract

This study explores the challenges faced by non-specialist students in learning foreign languages within higher education contexts. Non-specialist learners often experience low motivation, limited exposure, and difficulties balancing language studies with their major coursework. Using a mixed-method approach involving surveys, interviews, and classroom observations, the research identifies key barriers such as lack of relevance to students' fields, inadequate practice opportunities, and low classroom participation. The study proposes practical solutions, including curriculum integration of field-specific language content, communicative teaching methods, and supplementary support services to enhance motivation and engagement. Addressing these challenges can improve foreign language acquisition for non-specialist students, equipping them with essential skills for academic and professional success.

Keywords

Non-specialist students, foreign language learning, language acquisition challenges, motivation, curriculum design, communicative teaching, higher education, language support

Introduction



In today's globalized world, proficiency in a foreign language is not only an academic requirement but also a vital skill for career development and cross-cultural communication. While language majors often receive intensive training and support in mastering a foreign language, non-specialist students (i.e., students not majoring in languages) frequently face unique challenges in this area. These challenges stem from a lack of motivation, insufficient language exposure, limited access to tailored resources, and academic overload. Understanding the nature of these issues is critical to designing effective interventions and strategies for non-specialist learners. This paper aims to explore the major difficulties encountered by non-specialist students in foreign language acquisition and propose viable solutions to address these obstacles.

Methodology

The study employed a mixed-method approach, combining qualitative and quantitative data collection methods. A survey was distributed among 150 non-language major university students across different faculties, including engineering, economics, education, and natural sciences. The survey consisted of both closed and open-ended questions to gather data on students' attitudes toward foreign language learning, perceived challenges, and preferred learning strategies. Additionally, in-depth interviews were conducted with 10 language instructors who regularly teach non-specialist students. Classroom observations were also carried out over a period of one month to gain insights into student engagement, participation, and performance in foreign language classes.

Results

The survey revealed that a significant number of non-specialist students find foreign language learning stressful and burdensome. 72% of respondents reported low motivation due to the perception that the language course was not directly related to their field of study. Furthermore, 64% indicated difficulty in grasping grammar and vocabulary due to limited practice opportunities. Many students cited time



constraints caused by heavy coursework in their major subjects, leading to inadequate preparation and practice time for language classes. The instructors highlighted issues such as low classroom participation, lack of confidence among students, and minimal use of the target language outside class. Observations confirmed that many students hesitated to speak or participate in activities, often relying on their native language during group tasks.

Discussion

The findings suggest that non-specialist students face both internal and external barriers to effective foreign language learning. Internally, lack of intrinsic motivation and confidence inhibits active engagement. Externally, curriculum design and institutional support play a crucial role. Non-specialist students often view language classes as a mere academic formality rather than a meaningful learning opportunity. Therefore, integrating field-specific language content could enhance relevance and motivation. Moreover, employing communicative and task-based teaching approaches can encourage active participation and reduce anxiety. Providing supplementary language support services, such as tutoring, language clubs, or online resources, can also address individual learning gaps. Teachers should receive training to adapt their instructional methods to cater to mixed-ability, non-specialist learners by using more interactive and student-centered techniques.

Conclusion

Non-specialist students face a range of difficulties in foreign language learning, including motivational deficits, limited exposure, and competing academic demands. These challenges can be mitigated through strategic changes in curriculum design, instructional approaches, and institutional support systems. Tailoring language instruction to the specific needs and contexts of non-specialist learners not only improves language acquisition but also equips students with essential skills for their academic and professional futures. Institutions should prioritize creating an inclusive and engaging language learning environment that recognizes the diverse



backgrounds and needs of all students, thereby ensuring that no learner is left behind in the global linguistic landscape.

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