

## Towards the strategy of enhancing the level of linguistic competence of educational institutions

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### Abstract

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This paper is devoted to the problem of the role of linguistic competence of research and educational personnel of Russian universities. It is stated that inadequate level of the emphasized competence is one of the reasons, hindering the development of Russian higher education, which affects the positions of Russian universities in the world university rankings. The authors of the article address the experience of one of the leading Russian engineering universities – National research Tomsk polytechnic university (NRTPU) – on solution of this problem. The article provides main results of the project on enhancing the level of linguistic competence of the research and educational personnel of NRTPU and the analysis of the positive and negative sides of its realization.

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### 1. Introduction

One of the urgent problems Russian universities face at present is the problem of promotion of Russian higher education to the international market of educational services, which is closely connected with recognition in the world university community and with the raise of the level of competitiveness of Russian universities. For achievement of set goals Russian universities undertake different global initiatives, the results of which can positively influence the achievement of the estimated figures, constituting the world university rankings, such as Times, QS (Rowland, 2013, Colucci-Gray, 2013).

### 2. The analysis of the existing problems in the sphere of linguistic competences

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The analysis of the highlighted problems has shown that the main obstacle for Russian researchers, students and teachers is considered to be the low level of foreign language communicative competence. This implies quite inert development of international relationships and projects and, as a consequence, insufficient resources for obtaining a status of the open educational platform of the global scale.

In other words, the low level of linguistic competence of university staff and students is a sort of “lost profits”, which a university could have gained while realising scientific and academic communication. Let us give some arguments in favour of it. First, language competence is a leading communicative factor, allowing the formation of the open scientific educational and intercultural medium and realisation of personal contacts with associates all over the world. Second, this is the factor which allows additionally attracting gifted university entrants, post-graduates, postdocs and other specialists for study and work at a university. Third, this is an extended professional competence, imparting the feeling of personal freedom and confidence in the unbiased evaluation of the opportunities, which is an underlying factor in the process of professional motivation building for self-development and self-improvement.

At the same time, having a command of a foreign language (FL) at the level not lower than B1 (according to European scale) (Vidayev, 2014) by university students, postgraduates, staff is declared as a “swift victory” in TPU roadmap. However, we can agree with it only partially. Actually, taking into consideration methodical-technical basis, established in TPU, with regard to existing opportunities, such as access to information resources, means for realisation of academic mobility, it is possible to assume that enhancement of the activities to improve the level of FL knowledge should not encounter specific difficulties. And, probably, this would have been so, but for the time factor.

The university faces a challenge: how to train a great number of students, research and educational personnel, capable of using FL in their professional activity, without increasing the number of foreign language teachers in short time periods. In this connection, the search of the methods, optimizing the process of FL learning in the context of the university educational system in force, becomes urgent.

Basing on the arguments, mentioned above, a number of the approaches to establishment of the strategy for improvement of the linguistic competence level of research educational personnel has been developed by the example of Tomsk Polytechnic University.

A strategy is defined as a formalised plan of actions or an integrated model of the measures, defining the priorities of the set objectives, directions of activity, resources and sequence of the steps on achievement of the global purpose.

All the activities within the context of the work on establishment of the strategy were subjected to the following plan:

1. The analysis of the state of the issues relating to the problem under study in TPU (collection and analysis of the opinions of both the participants of the Project and university personnel).
2. Formulation of technical requirements in accordance with the obtained data.
3. Search of the mechanisms of realisation of the requirements and identification of “gaps”, that is, those obstacles that hinders realisation of the specific task.
4. Elaboration of the methods, approaches and means, facilitating the implementation of the emphasized requirements, formulation of the key measures and initiatives.
5. The analysis of the obtained data (prioritizing the requirements and measures on the basis of the linear analysis).
6. Determination of the coefficient of efficiency of the proposed measures, distributing them into categories, such as “universal”, “the most significant”, “less significant”.
7. Risks determination and calculation of budget of measures.

### **3. Methodology of strategy establishment for enhancement of the linguistic competence level**

First of all, in order to solve the raised problems it is necessary to analyse the current state of the language education inside the university. The method of the system analysis on detecting “problematic

mash” yields good results (Lee, 2013). It implies collection and processing of opinions by means of polling the employees of the scientific-research institutes, which are constituent parts of the university. The questions should be formulated in accordance with the global tasks of the university and do not imply fixed and unequivocal answers or answers of the multiple choice type. The responses of the respondents imply formulation of the personal opinions and suggestions.

Within the context of this work the analysis of the state of language education was conducted by the example of one of the subdivisions of Tomsk polytechnic university. The strategy of the poll for singling out the problem areas was based on the thesis – “it would be good, if...”. 30 people in all were polled. The examples of the questions are given below.

1. What are the drawbacks of the personnel training relatively their linguistic competence for its active application in the scientific and educational sphere?
2. What measures should be implemented so that the personnel training relatively their linguistic competence and its application in scientific and educational sphere allowed TPU to significantly improve its positions in the world university rankings?
3. Indicate the motivational factors, which will allow TPU personnel to improve the quality of their linguistic competence in order to use it actively in scientific and educational spheres.

As a result of the poll more than 100 variants of responses were received to each of the questions. The analysis on the basis of the data aggregation allowed revealing the following problems:

- 1) the distribution of the working hours of the research and educational personnel (REP) is that it does not allow engaging in other activity apart from the academic load;
- 2) the absence of foreign language environment and opportunities for real communication leads to minimisation of the opportunities for practising of real communication in FL;
- 3) weak motivation of REP to FL study is observed which is accounted for the absence of incentive language allowances or these allowances are so insignificant that the personnel tend to do different, higher-paid work;
- 4) low level of FL integration into professional activity, which is justified by a low number of scientific and academic events in FL around the university on the whole, the absence of the personal collected scientific papers, indexed in the world database;
- 5) low level of teaching, inflexible educational programme, which do not correspond to the current needs of the target groups of the learners.

The revealed problems allowed the developers to identify the priority directions, which underlay the technical requirements of the established methodology:

- 1) strengthening of the motivational factors of REP and students to FL study,
- 2) establishing bilingual environment,
- 3) enhancing the level of university internationalisation (invitation of foreign teachers, increase of the proportion of international students, increase of the percentage of educational programmes in FL);
- 4) establishing flexible professional development programmes for REP in FL study and development of their foreign language skills.

On the basis of the highlighted global purposes of the university and revealed priority directions, the following technical requirements of the developed strategy have been identified:

**Requirement 1.** Development of EP on the basis of the world standards,

**Requirement 2.** Having a command of FL at the level, allowing fluent communication with foreign colleagues when realising scientific and educational projects,

**Requirement 3.** Publications in the editions, indexed by the International data bases,

**Requirement 4.** Enhancement of the internationalisation of the university and increasing the share of educational programmes in FL,

**Requirement 5.** Establishing bilingual environment, including conduction of bilingual events according to the principle of language immersion,

**Requirement 6.** Introduction of the multilevel mass electronic system of FL teaching,

**Requirement 7.** Improvement of the system of language training of university entrants, students and REP.

The next step in this work is to propose the measures, which realisation would allow fulfilling technical requirements. Besides, it is necessary to conduct the work on evaluation of the possible risks, emerging during implementation of these measures and evaluate their conformity with technical requirements. This type of work has already been conducted. Its results are represented in table 1.

Table 1. Conformity of measures, directed at enhancement of linguistic competence with technical requirements.

Measures	Risks	Requirements						
		R1	R2	R3	R4	R5	R6	R7
Invitation of the leading world researchers to TPU for collaborative teaching of the disciplines and conducting scientific researches	Reduction of a number of already employed teaching staff in TPU; Creating a negative image of TPU abroad; Inconsistency between the expectations of a foreign specialist and a real situation;	+	+	+	+	+		+
Arrangements of linguistic internships in the leading linguistic schools	Employment of the gifted graduates, who are relied on by the departments, abroad		+	+	+	+		+
Arrangements of professional internships in the leading universities and scientific centres of the world	Employment of the gifted graduates, who are relied on by the departments, abroad; Dissatisfaction with the working conditions in TPU; Steep demands to the teaching staff work organisation; Direct transfer of the work methods of overseas universities to TPU reality without consideration of the Russian mentality	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
Restructuring of the educational courses according to the principle of module education	Time extension for coordination of sequence of courses, timetables and so on; Giving priority to the invited specialists; Conducting training in vacation time (for key specialists); Academic load on students and teaching staff	+					+	
Development of the flexible system of FL teaching with the use of network and local information resources	Cost increase for unprofitable groups	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
Inclusion of FL knowledge into qualification requirements of REP with introduction into effective contracts (development of the evaluation criteria of knowledge level)	Reduction of the teaching staff, who are not proficient in FL; Social tension	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
Development of evaluation criteria of language study effectiveness	Subjectivity of the criteria; Disbalance, leading from efficiency to effectiveness		+	+	+	+		+

Involvement of native speakers into the organisation of communicative practices with REP and students	Ineffective expenditures	+	+	+	+	+		+
Introduction of the clause about international FL certificates for teaching staff of the major departments into incentive allowances	Absence of motivation to FL study for teaching staff, having a low level of FL knowledge	+	+		+	+		+
Introduction of the required number of articles in FL into effective contracts of teaching staff as a compulsory indicator	Nonfulfilment of effective contracts; Decline in the quality of articles; Lowering of TPU image		+	+	+			
Prohibition of going abroad for REP, who are not fluent in FL (the exception can present administrative meetings accompanied by an interpreter)	Reduction of the number of contacts with foreign associates				+			
Involvement of the gifted students, masters, post-graduates into organisation of the events conducted in FL	Increase of the preparation time for the arrangement of a single event		+		+	+		+
Development of students' communicative clubs, moderated by native speakers; establishment of tandems "Russian student – foreign student"	Lack of concern of native speakers		+		+	+		+
Development of the system of contests of a creative and academic nature in FL	Reduction of attention to major disciplines		+			+		+
Development of regulatory documentation in FL	A great number of mistakes; Demand for the specialists for whom the documentation is developed; The necessity of introduction of requirements on FL use at work personal		+		+	+		

#### 4. Conclusion

The conducted work represents the methodology of creation of the strategy for enhancing the level of linguistic competence of research and educational personnel. Within the framework of this article in accordance with this methodology the measures to enhance linguistic competence of Tomsk polytechnic university personnel have been developed. For evaluation of the feasibility and priority of realisation of the proposed measures the assessment of risks, arising from their implementation, has been conducted. The more technical requirements a single measure implements, the more prioritised it is, although it is necessary to take into consideration possible risks.

This paper offers an opportunity of conducting a quick preliminary analysis of the measures, directed at the enhancement of linguistic competencies. For more detailed study of the problems concerning the importance of conducted measures, these measures should be parameterized and then the methods of statistical processing should be used.

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