

TEACHING A SECOND FOREIGN LANGUAGE AT A MODERN NON-LINGUISTIC UNIVERSITY: CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS

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Abstract. The article deals with the current problem of teaching a second foreign language at a non-linguistic university (Ural State University of Economics) at the present stage: it describes the volume of training, its dynamics, features, issues and their possible solutions. The purpose of the study is to analyze the prospects for teaching second languages at a non-linguistic university and develop recommendations for providing second language teaching under current conditions. The research methods include content analysis of existing curricula for relevant education programs, corresponding academic course programs, students' survey, statistical and interpretive analysis of closed and open questions, as well as scientific methods of synthesis, induction, generalization, and description. The conducted research has revealed certain problems, in particular, the preservation of linguistic diversity at the university (the availability of several second foreign languages in academic programs with an international component) when the discipline is optional. The study emphasizes the need to form the necessary competences in the students of various training courses, and, consequently, the relevance of the second foreign language courses in different curricula. In addition, the conducted students' survey confirmed the risk of transferring the discipline from the curriculum to the category of supplementary paid courses (a drop in the number of students by 2/3). The article develops recommendations for the preservation of linguistic diversity and further teaching of second foreign languages, in particular, the presence of the discipline in the variable part of the basic curriculum, and the formation of effective mechanisms for the interaction between the university and the students.

Keywords: second foreign language; linguistic personality; non-linguistic university; education program; competences; curriculum; academic course program; optional discipline

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ПРЕПОДАВАНИЕ ВТОРОГО ИНОСТРАННОГО ЯЗЫКА В СОВРЕМЕННОМ НЕЯЗЫКОВОМ ВУЗЕ: ВЫЗОВЫ И ПЕРСПЕКТИВЫ

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Аннотация. В статье рассматривается актуальная проблема обучения вторым иностранным языкам в неязыковом вузе (УрГЭУ) на современном этапе: определяются объемы обучения, его динамика, особенности, вопросы и возможные пути решения. Целью исследования являются анализ перспектив обучения вторым языкам в неязыковом вузе и выработка рекомендаций по организации обучения студентов вторым языкам в текущих условиях. Методами исследования послужили контент-анализ существующих учебных планов соответствующих профилей подготовки, рабочих программ дисциплин, опрос обучающихся, статистический анализ результатов закрытых и интерпретационный анализ открытых вопросов, а также научные методы синтеза, индукции, обобщения, описания. Проведенное исследование показало наличие определенных проблем, в частности сохранение языкового многообразия в вузе (наличие обучения нескольким вторым иностранным языкам на профилях подготовки с международным компонентом) в условиях факультативного статуса дисциплины. В исследовании акцентируются необходимость формирования компетенций, определяемых УК-4, ПК-3 и ПК-4 у студентов рассматриваемых профилей подготовки, и, следовательно, востребованность второго иностранного языка в учебных планах. Кроме того, опрос студентов в текущий период подтвердил риск перевода дисциплины из учебного плана в разряд программ ДПО (падение количества обучающихся на 2/3). В статье разрабатываются рекомендации для сохранения языкового разнообразия и дальнейшего обучения вторым иностранным языкам, в частности наличие дисциплины в вариативной части базового учебного плана, формирование эффективных механизмов взаимодействия структур университета со студентами.

Ключевые слова: второй иностранный язык; языковая личность; неязыковой вуз; профиль подготовки; компетенции; учебный план; рабочая программа дисциплины; факультативная дисциплина

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Introduction

Teaching a second foreign language has long been research discipline for national and foreign scientists. In this connection, various concepts of multilingualism are often discussed: issues of bilingualism (one of the first works was a study by U. Weinreich [Вайнрайх 1979]); trilingualism [Баграмова 2005], [Барышников 2003]; linguistic duality, including incomplete linguistic duality [Филин 1972]; polylingualism [Рябцева 2011]; bilinguality and multilinguality [Бец 2017]; multilingualism (in western studies [Хэкетт-Джонс 2016: 105]) and multilingual education in Russia [Рыбкина 2017]; plurilingualism [Coste, Moore, Zarate 2009], etc.

Researchers pay attention to many aspects such as cognitive mechanisms of multilingualism, the language development of bilinguals, language learning at various stages of educational process, and the development of a “linguistic personality.” O. N. Khrustaleva notes that referring to the term “linguistic personality” in pedagogy has become very relevant [Хрусталёва автореф. 2002а: 3]. According to Yu. N. Karaulov, a personality cannot be researched without taking into account the linguistic identity. The scientist’s thesis that “behind every text there is a linguistic personality who owns the language system” [Памяти Ю. Н. Караулова 2020: 9] became the basis of the anthropocentric paradigm in Russian linguistics. This thesis gave scientists the opportunity to simultaneously study language in all three forms: language-ability, language-system, language-text [Памяти Ю. Н. Караулова 2020: 9].

The understanding of linguistic personality as a personality embodied in a language, proposed by Yu. N. Karaulov, is used by many national scientists (V. G. Kostomarov, N. M. Shansky, E. A. Bystrova, etc.) [Хрусталёва 2002а: 4]. This concept is interdisciplinary, since a person who is aware of themselves and develops within a language, understands the world and communicates using a language, is the subject matter of many humanities disciplines dealing with problems of consciousness, social behavior and communication, thinking, mentality, etc. That is why, notes O. N. Khrustaleva, there is a “need to consider individual pedagogical problems through the prism of language, including the problem of modeling the image of a graduate from a particular educational institution.” Accordingly, the statement that “learning languages contributes to the development of a student’s versatile personality, gives them the opportunity to better understand the world around...” [Хрусталёва 2002b: 160], is theoretically justified and effectively implemented in practice.

By studying several languages, students compare, analyze, and build new logical connections, which leads to an increase of their intellectual potential. In addition to the development of cognitive functions and analytical abilities, learning several foreign languages contributes to the development of intercultural communication skills, acceptance of other cul-

tural values and traditions, assimilation of world culture, i. e. it leads to the development of those competencies that are necessary for a person in the modern multipolar world. A dialogue/polylogue of cultures, peaceful and productive coexistence in a multinational environment is very important not only for successful communication in professional spheres, but also in general, for the sustainable development of human society, which faces multiple challenges of the 21st century in many spheres of life.

In European educational system the importance of multilingualism can not be overestimated. For example, in Germany, promotion of multilingualism is a compulsory educational component at schools and universities. DAAD (German Academic Exchange Service) and HRK (German Rectors' Conference) shared their attitude and determined educational policy towards multilingualism in the document “Policy of HRK und DAAD on the European Year of Languages (2001) – Actions for Promotion of Foreign Languages Studies at Higher Education Institutions considering European Integration Processes and the Academic Mobility”. It demands to promote multilingualism, increase awareness of the cultural significance for linguistic diversity, and emphasize the personal and professional benefits associated with foreign language acquisition. Understanding of other people as well as the ability to engage in intercultural dialogue are closely related to knowledge of foreign languages [Stellungnahme von HRK und DAAD 2001].

However, despite the declared, theoretically and practically substantiated importance of language education for the development of a graduate’s personality in different countries, there are many problems and controversial issues in this area. If we consider teaching a second foreign language in Russia, then from 2022 it became elective in comprehensive schools, although schools retained the opportunity to offer this subject taking into account the conditions in educational institutions and the parents’ opinions. As statistics show, even before the exclusion of a second foreign language from the list of compulsory subjects, when in 2018 the Federal State Educational Standard provided “all the conditions for the introduction of this subject in all comprehensive schools” [Лытаева, Базина, Ионова 2018: 128], only 4% of schoolchildren studied it in the Russian Federation. After the introduction of the Federal State Educational Standard, which came into force on 1st September 2022, the percentage predictably became even lower. Many parents advocate refusing to study a second foreign language and file appropriate applications. Numerous discussions and questions can be found on the Internet at the first request. The parents’ arguments are quite justified – the high workload on schoolchildren, the need to prepare for final state exams, etc. Many note no need or possibility to use a second language, ignoring the fact that when learning a foreign language, the linguistic personality develops, the horizons of knowledge and in-

tercultural competencies expand.

In higher educational institutions where foreign languages are not studied as majors, the second foreign language, in accordance with the Russian Federal State Educational Standard for Higher Education, remained a discipline of a variable part in the curriculum or an elective discipline.

In Europe, universities have a central responsibility in the language acquisition process because, on the one hand, they provide education of foreign language teachers, interpreters and translators and, on the other hand, many students learn foreign languages while studying at different universities. It is stated that without sufficient knowledge of the language, future European citizens will no longer be able to work in the competitive international market. Besides, according to the language policy, in the future all European citizens should speak three languages: their mother language and two foreign languages. This goal can only be achieved if sustainable support at universities is implemented. Thus, universities should make it their purpose to enable all students to learn or deepen their knowledge of two modern foreign languages. Wherever foreign language skills are not yet stipulated in the requirements, universities should create an adequate and variable offer of disciplines, also in cooperation with external providers. This also means providing sufficient teaching opportunities (using new media and self-learning methods) as well as organizing studies and internships abroad, including integrated bi- or multinational educational programs [Stellungnahme von HRK und DAAD 2001].

Such requirements are met at universities where module educational system is implemented. Thus, according to the information on the website of "Freie Universität Berlin", while studying Business Economics within the compulsory study area for general vocational preparation (Allgemeine Berufsvorbereitung) you can choose from a wide range of courses, set individual priorities and supplement your own skills profile with qualifications relevant to the job market and personality. The study includes a mandatory professional internship as well as the following areas of competence: foreign languages, information and media competence, gender and diversity competence, organization and management, communicative competences, sustainable development, research [Freie Universität Berlin. Studienangebot]. So, foreign languages are included, and if you want to work in the international field, you will have to choose them.

On the website of HRK in the Recommendation "Language policy at German universities" (2011), it is stated that the acquisition of language skills is required, and it should be integrated into the educational programs as a mandatory element. University's language policy should also take into account its geographical location and regional environment. Institutions must provide the necessary resources and ensure adequate staffing as well as sufficient funding for language research [Hochschulrektorenkonferenz. Empfehlung].

The Bologna Declaration of the European Education Ministers makes specific reference to the language issue by stating that the desired establishment

of a European higher education area should take place "with full respect for the diversity <...> of languages". The European Council and the EU Commission are also explicitly committed to multilingualism in Europe and demand, among other things, "that young people <...> be provided with a broad and high-quality range of courses in the areas of languages and culture during their vocational and university training that enables them to master at least two foreign languages in order to integrate into the knowledge society" [Hochschulrektorenkonferenz. Empfehlung].

It would be great if the vision declared above was also true for Russian universities. They obviously want their graduates to develop Russian economy, and it is hardly ever possible without being integrated into global business nowadays. In this regard, organizing teaching a second foreign language at a non-linguistic university, preserving several foreign languages as taught disciplines as well as prospects for such training become relevant. This issue, in our opinion, is quite acute and has not been adequately studied.

Thus, the purpose of our study is to analyze the prospects for teaching a second foreign language at a non-linguistic university and develop recommendations for organizing such training under the current conditions.

Methods and Materials

Analysis of the existing approach to teaching a second foreign language was carried out on the basis of the Ural State University of Economics (the USUE), where a second foreign language is introduced in educational programs with international focus. The objectives were to study students' attitudes towards existing practice, analyze their opinions and wishes regarding a second foreign language as a university course, consider existing problems and trace ways to solve them.

The research methods included content analysis of existing curricula for relevant undergraduate degree programs (educational programs), detailed academic course programs, a survey, statistical analysis of the results for closed-ended questions and interpretive analysis of open-ended questions, as well as scientific methods of synthesis, induction, generalization, and description.

The methodology included a selection of curricula for undergraduate educational programs, which full-time students were enrolled for within several years (from 2019 to 2023), and a detailed comparative analysis of these curricula. The curricula for extramural undergraduates, relevant in the current academic year 2022–2023, were also analyzed. The next step was to review academic course programs for second foreign language at the USUE in 2022 in order to clarify and compare the competencies stated there and the thematic organization of the programs. At the same time, a survey among the USUE students studying a second foreign language within different educational programs (130 people) was conducted. After describing, interpreting the results and identifying problems, the data obtained were summarized, conclusions on the stated research topic were drawn, and the ways to solve the problems were outlined.

Results and discussions

Currently, 4 foreign languages are taught at the USUE as second foreign language – German, French, Spanish and Chinese. In the 2019 and 2020 enrollment years, the study of a second foreign language was offered in six educational programs, in 2021, 2022 and 2023 – in seven.

Since 2019, a second foreign language has been included in the curricula for such educational programs as “Foreign Economic Activities”, “World Economy”, “International Management”, “Hotel and Catering Industry”, “Tourism”, “Event Service”; also, since 2020, for the program “Legal Support of International Activities in Government Bodies”, then “Internet Marketing”, “Business Organization and Planning”, “Legal Support of Activities in State and Municipal Bodies of Authority”, “Law Enforcement and Human Rights Activities”, “Law and Business”, “State-legal profile”. Educational programs may vary from year to year, depending on students’ enrollment, group formation, and updating/optimization of offers from the USUE institutes. It is significant that in 2019–2020 “International Management” program had the discipline “Second foreign language” as an elective in the 2nd year, but in the 3rd and 4th years the status of this discipline changed to a discipline from a variable part of the curriculum (necessary for students to choose); then later it became elective in all years. In the variable part of the curriculum, second language is present only in the educational programs “Hotel and Catering Industry”, “Tourism”, “Event service”. The university strongly recommends students of these programs to study second foreign language, since agreed disciplines from the variable part of the curriculum are an integral part of educational programs, therefore students can’t reject it.

The situation is different when the discipline “Second Foreign Language” is only an elective discipline in a curriculum. It is recommended for students to choose this discipline, since they must have developed the competencies necessary for a professional engaged in international activities, and knowledge of several foreign languages, as well as proficiency in intercultural communication skills, are relevant for their successful performance at work. However, the university has the right only to recommend a second foreign language. The student may not choose it, or choose it, but refuse it later. If a student at some stage decides to abandon studying it, there is no way to block it. An ambiguous situation arises here: a group for studying a second foreign language is formed, classes start, and then, when some students wish to abandon the discipline, the existence of such a group is threatened. If the number of students in the group decreases, it will be on the verge of collapse, because according to the rules of the university, this number is regulated. A group is considered complete if it has at least 15 students. Sometimes there may be exceptions if the number of students is 1–2 people lower. Unfortunately, a student who has started learning a second foreign language and has encountered certain difficulties can abandon the discipline at any time. The reasons may be different. As a rule, senior students begin to work, therefore problems with attendance may

arise. However, when learning a new foreign language, such non-attendance leads to a significant lag, which is difficult to compensate on their own, and therefore the inability/unwillingness to continue the course. In any case, all these issues introduce certain instability into the process of learning a second foreign language. How to teach it in such conditions? How to form groups, maintain them, taking into account identified problems, motivate students and teach effectively? Will the discipline remain in the curriculum or will it be completely relegated to the category of supplementary paid courses? Will the second foreign language completely disappear in a non-linguistic university? These are all questions that require analysis and answers.

To get a holistic picture of the current situation, we conducted a survey of 130 USUE students studying second foreign languages in different educational programs. In addition to full-time bachelor’s students, extramural bachelor’s students were also included in the survey.

Among extramural undergraduate students, second foreign languages are currently being studied within the educational program “Hotel and Catering Industry” by the students of the enrollment year 2020 and the students in the program “Catering Industry” of the enrollment year 2019. In the variable part of the curriculum, the second foreign language is offered in three courses: in the 3rd study year “Professional foreign language (the second)”, “Foreign language in business communication (the second)”; in the 4th year “Foreign language in the field of service and tourism (the second)” is added, the same course is retained in the 5th year. The course “Foreign language in business communication (the second)” is not taught in the 5th year. Since the second foreign language in the educational programs mentioned above is an agreed discipline of the variable part in the curriculum both for extramural and for the full-time undergraduates, and it must be included in the program, all students choose it, indicating their preferred language for study. As already mentioned, if a second foreign language has the status of an elective discipline, the situation is different.

In order to complete the tasks stated in the research, in addition to studying curricula, identifying opinions through a survey, their interpretation and subsequent synthesis of information, we selected academic course programs for disciplines related to second foreign languages at the USUE in 2022 and examined their content: what competencies they include and how learning is structured thematically and methodologically at present.

Academic course programs for different disciplines are created for each educational program of full-time, extramural and mixed form of education, taking into account the competencies necessary for graduates, which must be developed during their studies at the university. In total, 4 disciplines are presented: “Second foreign language”, “Second foreign language (basic level)”, “Foreign language in the field of service and tourism (the second)”, “Foreign language in business communication (the second)”. Col-

lections of assessment materials are developed for each language separately. The goal of mastering the disciplines is formulated in the same way for all languages – acquiring a basic level of proficiency in a second foreign language, developing the necessary and sufficient level of competencies to solve social and communicative problems in various areas of professional and scientific activities. As a result of mastering such disciplines as “Second Foreign Language”, “Second Foreign Language (Basic Level)”, students should form the universal competence (UC-4, according current Federal Russian Educational Standard): being able to carry out business communication in oral and written forms in the state language of the Russian Federation and foreign language(s). Thematically, the program is presented in 8 sections; here we indicate some of them:

- Greeting options: getting to know each other; introducing oneself, friends and colleagues. Keeping the conversation going; rules of politeness; basic rules of greeting.
- Basic rules of communication during participation in international events, taking into account the characteristics of different cultures.
- Organization of international events: accommodation of guests; transport; big city problems.
- Comparison of traditions and holidays of a target-language country and other countries of the world. Interpenetration of traditions. Traditions of private and public life, ethical behavior in workplace situations, etc.

Each topic involves studying the lexical and grammatical materials using recommended textbooks, as well as reading and translating additional literature on the topic.

When studying the disciplines “Foreign language in the field of service and tourism (the second)” and “Foreign language of business communication (the second)”, students form professional competencies (PC-3 – being able to develop and apply techniques for serving tourists using information and communication technologies, and PC-4 – capable of organizing the process of servicing consumers on the basis of regulations, taking into account consumer requests and using client-oriented technologies). Thematic blocks include modeling of professionally oriented communication,

solving highly specialized problems in the context of intercultural communication, in general, and communication in a specific foreign language, for example:

- Service sector enterprises. Visiting a cafe/restaurant. Methods of interaction with consumers (guests, tourists).
- Relationships with clients and partners. Corporate standards and their application in the service sector. Employees’ behavior in business communication situations during the development and implementation of a tourism product, etc.

Thus, in the process of learning a second foreign language, the formation of a specialist in the relevant field becomes multifaceted – both universal and professional competencies are expanded, the intercultural component of professional activities, essential for these educational programs, is emphasized.

To identify students’ attitudes toward teaching a second language at the university, their points of view concerning the issues of the learning process and their wishes, closed and open-type questions were developed (12 questions, in total). The proposed questions reveal factual information about students (educational program, language), level of knowledge at the beginning of training, students’ preferences, their motives when choosing a second foreign language, the demand for specific foreign languages, attitudes towards the elective status of the discipline, changes in the views on learning foreign languages in connection with the situation of the “new normal” in the world [Стихина 2022], readiness to study a second foreign language outside the curriculum as a supplementary paid course. Students’ answers provide a snapshot of the current situation and reveal the main points: the current state, existing motivators. Taking into account these data, it is possible to build a recommended model for teaching second foreign languages at a non-linguistic university, in accordance with the existing specifics of creating curricula based on federal standards and the practice of developing academic course programs for definite disciplines. A students’ survey on studying a second foreign language showed the following actual relationships:

1. Of the 130 students surveyed, 70,8% are full-time undergraduate students, 29,2% are extramural students (Figure 1).

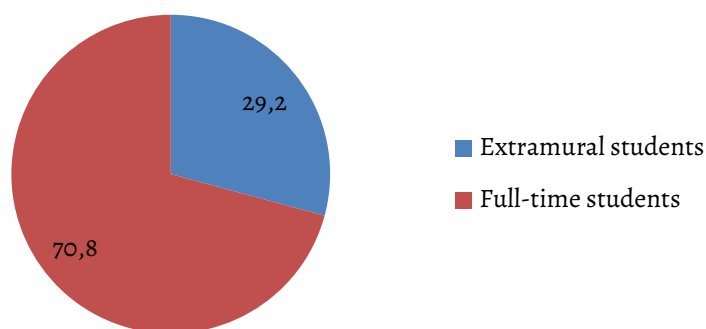


Fig. 1

2. The majority of students study in the fields “Hotel Industry”, “Foreign Economy and Customs Ac-

tivities”, “Catering Industry” (25,4%; 23,1% and 18,5%, respectively) (Fig. 2).

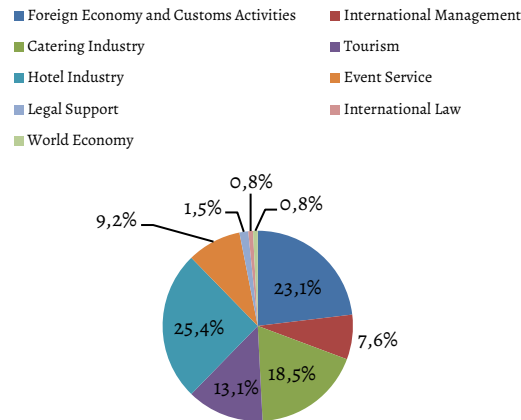


Fig. 2

3. The majority of students study French as a

second foreign language (35,4%) (Figure 3).

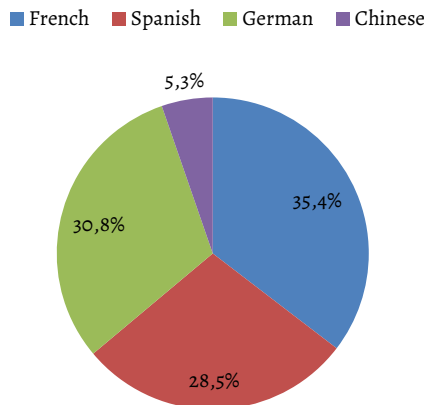


Fig. 3

4. A significant proportion of students have not studied their chosen second foreign language before

(76,9%) (Figure 4).

■ Yes ■ No

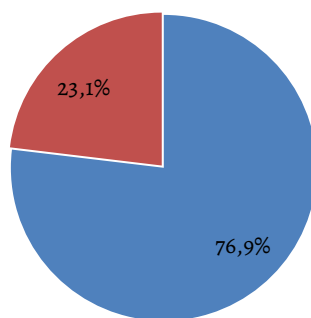


Fig. 4

5. Most of the 38 students who had previously studied a second foreign language before noted that

they had studied it at school. Among these students there are those who studied it only at a basic level for

1–2 years, as well as those whose training lasted the entire 10 years at school. Several people studied independently with video lessons (3 students), in a language center, online courses and with a tutor (4 students), there is also 1 student who went on an exchange program to another country and studied the language there for 6 months. Therefore, we can talk about a small percentage of students who are especially motivated to learn a specific foreign language, which they previously studied independently outside school curriculum. Most of the students, however, did not study a second foreign language at school for long. It may have determined their choice – to remember the language and continue studying it. The factor of “familiarity” is also important: what has already been studied is perceived by students as more accessible – something that will be easier to master and pass. In the future, due to the fact that, in accordance with the Federal State Educational Standard, from 2022 the study of a second language at school has become elective, most likely, there will be much fewer students choosing a second language at a university according to this principle.

6. It is interesting that when determining the

Personal preferences
 Recommendations
 Studied before
 Others

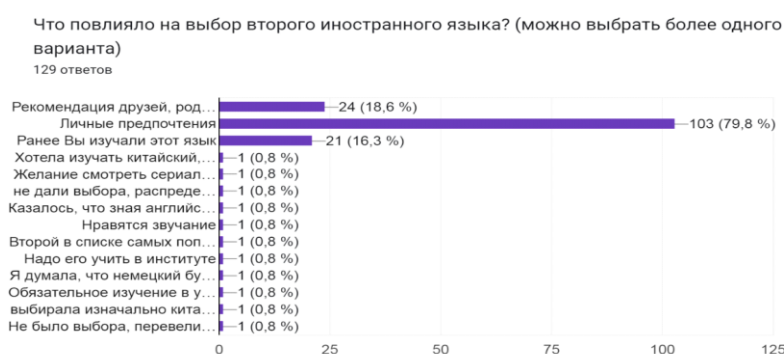


Fig. 5

7. To the question about the factor that motivated learning the chosen foreign language to the greatest extent, answers were given, where the three leading places are occupied by the possibilities of practical use in personal life (travel to certain countries and/or living there, communication with native speakers, understanding of interesting entertainment, educational and other content in this language, etc.) (61,5%); the “beauty” of the language, its “sound” (50,8%) and the expansion of cultural horizons, acquaintance with a different mentality and new realities in the process of learning a language (47,7%). This is followed by opportunities for practical use in professional life (work in a certain field, study/work in a certain country, etc.) (32,3%); development of one’s own cognitive processes (memory, thinking, etc.) while learning a language (29,2%); interest in studying the “structure” of a language, its grammatical, lexical and other features (16,2%). The remaining respondents chose the option “Other”.

In the first place in the answers there are practical opportunities that knowledge of a foreign language opens up for a person: travel, expanding one’s social

factor that most influenced the language choice, students indicated personal preferences (79,8%), followed by recommendations from friends, relatives, and other persons (18,6%), and only in third place there is a factor of a foreign language studied before (16,3%). The remaining reasons are individual answers from students who chose the option “Others”. Anyway, despite their small number (11 answers), they also deserve attention (Fig. 5). For example, the answer “I wanted to study Chinese, but the group was disbanded. I had to join the group studying another language” was given by 3 students. This highlights the problem of choosing a language in the context of the need to optimize the students’ number in groups (from 15 people) and the inability to open mini-groups. Of course, it is extremely difficult to take into account the interests of all students in such conditions. The Chair of Foreign Languages has now proposed a “priority selection” mechanism: a student writes several languages with priorities 1, 2 and 3. If a group for priority 1 is not recruited, the next of the student’s priorities is taken into account. This mechanism has shown its effectiveness in practice.

circle, the ability to choose where to live, the availability of interesting entertainment content in a source language, etc. It is not surprising that for young people, the opportunities for personal development, which knowledge of a foreign language provides, are in the first place. It is interesting that such a factor as the “beauty” of the language took the second place in importance. Of course, in this case, we are not talking exclusively about audition of a language. This answer also testifies to the significance of the existing images, ideas, and stereotypes about a foreign language in students’ minds. A certain role here can play cultural projections that arise in people’s minds not only as a result of acquaintance with the achievements of culture and art in a certain country, but also with the content of the mass media, which, apart from significant cultural phenomena, transmit many cultural stereotypes, “trivial” myths [Стихина 2013: 302]. Clichés merge into certain structures, perceived by our consciousness as the objective reality of a foreign culture, where the foreign language as an integral part belongs to. The more attractive the “picture” is, the greater the interest in learning a foreign language of the corre-

sponding country is, as well as the motivation to “immerse” in the linguistic and cultural layer of this “new” reality.

Students do not consider the professional importance of learning a foreign language a priority; it is only in fourth place after the opportunity to expand cultural horizons, get acquainted with a different mentality and new realities in the process of learning a language. We believe that interest in learning new things, healthy curiosity and a general thirst for knowledge should prevail at a young age. Professional realities in the context of the “new normal” worldwide, when contacts between European countries and the Russian Federation weaken or disappear, represent

Professional development
Personal life
“Beauty” of the language, its “sound”
Interest in language structure
Development of cognitive functions
Expanding cultural horizons
Others



Fig. 6

8. When answering the question about the status of the discipline, 50% of students noted that it should be elective, 46% – compulsory. The remaining answer options (4%) were as follows: “I don’t know”, “Both are possible”, “Not necessary”. Several respondents noted an insufficient number of hours for studying a second foreign language. Students were given an open-ended question to help them formulate their vision. The majority of respondents indeed gave detailed answers. Their votes were distributed approximately equally, with each group having certain prevailing opinions. Such opinions in the group advocating the optionality of the discipline can be considered the following: “I think it should be elective, since learning a second foreign language largely depends on desire and some specific personal motivation”; “You need to study it as an elective, since not everyone can benefit from a second foreign language in life.” If we summarize in the same way the opinions of the group advocating compulsory study, then these are the following positions: “This should be a compulsory discipline, since in the fields related to international activities, knowledge of a second language is necessary”; “A mandatory discipline, as it develops thinking.” It must be emphasized that some students who choose elective study are extramural students. They noted it in their answers, for example: “I believe that learning a second foreign language should be elective. Since studying two compulsory languages according to the curriculum can be more difficult for extramural students – there is a lot of in-

formation and too little time.” Thus, for some extramural students, who mainly combine full-time work parallelly with university studies, such discipline as a second foreign language becomes redundant, especially if they do not see opportunities for its practical use in their current professional activities. However, we did not conduct a separate survey of opinions among extramural students on this issue due to the fact that their number is significantly lower.

9. When choosing an answer to the question which of the “risk factors” in an elective course are the most significant, respondents identified insufficient attendance of classes by some students and the associated general low level of knowledge in the group; the need to wait for “lagging” students who work slowly (46%); insufficient number of students to create a group to study a second foreign language, and therefore, the inability to study it; as a consequence, absence of the discipline in the diploma (43,7%); dissolution of the group due to dropping out students and the inability to complete the chosen course with confirmation of its completion in the diploma (32,5%). The remaining answers are sporadic, for example: “Insufficient number of lessons”; “Inability to attend classes due to work”; “The lessons are too early in the morning”.

Answers to this question showed that the majority of respondents are aware of the risks associated with the elective status of the discipline and the degree of students’ responsibility for the organization of the normal learning process within an elective (Fig. 7).

Dissolution of the group
 Insufficient attendance
 Insufficient students'
 number
 Others

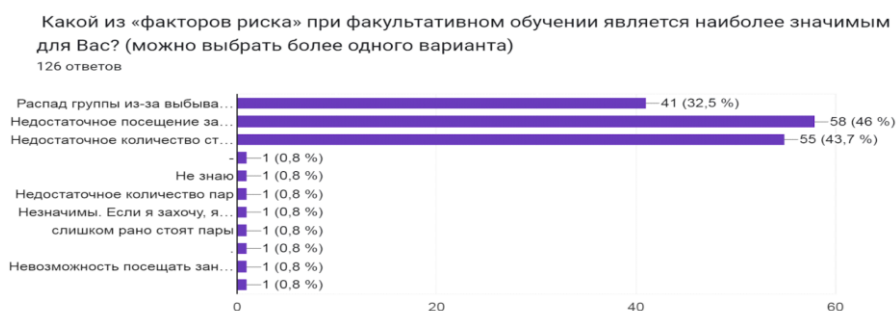


Fig. 7

10. When asked which language is the most demanded as a second foreign language, students often chose several languages, and the combinations of languages could be different. Some respondents did not pay attention to the wording and indicated English; we do not analyze such answers here. The leading position has Chinese (52 respondents). The most popular reason formulated by respondents was economic relations with China and the reorientation of business ties towards East Asia. Next, with a slight difference, are Spanish (35 respondents), German (33 respondents) and French (28 respondents). All of these languages hold the second place with a difference of less than 10 voices. The reasons given by respondents vary depending on the language chosen. For the Spanish language, this is, first of all, its “simplicity” and relevance for learning (travel, business partnerships with Latin American countries). The choice of French and German was explained mostly by the prevalence and popularity of these European languages, as well as their accessibility for study (groups are usually formed; these languages are traditionally studied from year to year, etc.). Several other languages were mentioned in isolated responses – Japanese, Italian and Korean.

The leadership of the Chinese language as the most popular second foreign language here is somewhat at odds with the actual situation: earlier, in Fig. 3, it was indicated that the majority of students

study French as a second foreign language. We believe that the reasons were as follows: firstly, only German and French are offered at the University as a choice for the extramural students; secondly, full-time study groups are formed according to the principle of the maximum number of participants, and not all students' priorities in choosing a language can be taken into account; thirdly, understanding the difficulties of learning Chinese and the insufficient number of lessons per week, students chose another language, still believing that Chinese was the most popular.

11. The next question, aimed at identifying the peculiarities of learning a second foreign language in current realities, showed that the majority of students (55,4%) believe that interest in learning a second foreign language has not changed. 23,8% of students reported a weakening of interest. There is also a share of those who believe that interest is growing (20,8%). We believe that the result is quite optimistic: almost 80% of students note that interest in learning a second foreign language exists (it remains unchanged or is even growing). This indicates that, despite changes in socio-political life, right now there is an awareness of the importance of international and intercultural interaction as well as of maintaining the country's openness and readiness to cooperate at the international level (Figure 8).

- The interest in learning second foreign languages has not changed
- The interest has weakened
- The interest is growing

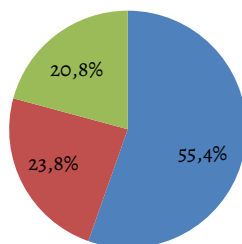


Fig. 8

Thus, the relevance of “multilingualism” in the current period is confirmed by the students' responses.

Despite the leading role of Chinese as a second foreign language, students are also aware of the importance of

other languages, and motivation to learn those remains. Given the demand for learning a second foreign language and the need for students to master a number of competencies during the learning process, maintaining “multilingualism” in a non-linguistic university seems quite justified. However, taking into account the elective status of this discipline and the fact that 50% of respondents agree with it, a contradictory situation arises: due to the fact that students have the right not to choose an elective, the number of groups decreases, and, accordingly, the teachers’ workload falls. How to maintain teaching of four languages as second foreign languages under such conditions? In Conclusions, we will suggest some ways to solve this problem.

12. Quite indicative is the answer to the question whether students are ready to study a second foreign language as a supplementary course on a paid basis if

it is excluded from the curriculum. The majority (64,6%) are not ready for this. Only 30% may be interested in such a course. The remaining answers make up a small proportion and represent such formulations as: “Maybe”, “Depends on the format”, “Already studied” or “I’m currently studying” (Fig. 9). The diagram clearly reflects the risk of abandoning a second foreign language as a discipline in the curriculum and its transition to the category of supplementary paid courses. In this case, the number of potential groups is reduced almost threefold, which cannot but affect the full-time teaching staff. In such conditions, providing linguistic diversity while teaching a second foreign language is unlikely to be realized. The possibility of systematic teaching of a second foreign language, in principle, becomes questionable.

При исключении дисциплины из учебного плана, готовы ли Вы изучать второй иностранный язык платно в рамках дополнительных образоват...ГЭУ (100-150 руб за академический час)?
130 ответов



Fig. 9

Conclusions

The following conclusions can be formulated regarding the problem under study:

1. Teaching a second foreign language contributes not only to the formation of universal and professional competencies necessary for a professional in the field of international activity, but also to the overall harmonious development and upbringing of an individual.

2. The greatest coverage of students learning a second foreign language was achieved in educational programs where the discipline is in the variable part of the curriculum (“Hotel and Catering Industry”, “Event service”), and students choose it en masse. The elective status of the discipline leads to the problem of forming and maintaining groups, and, as a consequence, preserving linguistic diversity at the university.

3. A significant proportion of students have not studied their chosen second foreign language before (76,9%). We believe that in the future, due to the fact that from 2022 the study of second foreign language in secondary schools has become elective, the share of students who have never studied a second foreign language will become even larger. This means that a second foreign language can be introduced the most students only at university. If second foreign language disappears from the curriculum, then a whole range of competencies will not be developed in the process of study.

4. The survey showed that students of educational programs that include international component are, in general, interested in learning a second foreign language. The practical use of a second foreign language in personal life, the attractiveness of the language and the expansion of cultural horizons prevail as motivators. A selection of motivating factors can help in improving and adjusting the academic course programs of the discipline.

5. The majority of students are aware of the risks associated with elective training, as well as the responsibility of students for organizing the learning process within the elective, however, a small majority (50% compared to 46% who are in favor of compulsory mastery of the discipline) chooses the elective status of the discipline, which does not bind students with obligations. This fact indicates the need to competently build interaction with students, taking into account the inevitability of elective training.

6. Chinese has become the most popular second foreign language (development of economic ties). Traditionally studied European languages (German, French) are still relevant, however, Spanish is slightly gaining ground (developing of economic ties with Latin America). The priority of the Chinese language and its complexity, perceived by respondents, raises the problem of the insufficient amount of lessons (academic hours) within the curriculum.

7. 80% of students note that interest in learning

a second foreign language remains unchanged or is even growing. This indicates an awareness of the importance of international interaction and maintaining the openness of the country, which, in turn, confirms the need for a second foreign language as an independent discipline in the university curriculum.

8. Only 30% of students may be interested in learning a second foreign language outside the curriculum as a supplementary course for additional fee, which proves the risk of the discipline becoming a course within Continuous Professional Education (CPE).

Thus, as a result of the study, the current situation in the field of teaching a second foreign language in a specific non-linguistic university was identified, as well as the main problems of the training, students' opinions and needs. The results allow us to talk about future prospects for the training and possible ways to solve the identified problems, discuss the tasks requiring solutions.

Peculiarities of higher educational processes in Russia demand from universities more attention to their language policy. It should include proper design of curricula for educational programs including international component, where second foreign language as an elective discipline should be interpreted as an integral part of the corresponding education program. In order to transmit such attitude, explanatory work on the institute and chair level should include individual consultations with students. The choice of elective disciplines shouldn't be conducted without the participation of the chair of foreign languages, whose representatives could explain the benefits of studying a second foreign language and reduce anxiety concerning this process. Also, methodological approach to teaching a second foreign language demands more variety: using different modern teaching techniques and tools such as online and blended learning, social networking, blogs, creative implementation of videos, audios, presentations, games and other materials in order to attract students' attention and retain it during the whole learning process. Without using combined, varied and sometimes complicated for teachers techniques it will

be more difficult to form new groups and retain the existing ones, so additional research and studies are required in the field of methodological approaches and definite techniques for teaching a second foreign language. Such research can form the further part of the current study which is aimed at the complex definition of the pedagogical problem in the field of higher education, its reasons, and identification of the ways to overcome challenges making particular suggestions about possible solutions.

We believe that the most important task is to preserve the teaching of several second foreign languages at the USUE. To do this, it is necessary to keep the discipline in the curriculum, without transferring it to the category of supplementary paid courses within Continuous Professional Education (CPE). It is advisable to offer the discipline in the variable part of the basic curriculum so that the choice of discipline is obvious to students. It should also be taken into account that with the elective status of the discipline in the curriculum of specific educational programs, additional coordination is necessary between university institutes, chairs and teachers of second foreign languages in order to improve the mechanism of interaction with students. Such a mechanism includes the explanatory work of institutes and chairs (both Chair of foreign languages and graduating chairs) in order to encourage students to choose a second foreign language as an elective discipline; formation of groups taking into account the students' priorities and the educational opportunities available at the university; an individual approach, both at the level of institutes and at the level of chairs, including teachers of the discipline, which allows us to remove emerging difficulties and prevent students from leaving the group. In the future, the exchange of experience with other non-linguistic universities that practice teaching a second foreign language can be useful in the framework of methodological seminars, conferences, possible cooperation in the field of writing textbooks, student competitions and events, as well as developing optimal approaches to the process of organizing teaching a second foreign language.

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