

УДК 378.015.31:[378.091.212:378.22]:378.016:81'243](045)

DEVELOPING MASTER'S STUDENTS' HARD SKILLS THROUGH ACADEMIC FOREIGN LANGUAGE COURSE

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Graduate education, particularly at the Master's level, is characterized by a dual focus: fostering essential soft skills while cultivating specialized knowledge. The study highlights the role of Academic Foreign Language Course in equipping students of non-linguistic specialties with intrapersonal skills and foreign language communicative competence while studying the Course themes.

The steps of integrating the hard skills development into AFL Course and factors influencing their fostering have been presented.

Keywords: *Master's students; Academic foreign language course; development of hard skills; subject-specific competence; course theme; foreign language proficiency; online tools; foreign language communicative competence.*

РОЗВИТОК ТВЕРДИХ НАВИЧОК ЗДОБУВАЧІВ ОСВІТИ ОС МАГІСТР ПІД ЧАС ВИВЧЕННЯ ДІЛОВОЇ ІНОЗЕМНОЇ МОВИ

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Вища освіта на другому (магістерському) рівні все більше орієнтується на формування цілого спектру знань та вмінь, від самодисципліни, вміння ставити цілі та досягати їх, креативності, аналітичного мислення, когнітивних навичок до твердих (спеціалізованих та професійних) навичок, необхідних для кар'єрного просування, професійного зростання ефективної адаптації та особистісного розвитку в сучасних умовах ринку праці. У статті висвітлюється взаємозв'язок між темами курсу Ділова іноземна мова та розвитком «твердих» навичок, таких як ведення презентацій та комунікація із аудиторією, аналітичні та дослідницькі навички, володіння цифровою грамотністю, вміння послуговуватися он-лайн ресурсами та платформами для оформлення документів різного рівня, написання листів, перекладу та редагування текстів, тощо. Наголошується, що іншомовна комунікативна компетентність також є важливою складовою професійних навичок, оскільки її сформованість дозволяє здобувачам освіти ефективніше взаємодіяти із колегами у глобалізованому світі. Автор підкреслює важливість адаптації освітніх підходів до вимог динамічного професійного середовища та зазначає необхідність інтеграції розвитку навичок, пов'язаних із обов'язками здобувачів освіти на робочому місці та їхніми спеціальностями, у викладання курсів загального блоку, зокрема Ділової іноземної мови. Вказано, що використання автентичних матеріалів, створення завдань

із наближеними до реальних умов ситуаціями, імітування ділового середовища, впровадження в освітній процес форм роботи, орієнтованих на виконання практичних діяльностей, застосування цифрових інструментів, інтерактивних методів та різноманітних стратегій викладання сприятимуть ефективності навчання та дозволять здобувачам освіти краще адаптуватися до подолання професійних викликів.

Ключові слова: здобувачі вищої освіти ОС Магістр; Ділова іноземна мова; он-лайн інструменти; розвиток «твердих» навичок; фахова компетентність; тема курсу; рівень володіння іноземною мовою; іншомовна комунікативна компетентність.

The requirements for the language competence of future employees in a global labour market are increasing in the modern world, as international relations and communication are becoming increasingly crucial for business, science, and other fields of activity. Knowledge of a foreign language opens up opportunities for employment in international companies and abroad, helps stay abreast of the latest trends and innovations, facilitates the exchange of experience with colleagues from other countries, and assists in participating in international educational and training programmes, which contributes to professional development and skills upgrading. Professional standards often define the requisites for effective communication skills in foreign academic and professional settings. As a result, they are to be incorporated into curricula and training programmes at higher education institutions.

The presented study draws upon existing literature pertaining to the multifaceted approach to skills development in higher education, with a particular focus on language competence and broader professional capabilities. A key focus of these works is the development of foreign language communicative competence, with a particular emphasis on professional contexts (Vasilieva P.). In this regard, approaches such as situational learning are examined as potentially effective methods for the practical acquisition of language (Starynets O.). Furthermore, the articles emphasise the increasing significance of integrating a range of soft, meta, and hard skills into higher education curricula (Folomieieva N. et al.; Kostikova I. et al.; Vieilandie L. et al.). This approach is believed to better prepare students for professional success. Several studies have proposed competence-based models that are tailored to the specific roles students are likely to encounter, such as leadership positions in academia (Yelnikova H.; Makhmetova D. et al.). Additionally, research on teaching English to Master's students (Doghonadze, N., Zoranyan, M.) has demonstrated how language classes can serve as a valuable platform for fostering a range of skills essential across industries.

The analysed theoretical sources also emphasise the distinction between hard skills and soft skills, pointing out both to be “an integral part of the professional structure of the future specialist, which is the totality of the competence model of professional training in higher education” [10, p. 2956]. Hard (intrapersonal) skills refer to practical, tangible abilities and describe the technical skillset required to perform a task, such as programming languages or network construction [8]. Soft skills, on the other hand, are interpersonal and socioemotional competences that are more subjective, including critical thinking, creativity, communication skills, leadership and management skills, emotional intelligence, team running, people interaction, conflict management, flexible consciousness and stress resistance [9; 10].

As the professional landscape evolves, the ability to balance technical expertise with interpersonal skills is becoming a critical factor in career advancement and organizational success. Regarding the English language courses for students of non-linguistic specialities at

universities, it is necessary to point out that they aim to develop both soft skills and foreign language proficiency. According to N. Doghonadze and M. Zoranyan, “while many successful Master’s student programs involve in the curriculum and syllabi the hard skills necessary for the given speciality, fewer programs integrate soft skills and particular activities for their development to train the 21st-century specialists” [5, p. 144]. On the contrary, recent studies accentuate the prioritisation of hard skills nowadays, which is caused by the development of innovative digital capabilities [11]. Besides, the modern approaches in language teaching aim to prepare students for real-world communication in various life situations, strengthening the practical orientation of the learning content and prioritising the formation of students’ abilities and skills to communicate in various environments of social life [1; 5; 7]. The increasing demand for hard skills in today’s globalized job market emphasizes the role of Academic Foreign Language Courses in equipping Master’s students with both language proficiency and essential hard skills.

The purpose of the article is to present the example of integrating hard skills development into Academic Foreign Language Course content and describe ways of fostering Master’s student intrapersonal abilities at AFL lessons.

Graduate education, particularly at the Master’s level, is characterized by cultivating essential soft skills, on the one hand, and fostering specialized knowledge, on the other. This approach equips graduates to navigate the complexities of a dynamic global environment while simultaneously developing expertise in the chosen fields of study. The Master’s training programs underscore this duality by emphasizing the development of professional competences (or subject-specific competences), often being identified with “hard” skills, which enable graduates to demonstrate a nuanced understanding of their specialization and proficiency in executing field-specific tasks. However, there are still some differences in scope, depth and development between the mentioned terms. Professional competence is “a set of knowledge, skills, abilities and readiness of a person to act in a difficult situation and solve professional tasks with a high level of uncertainty; the ability to achieve a better result of work, the attitude to the profession as a value” [3]. Thus, the effectiveness of the formation of professional competences in students depends on many factors (level of theoretical training, motivation to study, ability to think critically, application of forms, means and methods to practical training, unity of goals and content of preparation, conditions and functions of practical training, etc. [1; 3]. The concept of hard skills in the digital transformation era is considered an integrative definition, positioned as “a system of knowledge, abilities, and skills based on the activity’s goals and the capability for effective implementation of professional and social functions” [11, p. 1147]. Hard skills refer to acquired and learned skills that are used to complete a technical job or academic task and job descriptions [8]. They are transferable across disciplines, while professional competences are more industry-specific. Professional competences require a deeper level of understanding and critical thinking than hard skills. Professional skills are often developed through practice and repetition [7, p. 56], while subject-specific competences evolve through in-depth study and application. In an academic context, both “hard” skills and professional competences are essential for student success, but they represent distinct aspects of a well-rounded education. To summarize, a future employee becomes more competent, competitive, productive, creative, adaptable, flexible, and confident in developing professional competences together with hard and soft skills.

The Academic Foreign Language Course (AFL Course) studied by Master’s students at Pavlo Tychyna Uman State Pedagogical University provides a complex approach to skill development, encompassing personal and professional domains. It fosters soft skills such as self-discipline, goal-setting, creativity, analytical thinking, and cognitive skills and concurrently cultivates language proficiency and intercultural competence, enabling effective communication in diverse international settings. These acquired skills are essential for future professionals to establish global networks, engage in cross-cultural collaborations, and navigate the complexities of international communication. Accessing and utilizing global resources in their respective fields empowers them to unlock opportunities, contribute to international initiatives, and foster both personal and professional growth [2, p. 3]. The content of the AFL Course presents the environment for developing quantifiable abilities with practical, technical applications, which are crucial for navigating specific tasks across various speciality-connected disciplines, i.e. intrapersonal or hard skills.

Table 1

Relationships between Course themes and key hard skills

Course themes	Hard skills examples
Theme 1. Formal style and its main features (English as the world language of research, education and business. Formal and informal styles. English formal style and language).	Raising awareness of cultural differences in communication styles; presenting findings in a clear and concise manner according to English style norms, etc.
Theme 2. Spelling and some issues of transliteration.	Employing research tools, applications for transliteration of Ukrainian names (e.g. Grafiaty); etc.
Theme 3. Cautious writing. Grammar (Morphology. Agreement of subject and verb. Word order. Main types of sentences in formal English).	Managing basic writing (grammar, punctuation, spelling, vocabulary); using online vocabularies and translators (including professional ones) (e.g. Deeple), research tools (e.g. Perplexity) and applications (e.g. Grammarly).
Theme 4. Cautious writing. Academic Vocabulary (New lexical tendencies in formal / academic English).	Consuming appropriate academic language and vocabulary.
Theme 5. Important features of English academic texts (Paragraphs. Titles. List of references (Bibliographies). Summaries: main features. IMRAD structure).	Evaluating essays, reports, and summaries, adhering to specific stylistic and formatting conventions; developing literature reviews; critically evaluating relevant academic sources and their structure; citing sources accurately; using online applications for composing references (e.g. Perplexity, bibme.org); etc.
Theme 6. CV. Resume. Application for foreign employment.	Managing applications and online platforms while making CVs (e.g. Europass, CV maker).
Theme 7. Formal letters: main features and structure (Formal letter writing. Letter structure. Letter format).	Familiarizing research tools for letter writing (e.g. LettersWriter, WriteExpress).
Theme 8. Main types of formal letters (Motivation letter. Cover letter. Letter of invitation. Letter of apology. Recommendation letter).	Presenting real-world scenarios that require applying knowledge and language skills to find solutions.
Theme 9. Electronic messages (Main features of e-mail English. Introducing and final terms of courtesy).	Writing formal e-mails; employing correctly introducing and final terms of courtesy; etc.
Theme 10. Main features of formal telephone conversation and presentations.	Delivering effective oral presentations / telephone conversations; communicating information in an accessible and compelling format.

Master's student ability to communicate with representatives of other professional groups of different levels (experts from other industries/types of economic activity), to establish interaction between state, public and commercial organisations, ability to work together and motivate groups, facilitate group decision-making processes, ability to interact effectively with colleagues in mono- and multidisciplinary teams [2, p. 4] is incorporated with communicative competence in foreign languages, considered as “an essential hard skill for any professional orientation” [11, p. 1147]. It is treated as the ability of a person to successfully communicate and carry out professional and further educational activities in a foreign language in accordance with the tasks of foreign language communication situations in various intercultural situations, taking into account the linguistic and social rules followed by native speakers [1, p. 106].

The development of related-to-profession skills is defined to be crucial in today's competitive world, with universities adapting their curricula accordingly. The statement is supported by recent studies, highlighting the main pedagogical prerequisites for the formation of hard skills within professional training in higher education. The researchers emphasise the implementation of means of interdisciplinary integration by creating an interdisciplinary educational environment, integration of professional and general areas of vocational training according to the current labour market requirements, utilisation of innovative technologies in the organisation of training activities to model interdisciplinary occupational cases, realisation of integrative formal, informal, and non-formal forms of professional training to ensure compliance and adaptability to the modern labour market [11, p. 1147]. Thus, integrating the hard skills development into AFL Course teaching and studying for Master's student embraces several steps:

1) Content selection that involves choosing authentic materials relevant to Master's student fields of study (articles, video, audio, TV programmes, advertising brochures on Master's students' speciality). They create an atmosphere of real language communication and are able to ensure the successful perception of foreign language speech by students, to increase students' motivation to learn a foreign language. By incorporating situational tasks, connections between AFL Course and professional subjects are realized, and Master's students are provided with valuable opportunities to develop their communicative competence and prepare for the linguistic demands of their chosen occupation.

2) Task-based approach can be paid attention to so as to design activities that require Master's students to actively apply their language and hard skills in practical contexts and incorporating tasks that simulate real-world professional environments and demand the integrated use of various hard skills. This stage also integrates utilizing digital tools, applications and online platforms, on the one hand, and various teaching strategies and interactive activities (case studies, presentations, group and pair discussions, flipped classroom) on the other, to enhance learning, facilitate research, promote effective communication, to maximize engagement and retention.

For instance, developing a real-life CV requires describing a Master's student's education with appropriate degrees obtained, work experience, personal skills and competences, etc. It is vital that students can apply the digital CV builder “Europass” both as technical tool constructing CVs and a platform introducing the information to Master's students on resources aimed at both job seekers and students looking to develop and showcase their professional profiles in a clear, recognizable way across different European countries.

Besides, it provides a connection with the European Job Mobility Portal and various educational institutions, offering users the chance to explore job vacancies, courses, and training programs [6]. The Course themes “Formal letters: main features and structure” and “Main types of formal letters”, can employ tasks referring students to their CV document and offering to write a Cover letter or answer similar letters from their mates pretending to be applicants or employers. It is natural that role-playing ensures motivation, stimulates interest in English-language communication, broadens its subject content, gives students the opportunity to go beyond their own context of activity, and allows them to get ahead of future personal experience [4, p. 120].

Skill sets are crucial for personal and professional success. With soft skills becoming increasingly important in the modern workplace, language proficiency and essential hard skills are also treated to provide Master’s students with long-term benefits in academic and professional environments in a globalized world. That is why integrating hard skills development into AFL courses for Master’s students is considered by the article’s author as an essential factor to equip them with the practical expertise necessary for effective performance in their chosen fields, enabling them to meet the complex demands of the global job market with confidence and adaptability.

The Academic Foreign Language Course at Pavlo Tychyna Uman State Pedagogical University is designed to acquaint students with the lexical and grammatical features of English language styles for communication in the professional sphere; strategies for searching and selecting professionally oriented information; features of constructing texts of various genres typical for the speciality of the higher education applicant; language means characteristic of various types of professionally oriented writing; features of language behaviour during discussion and conversations, etc. [2]. Consequently, the Course provides the development of communicative competence in foreign languages necessary for effective work in the professional field, namely maintaining formal documentation, discussing a wide range of professional issues, and communicating with representatives of various professional groups in a foreign language. At the same time, the Course content correlates with communication, research and presentation skills, data analysis, digital literacy and, computer software knowledge, etc. Fostering a range of hard skills crucial for mastering students’ speciality, fields of study and job functions is possible by a combination of available authentic materials, creating real-life situations, task-based approaches, digital tools and a variety of teaching strategies and interactive activities. The prospects for further research can be realized in studying the peculiarities of implementing the situational approach and characterising the typology of exercises in AFL Course textbooks for the development of Master’s.

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