TECHNICAL UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' BELIEFS
ABOUT SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNING
УЯВЛЕННЯ СТУДЕНТІВ ТЕХНІЧНОГО УНІВЕРСИТЕТУ ПРО ВИВЧЕННЯ ДРУГОЇ МОВИ

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ABSTRACT

Demand for language proficiency of technical university students leads to recognition of enhanced efficiency in language instruction. Using effective methods can not work because the second language learners have other beliefs which contradict with each other. The article deals with technical university students' beliefs about second language learning and implications for university language teachers. The results of the research provide information for better understanding of teachers and students' responsibilities in a second language learning class. The data was gathered through the survey regarding students' attitude towards second language learning and individual feedback via Zoom sessions. Students gave their opinion on eighteen statements using a five-point Likert scale from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree". We used descriptive statistics to calculate the median (beliefs of most of the students) and Inter-Quartile Range of each item (how scattered their responses were). The findings showed that most technical university students agree with the statements about second language learning, most of which are "myths". Reflection on the results of the survey, providing additional input concerning controversial statements about language learning and discussion in groups contributed to better understanding of students' needs. The implications of the study suggest that being aware of students' beliefs about second language learning allows teachers to adjust instruction to the needs of students, share with students knowledge about the language, which they

need to make language acquisition more effective. Further investigations may be devoted to comparing technical university students and teachers' beliefs about second language learning.

*   **Key words:** second language learning, students' beliefs, error correction, grammatical rules, academic content, instruction, language chunks.*

Introduction. Second language learning and teaching issues mirror the concepts of historical, cultural, political, technological and economic processes occurring in the world. Experts indicate two main trends, which have the biggest influence on teaching and learning languages: technology development and globalisation (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2018: 273). Technological advances provide opportunities for learner autonomy possible through social networks, TV shows, audio and video materials, etc. (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2018: 274). Quarantine related to COVID-19 pandemic, added more choices for online communication, synchronous and asynchronous teaching and learning: Google Classroom, Google Meet, Zoom, Skype, and many other video-conferencing services which made it possible to continue studying and working even in lockdown (Saienko & Chugai, 2020). Globalisation created a great demand for language proficiency as a tool, which led to recognition of enhanced efficiency in language instruction. According to critical pedagogy, reconsidering the roles of teachers and students in a second language class, revisiting certain beliefs about teaching and learning makes it possible to suggest better practices which prove to be more effective (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2018: 274). It is important for teachers to be aware of the thoughts, which guide their actions in a second language class, and it is equally important for students to be aware of the thoughts, which they have about learning languages in general and their own learning in particular. Having that understanding allows all the participants of educational environment to analyse the everyday practice of teaching or learning and start doing it differently (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2018: 21). Considering the fact that learning a language is not linear and it is constantly evolving, cultivating students' language awareness is crucial for their progress (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2018: 260). The findings indicate that students hold a wide range of beliefs with varying degrees of validity, some of which could be called "myth" (Altan, 2006: 51; Mustafa, 2006). According to the findings of Horwitz (1988), who pioneered the investigation in this field, second language learners' beliefs did not undergo any changes in spite of experiencing new methods (p. 76). However, another study indicated that second learners' beliefs were possible to modify, which serves as an implication for educators to influence their students' beliefs. In fact, students should experience various ways of language learning, explore and experiment with new approaches (Dubravac & Latić, 2019: 48-49).

    The whole range of factors should be taken into consideration: characteristics of learners, the environment inside and outside classroom, similarities and differences between the first and second languages, exposure to the target language, informative feedback and balanced instruction (Lightbown &

Spada, 2013: 212). The research showed that, in spite of negative attitude towards the English language, majority of French university students recognized English to be necessary for their studies and future careers (Gabillon, 2007: 68). If teachers had known about that negative attitude, it would have been possible to focus on that particular issue and design the activities differently. Along with teaching a language, teachers should be aware of the necessity to educate their students on how to become better language learners (Büyükyazı, 2010: 179). If learners' beliefs lead to memorizing lists of separate lexical items or rules without context, such practice may lead to demotivation, disappointment and frustration (Büyükyazı, 2010: 179). Applying teaching methods without awareness of learners' beliefs may not be effective as students approach the task differently (Büyükyazı, 2010: 180). Applied methods may not help to reach the expected results because of the beliefs the second language learners hold. The ideas about how languages should be learnt and taught, may clash with learners' experiences in class. However, systematic assessment of students' beliefs may increase the effectiveness of second language acquisition (Horwitz, 1985: 333). Later studies confirmed this conclusion and stated that ignoring students' beliefs may deprive them of receiving benefits from teaching methods (Altan, 2006: 51).Therefore, there is the need for further investigations of language learners' beliefs (Bernat & Gvozdenko, 2005). The findings indicate that positive beliefs about language learning may be helpful in reducing anxiety and boosting learners' confidence, which has important implications (Aslan & Thompson, 2018). The awareness of learners' beliefs may assist in successful language learning (Mohebi & Khodadady, 2011). In addition, language learners' beliefs about their ability to control the process of learning and their ability to learn a language affect their motivation and help to develop language proficiency (Alhamami, 2019: 1). The recommendations are implementing positive instructional practices and realistic expectation in class (Ariogul, Unal, & Onursal, 2009: 1500).

The article aims to reveal technical university students' beliefs about second language learning. To achieve this aim the following tasks are to be completed: to analyse the students' responses and discuss the implications of the findings for university language teachers.

Materials and methods. *Research design.* A mixed method research design was used in the study: quantitative and qualitative data was obtained from the survey completed by students anonymously as Google Forms. Qualitative data was received through analysing information of individual feedback and group discussions via Zoom sessions.

Participants. This study was conducted at National Technical University of Ukraine "Igor Sikorsky Kyiv Polytechnic Institute". Students (N=33) who major on cybersecurity, mathematics and physics, completed the survey in December 2020, nearly 600 students' responses were analysed. First and second-year students have been studying English for about 10-12 years, prepared for the External Independent Evaluation (ZNO) in English at the end of high school, some studied German or French for a couple of years. All the respondents volunteered to participate in the survey

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regarding their experience and attitude towards second language learning.

Instruments and procedure. The survey consisted of 18 statements related to beliefs about second language learning (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2018: 3-4). Students were asked to give their opinion on eighteen statements and mark the choice associated with their opinion on a five-point Likert scale from strongly agree (SA) to strongly disagree (SD). We used descriptive statistics to calculate the median (Mdn) (beliefs of most of the students) and Inter-Quartile Range (IQR) of each item (how scattered their responses were).

Results and discussion. The results of the research showed that respondents agreed with majority of statements (78%), they were neutral about 17% of statements, and strongly agreed with 5% of statements about language learning (see Table 1).

Table 1.

Technical university students' beliefs about second language learning

N	Statements	SA	A	N	D	SD	Md	IQR
1	Languages are learned mainly through imitation.	3	18	11	1	0	**2**	**1**
2	Parents usually correct young children when they make grammatical errors.	9	18	5	1	0	**2**	**1**
3	Highly intelligent people are good language learners.	5	11	10	6	1	**3**	**1**
4	The most important predictor of success in second language acquisition is motivation.	18	13	2	0	0	**1**	**1**
5	The earlier a second language is introduced in school programmes, the greater the likelihood of success in learning.	9	14	6	3	1	**2**	**2**
6	Most of the mistakes that second language learners make are due to interference from their first language.	2	17	5	9	0	**2**	**2**
7	The best way to learn new vocabulary is through reading.	9	11	7	5	1	**2**	**2**
8	It is essential for learners to be able to pronounce all the individual sounds in the second language.	5	16	11	1	0	**2**	**1**
9	Once learners know 1,000 words and the basic structure of a language, they can easily participate in conversations with native speakers.	4	14	6	7	2	**2**	**2**
10	Teachers should present grammatical rules one at a time, and learners should practice	9	17	5	2	0	**2**	**1**

#	Statement							
	examples of each one before going on to another.							
11	Teachers should teach simple language structures before complex ones.	14	15	3	1	0	**2**	**1**
12	Learners' errors should be corrected as soon as they are made in order to prevent the formation of bad habits.	15	13	5	0	0	**2**	**1**
13	Teachers should use materials that expose students only to language structures they have already been taught.	2	11	12	8	0	**3**	**1**
14	When learners are allowed to interact freely (for example, in group or pair activities), they copy each other's mistakes.	0	9	10	12	2	**3**	**2**
15	Students learn what they are taught.	3	15	11	3	1	**2**	**1**
16	Teachers should respond to students' errors by correctly rephrasing what they have said rather than by explicitly pointing out the error.	7	19	6	1	0	**2**	**0**
17	Students can learn both language and academic content (for example, science and history) simultaneously in classes where the subject matter is taught in their second language.	4	14	10	5	0	**2**	**1**
18	Classrooms are good places to learn about language but not for learning how to use language.	9	12	9	2	1	**2**	**2**

(The questionnaire was designed by Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2018: 3-4, the data was obtained by the authors of the article).

The only statement with which most of students strongly agreed was about motivation being the most important predictor of success in second language acquisition (Mdn=1, IQR=1). Considering the fact that students have already their intrinsic motivation based on their experience and attitudes towards second language learning, teachers may offer scaffolding, engaging and friendly environment to support learning and strengthen positive motivation (Lightbown, Spada, 2013: 204).

Students were practically unanimous about agreeing with the statement about error correction, they think that teachers should respond to students' errors by correctly rephrasing what they have said (Mdn=2, IQR=0) (see Table 1). Teachers use different strategies of error correction, and rephrasing what students say without explicitly identifying the error, which is called "recast", is one of them. Being the most common in second language

classrooms, recasts do not interfere with continuity of interaction, they contribute to creating a friendly atmosphere. Recasts are proved to be effective with the focus being on accuracy rather than content, when students may interpret teacher's comments as agreement with the meaning of the message, not correction of the form. Besides, sometimes students do not even notice corrections, and mechanically repeat after teachers what they say. Using signals which indicate error correction may help teachers overcome this drawback (Lightbown & Spada, 2013: 210-211).

The findings showed that most students agreed with the statement that languages are learned mainly through imitation (Mdn=2, IQR=1) (see Table 1). The results are in keeping with another research, which stated that the majority of students believed in the effectiveness of imitation: listening and repeating (Ariogul, Unal, & Onursal, 2009: 1503). There is no evidence that languages are learned mainly through imitation though, as language learners experiment with imitated and memorised sentences producing novel patterns in new contexts. Findings from corpus linguistics show that learning a language is related to creating strong associations between combinations of language features (Lightbown, Spada, 2013: 201-202). Such word combinations like collocations, idioms, sentence starters and so on, are called chunks (Dellar& Walkley, 2020: 147). Therefore, language learning is based on the input of the target language chunks and their use in real communication (Lightbown, Spada, 2013: 201-202).

Most students agreed with the statement that parents usually correct grammatical errors made by their young children (Mdn=2, IQR=1) (see Table 1). However, as a rule, parents focus not on grammatical errors, but on appropriacy of their children's statements like the word choice, politeness, etc. The evidence claims that without corrective feedback on accuracy, second language learners continue making the same errors for a long time (Lightbown, Spada, 2013: 202-203).

The findings demonstrated that most students agreed with the statement about necessity for second language learners to be able to pronounce all the individual sounds (Mdn=2, IQR=1) (see Table 1). Another research has demonstrated that the ability to produce individual sounds is less important than to produce chunks of the target language, which leads to the goal of communication to be understood. One more argument is a great variety of one particular language spoken in different countries, therefore, second language learners should be aware of that and be ready to adjust (Lightbown, Spada, 2013: 206).

Most students also agreed with the statement that teachers should present grammatical rules one at a time, and learners should practice them in the same manner, one by one (Mdn=2, IQR=1) (see Table 1). According to another research almost half of the respondents were sure that learning rules and translation were the best ways of learning a second language (Ariogul, Unal, & Onursal, 2009: 1503). A strong belief shared by teachers and learners that any language may be presented as a set of grammar structures and single words, has existed for a long time (Dellar & Walkley, 2020: 9). In fact, just learning a rule

properly and then moving to the next one deprives second language learners of freedom to experiment, compare and contrast different language features. Rules in isolation and practicing one particular structure do not show how language patterns function in real life. At the same time continuous exposure, hearing, seeing and using them increases the effectiveness of learning new features (Lightbown, Spada, 2013: 207).

The results of the research established that most students agreed with the statement about the necessity of teaching simple language structures before complex ones (Mdn=2, IQR=1) (see Table 1). However, other findings indicated that learners use certain structures more easily than others, which is not connected with the order teachers present them. Therefore, it is not advisable to focus on "simple" language structures first, especially in isolation. Besides, it is not possible to define what "simple" and "complex" structures are. What second language learners need is modified interaction like repetition, paraphrasing, etc. In addition, it is not simplicity but necessity in teaching language patterns, which are common in real communication (Lightbown, Spada, 2013: 208).

The findings showed that most students agreed with the statement about correction on the spot in order to prevent the formation of bad habits (Mdn=2, IQR=1) (see Table 1). Making errors is natural for the process of learning, and teachers are expected to provide proper instruction and timely error correction. What, when and how to correct errors depends on students' characteristics, their relationships with a teacher, ethical code in class. Advanced learners may welcome metalingustic explanations like rules, while other learners need further exposure to authentic material. Some speakers want to be corrected immediately in order to get rid of fossilised mistakes, but others may be embarrassed by being stopped and have difficulties with continuing speaking (Lightbown, Spada, 2013: 208).

Most respondents agreed with the statement that students learn what they are taught (Mdn=2, IQR=1) (see Table 1). In fact, students do not learn what they are taught, they learn much more using their internal learning abilities. At the same time learners do not acquire at once what is available in the input. The reason for that is that learners may not be developmentally ready for certain language features. Vocabulary, on another hand, may be taught at any time at any stage of development (Lightbown & Spada, 2013: 210).

Most students also agreed with the statement that it is possible to learn both language and academic content simultaneously (Mdn=2, IQR=1) (see Table 1). Indeed, research proves numerous advantages of content-based instruction: students are interested in getting access to the subject matter available in a second language, the range of language features of academic content is more varied, students develop comprehension skills, vocabulary and communicative competence as well. However, in order for students to improve in areas of accuracy, elements of form-focused instruction should be added (Lightbown & Spada, 2013: 211).

The findings indicated that students agreed with the statement about the connection between early introduction of a second language in school

programmes and success in learning (Mdn=2, IQR=2), but the responses were scattered (see Table 1). The results of another research claim that those, who start learning a second language at an early age, reach native-like proficiency. At the same time it depends on the time and frequency of the lessons, one-two classes per week being not enough to make progress (Lightbown, Spada, 2013: 205).

According to the results of the research, most students agreed with the statement that interference from their first language is the reason for most of the mistakes that second language learners make (Mdn=2, IQR=2), but the responses were scattered (see Table 1). It is true that one of the main reasons for errors is transferring patterns from the native language, and those kinds of errors can be fossilised. Both similarities and differences between the first and second languages may lead to errors because of the wrong assumptions second language learners make. However, speakers of different origins often make similar mistakes, which proves that they experiment with the target language rather than recall the patterns from their native languages (Lightbown, Spada, 2013: 205).

The findings showed that most students agreed with the statement about reading being the best way to learn new vocabulary (Mdn=2, IQR=2), with responses scattered (see Table 1). Another research evidence recognises this statement as true, but suggests that the material should be selected according to the level of difficulty, it should be interesting and important for second language learners (Lightbown, Spada, 2013: 205).

Most students agreed with the statement that knowing 1,000 words and the basic structure of a language is enough for a learner to easily participate in conversations with native speakers (Mdn=2, IQR=2), the responses were scattered (see Table 1). Another research confirms that it is possible to take part in conversation having a command of limited number of words and certain patterns. However, without understanding the language usage in various situations, breakdown of communication is possible (Lightbown, Spada, 2013: 207).

The findings showed that most students agreed with the statement that they learn about a language in classroom, but not about using a language (Mdn=2, IQR=2), with the responses scattered (see Table 1). It is a complicated issue, and the answer depends on goal setting and the ways of achieving it, on the approach to teaching and learning a second language. Communicative, content-based and task-based approaches to language learning claim practical reasons to be crucial, the goal is to use a target language inside and outside the classroom. Balancing acquiring explicit knowledge (to know about language) and implicit knowledge (to use language) prepares students for effective communication in any environment (Lightbown & Spada, 2013: 211-212).

According to the results of the research, most students were neutral about the statement that highly intelligent people are good language learners (Mdn=3, IQR=1) (see Table 1). Indeed, high score in IQ tests usually indicates success in learning about the language like grammar rules. However, real

communication involves the whole range of wide intellectual abilities, which cannot be measured by IQ tests. Therefore, in order to achieve a good result in learning second language, it is important to use different ways to exploit multiple intelligences of students (Lightbown, Spada, 2013: 203).

Most university students were also neutral about the statement that teachers should use materials that contain the language structures already taught (Mdn=3, IQR=1) (see Table 1). In fact, restrictions to the language structures, which are familiar to students, may be demotivating for those, who are not challenged enough. Students gradually become dependent on the teacher, and they cannot develop the strategies of dealing with new language patterns, which they need in real communication (Lightbown, Spada, 2013: 209).

The findings showed that most university students were neutral about the statement that learners copy each other's mistakes when they work in pairs or groups (Mdn=3, IQR=2), but the responses were scattered (see Table 1). It is true that when working in pairs or groups students may make mistakes or use their interlanguage instead of the target one. Nevertheless, by effective design of the activities, grouping and clear instructions it is possible to eliminate disadvantages of group work. According to the research, learners make as many mistakes talking to their groupmates as with native speakers. Balancing group work with individual tasks and teacher-centred activities encourages effective language learning (Lightbown & Spada, 2013: 209-210).

To conclude, technical university students agreed with the statements about second language learning, thirteen out of eighteen being "myths", which could impede successful language acquisition. Follow up activities included reflection on the results of the survey, providing additional input concerning controversial statements about language learning and discussion in groups.

Limitations of the study. Though the study provided valuable data on technical university students' beliefs about second language learning, there were limitations to the study. More students could participate in the research, some statements could be not quite clear to all respondents. Future research include comparative analysis of teachers and students' beliefs about second language learning.

Conclusions. The results of the research provide information for a better understanding of teachers and students' responsibilities in a second language learning class. The findings showed that most technical university students agreed with the statements about second language learning, most of which are "myths". Reflection on the results of the survey, providing additional input concerning controversial statements about language learning and discussion in groups contributed to better understanding of students' needs. Being aware of students' beliefs about second language learning allows teachers to adjust instruction to the needs of students, share with students' knowledge about the language supported by the latest research, which they need to make language acquisition more effective.

Further investigations may be devoted to comparing technical university students and teachers beliefs about second language learning.

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АНОТАЦІЯ

Попит на володіння іноземною мовою студентами технічних університетів веде до визнання необхідності ефективного викладання мови. Використання сучасних методів може не привести до бажаного результату, оскільки студенти мають суперечливі погляди на вивчення іноземної мови. У статті розглядаються уявлення студентів технічного університету щодо вивчення другої мови та даються рекомендації для викладачів університету. Результати дослідження сприяє кращому розумінню відповідальності викладачів та студентів під час вивчення другої мови. Дані були зібрані в ході опитування щодо ставлення студентів до вивчення другої мови та індивідуальних відгуків під час сесій в Zoom. Студенти висловили свою думку щодо вісімнадцяти тверджень, використовуючи п'ятибальну шкалу Лікерта від рішучої згоди до категоричної незгоди. Ми використовували описову статистику для обчислення медіани (переконання більшості студентів) та інтерквартильного діапазону кожного елемента (наскільки розкиданими були їх відповіді). Результати показали, що більшість студентів технічних університетів погоджуються з твердженнями про вивчення другої мови, більшість з яких є «міфами». Рефлексія після отримання результатів опитування, надання додаткових матеріалів щодо суперечливих тверджень стосовно вивчення мови та проведення дискусій в групах сприяли кращому розумінню потреб студентів. результати дослідження свідчать про те, що усвідомлення переконань студентів щодо вивчення другої мови дозволяє викладачам пристосовувати навчання до їхніх потреб, ділитися зі студентами знаннями про мову, які необхідні для підвищення ефективності засвоєння мови. Подальші дослідження можуть бути присвячені порівнянню переконань студентів технічних університетів та викладачів щодо вивчення другої мови.

Ключові слова: вивчення другої мови, переконання студентів, виправлення помилок, граматичні правила, академічний зміст, викладання, сталі вирази.