

CHALLENGES IN TEACHING FOREIGN LANGUAGES IN NON-PHILOLOGICAL UNIVERSITIES

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Abstract:

Teaching foreign languages in non-philological universities presents unique challenges due to the specialized nature of these institutions, where foreign language courses are often not the primary focus of academic curricula. Students in fields such as engineering, medicine, and business may perceive language learning as non-essential, leading to low motivation and limited engagement. Additionally, foreign language courses in non-philological universities typically receive limited time, making it difficult to achieve proficiency. Other challenges include varying student proficiency levels, inadequate resources, lack of specialized teacher training, and the struggle to integrate cultural context with language learning. Despite these obstacles, potential solutions such as curriculum integration, differentiated instruction, use of digital resources, and incorporating industry-specific language training can enhance the effectiveness of foreign language teaching. This article explores these challenges in depth and offers practical recommendations to improve foreign language education in non-philological settings, ensuring that students develop language skills that are valuable in a globalized world.

Keywords: foreign language teaching, non-philological universities, challenges, student motivation, curriculum integration, language proficiency, educational resources, teacher training, global communication.

Introduction

Foreign language learning plays a pivotal role in the educational landscape of modern universities, offering students a chance to broaden their global perspective, enhance cognitive abilities, and gain access to diverse cultures. However, while the benefits of learning foreign languages are widely recognized, teaching these languages in non-philological universities— institutions where foreign language instruction is not the primary focus—presents unique challenges. These universities typically house students pursuing technical, business, and scientific disciplines, where foreign language education may not be seen as a core component of their academic training. Consequently, educators face numerous obstacles in fostering foreign language proficiency in such environments. This article explores the key challenges faced by teachers of foreign languages in non-philological universities and offers potential solutions to overcome them.



1. Limited Time and Curriculum Integration

In non-philological universities, foreign language instruction is often not integrated into the main academic curriculum but is instead treated as an elective or supplementary course. As a result, students may not prioritize language learning or may feel that it is not as critical to their academic success. For teachers, this means that foreign language courses often receive minimal time within the overall educational framework. For instance, in universities where technical subjects such as engineering, medicine, or computer science dominate the curriculum, language classes may be relegated to a few hours a week, making it difficult to achieve a high level of proficiency in the language.

Solution: To address this challenge, universities could integrate foreign language courses more meaningfully into the curricula of non-philological disciplines. For example, incorporating specialized language instruction tailored to students' fields of study—such as scientific English for medical students or technical jargon for engineers—could increase students' motivation to learn. Additionally, offering more intensive language programs, such as summer language immersion courses or weekend workshops, could give students the opportunity to develop their language skills outside of their primary academic commitments.

2. Lack of Motivation Among Students

One of the most significant challenges in teaching foreign languages in non-philological universities is the lack of intrinsic motivation among students. In universities where the primary focus is on specialized fields such as science, engineering, or business, students may perceive language learning as a non-essential skill or a mere requirement for graduation rather than an opportunity to expand their cultural and professional horizons. This lack of interest can lead to disengagement in language classes, making it difficult for instructors to foster a productive learning environment.

Solution: Teachers can work to increase motivation by emphasizing the practical benefits of foreign language proficiency. For example, showing how a second language can enhance career prospects, facilitate access to international research, and improve communication in a globalized job market can make language learning more relevant to students. In addition, incorporating culturally rich materials such as films, music, and literature from the language-speaking countries can spark students' interest by providing them with a more holistic and engaging learning experience.

3. Variation in Language Proficiency Levels

In non-philological universities, students entering foreign language courses often have diverse language proficiency levels. Some may have learned the language in high school or through personal interest, while others may have little to no prior exposure. This variation presents a significant challenge for teachers, as they must cater to a wide range of learners with different needs, backgrounds, and learning styles. Creating a balanced curriculum that is accessible and engaging for all students can be a daunting task, especially when the class size is large.



Solution: One approach to overcoming this challenge is to use differentiated instruction, where teachers design lessons that accommodate various learning levels. This can include offering supplementary materials for advanced learners, such as academic articles or business communications, while providing more foundational resources for beginners. Additionally, using digital platforms and language learning apps that offer personalized learning paths can help students progress at their own pace. Teachers can also encourage peer learning, where more proficient students can assist their classmates, fostering a collaborative learning environment.

4. Inadequate Resources and Infrastructure

Teaching foreign languages effectively requires access to a variety of resources—ranging from textbooks and online tools to audio-visual aids and language labs. Unfortunately, many non-philological universities may not have the same level of investment in language teaching infrastructure as philological faculties. Without the necessary resources, language instructors may struggle to create an engaging, interactive, and immersive learning experience for their students. This lack of infrastructure can significantly hinder the learning process, especially when students are expected to achieve a certain level of fluency or practical language skills.

Solution: To address resource limitations, universities can leverage digital tools and online platforms. Online language learning platforms like Duolingo, Memrise, and Babbel offer a wide range of interactive content that can supplement traditional language instruction. Virtual classrooms and online language exchange programs also provide opportunities for students to practice speaking with native speakers. Additionally, universities could collaborate with language departments in other institutions or language schools to share resources and expertise, enriching the overall language learning experience for students.

5. Teacher Training and Expertise

Effective foreign language instruction requires skilled and trained teachers who not only have proficiency in the language but also understand the unique pedagogical approaches needed to teach in a non-philological setting. Teachers in these environments may often be specialists in the language itself but may not have training in how to integrate language learning with the specific needs and interests of students in technical or professional fields. As a result, the teaching approach may not be as effective in engaging students or helping them develop practical language skills relevant to their future careers.

Solution: To improve teaching quality, universities should invest in professional development for language instructors. Offering workshops, certifications, or degrees in applied language teaching for specific fields (e.g., medical English, business language) would help teachers align their methods with students' needs. Moreover, teachers can benefit from collaborative projects with industry professionals who can provide insights into the language skills required in specific fields. For example, a partnership between language instructors and engineering



departments could lead to curriculum development that focuses on the language skills most relevant to engineers working in a global context.

6. Cultural Barriers and Communication Challenges

Language learning is closely tied to cultural understanding. In non-philological universities, where the focus is often on specialized subjects rather than cultural exchange, students may not fully appreciate the connection between language and culture. This can make it challenging for teachers to convey the importance of cultural context when learning a foreign language. Without an understanding of cultural nuances, students may struggle to use the language appropriately in real-world situations, whether in business, scientific conferences, or international collaboration.

Solution: To bridge the cultural gap, language courses should include not only grammar and vocabulary but also cultural studies. Teachers can introduce materials that explore the history, politics, and traditions of countries where the language is spoken. This could include case studies, virtual exchanges with students from the target language's culture, and visits from cultural experts. By creating a more immersive cultural experience, teachers can help students see the value of language learning beyond just the technical aspects, thus improving their communication skills and fostering greater global awareness.

7. Assessment and Feedback Challenges

In non-philological universities, assessments of foreign language proficiency often focus on written exams or vocabulary tests, which do not necessarily reflect students' practical language skills. Given that many students are learning foreign languages as a secondary focus, these assessments may not adequately measure their ability to use the language in real-world settings, such as in professional or academic discussions. Additionally, providing timely and meaningful feedback in large, diverse classes can be difficult for instructors, limiting opportunities for students to improve.

Solution: A more comprehensive approach to assessment should be implemented, combining traditional exams with practical tasks such as presentations, writing reports, or engaging in role-playing exercises. These types of assessments can better evaluate a student's ability to use the language in context, which is crucial for real-world applications. Teachers should also provide personalized feedback through one-on-one sessions, encouraging students to focus on areas of improvement and reinforcing their strengths.

Conclusion

Teaching foreign languages in non-philological universities presents a series of challenges, from limited class time and resources to low student motivation and varying proficiency levels. However, these obstacles can be overcome with strategic planning, innovative teaching methods, and the integration of technology. By recognizing the importance of language



proficiency for students in all disciplines and adapting teaching approaches to meet the unique needs of non-philological contexts, universities can foster a generation of graduates who are not only experts in their fields but also globally aware and culturally competent. Through targeted solutions and continuous improvement, foreign language education in non-philological universities can be a valuable asset for students and society alike.

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