

Foreign Language for Future Diplomats: What Integrated Education Approach Is Better?

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Abstract

The current study deals with the Foreign Language Training for university students seeking the Master Degree in International Relations. The research focuses on the efficient organization of Foreign Language for Specific Purposes (FLSP), including ESP, course regarding the professional competence: meeting specific needs of the program stakeholders, designing it for adult learners of intermediate or advanced levels, etc. The aim of the course participants' training is to apply a foreign language in professional work situations. The learners are expected to get new knowledge and experience through integrated education that includes more than one subject and tends to be more effective. This article offers the theoretical and practical support for FLSP practitioners researching, designing courses and providing materials for learners of the Master programs in International Relations and related professional areas. The support includes problem-based training to develop students' professional competence. The training focuses on the insights from designing an FLSP course for such students, the analysis of their future job responsibilities, the stakeholders' needs, as well as the FLSP literature on integrated education approaches review, the Master study programs and Qualification Requirements.

Keywords: foreign language for specific purposes, students of the Master programs in international relations, integrated education approaches, professional problem-solving, professional competence

1. Introduction

After declaring its independence in 1991, Ukraine underwent significant changes in its foreign policy agenda, national security challenges, economic and social ties. These transformations established the need for training specialists in the area of international relations and relevant FLSP courses in globalised work contexts. Nowadays, in Ukraine students enrolled for the Master program in International Relations are trained at the Diplomatic Academy of Ukraine, the Military Diplomatic Academy named after Yevheniy Bereznyak, the Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv, the National Aviation University and others. Two foreign languages are compulsory for the programs and form an integral part of training. Vast majority of students in Ukraine choose to learn English bearing in mind its leading role in the international communication. Besides English, the students prefer to select one of the most spoken European languages (German, French, Italian, and Spanish), languages of neighboring countries (Polish, Romanian, Turkish, etc.). The most difficult languages to learn (Chinese and Arabic) attract Ukrainian students as well.

Sharing their best practices of designing a FLSP course linked up with *professional competence* (the ability and readiness to tackle professional tasks and solve problems in a professionally related setting), foreign language providers underline the necessity of stakeholders' needs analysis. The stakeholders include not only the current students, but also alumni, content area faculty, administrators, and representatives from the larger off-campus community who will ultimately employ the program graduates (Westerfield, 2010).

The largest employer of the International Relations program graduates in our country is the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine (MFA). In accordance with the current version of MFA Qualification Requirements, applicants for the Foreign Service career should have the Master degree in International Relations or related professional area. They also should have a fluent command of Ukrainian and Law (the Constitution of Ukraine, the laws of Ukraine "On Civil Service", "On Diplomatic Service", Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations, Vienna Convention on Consular Relations, etc.). The graduates should be able to communicate verbally and in writing in two foreign languages (one is an official language of the European Union) for tackling the professional tasks.

There are other factors to consider and a variety of situations in which such a course is designed, for example, the target events in which the learners want to operate successfully and the necessary rhetorical awareness (Dudley-Evans, St. John, 2000) or client's sense of urgency (Friedenberg, Kennedy, Lomperis, Martin, & Westerfield, 2003), i.e. immediate and delayed needs. With this in mind, we examined professional work situations in which our students will operate and their employer's immediate/delayed needs.

Any career track has stages of a potential progression, in particular the career of a Foreign Service Officer. Choosing, for example, a Consular Career Track and working in an Embassy at the entry level a Consular Officer performs a function of adjudicating visas, assisting fellow citizens who stay or live in a foreign country, those who got in emergencies (hospitalization, arrest, and major accident). Such specialists provide non-emergency services (e.g., applications for passports and notaries services, reports of birth, etc.), respond to inquiries from different sources (parliament offices, attorneys, host government officials, business contacts, etc.) At the medium level, he/she is responsible for making not always easy decisions as to services visas for their co-citizens and resolving complex management issues such as dealing with human resources and working migrants. At the senior level, a Consular Officer participates in various public outreach activities, e.g. acting as a speaker to the press (other organizations), etc.

Because of these requirements, the curriculum has been modified. We have chosen the integrated education approach to FLSP as the most appropriate one for our target audience including bilingual (Ukrainian and Russian speaking) adult learners (upper-intermediate or advanced levels) with professional experience in the area of diplomacy and international relations. Therefore, we have looked at the FLSP training at the Master program in International Relations from this viewpoint.

Considering the importance of the future diplomats' foreign language training due to the high priority national-and-international-level professional functions they fulfill, the purpose of the study is to prove the transdisciplinary approach as the most appropriate for their FLSP training.

Tasks

Taking into account the purpose of the study, the following objectives have been identified:

- designing a FLSP course for the future diplomats in accordance with the job responsibilities and based on needs' analysis of the main stakeholders (learners and their future supervisors);

- choosing an appropriate education approach to FLSP training of students at the Master programs in International Relations regarding advantages and disadvantages of various integrated education approaches;

- model-making for learners seeking the Master Degree in International Relations.

Literature Review

Over the past decades, the integrated education as a factor of successful foreign language acquisition is increasingly being mentioned. However, researchers and practitioners (Katsara 2008, Markovina, Krasilnikova, Kravtsova, Litvinova, 2020) note that students' motivation at the FLSP course is often instrumental, which means that they see foreign language skills as a useful tool to perform such extra-linguistic tasks as going abroad to learn and tourism, communicating with foreign citizens, widening one's horizons, etc. This usually happens when the students are relatively young and have no experience in the professional area they have chosen. The students should know how to implement the ideas in a new way, how to solve new problems using the previous knowledge from the text, and how to detect common features in different situations (Yesypenko et al., 2022). Some scholars present a qualitative analysis and compare the number of critical elements in the written text (Hromova et al., 2022). Authors consider that students can understand non-physical concepts based on their own actions and characteristics while reading texts (Soloviova et al., 2021).

We surveyed the students enrolled for the Master program in International Relations. 40,9 per cent of respondents admitted the need for a foreign language to carry out professional activities in their country, 54,5 per cent – to go

abroad for studying, taking an internship and working. Besides the main goals, the students surveyed pointed out that learning a foreign language would help them to travel, research, take part in community projects, provide self-improvement, etc.

As we can see from the data, the majority of students as adult learners are professionally oriented and need a foreign language for getting a job and using it in their professional activities both in Ukraine and abroad. Therefore, the aspects that deserve more attention are how aware the students are of their potential employer's needs and how a FLSP provider can intertwine the needs into the course. It comes to the forefront the necessity of integrated education to meet the requirements.

In our earlier work with the coauthors (Lysenko et al., 2020) we also focus on the necessity of providing foreign language training for the future diplomats based not only on integrating their professional tasks but also modelling the high-risk environment in which these tasks are performed.

2. Theoretical Background

The word "integrate" has a meaning of "to merge, adapt, synthesize, include, unite and coordinate. To integrate (verb): to combine two or more things in order to become more effective" (Oxford Learners Dictionaries).

The integrated approach to teaching/learning was developed by a number of researchers worldwide. It includes more than one subject. Learning several subjects must be more effective than learning each subject individually. The integrated education is effective because it connects learning with life (here, life is regarded as a whole).

Kaulina (2013) and Petere (2003, 2014) point out that the most essential in integrated teaching/learning is the wholeness. The integrated learning process that creates a whole, which a student can see according to his/her abilities, motivates for learning. Here, a teacher's action is essential. The teacher facilitates the creation of favorable conditions for a learner to be able to see the wholeness of a learning content by him/herself. It is important to note that only the teacher indicates the connections to be seen by a learner. Here, the motive awareness in integrated learning is regarded as the inner driving force and a subjective component possessing purely individual features, different to everyone.

Likewise, Anspoka (2003) considers vital the connection of the term "integration" with integrity and unity of perception differently from other concepts that highlight more the external connections of phenomena.

Ukrainian researchers offer the main directions of the education system reform for primary, secondary, vocational, higher school and for people with special needs in the context of integrated teaching/learning (Dobrovyska 2010, Kozlovska, 1999, Luzik, 2010). Bozhko (2018) stresses three aspects of integrated education: content (integration leads to a holistic development of the individual), methodology (organically combines collective and individual learning, systematically synthesizes reproductive and productive teaching methods) and organization (provides a synthesis of the regulated and spontaneous activity of those who study).

Drakes and Burns (2004) identify three approaches to the integration: multidisciplinary, interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary. They are considered distinctive types of integrated education representing the connection of subject areas (science fields) of various levels, with different aims and methods.

Helmane and Briska (2017) describe the approaches to the integrated teaching/learning in terms of commonalities, connections, aims, results, learning outcomes, etc. By having a closer look at common and distinctive features of the approaches, we can spot that all three of them are common in 1) including more than one subject, which proves more effective than learning each individual subject, 2) building a holistic system and 3) making students active learners. The basis for integration in the multidisciplinary approach is the topic, while the interdisciplinary approach builds on the skills and concepts common for two disciplines. The transdisciplinary approach, on the contrary, has actual real-life problems (social, economic, cultural, ecological, etc.) as the basis for integration.

Looking at the connections, again, the multidisciplinary approach proposes a topic as an interconnection with each discipline, while in the interdisciplinary approach the processes and concepts of one discipline help to understand the others. The transdisciplinary approach considers all disciplines have particular sense only in life context. Both the multidisciplinary and the interdisciplinary approaches are student-oriented while the transdisciplinary approach is problem-oriented that focuses on complex problem-solving meeting society actual needs and values. The multidisciplinary approach is aimed at facilitating to obtain new knowledge. The interdisciplinary approach helps in indicating, using and developing particular general skills. The transdisciplinary approach has the aim of problem-solving, using content knowledge and skills.

The learning outcomes of the three approaches are the following: knowledge in different discipline and skills (multidisciplinary), various set of reasoning and metacognitive strategies (interdisciplinary), skills for life and

understanding the sense of learning (transdisciplinary).

As we can see from the analysis of the features, only one approach looks as most problem-oriented, aimed at making innovative problem-solutions by developing the content and methods of different disciplines. This approach promotes understanding of the sense of learning, taking active part in learning process, which reflects employer's needs, professional activities and helps to meet current challenges what is important for adult learners having the Bachelor degree, some professional experience and preparing for employment. At the same time, it helps the learners to answer the following questions: Which skills and content can help student in solving the real-life problems? How can students' learning help in solving the real-life problems? Unlike the other two approaches proposing typical student – teacher cooperation, this one focuses on the cooperation of teachers as well as on the school – community format of cooperation.

Therefore, it seems fairly obvious that among all the types of integrated education the *transdisciplinary approach* is the most effective for the students of the Master programs.

3. Methodology and Results

We use prefix “trans-” in the meaning of “across, beyond, crossing, on the other side, changing thoroughly, transcending” (Oxford Learners Dictionaries). That accounts for various options of interconnection between disciplines.

Kaufman, Moss and Osborn (2003) define transdisciplinary approach as the exploration of a relevant issue or problem that integrates the perspectives of multiple disciplines in order to connect new knowledge and deeper understanding to real-life experiences. The transdisciplinary teaching/learning should encourage students to ask authentic questions, involve them in participating and connecting to their lives as well as having learners to discover answers. Here, the exercises should be inquiry-based and provide an opportunity for discovery – “uncovering”.

In the transdisciplinary approach practitioners organize a course around student questions, concerns and work situations. Students develop professional skills as they apply interdisciplinary and disciplinary skills within the real-life context. It leads to top innovative, unforeseen solutions.

A FLSP course has always been an integral part of career in International Relations. As part of the training, our team (foreign language providers and content area faculty) widely use various types and forms of practice, which allow learners to become professionals that are more effective.

The goal of such training is to improve practical skills in performing the responsibilities of Foreign Service Officer acquired at universities and in the workplace.

Taking into account the goal, our teaching team develop a curriculum of FLSP course, educational and methodological materials. The representatives of the professional community together with the teaching team elaborate a plan for the realization of the training, approved by the supervisors of the program graduates. The plan reflects the activities of the preparatory period and a set of authentic problems the students would solve in the workplace. Here are some examples.

- The Security Service report that the neighboring country Z is holding large military exercises on our borders. We were not informed that this would be happening. *What is your advice to the President?*
- It is reported that Country Z is in the process of establishing a Consulate in Balaclava (the Republic of Crimea). This is the first you (or your Ministry) have heard of this action. *What is your comment and advice to the Minister?*
- On the 9th of April the European Union has banned aircraft from Motor Sich (and many others) from flying to the EU countries for safety reasons. The International Press has asked for a response from the Government of Ukraine. *What line would you suggest the Government should take and how should it be dealt with?*
- The Minister of Trade for your country has arranged a visit to Switzerland for medical treatment. *What action needs to be taken?*
- The Visa Officer of W Embassy is a national of Ukraine. He has Diplomatic Immunity but has been caught by the police driving under the influence of alcohol. He was on his way home from a beach party. *What is your advice to the Minister? etc.*

The plan also includes the progress of the professional problem-based training and summing up procedures of the training results. Thus, during their FLSP course the Master Studies participants improve their practical knowledge and test it out in professional work situations.

The study of commonalities, basis for integration, connections, focus, aim, results and learning outcomes of transdisciplinary approach and various Master programs in International Relations helped us to clarify and group subjects for the course. It includes Geopolitics and Geostrategy, Transnational Actors in World Politics, European Union Foreign Policy, International Relations in the Balkans and Black Sea Region, National Security of Ukraine, etc.). We have also grouped them into several science fields: Political Studies, Law Studies, Country/Regional Studies, Religious Studies, Cultural Studies/Ethnopsychology.

FLSP practitioner is a specialist in foreign language providing. Therefore, we concluded that subject-specific work is best approached in a team with subject experts. In the context of transdisciplinary approach, foreign language provider in cooperation with the subject experts can both teach the students FLSP and train them in using the knowledge and skills of aforementioned disciplines and interconnections. This leads the course participants to deeper understanding of professional experience, tackling professional tasks and solving real professional problems (as shown in Figure 1).

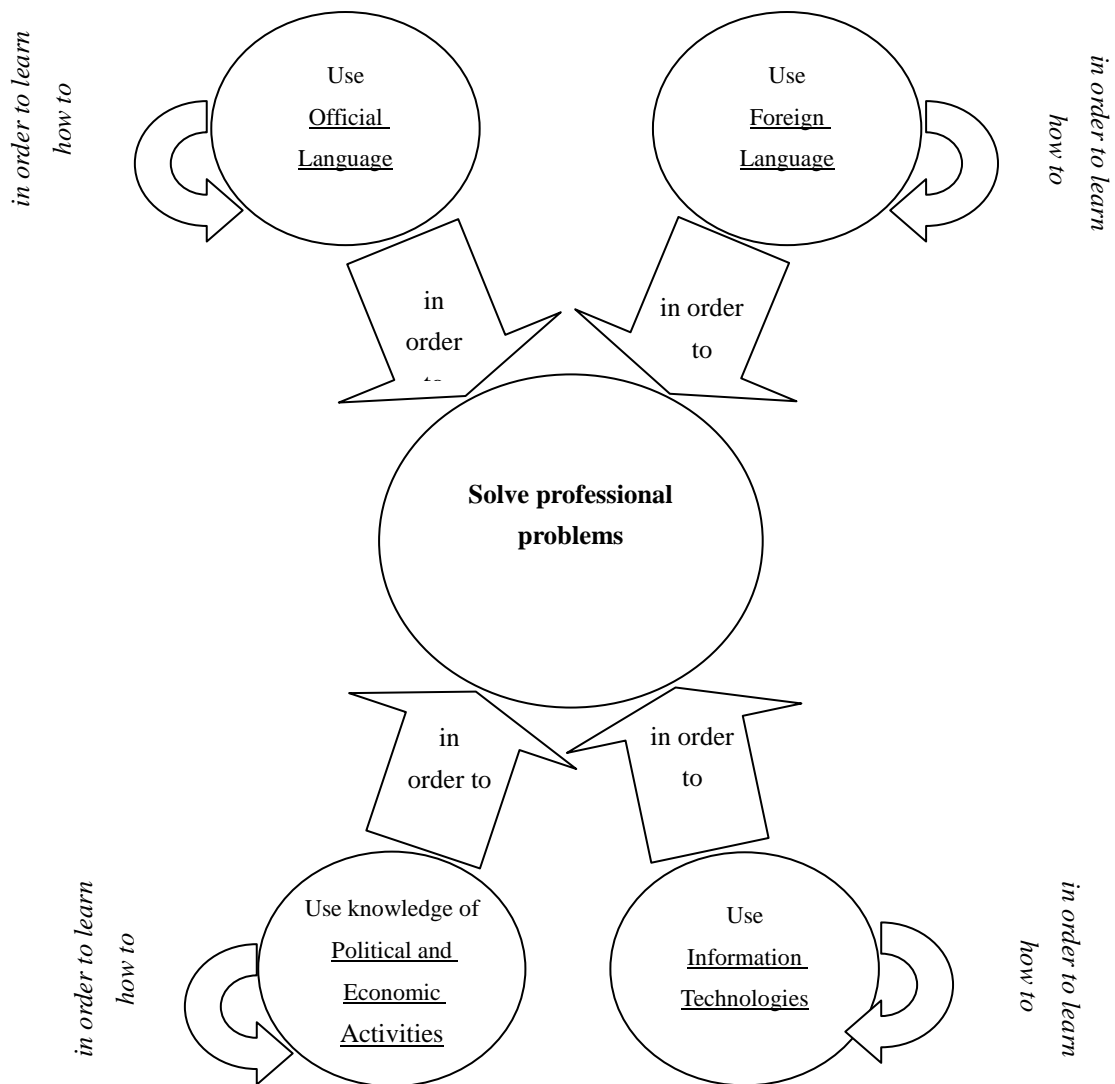


Figure 1. Model of Transdisciplinary Teaching/Learning for the Future Diplomats

Carver (1983) notes to the point that such a course is concerned with turning learners into users. We argue that the training helps the students become both users and creative professionals.

Using *Law Studies* (the knowledge and skills of the principles, practices, and theory of law, updates on recent legal developments) future diplomats learn to solve problems in their profession (protect the nationals and interests of the sending State).

Using *Country/Regional Studies* (specialized knowledge of the peculiarities of the historical, political, economic development of the country and region and the foreign languages that determine their regional specialization) students of the Master programs in International Relations try to better understand and influence local/regional issues.

Using *Political Studies* (the allocation and transfer of power in decision making, the roles and systems of governance including governments and international organizations, political behavior and public policies) future diplomats learn to solve professional problems by making specific policy recommendations.

Using *Religious Studies* (religious beliefs, religious practice, behaviors, and institutions) students attempt to understand more deeply people of other communities that leads to better communication and cooperation with them.

Using *Cultural Studies/Ethnopsychology* (the political dynamics of contemporary culture, its historical foundations, defining traits, conflicts, and contingencies) future diplomats investigate the ways in which “culture” creates and transforms individual experiences, everyday life, social relations and power; examine the psychology and behavior of the people of a particular ethnic community they have to cooperate with.

FLSP includes not only knowledge of a specific part of the language but also competency in the skills required to use this language, as well as sufficient understanding of the contexts within which it is situated (Orr 2002).

During FLSP training the course provider in cooperation with subject experts should attempt to link one or more from the above mentioned fields to language practice. FLSP learners practice to use a second or third language to solve their professional problems by conducting diplomacy with one or more other States or international organizations: representing and protecting interests of the sending State; initiating and facilitating strategic agreements, treaties and conventions, promoting friendly and mutually beneficial relations, assisting the co-citizens who find themselves in emergency situations.

4. Discussion and Conclusions

The consequence of the professional growth of entry-level diplomats and the development of their professional abilities and skills is the professional competence that the Master program students improve during FLSP training. This includes their ability and readiness to tackle professional tasks and solve problems as Foreign Service Officers.

Designing an FLSP course that maximally benefits all the stakeholders with a focus on the requirements of the stakeholder who will ultimately employ the program graduates, it is vital to do balanced needs analysis by asking both supervisors, content area experts and learners what kind of course they need. The FLSP training for future diplomats becomes more efficient if the focus is made on tackling professional tasks and solving authentic problems.

FLSP training especially tailored to the needs of learners seeking the Master Degree in International Relations requires a resource bank of pooled materials (with a set of professional problems) developed by the teaching team (foreign language providers and content area faculty) in cooperation with representatives from the larger professional community. Considering an overlap between content area knowledge and a foreign language for the learners in question we design and provide the course on team-teach basis.

Assessment of FLSP training takes into account the performance results of final tests and employment practice: the ability to communicate with foreign citizens orally and in writing, the ability to mobilize foreign language and content area knowledge to solve specialized professional problems, readiness for high-performance activities in the area of international relations within the limits of the job responsibilities.

Based on the analysis of various integrated education concepts we conclude that its approaches possess many common features as well as some distinctions that are crucial in professional training. The importance of integrated education can be seen through the development of a learner’s personality. The meaning of integrated education is to take care how to organize a FLSP course so that training is included in work professional situations and a Master program participant creates a holistic picture of his/her professional activities.

The design of the integrated education content can be multidisciplinary, interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary. These types of integrated education envisage the connection of content area subjects at various levels, with different

aims and methods. All integrated education approaches to curriculum pretend to be more effective for our learners' training than traditional approach based on one-discipline.

Our research has reached its goal of proving the transdisciplinary approach as the most appropriate for the future diplomats' FLSP training. The transdisciplinary approach (based on authentic problem-solving) can be seen as the most effective type of integration in the context of main stakeholder-employer needs – the ability and the readiness to tackle professional tasks and solve problems. The transdisciplinary approach to a FLSP course, in particular for learners of the Master programs in International Relations seeking problem-based training, allows applying knowledge and skills from several disciplines, solving real professional problems and shaping deeper professional experience.

5. Suggestions for Further Research

The methodological implications of developing professional competence through the integrated education approach may offer genuine ideas for research and at the same time be a helping hand for a teaching team to enhance both theoretical and practical training of the Master's program students. Our further research will comprise advantages of team-teaching in a FLSP course to meet the needs of its stakeholders. Another interest will concern the issue to which extent the set goal was attained and what has to be done to reach maximum contribution of all the course participants during team-teaching.

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