

NEW GENERATION SCHOOL TEACHER PROJECT AT KUBG: STUDENTS' PERSPECTIVE

Discussed in the article are the first year pilot results of the New Generation School Teacher project at the English Philology department of Borys Grinchenko Kyiv University in 2016/17 academic year as viewed by student participants. The joint project of the British Council and the Ministry of Education of Ukraine aims to reform the system of pre-service foreign language teacher training in the country by shifting the focus of pedagogical courses to practice-oriented experience, organized and delivered in the format of interactive training in the target language. The participants of the experiment were second-year students of the English Philology Bachelor program. It was a core course. The initial motivation for learning pedagogical subjects was diagnosed as low and the prospect to enter teaching career after graduation was not popular among the students. The topics for the first year included those, focused on psychological aspects of EFL learning (learner types, learning styles and strategies, multiple intelligences, levels of critical thinking), hypothesis about language acquisition, learner autonomy development, methods and approaches to teaching EFL etc. During the year students' attitude and reactions were closely monitored via introductory and end-of-year surveys and the students' oral and written reflection and feedback. Based on the data we could detect the following outcomes: students' attitude towards their prospective teaching career changed for more positive, a sufficient part of them declared their readiness to start teaching before graduation; the internal motivation to learning pedagogical subjects increased and the necessity to master the topics of the experimental course were recognized; the level of communicative competence and language proficiency improved; the ability to collaborate with peers developed, the level of learner autonomy advanced. Students also expressed moderate criticism about the project. It was mainly centered on course materials and the challenging level of input. General positive feedback proves of students' acceptance and approval of the experimental EFL Methodology course.

Key words: pre-service teacher training, EFL methodology, curriculum, feedback.

Judging by the level of the English language proficiency among Ukrainians [5], the necessity to reform the system of teaching foreign languages in Ukraine has been urgent for at least several decades. The majority of experts agree that the changes are necessary on all levels, including the system of pre-service teacher training [3].

Among various suggestions concerning the ways to tackle the problem there has been the New Generation School Teacher (NGST) project, launched by the joint effort of the British Council in Ukraine and the Ministry of Education of Ukraine in 2013 [7]. As it is stated in the general project description, it pursuits the overall aim "to introduce change to the initial teacher education system in Ukraine" by training future teachers as "reflective practitioners", who are ready to "make a shift from transmitters of knowledge to facilitators of learning" [ibid].

To achieve the declared aim, it was decided to re-design the content and format of pedagogical courses at teacher-training universities, providing the change of learning focus from general declarative knowledge of theories to practical skills. The Baseline Study [2] proved that the alterations would be supported by administration, teaching staff and students at Ukrainian universities. To implement the set aim, the draft of the new Curriculum [7] was designed. According to this curriculum, EFL (English as a Foreign Language) Methodology should be studied for three years. During those three years, best practices of leading EFL teachers and methodologists should be introduced to students, all sessions should be taught in English in the format of interactive training and students should be encouraged to use the target language for all the activities, related to the methodology course. Therefore, both issues of the present-day lack of professional competence and low-level language proficiency of would-be English teachers was supposed to be addressed.

For two years 2015-2016, English and methodology teachers from those Ukrainian universities, that expressed interest in the NGST project, participated in professional training with the British Council [7]; in the process of training the design of the New Curriculum was discussed and improved, sample session materials were developed and peer-reviewed.

In September 2016, eleven Ukrainian universities started piloting the new Curriculum. Among them was Kyiv Borys Grinchenko University, where the experimental course of ELT Methodology was implemented at the English Philology and Translation department of the Institute of Philology. Eight sub-groups of second-year Bachelor program students, majoring in English philology, started experimental training. The **purpose of this article** is to present the students' feedback on their experience during the first year of NGST project pilot.

It is necessary to mention that the Institute of Philology at Kyiv Borys Grinchenko University was not among the project participants from the very start. The decision to join the project and pilot the experimental curriculum was made at the end of the 2015/16 academic year. Within a few months, necessary changes were made to the Department Curriculum; EFL Methodology teachers were instructed to teach the course; the work program for the first year of EFL Methodology course, named Practical Pedagogy, was developed and approved; teaching materials were obtained and sorted out; working procedures were agreed.

The only group of experiment participants, who were unaware of the change in the approach to pedagogical disciplines at the English department, were students. Therefore, it was of special importance for us, teachers of the experimental EFL Methodology / Practical Pedagogy course, to monitor the students' attitude to studies and to provide in-process adaptation of the procedures and materials. We cannot claim, that the process ran smoothly; like any innovation it faced a number of difficulties, and every step towards improvement demanded sufficient effort.

When students returned to their studies in September they found a new compulsory subject of "Practical Pedagogy" in their time-table. As they were not provided with any prior information on the NGST project, they naturally expected a traditional set of lectures and seminars in their native tongue. Moreover, the first anonymous survey revealed that more than a half of students (about 57% of the survey participants) did not intend to work as teachers in their future and did not view the subject of Practical Pedagogy as necessary for their career. Therefore, the prospect of studying a new subject did not arouse much interest among them.

Nevertheless, there were respondents, who had a more positive attitude to a teaching career; a significant number of them were graduates from the Pedagogical college at Borys Grinchenko University. Though they admitted the necessity to be aware of pedagogical theories, they had already had experience of learning Pedagogy at college and hardly expected anything new. Consequently, the initial internal motivation for learning this subject was quite low. As a result, a lot of students were subconsciously ready to apply the surface approach (to cram, to pass, to forget) and did not set any high value on regular attendance of the subject.

Luckily, the very content of the course helped to change the attitude during the first months. As students discussed different learner types and the optimal ways of studying, learning strategies and their application for mastering English etc., they came to realize, that the obtained information could help them become more successful language learners. Further topics, related to developing learner autonomy, proved to be of real practical significance for students. As the end-of-year anonymous survey revealed, 100% of those 43 students, who volunteered to answer the survey questions, found the course in Practical Pedagogy either rather useful (51.2%) or very useful (48.8%).

The other questions were supposed to provide more detailed information on how the students benefited from the course. Nine in ten students admitted that the course helped them understand their learning better, for they rather (46.5%) or strongly (44.2%) agreed with the corresponding statement.

Further questions demonstrated that 81% of participants came to know their dominant types of intelligence, and the impressive 93% of the respondents claimed to get aware of their strength and weakness as language learners. Moreover, only one in ten students still hesitated about the situations when they could apply deep or surface learning style. Based on the given results we can see that the topics connected with the psychological aspects of learning foreign languages (the theory of Multiple Intelligences, the VARK learning styles, learner types and learning strategies) were definitely useful for students.

Another important topic that was learnt in Practical Pedagogy was learner autonomy. The concept itself was in the prevailing number of cases completely new for students, and we, the teachers, were not one hundred percent confident about it. One of the possible explanations for the situation is that though the topic has recently been included into EFL methodology textbooks by Ukrainian leading methodologists (for example, Nikolayeva et al. 2013 [1, p. 500-513]), the topic was not on the curriculum when the majority of the present-day teachers completed their education. As a result, it was not considered to be an integral or important part of teaching English at school, college or university. Teachers' total control of the students' learning process used to be and, in a lot of cases, still is viewed as a sign of true professionalism. Though the alternative point of view is regularly voiced and discussed at conferences, professional training or in research materials, true learner autonomy can rarely be found in Ukrainian education.

The situation with learner autonomy in our groups of students at the beginning of 2016/17 academic year was quite typical for Ukraine. In class, very few students volunteered original opinions and in general were quite reluctant to communicate on the spot in English. When asked to reflect on their learning experience they either blamed their schools and teachers for their present-day failures and low proficiency, or explained their learning problems by unchangeable peculiarities of their personalities (e.g. *My teacher was not interested in my progress so I cannot speak good English; It's difficult for me to speak English because I'm shy; I prefer to work on my own so group discussion is not for me; I will never speak well because I have problems with English grammar, etc.*). These and similar in-class remarks and passages from home assignments provided evidence on students' limited sense of personal control over different aspects of their lives and studies. When facing unfamiliar situations or procedures some of them tended to demonstrate what Martin Seligman (1975) called learned helplessness [9, p. 128].

Due to the above-mentioned reasons, we had some doubts whether we would be able to provide high-quality loop input (term of Tessa Woodward (1986) [10]) of the material on learner autonomy, i.e. to demonstrate the process of learner autonomy development by developing autonomy in our learners.

In spite of our worst fears, the end-of-year anonymous survey proved sufficient progress in this direction. Almost three in four students agreed that while doing the course in Practical Pedagogy they learned to manage their learning process better, while the majority of remaining respondents opted for the "I am not sure" variant. Only three participants admitted to having made little or no progress in managing their learning.

The statement "You have made sufficient progress with developing your learner autonomy at Practical Pedagogy sessions" was strongly and rather supported by 37.2 % and 48.8% of respondents respectively, leaving only 14% uncertain. The next statement, "You are responsible for your learning" gained 79.1% of strong and 18.6% of moderate support, while only one student opted for the variant "I am not sure". The suggested numbers can verify that although all the nine steps "from dependence to learner autonomy" [6] were not covered within one year by every participant, the levels of awareness, preference identification and choice [ibid] were achieved by the majority of participants. This assertion can be supported by students' reaction to another statement on the survey, "You are responsible for your learning". Only one student expressed uncertainty, while 79.1% strongly and 18.6 % rather agreed with it (Figure 1).

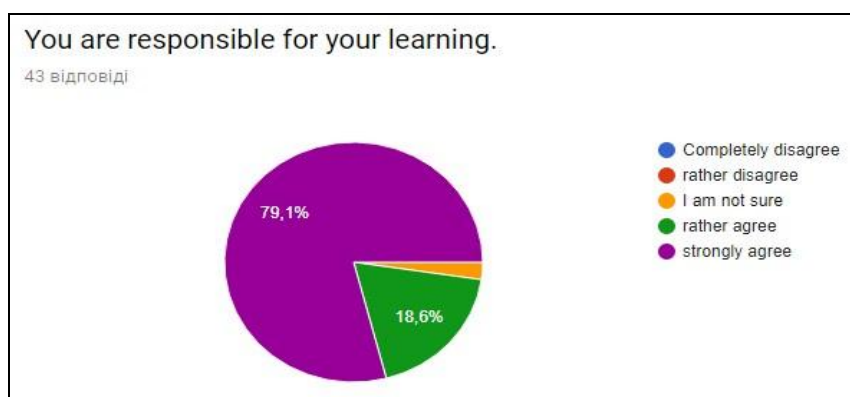


Figure 1. Students' opinion about their responsibility for their own learning

While the last question did not focus solely on the Practical Pedagogy course and implied the development of responsibility at other courses and out-of-class activities, we do hope that the in-class procedures at our subject contributed to the result. As making decisions about the process of learning is a vital component of learner autonomy [6], an opportunity to choose the mode of in-class interaction, timing for an activity and ways to present and assess its results etc. was definitely aimed at developing the students' sense of agency and responsibility. When asked to reflect on their decision-making at Practical Pedagogy, 90.7% participants admitted that they were provided with such opportunities during their in-class activities while only 9.3% hesitated about their answer (Figure 2).

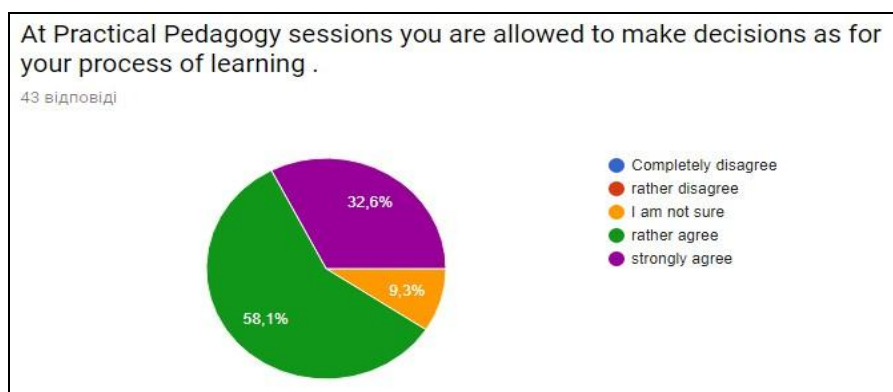


Figure 2. Students' reflection on developing learner autonomy

Providing conditions for learner autonomy development was not the only way to boost students' internal motivation for learning in general and for mastering Practical Pedagogy in particular. While students familiarized themselves with progressive approaches to generating and maintaining motivation for language learning [4], similar techniques were explicitly and implicitly applied to them. For example, teachers

intentionally demonstrated their own positive attitude to the subject and when appropriate expressed their appreciation of students' work. End-of-year survey proved that the teachers' efforts did not pass unnoticed (Figures 3 and 4).

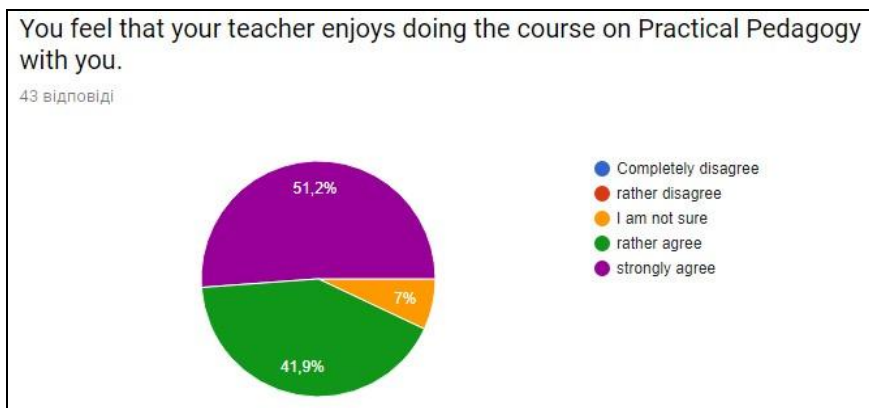


Figure 3. Students' impressions about the teachers' attitude

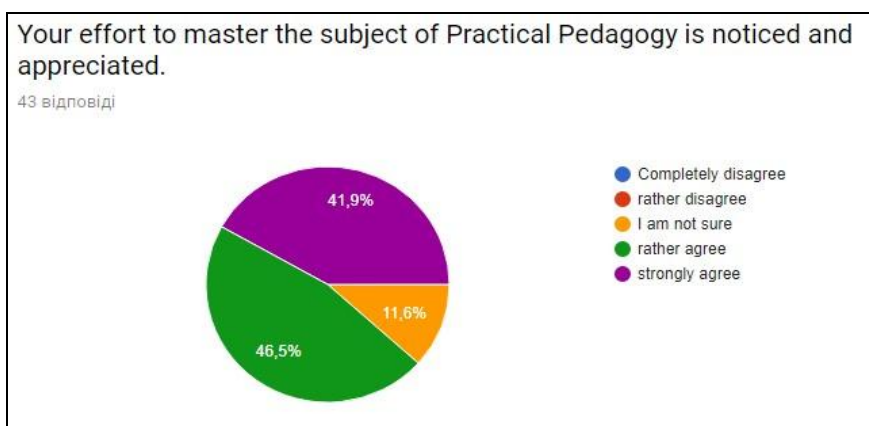


Figure 4. Students' impressions about the teachers' attitude to their effort

As it was mentioned at the beginning of the article, one of our key goals was to enhance students' language proficiency and communicative skills, therefore all the sessions were held in English. When answering the survey questions, all but one agreed that during Practical Pedagogy they communicated in the target language. As a result, 93% admitted the development of their language proficiency and all but one hesitant participant acknowledged the progress in communicative skills (Figure 5).

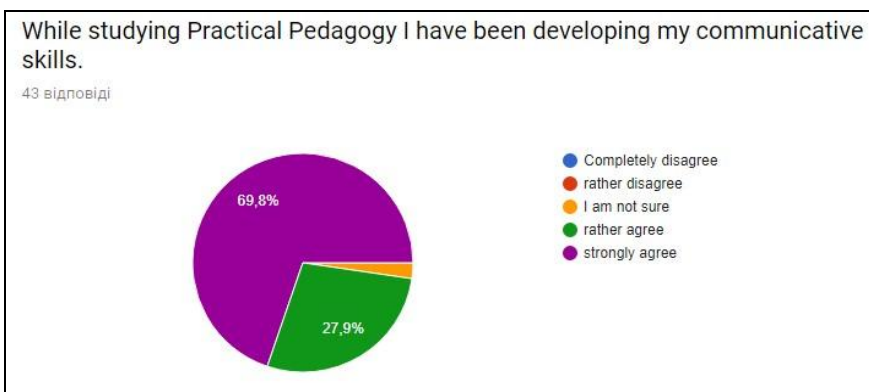


Figure 5. Students' observations as for developing their communicative skills

Moreover, interactive training contributed to the development of other 21st century skills [6], collaboration being among them. While at the beginning of the school year a noticeable proportion of students

were reluctant to interact with other members of their academic group and, if given a choice, tried to work on their own or with one and the same partner, by the end of the year the situation changed for better. Regular regrouping and cooperation while completing tasks became a norm. When asked to reflect on the dynamics of their collaboration skills, more than five in six students proved the positive influence of Practical Pedagogy on their collaboration skills.

Still the overall aim of the NGST project is to train a highly qualified EFL teacher. Therefore, while launching the survey our biggest concern was to check whether any transformation in students' attitude to their prospective teaching career could be detected. With that purpose students were offered statements connected with their ability to teach (Figures 6 and 7).

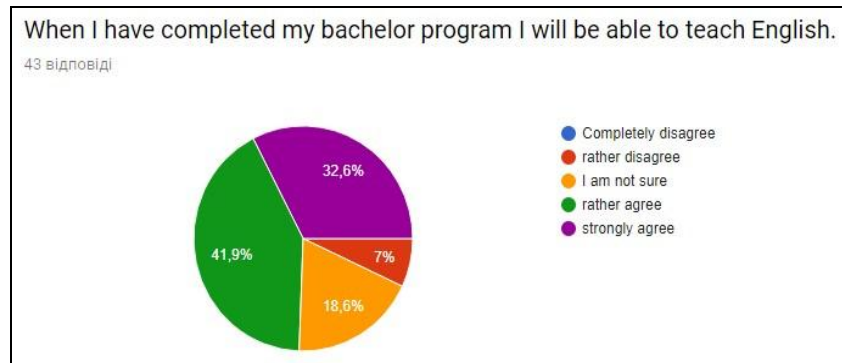


Figure 6. Students' opinion about their ability to teach English in future

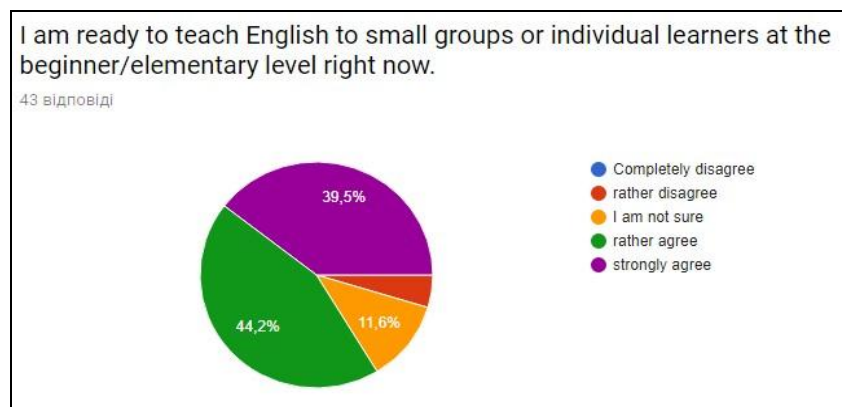


Figure 7. Students' opinion about their present-day ability to teach English

The numbers demonstrate that the students are more optimistic about their present-day ability to teach than about their prospective teaching career: 83.7% are ready to teach now while only 74.5% believe themselves to be able to teach in two years.

In spite of some inconsistency of students' judgements we can claim that the positive shift has taken place and the number of those who have a positive attitude to a teaching career has definitely increased.

At the end of the survey students were offered open-ended questions about what they liked, disliked or wanted to change in the course. Beside positive comment the students expressed moderate criticism, that in some cases was well-grounded and constructive. Among the most commonly named drawbacks of the course was the absence of one major textbook and great dependence on technical aids and the Internet. These issues are to be addressed in the near future. On the other hand, some complaints were about too complicated language of the materials and the abundance of terminology; several students objected to written assignments and challenging homework. While we do not consider the use of authentic materials or terminology to be a drawback of a theoretical course for second-year students at a Philological department, and we do believe that academic writing skills are necessary for future linguists, some reasonable adaptation of materials and tasks at the beginning of the course could be acceptable.

Nevertheless, positive feedback prevailed. Students felt quite free expressing their feelings and opinions and focused on those aspects and components of the course that appealed to them. For example, *"I enjoyed studying different methods and techniques of learning languages. They can be useful for my future learning"*; *"After this course we have an idea how to teach foreign languages and how to manage children"*; *"The course helped me to make my level of English higher than before, also I've learnt about methods to teach children"*; *"This course helped me to recognize my level of English and showed me how I should build my learning plan"*.

Thus, we can conclude that though the first year of NGST project pilot was quite challenging, the new curriculum for EFL Methodology has won students' approval and support. Therefore, further work in the chosen direction has a good chance to contribute to positive changes in Ukrainian system of teaching foreign languages and training EFL teachers.

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ПІЛОТУВАННЯ ПРОЕКТУ "ШКІЛЬНИЙ УЧИТЕЛЬ НОВОГО ПОКОЛІННЯ" В КУБГ: ТОЧКА ЗОРУ СТУДЕНТІВ

У статті розглядаються результати пілотування експериментального курсу методики викладання іноземних мов у рамках проекту "Шкільний вчитель нового покоління" на спеціальності "Англійська філологія" у Київському університеті імені Бориса Грінченка в 2016-17 навчальному році. Пропонується аналіз вхідного та підсумкового опитувань студентів та приклади поточних усних і письмових висловлювань; на цій основі зроблено висновок про загалом позитивне сприйняття студентами експериментального навчання та про доцільність продовження дослідження.

Ключові слова: переддипломна підготовка вчителя, методика викладання іноземних мов, навчальна програма, зворотний зв'язок.

Москалець Е. А.

ПИЛОТИРОВАНИЕ ПРОЕКТА "ШКОЛЬНЫЙ УЧИТЕЛЬ НОВОГО ПОКОЛЕНИЯ" В КУБГ: ТОЧКА ЗРЕНИЯ СТУДЕНТОВ

В статье рассматриваются результаты пилотирования экспериментального курса методики преподавания иностранных языков в рамках проекта "Школьный учитель нового поколения" на специальности "Английская филология" в Киевском университете имени Бориса Гринченка в 2016-17 учебном году. Предлагается анализ входного и итогового опроса студентов, а также примеры их устных и письменных высказываний на протяжении года. На их основе сделан вывод о позитивном восприятии студентами экспериментального обучения и о целесообразности продолжения исследования.

Ключевые слова: преддипломная подготовка учителя, методика обучения иностранным языкам, учебная программа, обратная связь.

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