CHALLENGES IN LEARNING FOREIGN LANGUAGES ENCOUNTERED BY INTERMEDIATE-LEVEL STUDENTS

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This article is dedicated to exploring and clarifying the challenges faced by intermediate-level learners aiming for advanced proficiency in a target language, but instead encountering a period of stagnation. Within this context, a survey of the students' expectations regarding learning outcomes revealed that the most highly valued achievement was the ability to conduct targeted searches on the Internet using their recently acquired language skills. Following closely was the recognition of the influential impact of fluent intercultural dialogue with foreigners as the second priority on the path to language proficiency. This capacity not only broadens professional horizons but also increases engagement in the virtual environment.

Understanding students' needs is a fundamental task in education. To address this, we suggest a range of productive strategies and tools to evaluate intermediate-level learners' needs. These include diagnostic evaluations, self-evaluation, needs analysis surveys, feedback monitoring, cultural competence assessment, learning style monitoring, technology usage and preferences, and continuous formative assessment. Applying these techniques allows educators

to acquire a comprehensive understanding of students' requirements, inclinations, and obstacles. It empowers teachers to customize their pedagogical approaches and content, providing enhanced support to students navigating through the stagnation phase.

Having determined students' expectations and the obstacles they faced at the intermediate level, the authors have drawn conclusions regarding the correlation between these factors, noting a direct dependency between them. The article proposes methods and approaches aimed at addressing the dissonance between learners' expectations and demotivating difficulties. These approaches include a task-based approach, error correction, individualized feedback, cultural immersion, co-teaching for dual guidance, and peer collaboration. Additionally, it is suggested that to rectify occasional errors, teachers should engage students in methods involving open-ended questions. They should instruct students in skills relevant to effective conversational performance, such as opening conversations, turn-taking, interrupting, changing the subject, understanding adjacency pairs, and closing conversations.

Problem statement. In the domain of foreign language acquisition, individuals engaged in the learning process frequently encounter a recurring phenomenon characterized by a notable decline in motivation. This state of disinterest emerges within the framework of a substantial dissonance between their enduring aspiration to attain language mastery and the palpable presence of discouragement and a lack of enthusiasm. This paradox, denoted as demotivation, stands as a prevalent psychological factor that obstructs an individual's further language learning and progression toward linguistic proficiency. The manifestations of the stagnation period predominantly affect intermediate-level students. At this stage, a significant proportion of highly motivated learners face barriers that result in reduced inspiration, even though they persist in their ongoing process of learning and self-education.

The phenomenon under consideration is contingent upon learners' inherent expectation, based on their innate proficiency in their mother tongue, of gradual or rapid progress in the dimensions of quality and fluency of communicative competence in a target foreign language. Their aspirations are underpinned by their diligent and unwavering commitment to refining fundamental language skills, encompassing reading, listening, writing, and speaking. Consequently, at a certain

point in their learning trajectory, these learners foresee a crucial breakthrough that promises to facilitate the production of language output similar to that of native speakers. However, contrary to their expectations, in the routine of learning, students encounter the realization that the mechanism enabling the discerning selection of language units and the skillful incorporation of stylistic elements does not contemporaneously emerge alongside the acquisition of general grammar and vocabulary.

Recent research and publications. Over the past forty years, there has been a notable surge in scholarly inquiry pertaining to the academic investigation of the causes of stagnation in the process of foreign language acquisition, with an emphasis on both theoretical and practical standpoints. The peculiarities of language transfer, encompassing both positive transfer (facilitation) and negative transfer (interference), as well as cross-language influence in the context of second language acquisition, have been the subject of extensive investigation. Scholars such as E. Kellerman (1983), C. Faerch and G. Kasper (1983), L. Selinker & Z.-H. Han (2001), M. Long (2003), Z.-H. Han (2004), and A. Fidler (2006) have significantly contributed to this area of study. The exploration of the process of fossilization and description of fossilized errors among adult learners have been offered by L. Selinker (1972), S. Gass & L. Selinker (2008), M. Long (2009), and B. Lekova (2010).

Adequate teaching methods and strategies are essential at this point to overcome the mentioned difficulties. The outturn of corrective teachers' feedback is clarified by Y-H. Lin & J. Hedgcock (1996), M. R. Hawkins (2004), and J. Russell & N. Spada (2006). Establishing congruity between the intentions of the teacher and the student has been regarded as essential groundwork for preventing a state of language plateau by J. H. Kim & Z.-H. Han (2007), Yi Fan (2019), and Q. Liu & S. Wu (2019).

According to D. Hanauer & R. Englander (2013), C. Yen & T. Hung (2018), and I. Hanauer, Ch. L. Sheridan & K. Englander (2019), certain activities and styles of writing in a foreign language can be challenging (the scientific style among others). Therefore, it places an additional burden on learners and can be perceived as a linguistic injustice by them. Offering profound insights into the inherent obstacles encountered in second language processing, scholars such as M. Bernaus & R. Gardner (2008), J. M. Dewaele, J. Witney, K. Saito &

L. Dewaele (2017), X. Zhang (2019), and V. Russell (2020) have delved into the intricate interconnection between anxiety and the actual performance in a public setting. Nonetheless, it is crucial to emphasize that the phase of stagnation encountered by intermediate-level students requires a more detailed examination. Despite being one of the central subjects of research in modern methodology and linguistics, there remains a lack of consensus regarding its various dimensions, reasons, negative consequences, and interconnection between students' expectations and the obstacles they face during learning.

The purpose of this article is to explicate and clarify the nature of the interconnection between the students' expectations and obstacles the intermediate learners confront during their stages of foreign language acquisition. The paper identifies effective methods and techniques to overcome obstacles in learning for establishing learners' positive outcomes and termination of the phase of language stagnation.

Presentation of the main research material. During the early stages of foreign language learning, students exhibit heightened motivation as they encounter a variety of stimulating and challenging language experiences that act as catalysts for skill development. This phenomenon has been studied extensively in the fields of linguistics and psychology, as it is one of the specific features of our linguistic cognition.

Innately endowed with the capacity to perceive and interpret information, human beings possess the innate ability to formulate concepts and acquire insights into reality. The mental repository of retained objects constitutes an individual's worldview system. It is expressed and articulated through linguistic constructs, thus culminating in a language worldview. Consequently, by learning new languages, individuals with an initially mono-level language worldview provided by their mother tongue competence progressively expand their horizons over time, transcending cultural boundaries. By assimilating supplementary data embedded within foreign languages, learners' intellectual capacity significantly expands. This process culminates in a multi-level language worldview, as they adopt new systems of communication and culture specific to various countries or communities. At the same time, the secondary school curriculum, with its focus on typical everyday interactions, sightseeing, and potentially even participation in events, presents an additional obstacle for learners, as during outside-of-class communication, they can feel a lack of

confidence in choosing appropriate means and conversational models. A survey of our students revealed their appraisal of the most valuable skills acquired during foreign language acquisition. The most valued competence, they indicated, was the ability to search for specific information on the Internet using the language skills they had recently acquired. Following closely, in the second position, was the recognition of the power of fluent communication with foreigners. This underlines a contemporary educational imperative, which has been described as the need to use language not only in the context of holiday travel but also in the realm of our professional opportunities and secondary online reality.

The symbols of another culture, particularly in the realm of communication, provide fertile ground for the retention of language in memory in the early stages of learning. These basic skills provide a framework for the development of more advanced competencies, leading to sustained success in the command of a foreign language. However, as learners progress to the intermediate level, they often experience a detrimental period of discouragement. During this phase, they begin to lose confidence and hope for communication with native speakers using the abilities they have acquired. Building upon our pedagogical experience in language instruction for Ukrainian, Egyptian, Bangladesh, Indian, Turkish, and Moroccan students, we assert that understanding the distinctive needs of intermediate-level learners constitutes a high-priority task for teachers since it signifies the trajectory of future educational endeavors.

Consequently, we propose a suite of efficacious methods and instruments for evaluating and pinpointing these needs: 1) Diagnostic evaluations. These include language proficiency examinations, as well as grammar and vocabulary assessments, which are utilized to determine specific areas of strength and weakness in grammar and vocabulary; 2) Self-evaluation and reflection. Tools such as self-assessment forms and learning journals assist learners in introspecting on their language learning journey, identifying challenges, setting goals, and pinpointing areas that need improvement; 3) Needs analysis surveys. These are designed to collect data on students' preferences, interests, and perceived obstacles in language learning, providing a deeper understanding of individual learning preferences and objectives; 4) Task-based evaluations. Educators assign tasks that necessitate learners to apply the language in practical contexts, then assess their

capacity to utilize language skills in real-world situations; 5) Feedback monitoring. This involves soliciting feedback on students' learning experiences and encouraging them to offer constructive feedback to their peers during language activities; 6) Cultural competence assessment. Teachers evaluate students' comprehension of cultural elements associated with the foreign language, such as knowledge of customs and traditions; 7) Learning style monitoring. Through surveys and questionnaires, educators can determine students' preferred learning styles (e.g., visual, auditory, kinesthetic) and adjust their teaching methods accordingly; 8) Technology use and preferences monitoring. Surveys on technological priorities are used to gauge students' comfort level and preferences concerning technology in language learning; 9) Continuous formative assessment. Educators should incorporate regular formative assessments throughout the course to track progress and make necessary adjustments. By applying a combination of these techniques and methods, teachers can gain a comprehensive understanding of the requirements, preferences, and challenges of intermediate-level students. This information will enable them to tailor their teaching methods and content.

To identify effective methods for overcoming the stage of stagnation and erroring, we conducted an inquiry to discern the foreign language challenges confronted by intermediate learners. In the initial phase of our study, we solicited from the students an enumeration of their anticipations associated with the acquisition of advanced competencies in a foreign language. Prominent within these findings were the ensuing expectations, characterized by a heightened percentage of mention: 1) Expanded vocabulary. Intermediate students expect to learn and use a wider range of vocabulary compared to beginners. 2) Improved grammar. Learners hope to grasp more complex grammar rules and sentence structures. They should be able to form more complicated sentences and understand subtleties in the language. 3) Enhanced communication skills. Intermediate learners look forward to engaging in conversations, expressing opinions, and participating in discussions on various topics in everyday situations. 4) Listening and reading comprehension. Students expect to understand spoken language at a normal pace and read longer, more complex texts with comprehension. This includes grasping implied meanings and nuances. 5) Cultural understanding. Intermediate learners count on being introduced to the culture and customs associated with the language they are learning.

They should understand cultural references and be aware of appropriate etiquette. 6) Writing proficiency. Students are expected to write coherent paragraphs and essays, demonstrating stylistic, lexical, and idiomatic literacy. 7) Self-expression. Intermediate learners have an intensive desire to express their thoughts, ideas, and emotions, and narrate personal experiences in a foreign language. 8) Independent learning. Students hope to take more responsibility for their learning by using resources like dictionaries and language learning apps effectively.

In the second phase of our study, learners made a list of obstacles they have faced within the frame of language acquisition: 1) Nuances of technical terminology and specific idioms. 2) Certain weaknesses across the skills of listening, writing, and speaking proficiency regarding their narrower professional field of study. 3) Ability to construct appropriate sentences depending on stylistic needs. 4) Sporadic uncertainties concerning the appropriateness of selected linguistic elements during communication feedback. 5) Encountering dissonance and upheaval upon immersion in unfamiliar cultural mores and practices. 6) Difficulties with error correction. 7) Challenges in preparation for advanced levels.

Having analyzed the correlation between intermediate students` expectations and the difficulties they have faced during learning, we have drawn conclusions regarding the connected nature of these aspects (hereinafter **Ex** stands for *Expectations* and **Ch** stands for *Challenges*):

1. Expanded vocabulary (Ex) and nuances of technical terminology and specific idioms (Ch). The desire to broaden their lexical repertoire motivates students in their communication initiative but at the same time confronts them with the necessity to comprehend and apply specialized vocabulary and idiomatic expressions, particularly within the context of their professional fields or in varied situations.

2. Improved grammar (Ex) and ability to construct appropriate sentences depending on stylistic needs (Ch). Intermediate learners expect to properly apply complex grammar rules to build sentences on diverse subjects, yet they are in danger of experiencing uncertainties and confusion regarding the correctness and appropriateness of their stylistic choices, particularly when dealing with figurative patterns of speech.

3. Enhanced communication skills (Ex) and sporadic uncertainties concerning the appropriateness of selected linguistic elements during communication feedback (Ch). Intermediate students expect to

participate in conversations and discussions across various subjects, but it may force them to experience uncertainty and confusion regarding the accuracy and appropriateness of their language selections, particularly in interactions with others, especially native speakers.

4. Listening and reading comprehension (Ex) and encountering cultural dissonance and upheaval upon immersion in unfamiliar cultural mores and practices (Ch). Intermediate students anticipate heightened proficiency in comprehending both spoken and written language. However, on their way to semantic literacy, they may encounter difficulties in grasping implicit meanings and nuances shaped by cultural influences. Additionally, exposure to diverse values and norms within the target language community may lead to culture shock and discomfort for these learners.

5. Cultural understanding (Ex) and certain weaknesses across the skills of listening, writing, and speaking performance regarding the narrower field of language for professional purposes (Ch). Learners rely on being acquainted with the culture and customs tied to the language they are acquiring, yet they may face a shortfall in knowledge and skills in specific domains pertinent to their academic or professional objectives. There is a need for the development of more specialized vocabulary, grammar, and discourse strategies tailored to their fields of interest.

6. Writing proficiency (Ex) and error correction (Ch). Intermediate-level learners expect to produce coherent paragraphs and essays showcasing stylistic, lexical, and idiomatic literacy. However, they may still commit errors in pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary usage. They need to exhibit improvement in recognizing and rectifying these mistakes.

7. Self-expression (Ex) and preparation for advanced levels (Ch). Intermediate students have a strong desire to express their thoughts, ideas, emotions, and personal experiences in a foreign language, but they may not be ready for the higher demands and expectations of the advanced levels. They should lay a solid foundation for further proficiency and specialization in a target language, as well as develop critical thinking and creativity.

At the stage of language stagnation, while there may still exist a capacity for the acquisition of crucial linguistic resources such as vocabulary, the understanding of the underlying conceptual framework of the language is not progressing proportionately. This perspective is

consistent with the assertion that the diagnostic process should extend beyond standardized assessments of reading or specific skills and should instead focus on identifying the specific idiosyncratic difficulties of the learner [2]. To help students overcome the mentioned problems, we offer several teaching methods and recommendations:

1. Task-based language approach. Students engage in meaningful tasks or projects that require language use. This approach promotes problem-solving and communication skills, helping learners tackle real-world language challenges.

2. Engage students in the language. Establish an environment where learners consistently encounter the language through activities, discussions, and multimedia materials, thereby enhancing listening and speaking skills.

3. Authentic materials. Using real-life materials like newspapers, movies, podcasts, and literature exposes students to authentic language usage, including idiomatic expressions and cultural references.

4. Vocabulary expansion strategies. Teaching vocabulary in thematic contexts, providing lists of common idiomatic expressions, and encouraging word exploration through reading can enhance vocabulary acquisition.

5. Error correction. Providing constructive feedback on errors helps learners understand their mistakes and learn from them. Error correction should be done sensitively, focusing on improving communication rather than discouraging students.

6. Individualized feedback. Provide personalized feedback to each student, addressing their specific strengths and areas needing improvement. Tailor your guidance to their learning style and pace.

7. Dual guidance through co-teaching. The effectiveness of pedagogical strategies is significantly enhanced when students are offered the unique advantage of dual guidance through co-teaching, e.g., being taught by one teacher coming from their cultural environment and another instructor who embodies distinct cultural codes. It has been noted that individuals in different global locations tend to acquire what can be described as "situational dialects", none of which accurately reflect the didactic rendition of language provided within the confines of the classroom. The classroom environment remains the quintessential locus where the structured rendition of language predominantly unfolds [1: 507].

8. Structured learning. Deconstruct intricate tasks into more manageable steps, offering support and guidance as students navigate challenges. Gradually escalate task complexity as they advance.

9. Collaborative learning. Promote peer-to-peer cooperation by pairing students with diverse proficiency levels. This approach facilitates learning through mutual support and peer teaching.

10. Real-life simulations and cultural experiences. Create simulations of real-life scenarios, these simulations provide practical language practice in authentic situations. Organize cultural events, guest speakers, or virtual field trips related to the target language. These experiences provide context and deepen students' understanding of the language and its cultural nuances. By combining these methods and approaches, language teachers can create a supportive and dynamic learning environment that enables intermediate students to overcome obstacles and progress toward advanced language skills.

Diverging from the preceding language processing stages, the stagnation period emphasizes the linguistic complexity of a target discourse. We emphasize that it is important to categorize the problem related to the target grammar not as a stagnation problem but as a language interference problem. The essence of interference refers to the intervention of the native language vocabulary into the vocabulary of the target language for certain reasons. It describes the circumstances in which learners unintentionally introduce errors arising from the rules and features of their mother tongue into their use of the target language. In this scenario, they engage in a form of language referred to as interlanguage. According to B. Lekova, the factors that cause interference include 1) lack of target vocabulary; 2) bilingualism of the speakers; 3) absence of user's loyalty to the language received; 4) need for rarely used words; 5) need for synonyms; 6) prestige of their mother tongue [3: 321–324].

Prolonged errors can be viewed as a main source of frustration for learners. Unfortunately, the extensive use of authentic materials can exacerbate this effect on students because, in the absence of knowledge, they tend to perceive, memorize, and subsequently adapt these acquired language mechanisms through the lens of their native language principles, thereby perpetuating certain grammatical errors. The impact of language interference on learners is particularly detrimental, especially as they become increasingly aware of their persistent linguistic failures. As a result, learners often converse with non-native

speakers as they find it more comfortable. However, when it comes to spoken language skills, the challenge becomes more apparent. The effectiveness of oral proficiency lies in the ability of language to elicit desired responses, a central objective of foreign language teaching. According to the anthropological perspective on culture and communication effectiveness, it is more important to elicit the right response than to send the right message. Creating positive situations that encourage and engage learners in communication must therefore be the primary aim of classroom management [4: 29]. Students should be instructed in the performance of six aspects that are particularly relevant to effective conversational performance: opening, turn-taking, interrupting, changing the subject, adjacency pairs, and closing. These aspects are deeply intertwined with cultural etiquette and represent a crucial breakthrough from stagnation to advanced levels of proficiency.

Conclusion. In summary, the consequences of stagnation for a particular stage of foreign language learning typically affect students when they reach an intermediate level of language proficiency. Striving for a high degree of accuracy and naturalness, these learners anticipate continuous progress in language acquisition. While they may have easily overcome vocabulary and grammar obstacles in earlier stages of training, they often lose motivation as they struggle to develop their conceptual understanding of foreign cultures and worldview backgrounds, presented with appropriate communicative feedback. In addressing the period of stagnation, it is crucial to recognize the nature of the intercorrelation between students' expectations and the challenges they face during learning. Task-based approach, error correction, individualized feedback, cultural immersion, and dual guidance through co-teaching will help to eliminate the consequences of the dissonance between learners' intentions and demotivating difficulties in language acquisition. The monitoring of typical errors is a promising direction for further research.

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ПЕРЕШКОДИ У ВИВЧЕННІ ІНОЗЕМНОЇ МОВИ, З ЯКИМИ СТИКАЮТЬСЯ СТУДЕНТИ НА СЕРЕДНЬОМУ РІВНІ КОМПЕТЕНЦІЇ

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Статтю присвячено визначенню певного кола проблем, які мають вирішувати мовці на середньому рівні компетенції, стикаючись з явищем стагнації на шляху до більш досконалого володіння цільовою мовою. Аналіз очікувань студентів щодо результатів навчання показав, що навички пошуку потрібної інформації у всесвітній мережі за допомогою набутих умінь є найбільш бажаним підтвердженням рівня отриманих знань. Це супроводжувалося визнанням суттєвих переваг, які надає усвідомлення норм і правил міжкультурного діалогу з іноземцями, що було визначено в якості другого пріоритету, оскільки це не тільки розширює горизонт професійного вдосконалення, але й надає можливість більш природного залучення до віртуального середовища.

Розглядаючи розуміння потреб тих, хто навчається, як першочергове завдання освіти, ми пропонуємо низку продуктивних стратегій та інструментів для визначення очікувань мовців на середньому рівні компетенції, як-от: діагностичне оцінювання, самооцінка, опитування для виявлення потреб, моніторинг зворотного зв'язку, оцінка культурної компетентності, дослідження використання технологій, безперервне формувальне оцінювання. Завдяки цьому педагоги можуть отримати цілісне розуміння цілей, преференцій і перешкод, із якими стикаються студенти, опановуючи іноземні мови.

У розвідці встановлено безпосередній зв'язок між очікуваннями й пере шкодами, що заважають ефективному міжкультурному діалогу. Запропоновано методи й підходи, спрямовані на усунення наслідків дисонансу між сподіваннями й демотивуючими чинниками стагнації, як-от: метод комунікативних завдань, корекція помилок, індивідуальний зворотний зв'язок, культурне занурення, дуальне керівництво через сумісне викладання, співпраця з однолітками у навчанні. Крім того, у статті наголошено на тому, що для подолання проявів і наслідків мовної інтерференції викладачам слід залучати студентів до діалогу в форматі відкритих запитань і відповідей, надаючи інструкції щодо комунікативних навичок ініціації розмови, правил ввічливого переривання співрозмовників, зміни теми, закінчення діалогу.

Ключові слова: *міжкультурна комунікація, студент, який вивчає мову на середньому рівні, мовна інтерференція, мовна стагнація.*

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