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Students' Professional Contests as a Tool for Motivation outside the Classroom

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Abstract

The paper looks through motivation of the law students at Peoples' Friendship University of Russia in language learning and especially learning (language for specific purposes (LSP)). The objective for the paper was to establish a link (direct or indirect) between the success in English and obtaining professionalism via participation in different competitions, and particularly taking part at Willem C. Vis Annual International Commercial Arbitration Moot Court in Vienna. The authors have been involved in students' training since 2011 and have seen the change of attitude and the success of the team as well as the insight. A teacher needs to find the student's motives to be able to accommodate them. According to the Webster's, to motivate means the act or process of giving someone a reason for doing something; the act or process of motivating someone, the condition of being eager to act or work; the condition of being motivated; a force or influence that causes someone to do something. The paper tries to explore how the above statements work regarding the students' professional contest potential for their future careers.

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1. Introduction

After the fall of the "Iron Curtain" there has been a great increase in language learning and teaching. Thousands of people, young and old threw themselves into foreign languages, mostly English. However, some decades later we have witnessed a little indifference in LSP by some students. This was partly due to difficulty in LSP teaching,

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because the country did not have far too many specialists in LSP itself, or the learners found it not easy. In a way it needed some hard-working and devotion by both the educators and the learners.

The foreign languages department at then Law Faculty of Peoples' Friendship University of Russia (PFUR) decided to start a new era in language teaching, trying to motivate students with some incentives. We established a few student conferences, devoted to legal aspects, as well as translating methodology and practice. The department started this deal having only thirty students taking part. Soon the number doubled and even went three fold. Now we had participants from about ten institutions of Russia and even some on line participants from abroad. Our students started taking part in other conferences with a number of two or three. Today we can choose from among best of the best and reject some week issues. The department has had to go beyond the traditional standards of legal education, to engage students in language mediation as part of lawyer's professional performance in the multicultural environment (Atabekova, 2011).

In 2011, realizing that the department has a lot to go and reveal all its potential, the department decided to engage students in international events, such as Philipp C. Jessup International Law moot or Willem C. Vis Annual International Commercial Arbitration Moot Court in Vienna. A few enthusiast students searched the net and decided to try the latter. The motivation of the students was average but not high as they were not very certain that professors or teachers might be able to assist them. After having questioned some teachers they discovered some enthusiasts to assist them. Two of the volunteers were the authors of this issue.

The main motivation of the students was the mere desire to get good marks at the exam as they wanted to make a good impression on the examiners. A lot has changed during the preparation to this world event.

The present research focuses on the students' motivation regarding their foreign language and professional context training within outside the classroom activities. The issue of students' participation in professional contests in foreign languages is in the focus. To start with it is necessary to map the concept of motivation for further research.

2. Conceptual Framework

2.1. *What is motivation?*

Motivation is a desire to achieve a goal, combined with the energy to work towards that goal. The word motivation makes us think of a goal, effort, desire, energy, active involvement, persistence. A teacher must know the sources of motivation to be able to support the learner's desire to success.

The learner's intrinsic satisfaction is number one. It is based on the learner's natural interests (Rowell & Eunsook, 2013). Then there comes the extrinsic reward: the teacher/institution/employment. Satisfaction and reward together make the success in the task (Fisher, 1990).

"The best way to create interest in a subject is to render it worth knowing, which means to make the knowledge gained usable in one's thinking beyond the situation in which learning has occurred." (Bruner, 1960, p. 31).



Fig. 1. Success in the task (Littlejohn, 2001, p. 6)

As a matter of fact, people like doing what they do well, and are therefore more likely to do it again, and put in more effort. Thus, those students who develop an image of themselves as 'no good at English' will simply avoid situations which tell them what they already know – that they are not any good at English. It can lead to a downward spiral of a self-perception of low ability – low motivation – low effort – low achievement – low motivation – low achievement, and so on (Littlejohn, 2001, p. 7).

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