



Study of International Relations students' motivation: Assessing the effectiveness of educational process management via Action Research strategy

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Abstract


Introduction. *The article raises the problem of increasing motivation among university students in learning their major. Despite the fact that a large number of research articles are devoted to the problem of motivation, the issue of assessing the effectiveness of educational process management as one of the key factors in creating a motivating educational environment, remains insufficiently studied. The aim of this study is to determine and describe an effective strategy of intervention and external support for students majoring in “International Relations” in order to increase motivation in learning their academic major via Action Research.*

Materials and Methods. *The methodology is based on Activity theory, person-oriented approach, educational environment assessment, literature review, project-based learning, role-plays and Action Research, as well as on quantitative, qualitative and interpretive research. An analytical review has been carried out in order to identify methods and technologies that can be used to increase motivation to educational activities. Quantitative and qualitative methods include two surveys with subsequent interpretation of the results obtained and provide the basis for developing and testing the strategy of assessing the effectiveness of educational process management.*

Results. *The results of the surveys and their interpretation analysis have demonstrated a high level of student interest in English as a foreign language yet with an insufficient level of motivation for their major, as well as the students' assessment of professional role-playing games as an effective and emotionally comfortable form of education. Based on Action Research and project-based learning the authors developed an action strategy, substantiated the principles of its implementation, the degree of intervention and external support while maintaining psychological comfort and the level of student autonomy. The authors found that increased involvement is also determined by the freedom to choose the focus of the project, a meaningful professional context, successful team work and effective management of the educational process. The results of the intervention helped the authors to develop recommendations for replicating and scaling up the experience gained.*

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Conclusions. *In conclusion, inferences are made about the importance of effective external management for increasing motivation among the students. It has been proven that a sufficient level of intervention in the educational process and external support allow for higher degree of engagement and motivation in learning majors. Conclusions are also made about the Action Research method as a basis for effective management of the educational process, solving didactic problems, adjusting teaching interventions and assessing the results obtained.*

Keywords

Motivation; Educational process management; Action Research; Intervention; Project-based learning; Professional role-plays; International Relations (IR).

Introduction

Having taught English to International Relations (IR) students at Tyumen State University for more than 10 years, we made an important observation regarding attitudes toward their major. In personal interviews IR students mention the opportunity to learn languages as the main reason for choosing their major. Very few students show keen interest in issues related to their major: history, politics, diplomacy and international relations. So we hypothesised that it is possible to boost the students' motivation in learning IR through activities carried out in their English classes.

Despite the fact that a considerable number of research papers are devoted to the problem of motivation, assessing the efficiency of educational interventions through Action Research in enhancing motivation remains insufficiently studied. Quite a few papers cover the whole cycle of Action Research investigation of the influence of gamification on student motivation [1; 2], developing students' positive attitude towards mathematics and physics [3–6],

enhancing writing skills [7], problem solving and critical thinking skills [8], elevating motivation through role-playing activities¹ [9], increasing motivation at university level² [10]. The relevance of this study is conditioned by the need for a comprehensive guide on how to assess the effectiveness of interventions aimed to tackle such a complex issue as motivation.

Motivation and its crucial role in learners' achievement has been the focus of many researchers and their studies during the past century. Though viewed from various aspects, motivation in general has some key points and certain predictors. The authors agree that motivation is inherently a psychological phenomenon and can be defined as the force that drives a person's behavior and engagement in goal-directed actions³ [11; 12]. The predictors are strategies that encourage learners to think more positively and thus be more motivated in their learning process. Kazuya Saito et al., for instance, stated that motivation concerns both how content is taught, and how students are learning, thus placing a great emphasis on classroom activities

¹ Aflah M. N., Rahmani E. F. Enhancing Students' Active Learning through Group Discussion Role-playing. *International Online Journal of Education and Teaching (IOJET)*, 2022, vol. 9 (4), pp. 1470–1479. URL: <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1353378.pdf>

² Feng X., Kim S. Enhancing Teaching Effectiveness to Foster Student Academic Motivation and Student Engagement in the EFL Classroom through Organization Development Interventions: An Action Research of

Zhejiang Yuexiu University of Foreign Languages in China. *ABAC ODI JOURNAL Vision. Action. Outcome*, 2020, vol. 7 (1), pp. 155–183. URL: <http://www.assumptionjournal.au.edu/index.php/odijournal/article/view/4256>

³ Schunk D. H., Meece J. L., Pintrich P. R. *Motivation in education: Theory, research, and applications* (4th ed.). Pearson, 2014.

[13]. To keep students motivated and involved in the target subject matter the instructor should follow and choose particular activities that best suit the goal, context, and learners' needs such as intrinsic, extrinsic and the like⁴.

As rightly pointed out by Myeong-Hee Shin, in recent years educators have experimented with various teaching methods in an effort to find more effective ways of teaching and learning. Flipped learning, project-based learning, problem-based learning, and cooperative learning have received a lot of attention recently, mainly because they deal with a paradigm shift from teacher-centered to student-centered learning [14].

Student-centered learning methods lying at the heart of project-based learning (PBL) allow students to organise their own learning content. They enable students to find practical and complex problems by themselves, plan solutions, and perform collaborative research through a process of social investigation in a meaningful context⁵. In a collaborative classroom atmosphere, learning occurs while students are in the process of solving problems and sharing results. While working together on a common

project, students learn to cooperate effectively with other people, learn various perspectives and approaches and develop deep content knowledge⁶ [15]. When students implement meaningful tasks in solving real-world problems, they can achieve more profound comprehension and become confident participants⁷ [16; 17]. As a matter of fact, learners who receive autonomy-support from their instructors, consider themselves to be more competent and have a greater interest in learning process⁸ [18].

This goes hand in hand with John Marshall Reeve's theory of engagement modelling motivational development. Along with behavioural, emotional and cognitive engagement the researcher emphasises agentic engagement that takes into account the learner's active and constructive contributions to their learning activities, such as offering input and making suggestions, as well as autonomy-supportive environment that facilitates student motivation and engagement [19; 20]. Agentic engagement is accentuated by many researchers as one of the key criteria of project-based learning⁹ [21]. Some other criteria are also outlined: 1. PBL projects are

⁴ Bernard J. B. *Motivation in foreign language learning: The relationship between classroom activities, motivation, and outcomes in a university language learning environment* [Unpublished master's thesis]. Dietrich College of Humanities and Social Sciences. Carnegie Mellon University, 2010. URL: <https://studylib.net/doc/18484436/motivation-in-foreign-language-learning>

⁵ Lee H.-J., Lim C. Peer Evaluation in Blended Team Project-Based Learning: What Do Students Find Important? *Journal of Educational Technology & Society*, 2009, vol. 15 (4), pp. 214–224. URL: <https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/Peer-Evaluation-in-Blended-Team-Project-Based-What-Lee-Lim/dfec1bcf11d223ded99b698eae4eafa833b27429>

⁶ Oakley B., Brent R., Felder R. M., Elhajj I. H. Turning student groups into effective teams. *Journal of Student Centered Learning*, 2004, vol. 2 (1), pp. 9–34. URL: [https://www.engr.ncsu.edu/wp-](https://www.engr.ncsu.edu/wp-content/uploads/drive/1ofGhdOciEwloA2zoffqkr7jG3SeKRq3/2004-Oakley-paper(JSCL).pdf)

[content/uploads/drive/1ofGhdOciEwloA2zoffqkr7jG3SeKRq3/2004-Oakley-paper\(JSCL\).pdf](https://www.engr.ncsu.edu/wp-content/uploads/drive/1ofGhdOciEwloA2zoffqkr7jG3SeKRq3/2004-Oakley-paper(JSCL).pdf)

⁷ Demir C. G. An overview of project-based learning practices within the context of 21st century skills. *Advances in Educational Technologies and Instructional Design*, 2020, pp. 36–52. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4018/978-1-7998-3146-4.ch003>

⁸ Bernard J. B. *Motivation in foreign language learning: The relationship between classroom activities, motivation, and outcomes in a university language learning environment* [Unpublished master's thesis]. Dietrich College of Humanities and Social Sciences. Carnegie Mellon University, 2010. URL: <https://studylib.net/doc/18484436/motivation-in-foreign-language-learning>

⁹ Hafner C. A., Miller L. Fostering Learner Autonomy in English for Science: A Collaborative Digital Video Project in a Technological Learning Environment. *Language Learning & Technology*, 2011, vol. 15 (3), pp.

central, not peripheral to the curriculum; 2. PBL projects deal with questions or problems that get students to encounter the central concepts and principles of a discipline; 3. Projects involve students in a constructive investigation; 4. Projects are student-driven to some significant degree; 5. Projects are realistic, not school-like.

One of the main tasks in this study was to decide on the type of PBL activity that IR students would mostly benefit from. It was a critical decision as the selected activity was meant to become a tool for assessing the level of students' engagement. To fully address this issue we have conducted a study in the frame of action research. The principles of action research as a methodology of systematic enquiry fall very well in line with the main goals of this study.

In general terms action research is a process in which participants examine their own educational practice systematically and carefully, using the techniques of research¹⁰. It refers to a wide range of evaluative, investigative, and analytical research strategies designed to diagnose problems or weaknesses – whether

organisational, academic, or instructional – and help educators to develop practical solutions to address them quickly and efficiently. The general goal is to create a simple, practical, repeatable process of iterative learning, evaluation, and improvement that leads to increasingly better results for schools, teachers, or programmes.

Unlike other traditional research endeavors, action research is based not on a hypothesis, but on a problem or a phenomenon that a teacher faces in the classroom trying to find a practical solution for that problem in order to improve teaching and student achievement. What is more, the sample in the traditional research can be chosen randomly, however in action research the sample should include the students whom the teacher teaches¹¹. Another thing that separates action research from general professional practices is the emphasis on scientific study. The researcher studies the problem systematically and ensures the intervention is backed by theoretical considerations¹². It is worth mentioning that a solid theoretical basis does not turn action research into a library project where

68–86.

URL:

<https://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.471.4705&rep=rep1&type=pdf>

Thomas J. W. A review of research on project-based learning, 2000. URL: <https://typeset.io/papers/a-review-of-research-on-project-based-learning-4thcwdu7d>

Stoller F. C. Project Work: a means to promote language and content. In J. C. Richards & W. A. Renandya (Eds.), *Methodology in language teaching: an anthology of current practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002, pp. 107–120. DOI: <http://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511667190.016>

¹⁰ Ferrance E. *Themes in education: Action research*. Brown University: Educational Alliance, 2000, pp. 1–34. URL: <https://studylib.net/doc/12294150/action-research-themes-in-education>

¹¹ Salman S. A. B. *Conducting action research for professional development*. (As an alternative procedures for self-assessment). Sidi Mohamed Ben Abdellah University, 2015. URL: <https://dlwqtxts1xzle7.cloudfront.net/43641037/Action->

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[v2.pdf?Expires=1661424818&Signature=M3ABsgog19iZ2YRZQ93Q3~CVD~ZogEJcktagNeSkXqBh97rAF-iK2rr0o3OVCD-MPFerJV08a9DA~oTRblmZWLxx5wj7KRGXnUBEarGMaBOh1yK35K3dBGUUrQHm6zScRMZyhmPeO1uJD7EoFAiJ2WLuCSiGzplVI9NqYaqgUKZzxCM5sxqJ44jA69bCH22a7vaeVvflxhyt~HVJrqcCO5geK~tjZKt8gMTSMBuoxHePnVv7Z8u3fSLO0rqIw1Bp7vaX9THF~Ai-0eVBaFf9pHYslu36IWg8JuuIIIRFoAswml4SJ6x7AgcE-2TIq-ALOO0zWKUQzNValpTeOyiyBg__&Key-Pair-Id=APKAJLOHF5GGSLRBV4ZA](#)

¹² O'Brien R. Um exame da abordagem metodológica da pesquisa ação [An Overview of the Methodological Approach of Action Research]. In: R. Richardson (Ed.), *Teoria e Prática da Pesquisa Ação [Theory and Practice of Action Research]*. João Pessoa, Brazil: Universidade Federal da Paraíba, 2001. URL: <http://www.web.ca/~robrien/papers/arfinal.html>

we learn more about a topic that interests us. It is not problem-solving in the sense of trying to find out what is wrong, but rather a quest for knowledge about how to improve skills, techniques and strategies¹³. Action research is conducted by teachers or supervisors or administrators so that they may have evidence as to whether or not they are accomplishing the things that they hope to accomplish [22].

When considering the distinct features of action research many researchers pinpoint the idea that action research is not a method but rather a set of methods or methodology¹⁴. Action research is a set of theories and principles that guide research through its entire cyclic process. The cyclic nature of action research is illustrated in the models of many authors¹⁵. With slight modifications they agree on five main phases of inquiry: identification of problem area, collection and organisation of data, interpretation of data, action based on data and reflection. The reflection process can therefore lead to the identification of new levels of inquiry and can help to identify new problem areas thus making the whole process a circular one.

For our study action research methodology can be beneficial in many ways. It is intended to reduce

the gap between theory and practice and to find practical solutions directly for the given problem. The collected data help to inform the theoretical assumptions about the motivation level of the IR students as well as to make informed decisions about the main intervention. It also promotes reflective teaching and thinking encouraging us further examine the target activity and modify it so that it could meet the students' needs. To crown it all, action research provides a scope of qualitative and quantitative methods to approach such a complex phenomenon as motivation.

The primary aim of this research is to identify an intervention that could better motivate students to engage in learning IR in English classes, assess its effectiveness and suggest ways of its further application. According to our assumptions the following hypothesis was put forward: student motivation in learning their major can be increased through activities carried out in English classes and through comprehensive assessment of effectiveness of the former.

Methods

The study draws on general scientific methods: theoretical analysis and literature

¹³ Ferrance E. *Themes in education: Action research*. Brown University: Educational Alliance, 2000, pp. 1–34.

URL: <https://studylib.net/doc/12294150/action-research-themes-in-education>

¹⁴ Creswell J. W. *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods approaches* (4th ed.). University of Nebraska-Lincoln, 2014. URL: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/289530686_RESEARCH_DESIGN_QUANTITATIVE_QUALITATIVE_MIXED_METHOD_APPROACHES;

Klein S. R. Action research: Before you dive in, read this! In S. R. Klein (Ed.), *Action research methods. Plain and simple*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012, pp. 1–20. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137046635_1

¹⁵ Elliott J. *Action research for educational change*. Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 2001.

Glanz J. *Action research: An educational leader's guide to school improvement*. Rowman & Littlefield, Lanham. – 2014.

Hine G. The Importance of Action Research in Teacher Education Programs. *Issues in Education Research*, 2013, vol. 23 (2), pp. 151–163. URL: <http://www.iier.org.au/iier23/hine.pdf>

McNiff J., Whitehead J. *You and your action research project* (3^d ed.). Routledge, 2010. URL: <https://golshanlc.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/You-and-Your-Action-Research-Project.pdf>

O'Brien R. Um exame da abordagem metodológica da pesquisa ação [An Overview of the Methodological Approach of Action Research]. In: R. Richardson (Ed.), *Teoria e Prática da Pesquisa Ação [Theory and Practice of Action Research]*. João Pessoa, Brazil: Universidade Federal da Paraíba, 2001. URL: <http://www.web.ca/~robrien/papers/arfinal.html>

review. They are underpinned by a set of specific methods: Action theory, person-oriented approach, educational environment assessment, project-based learning, role-plays, as well as quantitative, qualitative and interpretation methods. Action theory approach involves the use of active teaching methods that develop soft and practical skills. Person-oriented approach emphasises individualisation of learning, meeting the various needs and interests of students. Educational environment approach allowed us to assess the quality of educational interventions to ensure a motivating learning environment and effective academic performance. Project-based learning and role-plays, aiming at developing critical thinking skills, solving non-standard problems that are relevant in professional and everyday life, became a part of the key intervention in this study. Quantitative methods were used to show the numerical value of the two surveys that aimed to assess the level of engagement of the IR students with their major and their satisfaction with the intervention carried out. Qualitative and interpretation methods made it possible to identify the key intervention and develop a working strategy for its implementation and assessing its efficacy.

To address the research issue, this study was designed and conducted as a mixed-methods inquiry, which combines quantitative and qualitative research techniques. This approach is particularly efficient as it provides a stronger understanding of the problem tackled in a study. It helps to answer research questions with sufficient depth and breadth and generalise findings and implications of the researched issues to the whole population [23; 24]. Among several types of mixed-methods research design ¹⁶ [25; 26] in our study we accentuate and draw on

Explanatory Sequential design which involves a two-phase project in which the researcher collects quantitative data in the first phase, analyses the results, and then uses the results to build on to the second, qualitative phase.

Study Design

Our study fell into two successive phases. The first phase was centered around the survey that was meant to assess the level of the students' engagement with IR and to tease out an intervention or interventions to be later implemented in English classes. It contained six close-ended and four open-ended questions. In the second phase the acquired results were analysed and interpreted to give ground for deciding on the target intervention. We extended the research beyond a two-phase study by conducting another survey that was a follow-up to the target intervention and aimed at receiving feedback on it and student-generated suggestions for how the intervention could best support their engagement and motivation.

Participants and Setting

The setting was the Centre for Foreign languages and Communication within the University of Tyumen, Russia. The centre delivers English courses and provides education to the students across different departments in all years of study. Students majoring in International Relations study English for four years within IR English programme. IR English is focused on English language for a target language area of international relations and offers instruction in practical language use in the major related careers in order to develop communicative competence as the basis of intercultural professional communication. IR students are streamed

¹⁶ Creswell J. W. *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods approaches* (4th ed.). University of Nebraska-Lincoln, 2014. URL:

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/289530686_RESEARCH_DESIGN_QUANTITATIVE_QUALITATIVE_MIXED_METHOD_APPROACHES

according to the results of English placement tests taken at the beginning of a semester. At the beginning of the course the level of English varies significantly among the enrolled students. By the end of the second year of study all IR students are supposed to achieve B2-C1 CEFR level to be able to fully participate in classes designed specifically for this level. With these things in mind, the first survey targeted the students in all years of study, while the second one focused on junior students as it was meant to showcase what students feel about the project (target intervention) they were currently involved in. The project type was determined in advance and based on the results of the first survey. To level the playing field only third year students became the participants of the project thus forming the focus group for further investigation. The first survey covered 70 IR students in all years of study. 35 IR students in their third year of study participated in the project activity and gave their feedback on it within the second survey.

Data Collection Procedures

Before conducting the first survey we obtained informed consent from all the participants which secured their rights to withdraw at any stage or not to complete particular items in the questionnaire as well as the guarantees of confidentiality and anonymity. After all the responses were received they were analysed and interpreted with the intent to tease out the target intervention. The respondents placed the highest priority on professional role-plays like presidential debates, mock elections, model United Nations and others. After considering all the options, we negotiated on mock elections as the activity that can be organised on a high level and in accordance with the students' expectations and the teaching professors' expertise. We chose this type of activity as the target intervention having our

3d year students participate in the Student mock Election Project (STEP).

Within this project the students were to form political parties and introduce their manifestos. The project fell into 3 preparation steps. Step 1 – team building/ forming a political party, coming up with a name and a slogan. Step 2 – creating a questionnaire to identify problem areas. Step 3 – designing a one-slide presentation in the concept map format, explaining the main points of manifestos. These three steps were covered on a weekly basis. The final step was a mock election day when all the political parties were to pitch their manifestos and the teachers playing the part of the panel of judges were to choose the winner relying on the assessment rubric (relevance of the suggested idea, language accuracy, clarity of the visual aid, fitting into the time limit, equal participation of all the team members, holding a Questions-and-Answers session). The election campaign was wrapped up by an awarding ceremony and another survey that aimed to get the participants' feedback thus allowing us to make judgements about efficacy of the target intervention. It contained one open-ended and five close-ended questions. The mixed-methods approach determined the way the results were analysed. The quantitative method emphasised objective statistics based measurements while the qualitative research involved analysing non-numerical data generated by a set of open-ended questions.

Results

The first survey aimed to assess the level of the students' engagement in learning IR and identify an activity that can improve it. 70 IR students participated in it. Table 1 shows the research questions and students' responses. All the responses to open-ended questions were further categorised into overarching statements that included intersecting ideas.

Table 1

Degree of involvement in IR (descriptive statistics)

Таблица 1

Степень вовлеченности в МО (описательная статистика)

Question	Response category	%
1. Why did you decide to major in IR?	Interest in foreign languages	42
	Interest in history and politics	30
	Desire to become a diplomat	7
	Prospects of travelling and working abroad	5
	Relevance of the educational programme	8
	Possibility of getting a state-funded place at the university	2
	Recommendations of my relatives/friends	4
	Miscellaneous	2
2. Rate your interest in IR on a scale from 1 (low) to 5 (very high)	1	6
	2	10
	3	22
	4	40
	5	22
3. Have your expectations you had before entering the university been met?	Yes	15,8
	No	20,2
	Partially	50
	Not sure	6
4. Do you think that English is an important subject in your university curriculum?	Yes	100
	No	0
	Not sure	0
5. Determine your knowledge of English according to the CEFR scale	C2	4
	C1	26
	B2	56
	B1	8
	A2	6
	A1	0
6. Do you think that IR English is crucial for your professional development?	Yes	100
	No	0
	Not sure	0
7. Do you think that English classes can boost your interest in IR?	Yes	82
	No	4
	Not sure	14
8. What demotivates you in English classes?	Nothing	22
	Complex topics and terminology	19
	Lack of diversity in teaching methods	15
	Not sure	15
	Boring topics	11
	Teacher attitudes	9
	Topics that are not related to IR	4
	Low number of academic hours	4
Miscellaneous	1	

9. What activities should be an essential part of IR English classes?	Debates, public speaking sessions, professional role-plays	34
	Speaking activities	30
	Learning IR language	18
	Games and team work	3
	Classes with native speakers	3
	Academic writing practice	3
	Listening practice	2
	Translation practice	2
	Reading professional literature	2
	Watching films	2
10. What is the most important skill you should master to work in IR?	Miscellaneous	1
	Knowledge of foreign languages	56
	Grasp of history and political processes	24
	Public speaking skills and ability to hold negotiations	5
	Being broad-minded	2
	Being articulate and eloquent	2
	Knowing the rules of business etiquette	2
	Critical thinking	2
	Tolerance	2
	Ability to analyse a large amount of information	2
Intelligence	2	
Miscellaneous	1	

The second survey was designed as a follow-up to the key intervention – Student mock Election Project (STEP) – and aimed at receiving feedback on it. 35 IR students participated in the activity mentioned and gave their feedback.

The survey consisted of 5 close-ended questions and 1 open-ended question. Table 2 demonstrates the survey questions and the participants' responses.

Table 2

Feedback on STEP project (descriptive statistics)

Таблица 2

Отзывы о проекте STEP (описательная статистика)

Question	Response category	%
1. Do you find this project activity interesting?	Yes	85,7
	No	14,3
2. What challenges did you face while being engaged in the project?	Deciding on the concept of the bill	27,9
	Designing a one-slide presentation	25
	Preparing for an oral presentation	19,3
	Fitting into the time limit	19,3
	No clear instruction from the teachers	8,5
3. What do you think is the optimal number of participants per team?	2	2,9
	3	14,3
	4	51,4
	5	31,4

4. Do you believe that this type of activity can boost your interest in learning IR?	Yes	68,6
	No	11,4
	Not sure	20
5. How often would you like to be involved in such a type of activity?	Once a month	4,3
	Once a semester	45,7
	Once a year	45,7
	Never	4,3
6. What should be changed about this project to make it more meaningful for IR students?	Nothing / everything is all right	26,6
	Allow the participants to reconsider the topics/ give more freedom in choosing the topic/	23,3
	Make it a role-play and invite IR experts as a panel of judges	10
	Make preparation time more structured and efficient	10
	Offer a wider range of topics related to IR	6,7
	Change the voting system	6,7
	Allow more components in the one-slide presentation to make it more informative	6,7
	Allocate more time	6,7
	Introduce different types of awards: an opportunity to get your research paper published in an IR journal, meetings with IR experts	3,3

Discussion

Before undertaking the research, we hypothesised that IR students do not demonstrate high interest in IR. It was our observation during classes when they were exposed to different activities in which they had to discuss various IR issues and in personal interviews. It came as a surprise to us that 22 % of the respondents have rated their interest in IR as very high and 40 % as “high”. It means that our assumption was not accurate enough. Yet it does not mean that there is no room for improvement. There is still 38 % of respondents who gave low grades. So they may be qualified as our target /focus group. We should as well take into account the fact that not all the IR students who are currently enrolled in the course submitted their responses. The margin of error for this result is seen acceptable.

The results also suggest that the primary driving factor for choosing the major of IR is high interest in learning foreign languages. This data was completely unsurprising as the students have

repeatedly stressed the fact in personal interviews. Our intention was to provide statistics to be able to claim that English classes can be used as a platform for propagating a positive attitude towards IR. Questions 4, 6 and 7 served the same purpose and the results obtained helped to reinforce our belief that English classes can become a useful tool for boosting students’ interest in IR.

Questions 3, 5, 8, 9 and 10 were designed to spot problems and develop effective strategies for increasing student motivation. The results demonstrate that the majority of the respondents believe that not all of their expectations have been met. The respondents were not supposed to specify their answers. The primary goal was to evaluate the overall level of satisfaction with the university curriculum. This creates another target for future research into ways of reconsidering the educational programme and approaches to teaching IR on the university level. On the part of English classes, the students pinpoint complicated

discussion subjects and terminology, lack of diversity in teaching formats, very low number of academic hours, though; most of the respondents do not mention anything that demotivates them. Among the essential activities the students prioritise debates, public speaking sessions and professional role-plays.

Question 9 was crucial for analysing the activities we do on a regular basis and for teasing out those which fall short of student needs. This basically evolved into a target intervention. Among the activities mentioned, we may single out professional role-plays as those, which we never expose our students to. We chose this type of activity as the key intervention within this action research project having our students (juniors) participate in a mock election (STEP).

The format of the play is seen beneficial on many levels. First, it falls very well in line with the students' level of English (most of the students are of B2 level), and secondly, with the students' image of IR specialists (Question 10). Third, it adheres to the list of competences that IR students should possess (in accordance with the academic curriculum of the University of Tyumen) and intended to polish skills and develop competences around research, creation, communication, public speaking and more specifically around assessment of the modern international situation applying IR theory. This all lies in harmony with student-centered learning stressed by C. G. Demir¹⁷, T. Q. Tran and T. N. P. Tran [17]. And lastly, the play meets the criteria of PBL

outlined in Introduction section. Though some clarification needs to be made in this regard.

Not all the criteria mentioned by J. W. Thomas¹⁸ can be applied to the project in question. The role-play appears to be peripheral to the curriculum. It can not be the central teaching strategy as it serves to provide additional practice to scheduled regular activities. To become central to the curriculum the entire IR academic programme should be reconsidered as well as the teaching policy has to be changed. This also complicates the possible application of student autonomy principle. Being mostly teacher-led, the project strives to provide comprehensive instruction and guidance to enable the participants to organise their time most efficiently. However, the project incorporates a good deal of student autonomy on the part of researching the chosen issue and designing their political manifestoes. All the other PBL criteria suggested by F. C. Stoller¹⁹, L. Miller, C. A. Hafner and C. N. Fun [21] have fully manifested themselves in the format of the play. The project is focused on problems that encourage the students to encounter the central concepts of international relations: society, diplomacy, war, balance of power, international law and human rights. The project involves the students in a constructive investigation that encompasses inquiry, knowledge building and resolution. It also embodies characteristics that give a feeling of authenticity to students: relevant topics, the roles that students play, the authentic format of elections, collaboration with other participants,

¹⁷ Demir C. G. An overview of project-based learning practices within the context of 21st century skills. In *Paradigm shifts in 21st century teaching and learning*. IGI Global, 2020, pp. 36–52. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4018/978-1-7998-3146-4.ch003>

¹⁸ Thomas J. W. *A review of research on project-based learning*, 2000. URL: <https://typeset.io/papers/a-review-of-research-on-project-based-learning-4thcwdu7d>

¹⁹ Stoller F. C. Project Work: a means to promote language and content. In: J. C. Richards & W. A. Renandya (Eds.), *Methodology in language teaching: an anthology of current practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002, pp. 107–120. DOI: <http://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511667190.016>

the final product (speech /pitch), the criteria by which the products and performances are judged.

The intervention proved to be successful, since most of the participants liked the activity and were motivated to continue their research. Among the response options for Question 2 there was Other option that was never used. The respondents chose the options offered which suggests that all the mentioned challenges have to be addressed during the preparation period. Due attention should be paid to explanatory work, providing sources and materials for investigation and allocating more time for feedback from teachers.

Questions 3 and 5 meant to provide statistics on the optimal number of participants per team and frequency of exposure to such a type of activity. Deciding on 'four' as the ideal team size may be dictated by the tasks that have to be accomplished, deadline and time limit. Some of the participants whose team size exceeded four complained about social loafing of some members who were trying to avoid interaction and cooperation. Opinions were split regarding the frequency of being involved in activities of this kind. They were divided between 'once a semester' and 'once a year'. We believe that decision making in this respect should be on the part of moderators of a project activity. There are certain factors that must be taken into consideration: syllabus requirements, number of academic hours, venue options and many others.

Question 6 was an open-ended question that allowed the students to scrutinise the project activity and offer ways of making it more meaningful and efficient. We were encouraged by the response given by most of the participants who said that they would not change anything about the project. Nevertheless, we should not

discount the possibility that the students might have been lazy to write extended answers and chose the easiest way to complete the survey. All the other responses set a framework for reflection and future modifications. This echoes one of the main principles of action research emphasized by S. Kemmis, R. McTaggart and R. L. Nixon²⁰: improving education by changing it and learning from the consequences of changes as well as giving a reasoned justification of our educational work to others because we can show how the evidence we have gathered and the critical reflection we have done have helped us to create a developed, tested and critically-examined rationale for what we are doing.

The survey also adhered to agentic engagement as one of the PBL criteria pointed out by J. Reeve [19] through which learners have the opportunity to enrich, modify and personalise their instruction, thus contributing to the teaching process. All the suggestions given by the students matter and those which are statistically insignificant should not be underrated whatsoever (Question 6). They add up to a full picture of the scale of changes. Quite a number of students stressed the opportunity of reconsidering the topic and getting more freedom in choosing it. In the first meeting we asked the students to split into groups and make a list of the most worrying issues worldwide. Each group had to write the list on a sticky note and attach it to a classroom board. Then all the students one by one had to go through all the lists displayed on the board and write their names next to the issue they are truly interested in. The moderators then put the students into groups in accordance with the topic they chose. It did not go smoothly since the moderators generalised all the topics to be able to make groups. Thus, some nuanced topics were left

²⁰ Kemmis S., McTaggart R., Nixon R. L. *The action research planner: Doing critical participatory action*

research. Springer, 2014. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-4560-67-2>

behind. This caused a wave of discontent among the participants and spiraled into a negative feedback. The other suggestions encompass strategies of moderating the preparation period, voting time and awarding ceremony.

Taking into account the respondents' recommendations and our observations we suggest some scaffolding strategies:

1. Give participants the right to choose the area of investigation.
2. Offer sufficient guidance on developing the concept of a manifesto and a one-slide presentation.
3. Schedule meetings more efficiently: anticipate questions, give specific assignments and set a time-limit for research, discussion and sharing.
4. Give a panel of experts the right to vote.

In a competition with a small number of participants who are eligible to vote, there is a strong chance of choosing a wrong winner. Unless it is strictly prohibited, the participants would vote for their teams.

Think in advance of all possible ways of how winners can be awarded. Awards should not be limited to certificates. Seek opportunities to stimulate further research by providing meetings with IR experts, by getting articles published in scientific journals, by organising competitions on the university level and between teams of several universities and others.

Conclusions

The present study aimed to evaluate the relevance and efficacy of the educational management through the Action Research strategy as well as to tease out an intervention that could be implemented in English classes and thereof could enhance the students' interest in IR. The hypothesis put forward has successfully been confirmed: the level of IR students' engagement and motivation in learning their major can be

increased through effective management of the activities carried out in English classes and through comprehensive assessment of efficacy of the former via the Action Research strategy.

Despite the fact that the prevailing number of the respondents grade their interest in IR as 'high' and 'very high', there is statistically a big amount of students who do not show keen interest in their major and do not feel satisfied about the curriculum offered. What brings all the respondents together is their unconditional interest in the English language. This creates a wide spectrum of possibilities with respect to the use of English classes as a platform for raising interest in IR among the students.

We chose to address the issue via Action Research approach to be able to give a comprehensive analysis, in other words, to go through all the phases of inquiry: identification of problem area, collection and organization of data, interpretation of data, action based on data and reflection. Action Research strategy allowed us to effectively manage the educational process, to modify the intervention when needed, to assess the results obtained and to spot new problem areas. One important finding was that effective and strategic management is a key factor in boosting motivation among students, meanwhile, a meaningful context and a timely intervention in the educational process allows for increased level of student engagement and interest in their major.

The novelty of the research lies in emphasizing the role and resource potential of a foreign language in increasing the level of students' motivation when studying their major. In this regard Action Research was first considered as a complete methodological guide to identify the problem, interpret the results and spot emerging areas for investigation. The scientific significance of the research is indicated by shifting the focus of the study of student motivation from particular academic subjects to

understanding the potential of a foreign language as a universal platform for enhancing motivation in learning majors. The study also contributes to deeper understanding of Action Research as a research method, its integrity, cyclic nature and high significance in solving pedagogical problems. The practical value of the research suggests identifying data on the basis of which one can objectively assess the effectiveness of the action strategy proposed by the authors, the quality of the intervention and its influence on students' motivation in learning their major, the role of teamwork and emotional climate in project-based activities.

Among the possible research avenues, we can mention team building in preparation for the

role-play, designing visual aids before presenting a manifesto (project, bill, etc.), assessment criteria, presentation criteria, social loafing and others. It is worth pointing out that one of the limitations of this study was the sample size, from which the results may not be completely generalised. Likewise, IR English courses could also be qualified as a limitation since they belong to a particular department in the University of Tyumen. Utilising a larger sample from several universities with IR departments would undoubtedly increase the generalisability of the findings.

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Contribution of the co-author: collection of materials; formulation of a scientific problem research and definition of the main directions of its decision; analysis of research data.

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Научная статья / **Research Full Article**
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Исследование мотивации студентов-международников: оценка эффективности внешнего управления учебным процессом на основе стратегии действий Action Research

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Проблема и цель. Авторы исследуют проблему повышения мотивации студентов университета. Несмотря на то, что проблеме мотивации посвящено большое количество работ, вопрос оценки эффективности внешнего управления учебным процессом как один из ключевых факторов создания мотивирующей образовательной среды остается недостаточно изученным. Цель – выявить и описать эффективный инструмент внешнего управления и поддержки студентов для повышения мотивации к изучению своей специальности на основе стратегии действий Action Research.

Методология. Основой методологии послужили системно-деятельностный, личностно ориентированный, средовой подходы, методы проектного обучения, ролевых игр и Action Research, а также количественные, качественные и интерпретационный методы. Для достижения цели проведен аналитический обзор литературы по проблеме, нацеленный на выявление методик и технологий, используемых для повышения мотивации к учебной деятельности. Количественные и качественные методы включают проведение опросов с последующей интерпретацией полученных результатов, на основе которых была разработана и апробирована стратегия действий внешнего управления учебным процессом.

Результаты. В результате проведенных опросов выявлены высокий уровень интереса студентов к иностранному языку при недостаточном уровне мотивации к своему мейджеру, оценка студентами профессиональных ролевых игр как эффективной и эмоционально комфортной формы работы. На основе метода Action Research с применением проектного метода авторы разработали стратегию действий, обосновали принципы ее реализации, степень интервенции и внешней поддержки при сохранении психологического комфорта и уровня автономии студентов. Авторами установлено, что усиление вовлеченности определяется свободой выбора темы проекта, значимым профессиональным контекстом, конструктивным участием в командной работе и эффективностью внешнего управления учебным процессом. По результатам проведенной интервенции авторы разработали рекомендации, позволяющие повторить или масштабировать полученный опыт.

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Заключение. В заключении делается вывод о том, что важным условием повышения мотивации студентов является эффективное внешнее управление. Доказано, что обоснованный уровень интервенции в учебный процесс и внешней поддержки студентов позволяет усилить их вовлеченность и мотивацию к изучению своей специальности. Обоснована целесообразность использования стратегии действий Action Research для качественного внешнего управления учебным процессом, решения комплексных дидактических задач, своевременного корректирования педагогических действий и оценки результатов принятых решений.

Ключевые слова: мотивация; управление образовательным процессом; стратегия действий Action Research; интервенция; проектное обучение; профессиональные ролевые игры; международные отношения.

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