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Impact of Motivation, Language and Social Network on Learning Process

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This study considers the impact of motivation and effect of language on the learning process while studying in non-native languages. We will show how much the language can affect the learning process and how motivation and what kind of motivation can help a student to pass a course faster. Also, the meaning of social networks is discussed.

The study was done in an electronics laboratory course in Aalto University, Finland, and in Rigas Technical University, Latvia, during the spring term in 2011. The course was taught for the first time in English in both universities and for the first time ever in Rigas Technical University. All students in this study volunteered to participate and this course is not a part of their normal bachelor degree program.

As is well known, studying in English is very different from studying in one's native language for most people. Many students feel that they are still learning the language used in a course and also need to learn the substance at the same time. [1] All students taking part in the laboratory course both, in Finland and Latvia, were interviewed at the beginning and at the end of the course. Exchange students evaluated their own language skills in English evenly with a grade 3-5 of 5. While being interviewed, all exchange students were fluent in English and a teacher evaluated their language skills higher than the students did themselves. Some Latvian students thought their language skills were very low and barely acceptable to take a course in English. They were unsure if they could follow a lecture or read assignment handouts. Also their skills in English were evaluated higher by a teacher.

The Latvian students evaluated their language skills with a grade 3.64 when they started the course but the same students had an average value of 3.82 when they completed the course.



The exchange students evaluated their language skills with a grade 4.00 before the course but the grade was as high as 4.50 when they evaluated it after the course. If comparing the results before and after the courses, it can be seen that the students underestimated their language skills at least a little bit. They did not have difficulties passing the course as a result of the language.

When doing self-evaluation about their own background knowledge of electronics, the Latvian students had a grade of 3.55 on average. After the course the average value was exactly the same. As discussed earlier in this paper, the Latvian students passed the course easily but they were a bit unsure about their level of skill in electronics.

The exchange students were more self-confident at the beginning of the course. They estimated their own background knowledge in electronics to have a grade of 3.67. As mentioned earlier, it took much longer for them to finish all of the assignments compared to the Latvian students and compared to the reference group. At least the exchange students were honest when having the after course interview because they estimated their background skills in electronics to be 3.17. ■

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