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THE CHALLENGE OF CONTENT AND CONTEXTUALIZATION IN ESP FOR CHRISTIAN STUDENTS

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Abstract. This article examines the specialized methodology of teaching Foreign Language for Professional Purposes (FLPP) to students in Christian degree programs. It explores how professional language competencies are developed within a framework of Christian professions needs and peculiarities, highlighting the unique educational environment of religious universities.

The professional needs of Christian students necessitate a distinct approach to English language instruction. As this field is still developing, ongoing scientific analysis, research, and discussion are necessary to refine our understanding of the specific content needed for English-language materials within a Christian educational context, and to discover effective methods for maximizing teaching effectiveness by leveraging all available relevant characteristics.

The methodological basis of the research is built upon an interdisciplinary framework that integrates pedagogical theories with a specialized spiritual orientation. The study details several critical pedagogical aspects, including: vocabulary and terminology: identifying the specific linguistic challenges of religious and professional terminology; curriculum and content: selecting primary sources and Christian literature that provide necessary cultural context while fostering professional thinking rooted in faith; instructional methods: emphasizing communicative and interactive approaches tailored to the needs of students preparing for global service; intercultural competence: training students to navigate diverse cultural landscapes through an ethical, faith-based lens.

As a result, the authors conclude that effective language instruction in this context requires a holistic integration of specific content, contextualization and methodology, as well as professional skills and spiritual values. The goal is to develop specialists capable of utilizing their language proficiency for professional communication, professional service and spiritual growth in a globalized world.

Key words: Foreign Language for Professional Purposes, professional language competencies, contextualization, foreign language skills, career-specific tasks, holistic integration, communicative approach.

Introduction. In the era of rapid technological growth and global integration, proficiency in foreign languages has evolved from a secondary asset into an essential requirement for professional survival. In different professional fields, linguistic skills enable practitioners to analyze new scientific information, navigate cross-border relations, remain competitive in international professional space. Be it an economist, a lawyer, or a diplomat, multilingualism is the foundation for effective negotiation and international cooperation, helping professionals build trust by engaging with local cultures and stakeholders in their native tongues.

For future theologians and clergy, mastering English has become critical for bridging the gap between local ministry and the global Christian community. It provides direct access to a vast body of global theological research and primary sources that are often available only in English as a modern lingua franca. Engaging with

academic literature and historical religious texts in English allows students to gain a profound understanding of modern professional trends and cross-cultural perspectives, particularly in the context of World Christianity (Anderson, M., 20212; Binkley, S., 2007; David I. Smith, 2020). Furthermore, specialized language training equips these students with vital communication skills for:

- missionary work: language is a spiritual tool that allows missionaries to share the gospel in a way that resonates with a community's "heart language," fostering deeper relationships and mutual respect.
- public speaking and preaching: training in public speaking and rhetoric enhances the delivery and organization of sermons, making them more impactful for diverse audiences.
- global academic dialogue: proficiency transforms a theologian into a globally connected scholar. For example, major international conferences – such as the Global Conference on Christian Scholarship in Nairobi or the International Conference on Theology, Doctrine, and Spiritual Traditions – provide platforms where English is essential for presenting peer-reviewed research and networking with international peers (Pennycook, A., & Coutand-Marin, S., 2003).

Ultimately, these skills ensure that religious leaders can effectively participate in the worldwide Christian community, contributing their unique insights to global theological dialogue while remaining grounded in their local contexts.

For students at a Christian university, English language acquisition is uniquely shaped by their specific vocational objectives and professional requirements. This educational process is increasingly viewed as a specialized field that demands rigorous academic inquiry and evidence-based justification. To maximize instructional success, research must focus on the distinct pedagogical nuances of the specific professional setting, ensuring that curricula are precisely aligned with the unique academic needs of the learners. Scientific analysis identifies some persistent barriers to effective instruction in faith-based institutions:

- Curriculum Realignment: Studies highlight the need for a "scientific justification" of curricula to ensure they meet the unique needs of clergy, such as preaching and public speaking.
- Professional Development: Research indicates a gap in students training, specifically regarding how to embed professional language needs into the specific pedagogical practice of a theology department.
- Contextualization: Linking language learning directly to professional activities and content. Contextualization is putting language items into a meaningful and real context rather than being treated as isolated items of language for language manipulation practice only.

Precisely these aspects of ESP and their specific design in the learning process for Christian students are **the objectives** of the present study.

The core **methodological pillars** identified in the research include *Competency-Based Approach*: The research focuses on the formation of "foreign language professional competencies," specifically tailored for students of Christian specialties. *Communicative approach*: the study emphasizes the "communicative approach" as a primary method for language acquisition. *Interactive teaching methods*: the research promotes the use of "interactive methods" to ensure effective training and student engagement. *Professionally Oriented Approach*: the methodology is designed to integrate foreign language training with specific professional needs (ESP – English for Specific Purposes) relevant to Christian ministry and service. *Integration Strategy* – the overarching methodological principle is the integration of professional foreign language training with professional needs and requirements, to develop a "holistic personality" capable of using language for ethical communication and service in a globalized world.

Analytical **methods** include comparative and structural analysis: the authors analyze the "uniqueness" and "specifics" of teaching in a Christian institution across several aspects: vocabulary, terminology, topic range, and educational literature selection; linguistic and cultural analysis: the study evaluates Christian literature as a "linguistic and cultural source," examining how primary sources reveal Christian culture and worldview to form professional thinking.

Main part. In the globalized landscape of modern world the landscape of higher education has been fundamentally reshaped by global integration and the rapid rise of specialized communication tools. For Christian universities, this evolution has placed a spotlight on a critical pedagogical hurdle: the problem of content and contextualization in teaching English for Professional Purposes (EPP) to theology and ministry students.

Lexical Gaps. First of all, this is a specialized vocabulary that students study, related to the understanding of religious and theological concepts, biblical texts. Religious vocabulary is studied here not as part of general culture or literature, but in connection with church history, dogmatics, ethics, biblical studies, with an emphasis on key concepts such as Faith, Grace, Salvation, the Kingdom of God, their evolution and various theological interpretations. At the end of their studies, students should be able to read, understand and discuss texts related to theology in English, use this vocabulary in real communication: worship services, missionary work, academic discussions, religious journalism. Thus, the main specificity of vocabulary acquisition in a Christian university is the combination of secular and spiritual dimensions, requiring not only linguistic but also deep theological knowledge, and the main problem is the multi-layeredness of meanings, cultural specificity, and the need to understand the context of Scripture (Nykiforchuk Zh. V., Labinska B. I.. 2021).

The research shows that the special characteristics of the vocabulary studied at a Christian university include:

- Ambiguity and symbolism: Biblical words often have deep symbolic and metaphorical meanings that are not conveyed by a single equivalent in modern language (e.g., "blood," "light," "truth").
- Cultural and historical context: The vocabulary is related to the realities of the Ancient Near East that are foreign to the modern student (names, geographical names, customs).
- Archaic language: Many words, although used, have somewhat changed or outdated meanings compared to their original biblical context.
- Polysemy and homonymy: The same word can have different meanings depending on the translation and the biblical book.
- Translation differences: Students are faced with different versions of translations that may convey the meaning of the original languages (Greek, Hebrew) differently.
- Theological accuracy: Choosing the right word is crucial to understanding doctrines.
- Integration with other subjects: It is necessary to simultaneously study a foreign language, theology, and hermeneutics (interpretation of Scripture) (Nykiforchuk Zh. V., Labinska B. I.. 2021).

Such features of the lexical composition, important for students of a Christian university, are closely related to the features of the subject matter of professional English, which includes Biblical and theological topics, Christian doctrines, such as Anthropology, Soteriology, Hamartiology in the context of a foreign language. This also includes topics related to Christian ethics and morality – discussion of the topics human behavior and relationships in the light of faith. Also necessary are topics on intercultural communication, understanding professional communication in different cultures. An important component of professional foreign language in a Christian university is topics related to sermons, missionary work, and volunteering, mastering the skills and abilities of using a foreign language in these types of professional activity, as well as mastering an academic foreign language for writing essays, abstracts, reports on theological topics, and participating in conferences (Anderson, M., 2012; Binkley, S., 2007).

Genre Specificity. Christian specialists must master unique genres – the sermon (homiletics), the academic paper, and the pastoral letter. Traditional language teaching often ignores these distinct rhetorical structures, leaving students ill-equipped for professional public speaking.

The Challenge of Contextualization. Special requirements for the lexical composition and topics of a foreign language of professional orientation in a Christian university also determine the specific selection of educational literature, which should offer an appropriate context in which language learning takes place. This means the use of texts that include biblical plots, Christian literature, hagiography, as well as materials that reveal Christian culture and worldview. Textbooks should contain topics related to faith, morality, service, and family, which forms not only communicative but also spiritual competence.

- Using the primary source: using passages from the Bible to study language, vocabulary and grammar; analysis of biblical texts; analysis of parables, psalms, epistles of the apostles from the point of view of linguistics and theology.
- Christian literature: works of famous Christian authors (C. Lewis, J. Tolkien, contemporary writers); psalms, prayers, quotes from sermons, which enrich the vocabulary with high style and foreign language material for the development of reading skills and understanding of the cultural context.
- Christian music and films: analysis of lyrics of songs, hymns, sermons.

Thus, educational materials in Christian universities are not just language textbooks, but a tool for the formation of a holistic language knowledge that combines language proficiency in all possible aspects and practical professional skills (David I. Smith, 2020; Kostyk YE. V., Silyutina I. O.; Orlova N. 2019).

Methodological Shifts. Before proceeding to the consideration of the methodology of teaching a professional foreign language in a Christian university, we note that it is based on such modern approaches and concepts as: a communicative approach, the main goal of which is the formation of communicative competence, i.e. mastering the language as a means of intercultural communication, and not only knowledge of grammar and vocabulary; dialogue of cultures, which implies understanding and interaction with other cultures through language; professionally oriented learning (ESP/EAP), i.e., adaptation of language learning to the specific needs of students of specific specialties; innovative methods – the use of modern technologies and the integration of professional disciplines with language ones (interdisciplinary coordination) (Herasymchuk, H. A., Koval'chuk, O. M., Mel'nychuk, O. V.. 2024; Orlova N., 2019; Shevchenko S. P., 2020). According to the communicative approach, we define the *main principles* of teaching a professional foreign language: priority of communication – the main goal is to learn to speak, listen, read and write in order to realize oneself in communication, overcoming the language barrier; situationality – learning through the creation of realistic language situations (role-playing games, discussions); active interaction – active communication; holistic language processing – simultaneous development of all language skills (speaking, listening, reading, writing), and practical, rather than theoretical, study of grammar; speech and mental activity – emphasis on the spontaneous formation of thoughts and their expression in a foreign language without constant translation; authentic materials – the use of real texts, recordings, videos for immersion in the language environment. This approach helps students not only to know the language, but also to use it confidently, convey their thoughts, understand the interlocutor and function in a foreign language environment, which is especially important in the context of European integration (Orlova N., 2019; Shevchenko S. P., 2020).

These characteristics also determine the specifics of the methods of teaching a professional foreign language in a Christian university:

- Interpretation: Analysis of texts from the perspective of professional point of view.
- Contextual approach: Study of words in the context of biblical texts, their original meanings and development, as well as comparison with other religious or secular concepts.
- Doctrinal analysis: Analysis of key biblical terms through the prism of theological disciplines (anthropology, soteriology), which helps to understand their content more deeply.
- Structural-semantic analysis: Study of functional-semantic fields of religious vocabulary, identifying their semantic processes and features of functioning in language.
- Dialogue of worldviews: Teaching students to conduct a dialogue with representatives of other worldviews, arguing for a biblical position, which requires a deep understanding of both language and content.
- Media Literacy: Understanding the transformation of religious communication under the influence of mass culture and media, which includes the analysis of contemporary narratives.
- Discussions: Discussing current issues through the prism of Christian values (e.g., family values, service).
- Creative tasks: Creating translations, essays, presentations on spiritual topics.
- Lecture-discussion: Discussing biblical texts and their relevance today.
- Case method: Examining real-life situations where biblical terms and principles need to be applied.
- Project work: Creating content (articles, videos) on biblical topics in a foreign language.
- Task-Based Learning, which involves learning a language through completing real-life, meaningful tasks that simulate real-life situations to develop practical communication skills.
- Guided Discovery, when instead of directly explaining the rules, the teacher offers students tasks, examples and tips that encourage them to "discover" the rules, properties or patterns themselves, which makes learning more conscious and effective. This is combined with game and communicative approaches, contributing to better assimilation of the material.
- The use of visual methods and TOR, the involvement of emotions to increase the efficiency of memorization, which is consistent with the physiological aspects of learning.

Thus, for studying a foreign language at a Christian university, it is recommended to combine communicative methods with technologies that take into account specific professional content and aims, as well as to apply

innovative approaches, digital resources, visual methods, and individualization, focusing on practical application.

Results and Discussions. Taking into consideration the above, it can be argued that the main features of teaching a professionally oriented foreign language in a Christian university are:

- integration of learning and professional training: using biblical texts as a basis for studying vocabulary and grammar; discussing Christian themes, values, and ethics through a foreign language; studying English through songs, sermons, and historical documents.

- development of personality and vocation: emphasis on character formation, responsibility, and service; language is viewed not simply as a skill, but as a tool for missionary work and intercultural communication.

- worldview approach: communicative tasks are often related to a Christian perspective (for example, discussing social issues, moral dilemmas from a faith perspective); selection of authentic materials.

In accordance with the above needs, we define the following goals for teaching a professional foreign language at a Christian university:

- communicative competence: mastering the language as a tool for communication in the dialogue of cultures, with an emphasis on Christian values.

- personality formation: development of tolerance, critical thinking and understanding of world trends through the prism of faith; formation of also Christian worldview competence; preparation for international work (missions, charity) and effective communication in the global Christian environment.

- spiritual development: using language for a deeper understanding of the Holy Scriptures and the formation of a Christian worldview; developing critical thinking through the prism of biblical truths.

As for teaching methods, the communicative methodology remains key (interaction, cooperation, communication), but with the addition of a spiritual dimension. Language is studied as a tool for intercultural communication and exchange of values, which meets modern requirements. In this case, the methods are aimed not only at acquiring foreign language skills, but also at forming practical skills and experience.

Conclusions. As a result of the study, we can conclude that the future of foreign language education in Christian institutions depends on moving away from a one-size-fits-all approach. By scientifically justifying the content (ESP) and rigorously applying principles of contextualization, educators can ensure that future Christian specialists are not just "fluent" in English, but are capable of serving as authentic, globally connected practitioners and researchers.

The problem of content and contextualization is a call for educational integrity. To prepare the next generation of Christian specialists, institutions must shift toward a discipline-driven model – one that justifies every lesson through the lens of professional necessity and spiritual formation. Only by deeply integrating professional content with an authentic faith context can educators transform English from a mere subject into a powerful instrument for global ministry.

Thus, Christian higher education institutions strive to modernize their language curricula and to overcome a critical content selection and contextualization challenge. The main feature here is a holistic approach, where language is not an end in itself, but a means of cognition, self-expression and service, integrating intellectual development with spiritual. Language study is connected with the professional needs and cultural studies, which gives a deep understanding of the context and contributes to intercultural competence.

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