COOPERATIVE LEARNING TO FORM COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE OF UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

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Abstract. The article discusses the features of cooperative learning in universities, as well as its potential advantages related to edutainment, gamification, digital storytelling, and pitching. This innovative technology involves collaborative activities among students in small groups under the guidance of an instructor to achieve specific educational goals. Positive interactions among group members, individual responsibility of each participant, mutual encouragement of success in the student-student and student-instructor interaction, and the development of soft skills are the main components of cooperative learning. The research aims to develop and test a cooperative technology to form communicative competence of students of Russian higher education institutions. The authors developed a cooperative technology to form communicative competence of students, identified the characteristics of the technology, determined students' expectations from the technology used, and tested the technology through pedagogical experimentation. The study employed theoretical (integrative literature review, modeling) and empirical (survey, questionnaires, pedagogical experiment, descriptive statistics) methods. The experiment involved first-year bachelor's students from the advanced engineering school "Heart of Ural" at South Ural State University. The effectiveness of the developed technology was demonstrated based on the following criteria: the improvement of foreign language proficiency according to the European CEFR scale, motivation, and teamwork skills.

Keywords: higher education, foreign language, cooperative learning, communicative competence, university students, edutainment

КООПЕРАТИВНАЯ ТЕХНОЛОГИЯ ФОРМИРОВАНИЯ КОММУНИКАТИВНОЙ КОМПЕТЕНТНОСТИ СТУДЕНТОВ ВЫСШЕЙ ШКОЛЫ

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Аннотация. В статье рассматриваются особенности технологии кооперативного обучения в университетах, а также ее потенциальные преимущества, связанные с эдьютейнментом, геймификацией, цифровым сторителлингом, питчингом. Данная инновационная технология предполагает совместную деятельность студентов в небольших группах под руководством преподавателя для достижения конкретной образовательной цели. Позитивная связь между участниками групп, индивидуальная ответственность каждого, взаимное стимулирование успеха по схеме студент – студент и студент – преподаватель, формирование мягких навыков являются основными компонентами кооперативного обучения. Целью статьи является разработка и апробация кооперативной технологии

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формирования коммуникативной компетентности студентов российского вуза. Авторы разработали кооперативную технологию формирования коммуникативной компетентности студентов; выявили особенности технологии; определили ожидания обучающихся от используемой технологии и апробировали технологию методом педагогического эксперимента. В исследовании использовались теоретические (анализ современной научно-методической литературы), эмпирические (интернет-опрос, анкетирование, математическая обработка полученных данных, построение гистограммы и круговой диаграммы) и комплексные (моделирование, педагогический эксперимент) методы. В эксперименте приняли участие бакалавры первого курса передовой инженерной школы «Сердце Урала» Южно-Уральского государственного университета. Эффективность разработанной технологии была доказана по критериям: повышение уровня владения иностранным языком по европейской шкале CEFR (как средством коммуникации), мотивации и умения работать в команде.

Ключевые слова: высшее образование, иностранный язык, кооперативное обучение, коммуникативная компетенция, студенты вузов, эдьютейнмент

Introduction

The current goal of education at present is to train highly qualified specialists who possess not only professional skills, but are also able to carry out business communication in a foreign language. Communicative competence implies the willingness and ability of future specialists to use the acquired knowledge and skills in professional interaction. Our research focus is bachelor students of Advanced Engineering School of the South Ural State University. The educational standard requirement from a future engineer is the good knowledge of one or more foreign languages on B2 levels [21, 26, 27]. Modern working conditions require the education of a future engineer that would meet the level of world standards, the main component of which is the mastery of international communication languages. According to the syllabus, this higher school is considered to be non-linguistic. The total workload of the English language subject is 48 hours per semester. The program provides practical classes 3 hours a week. It is very difficult to improve the communicative skills of a foreign language in such a period of time. Lecturers have to resort to various innovative technologies to achieve their goals. One of these innovative technologies can be cooperative learning. It involves students collaborating in groups. With this approach, students achieve learning success by interacting with each other, taking individual responsibility in their decision-making and teamwork. The use of Cooperative Language Learning (CLL) will enhance future engineers' language proficiency.

The research aim is to develop and to test CLL technology for the formation of communicative competence of Russian university students. The tasks are the following: to develop a cooperative technology for the formation of students' communicative competence; to identify the features of the technology; to identify students' expectations from the technology used, to test the technology using the method of pedagogical experiment.

Literature Review

Nowadays the foreign language education of engineers involves the integration of language learning into the educational process. This is necessary in the context of the globalization of the labor market and the expansion of international opportunities for technical universities graduates. For future engineers involved in production, technological, organizational and managerial activities, the volume of communicative tasks using interactive and cooperative technologies modeling professional situations is increasing.

In our study we rely on the definition of the following researchers G.M. Jacobs, S.G. Mc Cafferty, M.A. Power, D.W. Johnson, E.J. Holubec, H. Kimura, R.E. Slavin, N. Rashidi. The innovative technology of CLL implies joint students' activity in little groups under tutor supervision to reach the specific educational goal [7, 8, 10, 14, 20, 24].

When considering the main components of CLL (W.I. Loh, R.T. Johnson, T. Wang, Yan Zhang, O. Yavuz, A. Arslan) it is necessary to mention the ones below:

1. Positive mutual connection. The good

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overall result relies on the proper preparation of each group member.

2. Structural individual responsibility. The activity of a personality is evaluated on the individual contribution.

3. Success stimulation. Mutual student – student and teacher-student success stimulation.

4. Soft skills formation (team work, leadership, decision-making and so on) [8, 10, 28–31].

Some methods of the CLL [1–4, 25] include: "Teach like a PIRATE" methods of teaching; edutainment, infotainment, gamification; case study in digital storytelling; pitching; speating meetings.

In general, the main questions that every professor of the university should ask himself are the following ones: 1. Do students wait for my class? 2. Do students discuss my discipline outside the class? 3. Is there anything that attracts students in my lessons? So, the issue of students' motivation is rather controversial to most professors. How to change students' outer motivation into inner motivation? How to introduce infotainment in the process of learning? [16, 19, 22, 23]

"Teach like a PIRATE" methods of teaching were elaborated by Dave Burgess, writer, author of a lot of books, coach in education training, history teacher in California, San Diego, the USA [2]. He is popular for his creative, energetic and highly entertaining style of teaching. A tutor should have passion (P stands for Passion) for what he is doing: content passion, professional passion and personal passion. A teacher should make a student dive into the subject (I stands for Immersion). It concerns mutual understanding, connection between students and supervisor (R stands for Rapport). In order to create analytical thinking students should be able to ask right questions and analyze answers (A stands for Ask and Analyze). Lessons should be transformed into such an activity so that students could see the connection between the studying material and its implementation in real professional life (T stands for Transformation). Teaching like a pirate means an adventurous way of creative tasks, transformation of lessons and tasks into a special comfortable place with theatrical elements and significant emotional response (E stands for Enthusiasm) [2, 9, 17].

Dave Burgess says that if you come to somebody's place for dinner and you see how the host is making a delicious grill, you will wait for the wonderful meals. But if you see that a host is giving you a piece of raw meat, you will be disappointed and will not enjoy the communication and the food [2]. So, teachers should "grill" the study material, "season" it with cases, games, personal life examples, jokes and image transformation.

According to S. Deterding, D. Dixon, R. Khaled, edutainment (education + entertainment) is the educational technology that is considered as a set of technical and methodological means of teaching, based on the concept of presenting the study material in the interesting, easy and comfortable for students' manner [4]. The content of this technology should contain infotainment (information + entertainment). The following emphasis must be taken into account: amusement and recreation focus, game-based learning, stress on modern technologies [3, 5]. Gamification, as K. Kapp writes in his book "The gamification of learning and instruction fieldbook: ideas into practice", is the educational process which is based on the game's principles [13]. Gamification can be divided into digital (computer) and non-digital (real games in class) [6, 12, 15].

When students are playing real games in class, the tutors ought to mind the following psychotypes of players in order to provide them with the motivation to participate and win. The classification was developed by Richard Bartle, famous British writer and the professor at the University of Essex [1]:

1. Killers – gamers who desire to compete and to win afterwards, they want to be leaders in everything.

2. Achievers – gamers who wish they had more benefits and resources.

3. Explorers – gamers that are not interested in levels, achievements, their aim is to investigate, analyze, know the secrets of the game world.

4. Socializes – gamers that are eager to communicate, to connect with other players.

Speating (speaking+eating) is a form of studying the material when learners are in a comfortable atmosphere, for example, Christmas, Halloween, St. Patrick Day, Easter party, where the main topics for conversations can be traditions of the English-speaking countries, food, religion [11].

Pitching is usually used in business practices, but now it has moved to education. Pitch is a brief and convincing presentation of a project, idea, products and services. It is prepared in order to attract attention, highlight an idea from many others, to interest a potential client, to prove the offer value. For future engineers it is essential not

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only to create some products and services, but also to promote them to foreign business partners or investors using their communicative skills [18, 28].

According to our theoretical research, we need to develop and implement cooperative technology that helps to form communicative competence, increase the level of foreign language proficiency and allow students to meet the expectations of the educational process. Thus, we imply in our study: "Teach like a PIRATE" methods of teaching; edutainment, infotainment, gamification; case study in digital storytelling; pitching; speating meetings.

Materials and Methods

In order to achieve the main goal of the study and solve the above set tasks we used the method of scientific literature analysis on the debated problem of CLL. In the conducted research, we focused on various aspects: the educational standards that a future engineer should meet, innovative techniques involving students working in small groups under the supervision of a tutor towards achieving a specific learning goal, the key components of cooperative language learning, and the possibility of incorporating these innovative techniques into the educational process.

To reveal the peculiarities of cooperative language learning technology, several empirical research methods are applied, including the use of the Google Internet Survey, questionnaires containing both closed and open questions, as well as mathematical methods for processing the data, collecting and conducting quantitative and qualitative analysis and complex research method of pedagogical modelling.

Bachelor students of Advanced Engineering School of the South Ural State University took part in the survey and experimental teaching (62 first-year students of 2024/2025 academic year, 1st semester). The interviewed students are enrolled in the new program whose main task is considered to be solving advanced engineering problems together with industrial partners and training personnel for high-performance sectors of the country's economy. The survey was conducted online using Google Docs. Absolute anonymity and confidentiality were provided for students. An electronic questionnaire method was used, which allows users to quickly respond to the answers provided and receive information in the form of pie and bar charts.

The proposed questionnaire included both open and closed questions as we needed to study how students evaluate certain language learning techniques, as well as to analyze their attitude to them and their expectation from the classes.

Students are to respond the given below questions:

➢ What do you expect to achieve by learning English?

➢ How would you prefer to acquire new knowledge: through problem-solving activities, reading texts, watching videos, or doing exercises?

➢ What class format would you prefer: group discussions, individual assignments, role-playing games, or something else?

➢ Are you open to participating in projects or activities related to the English language, like creative writing, debates, presentations, or digital storytelling?

➢ Would you like to incorporate modern technologies into the classroom, like interactive online platforms, apps, or video games?

➢ Do you find the culture of English-speaking countries interesting? Would you like to learn more about their traditions, customs, and holidays in class?

➢ Do you agree that using new methods will help you better understand and use English in everyday life?

➢ What do you think about the opportunity to work in small groups while learning new material?

➢ Do you prefer to work individually or in a team? Why?

➢ Have you ever had a situation where working in a group caused difficulties? What were these difficulties?

➢ Do you think that working in small groups could contribute to the development of communication skills?

The research served as the foundation for developing CLL technology for teaching future engineers in higher school and for conducting a pedagogical experiment on the basis of the following units in the study process (Table 1).

PIRATE formula turns the lesson into a show or theater. In our understanding this method implementation for teaching English for students of the Advanced Engineering School is effective and productive. In little cooperative groups students are immersed into cases, projects, problem-solving activity. We introduce some "hooks" in our class (Table 2).

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CLL Implementation in the Study Process

Motivational Unit	Modelling Unit	Evaluation Unit
"Teach like a pirate" methods System of "Hooks"	Gamification Edutainment Infotainment Case study in Digital Storytelling Pitching Speating meetings	Classroom assessment of language proficiency Analysis of mistakes

The system of "hooks"

The kinesthetic hook	"People are props" hook	Hobby hook	Creative challenge hook
Can we roll, throw, catch something inside or outside the classroom? Can we stand up and act out some kind of scene? Is it possible to include gestures and movements that students can do while staying in their seats? Is it possible to increase the effectiveness of the lesson by using an active game?	How to prepare a lesson using students as props? Is it possible to make a graph, diagram, map out of students? Can some students be props, and others – "prop carriers"? Can students stage a historical event?	How can a student's hobby be used when studying educational material? How can educational material be linked to what a particular person is interested in?	How can I improve the start of a class with music? How can I use pizza in class? How can I use food in class? How can I use colored stickers in class? Is it possible to turn on sign language in class? What kind of investigation can students conduct in class? How can I use a ball of thread in class? Can I create a travel lesson?

In the gamification framework students of the Advanced Engineering School were asked to play the computer game "Global Conflicts: Palestine". This is a video game published in 2024 on Windows Serious Games Interactive. It's an educational game, set in a geography, history, religion, sociology and Middle East themes. The main heroes are the Jewish girl or the Palestinian boy. They are eager to find the truth about the Israel-Palestinian conflict, they take the interviews. As options they can work in one of the following newspapers: Palestinian, European or Israel one. This game is a little bit politicized, but rather contemporary, very challenging and timely. At the end of the game students write an article that is assessed on the CEFR level.

Also, the students were suggested an interesting and attractive activity in the form of a case-study to create a digital story on the topic "Transport" (Table 3). Project-based training with specific case-study allows students to deepen their knowledge in the field of logistics, develop critical thinking and analytical skills, as well as speaking skills in English and prepare them for future professional activities by providing an opportunity to work on real industry problems. The following is an example of such a case-study.

The students were given the following instance situation for pitching. You are participating in a business conference on transport in China. During a coffee break you decide to go outside the Guangzhou Chow Tai Fook Finance Centre to look at the city sites. And when you are in the lift, you see that the important investor comes in. Speak about your product while the elevator will descend from the 103rd to the first floor.

One more way of cooperative activity is speating, a method of learning foreign languages in a relaxed atmosphere. The real cooked food is used at this event. It can be prepared by a teacher, students or both. Games, jokes, transformation of images, immersion into cases, theatrical performances can be added.

To evaluate the use of CLL technology we used the received data. Firstly, the starting and postexperimental levels of students' language proficiency were defined according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). It is an international standard for describing language ability on a six-point scale, from A1 for beginners, up to C2 for those who have mastered a language. Secondly, the students' answers to the questionnaire were analyzed. Finally, CLL technology effectiveness was proved.

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Table 3

Case-study "Development of an effective delivery system in urban logistics"

The purpose of the project: create a comprehensive plan to improve the cargo delivery system, taking into account the features of urban logistics, including routing, the use of alternative vehicles and modern technologies
Background: you are a team of students working on a project for a local transportation company that is facing problems delivering goods in urban traffic conditions. Your task is to develop an innovative solution to improve the efficiency and reliability of the delivery system
The project development process: investigation of the problem (analyze the company's current delivery system, including examining the existing infrastructure, types of cargo, routes, and vehicles used, assess existing problems such as delays, high fuel costs, low customer satisfaction and environmental impact)
Data collection: explore existing solutions in the field of urban logistics: use information from scientific articles, studies of companies operating in similar conditions, and statistics on delivery; interview customers and drivers to identify key issues
Generating ideas: develop improvement options (may include changing routes, introducing new equipment, or using technology to track cargo; use brainstorming and techniques such as cause and effect diagrams to evaluate ideas)
Concept development: justify the chosen solution; identify what changes need to be implemented to improve the delivery process, including potential new technologies (e. g. delivery drones, electric vans); prepare a route diagram describing optimization and compliance with the city's infrastructure
Modeling and Simulation: create a change implementation plan with a time frame and expected results using computer models, if possible; run a simulation of the new delivery process, evaluating how the proposed changes can improve the system
Presentation and results: prepare a digital story on www.powtoon.com where you will talk about the identified problems, proposed solutions and expected results; involve interested parties (e. g. teachers, clients and businessmen) to discuss and receive feedback
Expected results: each team member will gain experience working in a group, learn how to analyze problems and propose solutions in the field of logistics. Formation of skills for working with real data and the ability to apply theory in practice. Creation of a related project that can be practically implemented by the company

Results and discussion

CLL is a technology that involves working in small groups and is characterized by students' interaction and interdependence to fulfill the set goals and to improve performance working in teams. The effectiveness of CLL technology depends on careful planning and suggested techniques combination that provides all students contribute and benefit from the learning experience.

Before presenting the main results of the research, which was focused on developing and testing CLL technology, we identified the students' motivation to work in a team. The picture (Fig. 1) shows the level of students' interest in improving language proficiency through the use of innovative teaching techniques and working in small groups. Two-time frames of the training course 2024–2025 are compared. The very beginning of the first semester is the period of starting a practical English course, and the midterm is the period of control measures to assess the assimilation of new material after implementation of CLL technology.

The received results show that the use of tools and applications based on CLL raise students' awareness of teamwork effectiveness and develop critical thinking and analytical skills, as well as communicative skills in English. The students acknowledge that CLL resources provide them with improved learning and the best support possible.

The task of our research was to reveal CLL peculiarities in the formation of the communicative competence with the help of innovative teaching techniques implementation such as gamification, edutainment, infotainment, case study in digital storytelling, pitching and speating meetings.

Speaking about students' expectations of learning English (Fig. 2), it should be noted that most hope to improve their communication skills so that they can easily talk with people from different countries, get a better job in the future or even work abroad, be fluent in English as it opens up many opportunities in education, broaden horizons and gain access to more information online.

Among the main problems and difficulties associated with working in a group, different communication styles, approaches to solving problems, conflict of interest and lack of leadership were mentioned. Some students prefer to work independently and may feel uncomfortable
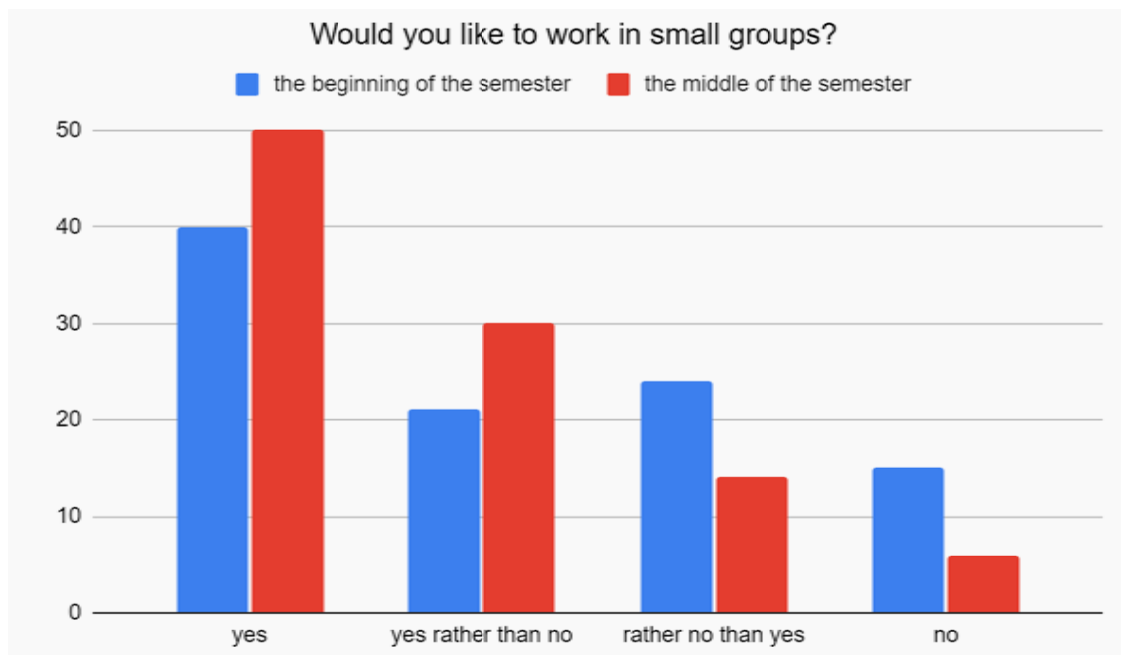
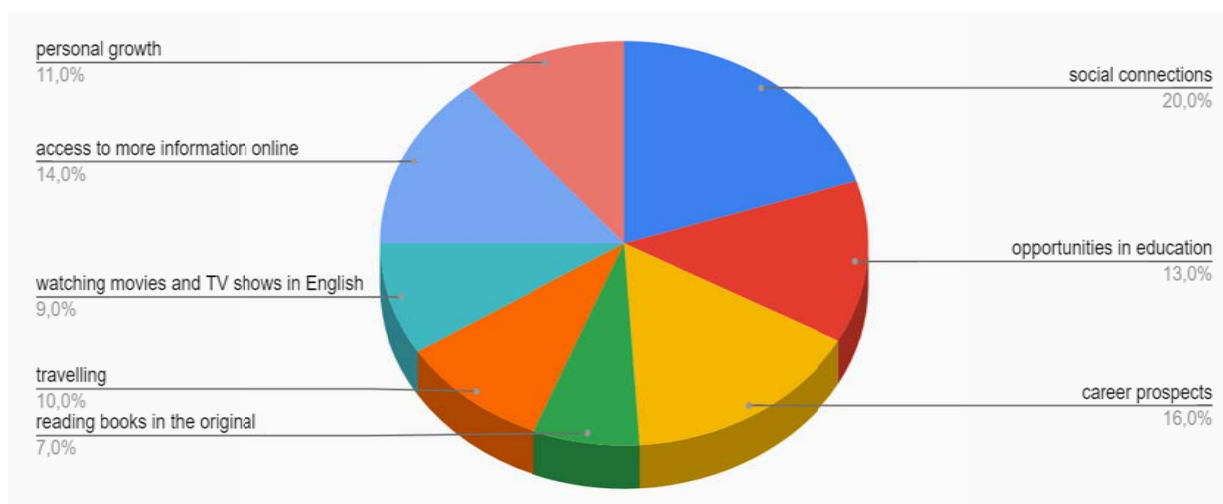Fig. 1. The students' desire to work in small groups

Fig. 2. Students' expectations of learning English

when they need to cooperate with other members of the group.

Others, on the contrary, get used to active teamwork and expect everyone to be equally involved. Effective communication is the key to successful group work. If there are problems with the exchange of information between the participants, this can lead to delays and misunderstandings. Without a leader the whole process turns into chaos, inefficient use of resources and a group may lose focus and direction. To minimize these difficulties, it is important to establish a clear work structure, delegate responsibilities, establish effective communication and get regular updates.

In the diagram (Fig. 3) the level of language proficiency of students at the beginning of the first semester is shown according to the results of the conducted speaking test in comparison with the data collected in the middle of the academic course. The number of students with B1 and B1+ levels has increased by 14% and 10%, respectively.

In general, the starting students' level of language proficiency was identified as A2–B1. After the experimental teaching the level of English proficiency was raised to B1–B1+ (Table 4). The comparative analysis of the given data was undertaken.

Based on the research results it becomes clear that CLL is a technology of interactions within groups that helps in language teaching and practice. This is the implementation in the study
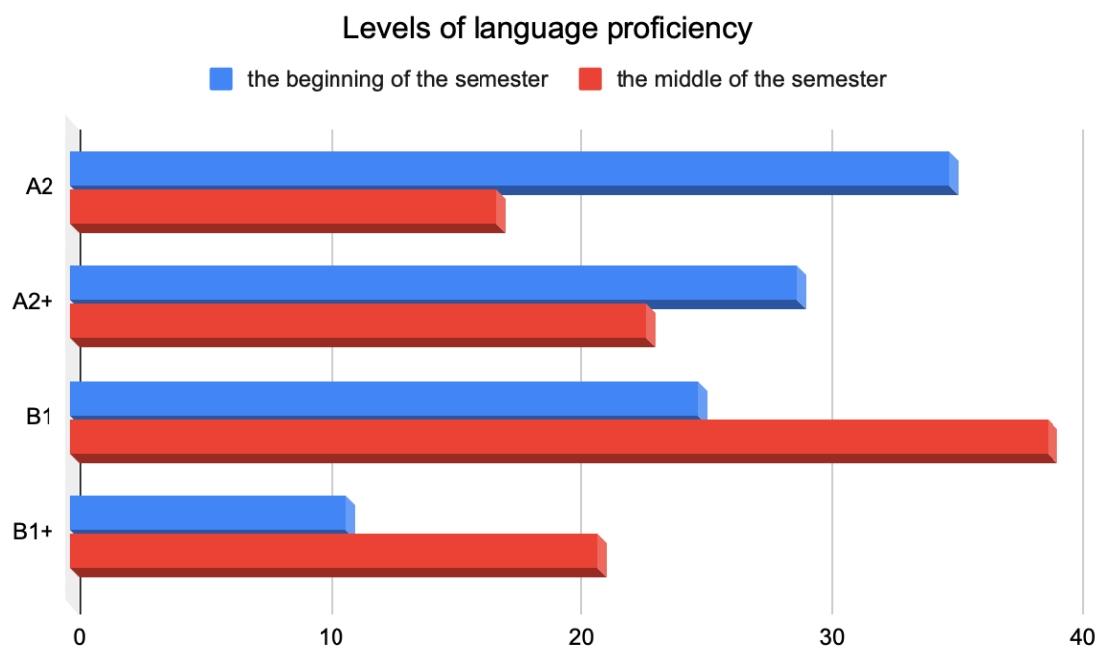
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Levels of language proficiency

Fig. 3. Levels of language proficiency

Table 4

Students' level of language proficiency

The starting students' level of language proficiency (CEFR)	The postexperimental students' level of language proficiency (CEFR)
A2–B1	B1–B1+

process of various motivation, modelling and evaluation units. The received results show that CLL technology for forming communicative competence is effective and has enhanced due to the following criteria: increasing language proficiency according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), motivation level and teamwork skills.

The theoretical value of the study lies in determining the possibility of using CLL technology in the context of studying English at the university to develop and improve the communicative competence of engineering students. The practical value of the research consists in the development of CLL technology for mastering communicative skills, including the proof of the effectiveness of its use in practice.

Conclusion

CLL is an innovative technology in higher education aimed to attract students and to raise their language proficiency. The research results are the following: CLL technology for the formation of students' communicative competence is developed, CLL peculiarities are identified, the students' expectations are evaluated, feedback

questionnaire is conducted, the initial and postexperimental teaching levels of English proficiency are assessed.

The use of CLL technology, based on edutainment, infotainment, gamification, case-study in digital storytelling, pitching and speating, leads to increased students' motivation to learn foreign languages, to develop social and personal interaction skills, to learn how to effectively plan and manage their study time and to become active participants in the learning process. It helps them interact with each other in an atmosphere of trust, support and mutual assistance. It has a positive impact on their success in the upcoming work with advanced technologies in an innovative environment to transform the engineering industry.

Taking into account the successful solution of the tasks set in the study by the authors and substantial conclusions on each of them, it can be stated that the goal of the presented study has been achieved. Further research and interventions are needed in this area to improve students' communicative competence in higher education.

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