

MOTIVATION TO LEARN ENGLISH IN THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION

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Аннотация: В этой статье рассматривается исследование, проведенное в 2016 году, целью которого было определить, какие факторы мотивируют студентов изучать английский язык в евангельской семинарии в Украине. В первое время после распада Советского Союза английский язык преподавали в недавно появившихся евангельских семинариях преимущественно для того, чтобы студенты могли работать с богословской литературой, которая в то время была недоступна на русском или украинском языках. Для сбора данных применялся разноплановый подход, который предусматривал использование таких методов, как письменный опрос и беседы в фокус-группах. Участниками эксперимента стали студенты второго курса музыкального факультета и студенты первого, второго и третьего курсов богословского факультета, которые записались на занятия по английскому языку. Результаты исследования позволили сделать вывод, что через двадцать пять лет мотивирующими факторами при изучении английского языка являются, в основном, желание общаться с иностранцами, путешествовать за границей и иметь высокооплачиваемую работу.

Ключевые слова: английский для богословов, мотивация, английский язык как иностранный, богословское образование, семинария.

Abstract: This study was designed to determine what factors motivate students to learn English at an evangelical seminary in Ukraine. After the fall of communism, English was mainly taught at newly formed evangelical seminaries in Ukraine to enable students to access theological resources in English that were not available in Russian or Ukrainian. A mixed-method approach involving a written attitudinal questionnaire and follow-up focus group interviews was employed to collect data. Participants in this study were second-year music ministry and first- to third-year theology students enrolled in English courses. The results of this study revealed that twenty-five years later seminary students are primarily motivated to learn English by the desire to communicate with foreigners, travel abroad and find employment.

Key words: Theological English, Motivation, EFL, Theological Education, Seminary

Introduction

Historically, English had been taught in Russian and Ukrainian seminaries because of founding partnerships with North American churches. Seventy years of communist rule that was oppressive toward Christians left a great gap in theological resources available in Russian or Ukrainian languages. It was not possible to get a theological education under communism, which is also why there were very few qualified nationals who could teach theology.¹ This resource gap resulted in a surge of North American missionaries and visiting professors traveling to Ukraine to make up the staffs of the newly formed seminaries being organized in the early 1990s. Now, more than two decades after communism, great strides have been made in the translation of foreign theological materials and there have also been significant contributions by local authors.² Moreover, seminaries across Ukraine are increasingly staffed by nationals who have had the opportunity to complete graduate studies abroad, with most staff and seminary leadership now being Ukrainian. Being an English teacher at a seminary in Ukraine, my biggest question was: is there still a need for teaching English at Ukrainian seminaries? And if so, is the main purpose for teaching English still to access theological resources in English?

In the fall of 2014, I was invited to a conference of a regional accrediting association, where dozens of seminary leaders from Ukraine and other former Soviet countries gathered. It was there, in Minsk, Belarus, that I began trying to discover what kind of needs there were for English in theological education. I was surprised by the answers. According to some of these seminary leaders, English no longer had great importance because there was already a sufficient amount of resources in Ukrainian and Russian for Ukrainians to study theology successfully and concerns were raised that many students emigrate to English-speaking countries after learning English in seminary. Others disagreed, feeling that resources were still lacking and that the only way to get a truly well-rounded theological education was to have access to English resources. Some felt English had greater importance in developing and maintaining North American church partnerships, while others felt English was more important to continue graduate studies abroad or to be able to get better paying jobs after seminary since most Christian ministers in the former USSR are not fully supported by the church and must work a full-time job to support their families. To my surprise, opinions varied widely on the need for English instruction in Ukrainian seminaries, although nearly everyone agreed there was a need to teach English.

Guiding Questions

My time at the conference in Minsk left me certain that there was a need for teaching English to Ukrainian seminary students and that it was not exclusively for accessing theological resources. However, I only had the perspective of seminary leaders. What

¹ G. Ryan, "An English program in a post-communist context," in *English Language Teaching in Theological Contexts*, ed. K. B. Purgason (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 2010), 53-55.

² L. Thorpe, "Preparing Students to Read Theology in English: Adapting a Standard Curriculum to an Intensive Modular Format," in *English Language Teaching in Theological Contexts*, ed. K. B. Purgason (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 2010), 57-66.

about the students? What factors relevant to theological education motivate Ukrainian seminary students to learn English? The purpose of this study was to discover what factors related to theological education motivate students to learn English at an evangelical seminary in Ukraine. In this article, the term *factors* refers to those reasons that influence one's motivation to learn English.

Literature review

L2 Motivational Research

Motivation is often thought of as the drive behind doing something. Dörnyei, Csizer, and Nemeth admitted that there is really no consensus on the definition of motivation but suggested “most researchers would agree that it concerns the direction and magnitude of human behavior, that is the choice of a particular action, the persistence with it, and the effort expended on it.”³ Pioneering motivational researcher Gardner defined motivation as “effort plus desire to achieve the goal of learning the language.”⁴ While there appears to be no agreed-upon definition, this study worked within the definition of motivation as the reasoning behind human actions, or, in language-learning terms, the rationale for learning a second language.

The L2 Motivational Self System

Dörnyei's L2 Motivational Self System was used as a framework for this study. The L2 Motivational Self System is made up of three components – the ideal L2 self, the ought-to L2 self, and L2 learning experience.⁵ The first component, the ideal L2 self, refers to the L2 speakers that learners would like to become such as an immigrant in an English-speaking country or a businessman engaged in international commerce. The ought-to L2 self involves qualities one ought to possess to meet expectations and avoid potentially negative outcomes. This could include learning English to satisfy the expectations of one's parents, get good grades, or meet educational requirements. The final component, L2 Learning Experience, has to do with the impact of the learning environment on motivation, such as the impact of the teacher, the curriculum, relationships with classmates, and comfort of the classroom.

Motivation for learning English in other seminary contexts

There have been several studies done on motivation in English for specific purposes (ESP) contexts, a category under which theological English would fall, but very little is known in general about motivation to learn English in theological education contexts, and even less about Ukrainian seminary contexts. With this in mind, I reviewed two

³ Z. Dörnyei, K. Csizer, & N. Nemeth, *Motivation, Language Attitudes and Globalisation: A Hungarian Perspective*, (Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, 2006), 9.

⁴ R. C. Gardner, *The role of attitudes and motivation. Social Psychology and Language Learning*. (London: Edward Arnold, 1985), 10.

⁵ Z. Dörnyei, “The L2 motivational self system,” in *Motivation, Language Identity and the L2 Self*, eds. Z. Dörnyei & E. Ushioda (Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, 2009), 9-42.

studies that touch on the subject of motivation in seminary contexts. Molavi and Biria examined the motivation of Iranian seminary students learning English⁶; Pierson studied the contribution of teaching English to theological education at a Romanian Bible institute.⁷

Molavi and Biria conducted a study on 50 intermediate Iranian male seminary students from various Islamic seminary schools. The purpose of their study was to determine, not what factors motivated English learning, but the factors that demotivated students learning English and the extent this demotivation affected overall achievement. They found that several factors led to the students' demotivation. These included: Ideal L2 Self factors such as lack of self-confidence and expectations of being sent to non-Anglophone countries for propagation of Islam; Ought-to L2 Self factors such as no use for English in theological study; L2 Learning environment factors such as expectations of the use of textbooks developed by westerners, boredom encountered in English class, and unpleasant English teachers. While the context of this study, having taken place in an Islamic seminary, would be expected to produce different results from those of a Christian evangelical seminary, this study did demonstrate the importance of measuring not only general motivational factors found in most motivational surveys, but also context-specific factors.

The other work of relevance to this study on motivation in a seminary context is Pierson's study on the contribution of English learning to theological education at a Bible institute in Romania. While not a true motivational study by design, the results draw close parallels to motivational research as part of the purpose of this study sought to determine how learning English was instrumental to students. Pierson's study revealed that the greatest contribution of learning English was the ability to read theological texts in English. This is a theme that is also prevalent in the history of English language learning in Ukrainian seminaries, which should not come as a surprise considering Pierson's study was completed more than 15 years ago, not long after the fall of communism, at a period when evangelical seminaries in post-Soviet eastern Europe were just getting started.

The Gap

While some research has been done related to motivation in various EFL language-learning situations, very little research has been done related to motivation for learning English in theological education contexts, and none specific to the Ukrainian context. This, along with the fact that very little is known about the current state of motivation to learn English in Ukrainian seminaries, gives credence to the necessity of doing a study to determine what those motivating factors are.

⁶ A. Molavi, & R. Biria, "EFL learning among motivated and demotivated Iranian seminary students," *Latin American Journal of Content & Language Integrated Learning* 6, no. 1, (2013): 55-66.

⁷ C. L. Pierson, *Contribution of Adult Christian and English-Language Education to a Society in the Process of Transformation: A Case Study of the Emmanuel Bible Institute, Oradea, Romania*, Available from Linguistics and Language Behavior Abstracts (LLBA). (85522409; 200100175).

The question I attempted to answer in this study is: What factors relevant to theological education motivate full-time theology and music ministry students to learn English at an evangelical seminary in Ukraine? In carrying out this study, I also tried to determine whether these factors differ from the traditional rationale for teaching English in Ukrainian seminaries (reading theological texts) so that implications may be drawn to produce curriculum that keeps students motivated to learn and meets the goals of the seminary, which are to increase the quality of students' theological education through access to resources in English, to enable students to continue graduate studies in theology abroad, and to grow students' potential for ministry through international partnerships and the confidence to travel and participate in cross-cultural missions.

Methodology

This study used an integrated approach called mixed methods research. As the main instrument of research, I used a questionnaire, which is a quantitative measurement, followed by focus group interviews, which are qualitative in nature, based on the results of the questionnaire. The integration of these two types of research measurements results in a methodology that is mixed. Using this type of method provides triangulation by using different methods to gather data that lead to the same research conclusions in order to enhance the reliability and validity of the information.⁸

Written Questionnaire

The main part of this study involved a written questionnaire, which followed the model of an in-person, self-administered questionnaire laid out in *Questionnaires in Second Language Research*.⁹ The first draft of the questionnaire was piloted with 12 seminary students at another evangelical seminary in the same city as that of the final survey. Alterations were made and a final version of the questionnaire was administered to 33 students at a Ukrainian evangelical seminary in 2016. These participants represented all students who were enrolled in English courses at the time of the study, which included first-through third-year theology and second-year music ministry majors. As shown in Table 1, there were seventeen male and sixteen female participants. Twenty-six participants were under the age of twenty-five, while seven participants were twenty-five or older. There was a total of 11 first-year, 13 second-year, and 8 third-year students who participated, with one participant who did not respond in this category. Twenty-five participants were theology majors while eight were music ministry majors. Seventeen participants studied English in school six years or less, seven studied English seven to nine years, and nine studied English ten to eleven years.

⁸ A. Mackey & S. Gass, *Second Language Research: Methodology and Design*, (New York: Routledge, 2005)

⁹ Z. Dörnyei, *Questionnaires in second language research: Construction, administration, and processing*, (Mahwah, N.J: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2010)

Table 1
Written Questionnaire Participant Demographics

Gender	
Male	17
Female	16
Age	
Under 25	26
25 or more	7
Year of study	
First	11
Second	13
Third	8
No response	1
Major	
Theology	25
Music Ministry	8
Years of English in school	
0-6 years	17
7-9 years	7
10-11 years	9
<i>N=33</i>	

The questionnaire included forty-three attitudinal items which corresponded to ten predetermined variables that relate to studying English in a Ukrainian seminary (see Table 2). Participants were asked to rate their level of agreement with each statement on a 6-point Likert scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree. These responses were then coded by assigning a positive number to affirmative responses (slightly agree = 1, agree = 2, strongly agree = 3) and negative numbers to negative responses (slightly disagree = -1, disagree = -2, strongly disagree = -3). In this manner, it was possible to determine the extent to which these ten pre-determined factors did or did not influence participants' motivation to learn English. A positive response indicates that a particular factor indeed motivates to some extent, while a negative response indicates that it is not a factor that motivates. It is not possible to say, in the case of a negative response, that the factor demotivates, but it can reveal the extent to which it is not a motivating factor. The higher the positive number, the more a factor has influence over the remaining factors. Likewise, the lower a negative number, the more that factor was not a motivator.

Table 2
Number of Questionnaire Items per Attitudinal Category

Category	Number of Items
Future employment	5
Emigrate to an English-speaking country	4
Travel abroad	4
Graduate studies abroad	4
Foreign missions	5
Reading theological texts	4
Writing academic papers in English	5
Communication with foreigners	4
Fulfillment of seminary requirements	4
Passing proficiency exams	4
Total items	43

Focus Groups

This study included two focus groups interviews, one with four theology students and one with three music ministry students. Pseudonyms are used for each participant in presenting focus group results. Participants were asked questions related to the questionnaire data in order to get a better understanding of the results. Table 3 shows a profile of the participants who participated in

Table 3
Profile of focus group participants

Focus Group with Theology Majors					
<u>Name</u>	<u>Gender</u>	<u>Age</u>	<u>Year of study</u>	<u>Level</u>	<u>Years of English in school</u>
Viktorija	Female	18	3 rd	Intermediate	11
Larisa	Female	20	2 nd	Pre-intermediate	10
Olga	Female	29	1 st	Pre-intermediate	a few
Petro	Male	30	1 st	Beginner	0
Focus Group with Music Ministry Majors					
<u>Name</u>	<u>Gender</u>	<u>Age</u>	<u>Year of study</u>	<u>Level</u>	<u>Years of English in school</u>
Vira	Female	n/a	2 nd	Elementary	9
Nikita	Male	n/a	2 nd	Beginner	7
Borys	Male	20	2 nd	Beginner	5

The focus groups. An attempt was made, as much as possible, to get a diverse representation from among the questionnaire participants.

Results

Written Questionnaire

In Figure 1 are displayed the data of all participants in the written questionnaire. These data show that future employment had the greatest influence on motivation to learn English. This factor was closely followed by communication with foreigners. “Going abroad” factors (i.e. travel abroad, graduate studies abroad, emigration to English-speaking countries, and foreign missions) were the next most motivating factors, all receiving more than one point. The four factors that were the least motivating factors or not motivating at all, having received scores of less than one point and even negative scores, could be termed “academic factors” (i.e. reading theological texts, passing proficiency exams, writing academically in English, and fulfillment of degree requirements.)

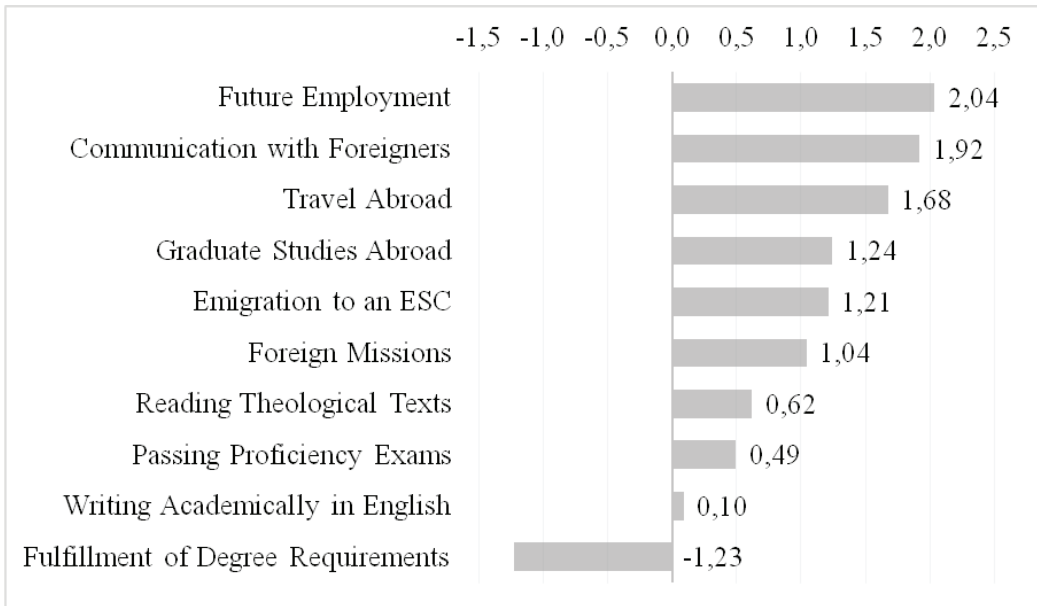


Figure 1. Questionnaire data from all participants showing level of agreement or disagreement with factors as motivators to learn English.

Some demographic breakdowns of the data show marked differences. Female participants were two times more likely to be motivated to learn English in order to emigrate to an English-speaking country. In the age demographic, travel abroad and foreign missions were greater motivating factors for participants under twenty-five years-old than for those who were twenty-five and older. For music ministry majors, reading theological texts and writing academically in English were non-factors, whereas

for theology majors they were factors that somewhat motivate. Emigration to a foreign country was an important motivator for first-year theology students, but this was less and less motivating for second- and third-year students, respectively. Also, reading theological texts and writing academically in English were considerably more important factors for second- and third-year theology students than for first-year students. Finally, those who had studied 10-11 years of English in school were notably more motivated to learn English due to “going abroad” factors (emigration to an ESC, foreign missions, graduate studies abroad, and travel abroad), than those who had nine or less years of English.

Focus Group

Before revealing some of the research data, focus group participants were asked first why they were learning English. The goal of this question was to determine, without interference of knowing the actual data, what students’ initial thoughts were, and whether these answers corroborated with the questionnaire results. While answers varied some, when pressed to narrow their responses to the single most important reason for learning English, nearly all participants agreed that communication with foreigners was the most important (see tables 4 and 5).

Table 4
The most important personal reason for learning English (Theology Majors)

<u>Name</u>	<u>Response</u>
Viktoria	Communication with foreigners and traveling
Larisa	Communication with foreigners
Olga	Communication with foreigners and traveling, teaching
Petro	Communication with foreigners

Table 5
The most important personal reason for learning English (Music Ministry Majors)

<u>Name</u>	<u>Response</u>
Vira	Conversation in English, study abroad
Nikita	Communication with foreigners, traveling as a missionary, finding a job abroad
Borys	Fulfilling seminary requirements, finding a job abroad

On reading theological texts, the main focus of English programs at seminaries for nearly three decades, students had varying opinions. Petro, a beginner-level student, responded, “First I need to learn how to talk, and then I can think about reading...” Viktoria, an intermediate-level student, thought that, of the list of ten motivating factors, reading theological texts would rank fifth in importance to her motivation to learn English. Larisa, a pre-intermediate-level student, on the other hand, considered reading theological

texts to be an important factor, because “there are not enough books in Russian to write essays and papers. It’s important to know English in order to read texts in their original language.” Olga, also pre-intermediate-level, agreed, adding, “it’s important to read in English because the knowledge that is contained in Western books is deeper and more scholarly than Russian ones, unfortunately.” Although theology students, generally, did not consider reading theological texts to be a major motivating factor, it still has some level of importance to some students.

One obvious pattern in the written questionnaire data was the emigration factor which seemed to be more of a factor for first-year theology students but was less of a factor for second-year students, and even less of a factor for third-year students. Viktoria thought this pattern could be due changes in students’ goals as a result of their continued education in seminary. She continued, “when people begin to understand their calling they become more committed to ministering in Ukraine or other countries. We often joke about becoming missionaries to the USA, but we understand that that is not our calling.”

Conclusions

The factors connected to theological education that most generally motivated students to learn English at a Ukrainian evangelical seminary were future employment, communication with foreigners, and travel abroad. For most demographics these factors were in the top three, while for some demographics at least one of these factors was included along with other factors such as reading theological texts and emigration to an English-speaking country (ESC) (see Table 6). Also, despite differences in nature between the theology and music ministry programs at the seminary, these three factors were the top factors for students in both programs. Of these factors, focus group interviews revealed that communication with foreigners was a major theme for both music ministry and theology students. This leads to the implication that of the top three factors that motivate students to learn English, communication with foreigners was most important to all students.

Table 6
Top three motivational factors by demographic

	1 st	2 nd	3 rd
<i>All participants</i>	Employment	Communication	Travel Abroad
<u>Gender</u>			
<i>Male</i>	Employment	Travel Abroad	Communication
<i>Female</i>	Communication	Employment	Travel Abroad
<u>Age</u>			
<i>Under 25</i>	Employment	Travel Abroad	Communication
<i>25 or more</i>	Communication	Employment	Grad. Studies Abroad
<u>Major</u>			

<i>Theology</i>	Employment	Communication	Travel Abroad
<i>Music Ministry</i>	Travel Abroad	Communication	Employment
<u>Year of study (Theology Majors)</u>			
<i>First</i>	Employment	Communication	Travel Abroad
<i>Second</i>	Grad. Studies Abroad	Reading Theol. Texts	Employment
<i>Third</i>	Employment	Communication	Reading Theol. Texts
<u>Years of English in school</u>			
<i>0-6 years</i>	Employment	Communication	Travel Abroad
<i>7-9 years</i>	Employment	Communication	Travel Abroad
<i>10-11 years</i>	Travel Abroad	Communication	Emigration to an ESC

Another important finding is that reading theological texts is not a major motivating factor for today's seminary students learning English. For all participants of this study generally, of the ten variables that were measured, this one was ranked seventh, with students only indicating very slight agreement with this variable as being a motivating factor. This suggests a notable shift from Pierson, who more than 15 years ago found that students at a Bible institute in neighboring Romania considered reading theological texts their greatest need for learning English. And while this factor may not be classifiable as a major motivator, the focus group interview with theology students showed that some of them still consider it to be a motivating factor for learning English, acknowledging the gap in resources that still exists in Russian and Ukrainian. Questionnaire data seem to confirm this, at least for second- and third-year theology students who are more aware of the need to use sources in English for their final research paper required to graduate. These students rated this factor in their top three motivating factors for learning English, however, this motivation seems to be more temporary in nature connected to the immediate need of completing their bachelor degree.

Implications on Theological Education

Given the nature of study at a theological institution with a lack of native-language resources, it is desirable for theology students to be able to access resources in English for theological research. The findings show that second- and third-year theology students considered this factor to be one of their top three motivators for learning English, however, overall, accessing theological texts was not a motivating factor. With this in mind, I recommend that reading theological texts should not be a major component for first-year English instruction, but should be incorporated with greater emphasis in second- and third-year instruction to theology students as they understand better their needs for theological research in later years.

One problem with the English program at this seminary in the past, however, has been the limited success of advancing students to a high enough level in English at which they had the competence necessary to do theological research in English. At the

time of this study, only one of the thirty-three students enrolled in English was at an intermediate level or higher and was capable of using English resources in a significant way in their studies. The same can be said of other factors like graduate studies abroad and passing proficiency exams. Since it is important for theological education institutions that students be able to access English resources to have a more well-rounded theological education, and that seminary graduates have the competence necessary to study further in graduate theology programs abroad, then we need to first focus on getting them to that level.

Petro, a first-year theology student in beginner-level English, put it best: when asked how important this factor was to him, he responded, “First I need to learn how to talk, and then I can think about reading...” I suggest the best way of getting students to that level is by focusing English instruction first on the areas that are more motivating to students like Petro, and then, as they reach greater competence, on reading theological texts. This means that the greater portion of our English program needs to be focused on the skills that they need to communicate effectively with foreigners, get a good job, and travel confidently abroad.

In light of this, some of the changes we are making at our seminary is to facilitate practical language learning experiences into the curriculum that put more focus on the communicative aspects of language learning. These assignments give students opportunities to learn about other cultures and to communicate authentically with native speakers of English and non-native speakers who use English as a lingua franca. These practical assignments so far have included a field trip to an American restaurant to simulate a situation when visiting another country, where students would be able to practice using English to negotiate meaning and order food off an English-only menu. Students also attend a local international church, where English is the mode of communication and the language in which services are conducted.

We are also developing an English conversation club on campus where students gather to play games, watch movies and hold discussions to practice communicating in English. We hold regular English language days, where from morning until evening, students and staff only speak English. In the future, we are hoping to organize one- to two-week English intensives on campus where students would have the opportunity to experience simulated second language immersion with the help of visiting native English-speaking volunteers. This idea takes a lot of time and effort to organize and realize, but for students, who have never traveled abroad, this could be potentially life-changing as they experience significant growth in their knowledge of English over a short period, gain confidence and recognize their language-learning potential.

Suggestions for Further Research

Students with 10-11 years of English in school were more motivated to learn English by the “going abroad” factors (see Figure 2). These students represented 27% of the written questionnaire sample. With it becoming standard to learn English starting in first grade, more and more emphasis is being put on English in Ukrainian grade schools. If this trend continues we can expect the proportion of students with 10-11 years of English in school

to rise along with the influence of these “going abroad” factors. However, due to the small sample in this study, more research would need to be done on a larger sample to determine if this is the case.

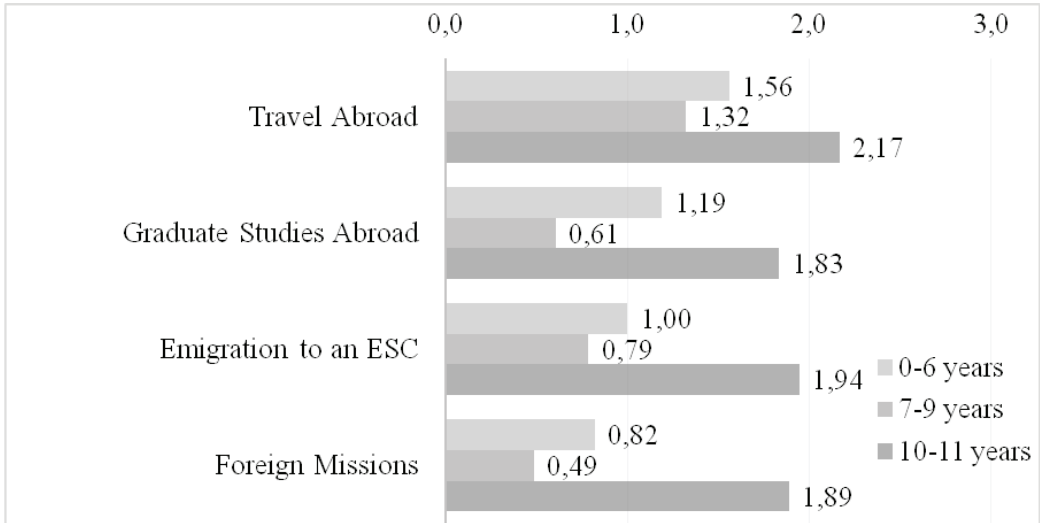


Figure 2. “Going Abroad” factors for all participants by years of English in school showing level of agreement with factors as motivators to learn English.

In another area for further research, the emigration to an English-speaking country factor motivated first-year theology students to learn English much more than second- and third-year students (see figure 3). It would appear that this motivation for learning English decreases the longer one studies in seminary. One focus group participant responded to this observation by explaining that this was most likely due to the influence of their education in seminary. Although this student’s response seems to confirm this conclusion, this study provided only a snapshot of participants’ feelings at one moment in time, therefore it is not possible to conclude that this is an actual trend. In order to determine the influence of seminary education on factors that motivate students to learn English, it would be necessary to repeat this study once a year with the same sample, preferably on a larger scale, over the whole course of their seminary education.

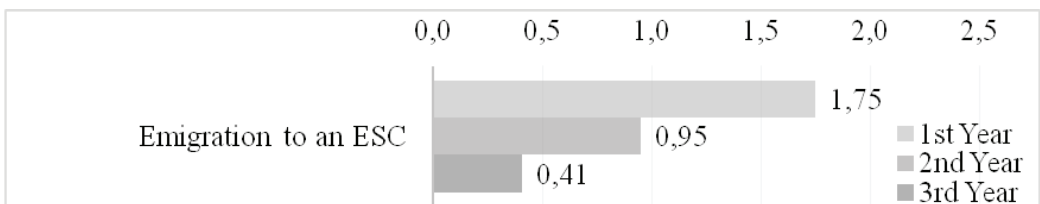


Figure 3. Comparison of 1st, 2nd and 3rd year students on emigration to an ESC factor.

Conclusion

I came to Ukraine with the understanding that teaching English to seminary students was mainly to give them access to theological resources in English. However, my conversations with various Ukrainian seminary leaders in 2014 left me with the feeling that this was no longer the main reason to teach English. This study gave me the data to turn that feeling into fact by revealing that several other factors played more important roles in motivating my students to learn English.

It is my hope that the results of this motivational study will transform the way we teach English at our seminary, and that by teaching English more effectively we will unlock the potential of our students to grow deeper in their knowledge of God and to prepare them for greater service in His Kingdom. I also hope it will inspire others to conduct further research on motivation for learning English at Ukrainian seminaries with the goal of increasing the effectiveness and usefulness of English language instruction at theological education institutions all across Ukraine.

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