USING CLIL IN TEACHING CHINESE STUDENTS ENROLLED IN RUSSIAN-TAUGHT ENGINEERING PROGRAMS AT A TECHNICAL UNIVERSITY

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Abstract: The growing globalization of higher education necessitates the development of specialized courses that address the unique cultural and educational needs of international students. This article describes the experience of teaching the course "Fundamentals of Architectural and Construction Design" to a group of students from the People's Republic of China studying technical disciplines at the National Research University "Moscow State University of Civil Engineering". It examines the challenges associated with developing courses in specialized subjects for Chinese students studying in Russian at Russian universities. A survey was conducted with 22 Chinese students to gather information about their needs and the difficulties they face while mastering the course "Fundamentals of Architectural and Construction Design". Factors influencing motivation were identified, and an assessment of language proficiency was carried out. The survey consisted of 10 questions with multiple-choice answers. The use of CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) technology is proposed to enhance both language proficiency and comprehension of technical subjects. The importance of adapting course content, educational materials and teaching methods is emphasized to improve academic and social integration for students. Scaffolding methods employed by the instructor can help overcome language barriers and enhance the learning experience for Chinese students in a multicultural educational environment.

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Introduction

The trend toward the internationalization of education has gained significant momentum in recent years, as universities seek to attract a diverse student body and prepare graduates for a globalized workforce. This movement is characterized by the development of tailor-made courses designed specifically for international students, addressing their unique needs and cultural backgrounds. For instance, institutions like Moscow National Research University of Civil Engineering (MGSU) offer specialized programs in engineering majors, which incorporate global perspectives and cross-cultural competencies. Similarly, other major universities in Russia provide customized pathways and support systems that facilitate the integration of international students into its academic community. Additionally, some universities, such as Tambov State Technical University (TSTU) offer International Foundation Programs to facilitate international students' transition into higher education by equipping them with essential academic skills, Russian language proficiency and cultural knowledge. Through these efforts, universities are not only enhancing their appeal to global learners but also enriching the educational experience for all students by fostering a multicultural learning environment.

In the increasingly globalized landscape of higher education, the number of international students choosing to study at Russian universities is steadily rising. This influx brings several advantages, including improved positions in global rankings and enhanced reputation among prospective students. However, the growing presence of international students also presents challenges for universities, particularly the need to provide customized courses that cater to their diverse needs.

Traditionally, universities provide courses in the local language, although some also offer programs in English. English Medium Instruction (EMI) and Content and Language Integrated Learning (**CLIL**) have emerged as two prominent approaches for teaching in a foreign language, particularly in non-native contexts. EMI primarily focuses on delivering academic content in English, catering for the needs of international students and fostering an English-speaking academic environment. In contrast, CLIL emphasizes the simultaneous development of both language skills and subject content knowledge, aiming to enhance students' proficiency in the target language alongside their understanding of specific disciplines. Numerous studies have explored the effectiveness and implications of these approaches, including research by Macaro (2018), examining the impact of EMI on student engagement and learning outcomes [1], Doiz (2006), focusing on linguistic demands of students and the need students may feel for some form of language assistance [2], Dalton-Puffer (2011) and Kim (2018), investigating the pedagogical practices within CLIL classrooms [3, 4]. Multiple studies highlight the diverse educational strategies employed in universities worldwide, shedding light on how EMI and CLIL can shape student experiences and academic success in an increasingly interconnected world [5 – 7].

Content and Language Integrated Learning is an educational approach where subjects are taught in a foreign language. This method aims to promote both language proficiency and subject knowledge simultaneously, creating

a more holistic learning experience. Content and Language Integrated Learning is widely used in various educational contexts around the world, especially in multilingual settings [4].

The term was introduced in the mid-1990s by D. Marsh. It is an umbrella term for the following approaches:

– CBI – Content-based instruction;
– CBLI – Content-based language instruction;
– CBLT – Content-based language teaching;
– Dual-focused language education;
– LAC – Languages across the curriculum;
– Immersion instruction;
– Bilingual education [8].

Teaching professional courses to international students presents a unique set of challenges and considerations. When designing such courses it is necessary to take into account a number of problems that educators and course designers might face with. To begin with, it is crucial to understand the cultural differences between Russian-speaking lecturers and international students. They can even result in misunderstanding or cultural clashes. Language barriers might also be an issue, especially when it comes to using specialized vocabulary and terminology. International students come from different countries and have diverse educational backgrounds, which might differ from those that domestic students have. This can be especially challenging when international and domestic students are enrolled in the same group and have to master the same course.

Despite their strong academic backgrounds, many Chinese students face significant challenges when studying in a foreign language environment. These challenges include navigating complex technical vocabulary in Russian, adapting to different pedagogical styles, and overcoming cultural barriers that may hinder their engagement and learning.

To mitigate these challenges, educators can employ scaffolding techniques – strategies designed to provide temporary support that enables students to achieve greater independence in their learning. Scaffolding is particularly crucial in CLIL contexts, where the dual focus on content and language can overwhelm learners without appropriate guidance [9].

This paper seeks to explore the scaffolding techniques that can be effectively utilized in teaching Chinese students in Russia, specifically within the CLIL framework. By identifying and analyzing these techniques, the research aims to provide educators with practical strategies that enhance both content understanding and language proficiency.

Thus, the central research question guiding this study is: "What scaffolding techniques can be used in teaching Chinese students in Russia?" This question aims to uncover effective methods that support these learners in navigating the complexities of their educational environment.

Materials and Methods

The study was conducted using a comprehensive survey targeting Chinese students enrolled in the "Fundamentals of Architectural and Construction Design" course. The primary objective of the survey was to gather

valuable insights into the students' academic goals, interests, and preferred learning methods. By understanding these factors, educators can tailor the curriculum to better meet the needs of the students.

Participant Selection

The participants for this survey were selected from a cohort of 22 students enrolled in the Civil Engineering major at Moscow State National Research University of Civil Engineering. All students were engaged in a course titled "Fundamentals of Architectural and Construction Design", which was conducted in Russian. The selection criteria ensured that all participants had relevant exposure to the course content, making them suitable respondents for the survey. The choice of this specific group allowed for focused insights into their experiences and perceptions regarding the course, particularly in the context of learning in a non-native language.

Survey Design

The survey was designed to gather quantitative data through 10 multiple-choice questions, aimed at understanding the students' goals, interests, preferences, challenges, and motivations related to the course. The use of Google Forms facilitated easy distribution and collection of responses, ensuring anonymity and encouraging honest feedback.

The survey intended to collect information about students' objectives, interests, preferred learning methods in the "Fundamentals of Architectural and Construction Design" course. Additionally, it aimed to identify challenges, the areas that could be enhanced, motivational influences, and evaluate language proficiency pertinent to the course.

Results and Discussion

CLIL vs. Russian-taught courses

CLIL is grounded in several key educational theories that enhance its effectiveness. One of the foundational theories is constructivism, which emphasizes the importance of students actively constructing their own understanding through experiences and interactions with both content and language. This approach encourages learners to engage deeply with the material, fostering a more personalized learning journey. Additionally, sociocultural theory plays a significant role in CLIL by highlighting the importance of social interaction in the learning process. This aligns perfectly with CLIL's focus on collaboration and communication among peers, as students often work together to explore and understand new concepts. Finally, task-based language learning (TBLL) is integral to CLIL, as it centers on the use of meaningful tasks that promote language use in context. This approach ensures that language learning is not just theoretical but is applied in practical situations, enhancing both language proficiency and content comprehension. Together, these theories create a robust framework that supports the dual goals of CLIL: content mastery and language acquisition [6 – 10].

CLIL and teaching professional courses in Russian (are both approaches to teaching in a second language, but they have distinct characteristics and goals.

Table 1

Comparison of CLIL and Teaching professional courses in Russian

Aspects	Content and Language Integrated Learning	Teaching professional courses in Russian
Focus	The primary aim is to teach both **content** (e.g., science, history) and **a foreign language** simultaneously. It emphasizes the integration of language learning with subject content.	The focus is on delivering **academic content** in a foreign language, often without a specific emphasis on language development. The primary goal is to teach the subject matter using a foreign language as the medium of instruction.
Language development	Language acquisition is an integral part of the learning process. Developing students' language skills alongside their understanding of the subject matter, often incorporating language objectives into lesson plans	While language proficiency is important, it does not typically prioritize language learning. Students are expected to already have a certain level of proficiency in a foreign language to engage with the content effectively
Curriculum design	Lessons are designed with both content and language objectives in mind. Teachers often use scaffolding techniques to support language development while teaching content	The curriculum is usually designed around the subject matter, with a foreign language serving as the medium of instruction. There may be less emphasis on adapting materials or teaching methods to support language learners
Learners	Often used in contexts where students are non-native speakers of the language of instruction, aiming to develop both content knowledge and language skills	Typically found in higher education institutions where the language of the country is used as the medium for international students, focusing primarily on delivering academic content
Teaching methodology	Employs interactive and communicative teaching methods that promote active engagement, collaboration, and critical thinking while learning both content and language	May rely more on traditional lecture-based methods, focusing primarily on content delivery, with less emphasis on interaction or language support
Assessment	Assessment often includes both content knowledge and language proficiency, evaluating students on their ability to use language in context	Assessment focuses primarily on content understanding, with less direct evaluation of language skills unless explicitly stated

While both CLIL and EMI involve teaching through a second language, CLIL places a stronger emphasis on integrating language learning with content knowledge, whereas EMI focuses primarily on delivering content in English without a specific focus on enhancing language skills.

Survey findings

The survey questions covered a range of important aspects regarding the experiences and needs of Chinese students studying at Moscow State University of Civil Engineering, particularly in the context of a course on "Fundamentals of Architectural and Construction Design. Below, we provide the findings of the survey.

The first question was about the learning objectives that the Chinese students have in studying the course. Understanding students' goals can provide insights into their motivations. The findings revealed a mix of personal and professional aspirations, which can guide curriculum adjustments.

As can be seen from the diagram (Fig. 1), 42.9 % of the surveyed want to obtain practical knowledge about architecture. Slightly more than 38% think that the course will prepare them for their future career, 19% hope to get practical design skills. Surprisingly, none of the respondents chose the options "developing critical thinking" and "boosting professional terminology".

The second question was about the topics that the students find the most relevant in the course. Identifying specific topics that resonate with students can help tailor the course content to better engage them. As can be seen from the diagram in Fig. 2, the findings were as follows: History of architecture (28.6 %), Design solutions of buildings and structures (23.8 %), Architectural solutions of buildings and structures (9.5 %), Methods of design and drawing development (38.0 %).
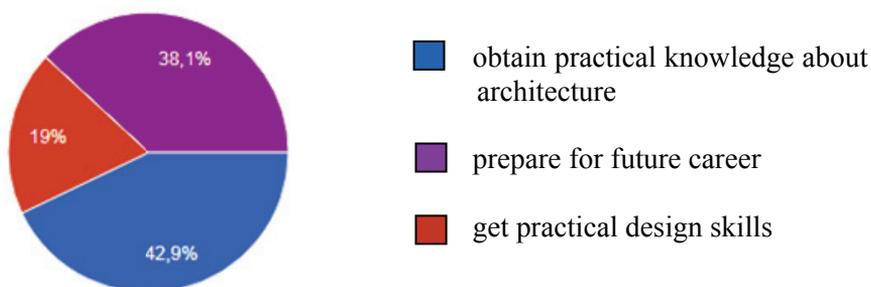

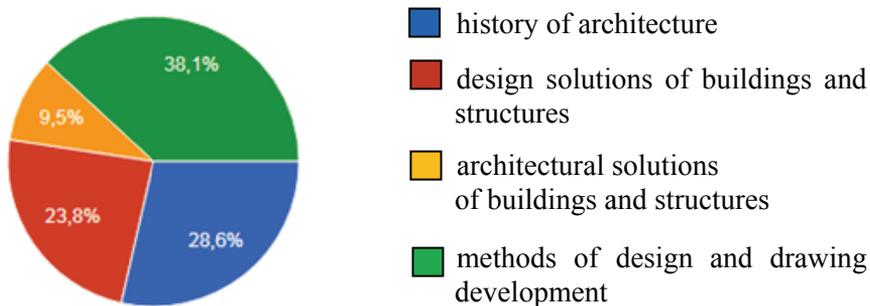**Fig. 1. Learning objectives in studying the course**

Fig. 2. Topics of interest

Obviously, since many students expressed interest in design and development of drawings, it could be emphasized in the syllabus.

Another question which is crucial for understanding how students learn best is the choice of the most preferred learning format. Preferences for lectures, hands-on projects, or online resources can inform teaching methods and course delivery, ensuring that it aligns with students' learning styles. The diagram in Fig. 3 shows that the Chinese students gave preferences to practical classes (38.1 %) and team hand-on projects (28.6 %), while lectures and online courses remained less favorable options selected by 19.0 and 14.3 % of the respondents, respectively. Nobody chose the option "one-to-one consultations". Presumably, Chinese students are not used to asking questions and clarifying concepts directly with their instructors. This can be explained by cultural factors. In some cases, students may feel hesitant to approach teachers due to traditional respect for authority or a belief that they should be able to solve problems independently. This can lead to a more independent study approach, particularly among younger students.

Knowing what resources students intend to use (textbooks, online platforms, peer collaboration) can help instructors recommend additional materials or create a resource hub that supports their learning. The diagram in Fig. 4 shows students' preferences in learning resources.

Interestingly, the majority of the respondents are likely to use textbooks and tutorials (52.4 %), software tools, e.g. NanoCAD (23.8 %), video classes and online tutorials (19.0 %). The least popular option was one-to-one consultations with a tutor (5.0 %). This can be explained by the fact that Chinese students tend to study independently.
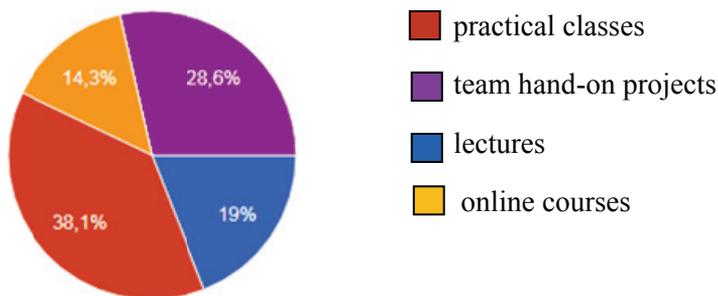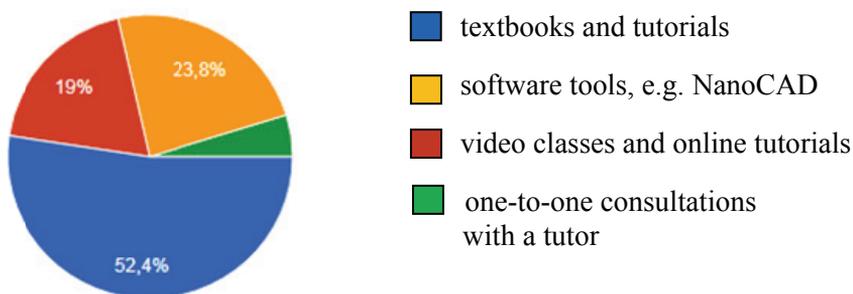

Fig. 3. Preferred learning format

Fig. 4. Study resources

The survey also included the question about skills that students seek to develop. The responses help to pinpoint what competencies students intend to gain.

As the diagram in Fig. 5 demonstrates, the overwhelming majority express the desire to improve technical drawing skills (85 %). The other two options – 'critical analysis of architectural projects' and 'teamwork and collaboration with colleagues' were chosen by 5.0 and 10.0 %, respectively. Obviously, these areas have to be prioritized in the curriculum.

The study revealed that only 15 % of the respondents had substantial experience in architecture or design, and 35 % of those surveyed had little experience, while 35 % had no experience, with 15 % expressing interest in studying the topic (Fig. 6).

Understanding students' backgrounds can help tailor instruction to different skill levels. Those with prior experience may benefit from advanced topics, while beginners might need more foundational support.

When designing a course, especially for international students, it is crucial to identify common challenges (language barriers, complex concepts, cultural differences) that can guide instructors in providing additional support, such as tutoring or supplementary materials. The survey revealed that 38.1 % of the respondents have the language barrier, 33.3 % of the surveyed have difficulty mastering the theoretical material and 28.6 % have problems with using design software (Fig. 7).

The study revealed the reasons behind low motivation of students. Almost half of the Chinese students (42.9 %) complained about the insufficient amount of practical examples; 33.3 % think that the course has complicated topics, 19.0 % of the respondents believe that the course has little practical value for the future career, 4.8 % complained about lack of assistance from the faculty (Fig. 8). Understanding the reasons is essential for addressing student engagement.
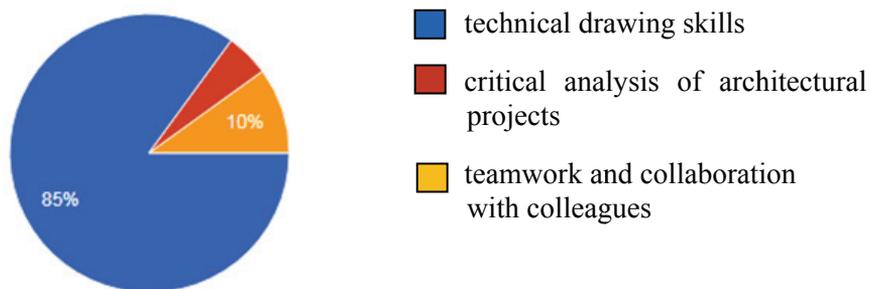

technical drawing skills

critical analysis of architectural projects

teamwork and collaboration with colleagues

Fig. 5. Skills development

substantial experience

little experience
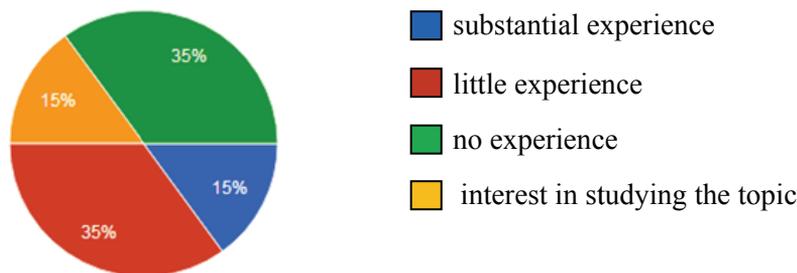
no experience

interest in studying the topic

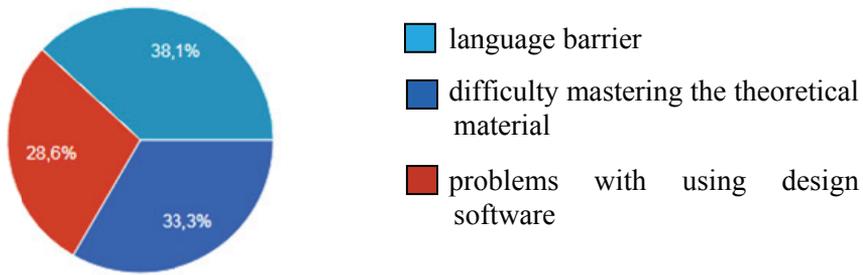**Fig. 6. Prior experience in architecture or design**

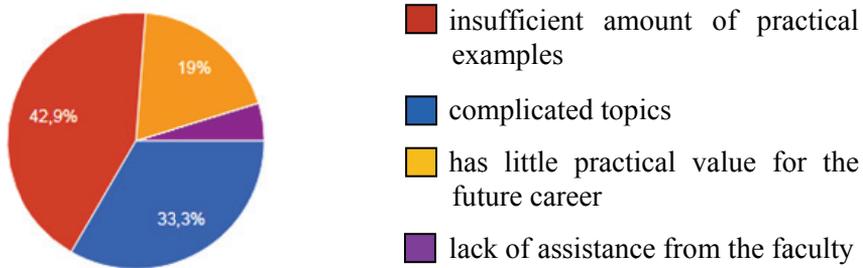**Fig. 7. Difficulties in studying the course**

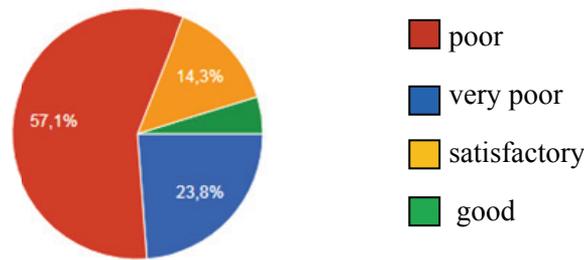**Fig. 8. Reasons for lack of motivation**

Fig. 9. Proficiency in Russian

Language proficiency is critical in a Russian university context. Unfortunately, more than half of the Chinese students (57.1 %) rated their level as poor, 23.8 % – very poor, 14.3 % – satisfactory, 4.8 % – good (Fig. 9). The responses revealed that additional language support is necessary; the course materials need simplification to accommodate varying levels of proficiency.

Overall, the survey findings provided valuable insights into the educational experience of Chinese students in a Russian university setting. A diverse range of prior experiences showed the necessity for differentiated instruction, and the need for more interactive and engaging learning formats. The main challenges are related to language barriers impacting comprehension and participation, complexity of theoretical learning materials and insufficient competency in software tools.

Scaffolding techniques in the CLIL classroom

The problems and challenges identified in the survey could be addressed through scaffolding techniques. In contemporary pedagogical literature, scaffolding is often viewed as a methodology that aims to provide support to

learners and maximize their abilities and skills. This is achieved through carefully structured pedagogical support from university instructors, which gradually diminishes to encourage greater independence in students' actions and decision-making and setting learning objectives [10]. It can be defined as a framework for educational activities in which the teacher facilitates the student's understanding of the material, aiding their progression from simple concepts to more complex ones [11, p. 52]. Therefore, a university educator, when implementing scaffolding techniques creates an environment conducive to students' self-realization and motivates them toward independence and self-confidence.

Bearing in mind the challenges that international students face when mastering a program in a local language, scaffolding techniques seem to be crucial in supporting Chinese students in Russian-taught engineering programs as they help bridge the gap between their existing knowledge and the new content being introduced.

Scaffolding techniques are aimed at providing language support, reducing cognitive load, building confidence, encouraging independence and promoting cultural exchange. The survey revealed that many Chinese students struggle with the Russian language, especially technical vocabulary. Scaffolding provides a framework that helps them understand complex concepts gradually. Scaffolding techniques break down complex information into manageable parts, reducing cognitive overload and allowing students to focus on understanding one concept at a time. By providing structured support, scaffolding helps students gain confidence in their abilities, encouraging them to engage more actively in their studies. As students become more comfortable with the material, scaffolding can be gradually removed, fostering independent learning and critical thinking skills. Scaffolding can also help students navigate cultural differences in educational practices, making it easier for them to adapt to a new academic environment.

Scaffolding techniques implemented in the "Fundamentals of Architectural and Construction Design" course included pre-teaching vocabulary, collaborative learning, structured notes and plans, and individual consultations. Each of these techniques facilitates the learning process and improves student engagement.

Pre-teaching vocabulary

Introducing terminology and specialized technical vocabulary helps improve the understanding of complex topics. Knowing key terminology will help students feel more confident, especially when dealing with complex material. Another way to make learning easier is to use visual aids such as diagrams, charts, and videos. This will help students with different learning styles to understand the material more easily and make complex ideas more accessible. Teachers will use these tools to promote understanding of the subject matter.

Collaborative learning

Collaborative learning plays an important role in student achievement, especially for those studying in a bilingual environment. Encouraging group work and pairing between Chinese students and Russian-speaking peers was a good solution to develop language support and deepen understanding through collaboration.

Structuring lectures

Providing structured notes or outlines during lectures helped students formulate their thoughts and follow the material. The materials were supplemented with culturally relevant examples and case studies to make the content more interesting for students from different backgrounds.

Individual consultations

To further support student learning, a one-on-one consultation program was introduced, providing additional help outside of regular classes. This helped to create an open environment where students could freely ask questions. In this way, teachers tried to create a more supportive and effective learning environment that met the specific needs and preferences of their students.

By doing this, educators tried to create a more supportive and effective learning environment that addresses the specific needs and preferences of their students.

Conclusion

The swift economic changes we have witnessed recently highlight the interconnectedness of nations and underscore the importance of effective communication across languages and cultures. The study revealed that in the CLIL classroom students develop subject-specific literacies in two languages, enabling them to explore tertiary studies and employment opportunities beyond their home countries. This can help them establish intercontinental networks much earlier than many of their peers in mainstream schools.

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Ключевые слова: предметно-языковое интегрированное обучение; методы скаффолдинга; проектирование курса; китайские студенты.

Аннотация: Растущая глобализация высшего образования обусловливает необходимость разработки специализированных курсов, учитывающих особые культурные и образовательные потребности иностранных студентов. Представлен опыт преподавания дисциплины «Основы архитектурно-строительного проектирования» группе студентов из КНР, обучающихся на технических направления подготовки в НИУ «Московский государственный строительный университет». Рассмотрены проблемы, связанные с разработкой курсов по профильным дисциплинам для китайских студентов, обучающихся на русском языке в российских университетах. Проведен опрос 22 китайских студентов в целях получения информации о потребностях и трудностях, с которыми сталкиваются студенты в ходе освоения дисциплины «Основы архитектурно-строительного проектирования». Выявлены факторы, влияющие на мотивацию, проведена оценка уровня владения языком. Опрос включал 10 вопросов с несколькими вариантами ответов. Предложено использование технологии CLIL (предметно-языкового интегрированного обучения) для повышения как уровня владения языком, так и усвоения содержания технических дисциплин. Отмечена важность адаптации содержания дисциплины, учебных материалов, методик преподавания в целях повышения академической и социальной интеграции студентов. Методы скаффолдинга, используемые преподавателем, могут помочь преодолеть языковой барьер и повысить качество обучения китайских студентов поликультурной образовательной среде.