

LATIN LANGUAGE IN PUBLIC HEALTH

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Abstract

“Basics in Latin” has been an obligatory study course for the Public health students in Riga Stradiņš University (Latvia) since the year 2015. The current research work is based on the students’ feed-back after the study course. Students’ motivation, their recommendations as well as the professor’s observations in the classroom were taken into consideration. Approximately 115 students have undergone and passed the study course “Basics in Latin” during these years (2015-2019). However, only 40% of them (46 students) filled in the questionnaire after completing the course and participated in the research. We have modernized the course and introduced e-tests. The teachers have other ideas about its future modernization. The beginning is a new text book with e-assignments, practical class and Independent tasks.

Key words: *public health, e-tests, e-assessment, basics in Latin, new approach*

1. INTRODUCTION

The Latin language has been an obligatory subject for the Public health students for at least 5 years. Before that time it was an optional course (B course) for the students of that program in our university. The reason to include this course into the obligatory courses (so called A courses) is that the study program is related with medicine, medical terminology and the students must study anatomy as well. We need to take into consideration the Public health definition and its basic aim: “Public Health is an empiric and multidisciplinary field whose goal is to assure conditions in which people can be healthy. While medicine mainly focuses on treating illness in separate individuals, it is the central goal of public health activities to increase health at the population level” Consequently, all the 1st year students of this study program have to study and pass the test in Latin at the end of the course. Starting from year 2020/2021 the students will get grades at the end of the course. At present, they complete the course by taking an online test for which they get a “pass” or “fail”. The duration of the course is 40 contact hours (one contact hour is 45 minutes long) and they get 3 ECTS points.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

Methods used in our investigation are direct observation during the classes, analyses of the questionnaires, which students must fill in after the course “Basics in Latin” (5 year time period: from the academic year 2014-2015).

The most important and at the same time the most difficult thing is the motivation of the students. During the first class we often ask the students to mention the reasons why they need to study the Latin language. Usually they say that it is important for the terminology, some students add that they will need it for their future studies, writing articles, presenting scientific works, yet some of them are not sure why they have to do it. We need to bear in mind that they are the first year students. I have been teaching Latin in this study program for more than 5 years and I know that in the first practical class they are not motivated enough to study it. The number of these students is not big. Usually I have 3-4 such comments from a group of 15-20 students.

At the end of the course the students understand the reason of learning the subject much better. Having analyzed the data in the questionnaire about the course (feedback at the end of the course) for five years, I have come across such comments like these: “I still don’t see the reason why I had to study Latin.” (1 comment from 25, year 2015), “I don’t think it will help me in my future studies” (1 comment from 23, year 2017). Therefore, such kinds of comments are not common. Basically, at the

end of the course at least 85-98 % of the students are satisfied with the course, its contents, duration, and test tasks. This year they have even mentioned that they liked the class where we compared Latin with the other languages we speak or know and we listened to the song “Jingle bells” in Latin.

As we have already mentioned, it is important and at the same time difficult to motivate the students. Our explanation why the course “Basics in Latin language” is included in the study program is the following:

1. Latin is not that dead as we might think. It opens the doors to the Romance languages, and professional medical English takes much from Latin as well. Therefore, we encourage the students to find out its relation with their native language (the course language is Latvian, the students know it very well, but their native tongue can be different).
2. We try to use examples from the professional literature (journals, books) where the students can see Latin terms.
3. We also remind the students that the course in Anatomy, which is obligatory as well, is related with Latin terms that we learn during the first part of the course (first 20 contact hours). We have also asked the anatomy professors to collaborate with us in selecting the terms they would need for anatomy classes.

Some of the students don't have a clear understanding about their future profession and their future needs. They cannot comprehend the relation between other subjects and Latin (sometimes the subjects where they need some Latin skills start later, in the second semester or next study years). We take this into consideration and try to help the students to be motivated.

As the time brings changes, the teachers of our university also started to introduce innovations into the studying process. Our department started to use online tests in Latin approximately 5 years ago. Firstly, we had prepared online tests for the Medicine and Rehabilitation study programs. Then, from the academic year 2017-2018 we also started to use computerized tests for the students in the Public health study program. It brought a new approach to the evaluation system. According to the rules and regulations of our university, the student must get at least 55% of correct answers to pass the online test. And if it is an exam, the lowest grade to pass is 4 out of 10 and the student gets it if he/she has 55 – 59 %.

We have introduced obligatory independent tasks available in the e-studies. They are meant to help the students to prepare themselves for the final test or exam. If they do these tasks well, they get up to 3 % for the study work totally.

The most of the students complete the obligatory independent tasks successfully. They are interested in the result that they get and ask for explanation of the mistakes. They do take these tasks as the possibility to prepare themselves for the test or/and to consolidate the specific theme that we have learned during the class. Almost 91% (30 from 33, academic year 2018/2019) of the students admit that they prefer to do home tasks online and don't mind having an online test at the end of the course. The rest of the respondents don't answer the question or explain that they have problems with the keyboards, computers etc. due to specific reasons (“I just like to use my computer”, “It takes me more time to type on the computer”, “I am afraid I make more mistakes, because I am thinking about the result and about the time limit”).

We have slightly changed the system of evaluation since the last year so that the students can understand better that the study work totally contains 3 different grades (the grades for the independent tasks, the first and the final tests). Most probably, the students cannot understand the reason of taking the first test (after completing anatomy terminology) and the importance of doing the Independent tasks. Therefore, some of them are surprised that the study work totally is not just the result of the last (final) test. We have introduced an additional explication about that in our e-studies. The resulting percentage of these 3 grades is the one that we take into consideration when we prepare the grading sheets; this is what the students need to understand precisely.

The first test's tasks have also been changed for some of them because the tasks were really too difficult. But they are used in other study programs (Medicine, Dentistry). As for anatomy terminology in Latin, we have found out that even if the students learn most of the terms in Latvian, they also need to know the terms in Latin. Their anatomy teacher agrees that they get better grades if they can also write the correct term in Latin. We have also examined the books, which the Public health students use in their Anatomy classes, and we have discovered that the most terms are in Latin as well. For example: ossa, membrum, organa interna, systema nervorum etc. Both parts of the book, the first one about the muscles and bones and the other one about the inner organs, also have an alphabetic list of words in Latin.

As an experiment we allowed the students to use the tables with the endings of the nouns and adjectives during the first test. We took into consideration the students' petition and as it was just a half-semester test, we considered it to be acceptable. This year we have had two groups of the students in the Public health program. Surprisingly, the results of the first group were quite bad: 4 fails (out of 16 students). In the second group we had one student who did not show and no fails at all. The conclusion we have come to was as follows: most probably, the schedule for the students of that group was better, they could come more relaxed and prepared, and the reason why the students failed could be their individual problems. We can think so, because the students of the second group had two Latin classes a week for two weeks, while the other group always had just one class of Latin a week. The second try for the students who had failed the test for the first time was successful. It can also mean that the students just needed more time and effort to prepare for the test.

According to the data of students' questionnaires, they like the second part of the studies better. Some students say that it is easier to form clinical terms, some think that they will need the clinical part more in the future. The reason for this is that the names of certain medical professions come from this part and the students are familiar with them. Examples: nephrologist (nefrologs in Latvian) comes from a Greek synonym for Latin "ren" - kidney, gynecologist (ginekologs in Latvian) also comes from the Greek word "femina" - woman etc. Perhaps, they have also heard terms like bronchographia - bronchography, cardiologia - cardiology etc. As we deal with the Public health program students, we also pay special attention to the terms related with the infectious diseases. We have found out that in the Abstracts of different scientific conferences on public health and rehabilitation there are many clinical terms which we use in our course. For example: vasectomy (vasectomia), colitis, enteritis, laryngitis, pharyngitis etc.

The student centered approach is a very important part of our university's politics, and we base our teaching on it as well. Therefore, we have started work on a new book during this study year. Firstly, we have prepared some new exercises on the formation of Latin terms containing nouns and adjectives, Later, we have also added new general Latin nouns, adjectives and exercises with the verbs "esse" (to be) and "habere" (to have). The nouns were carefully selected so that students could understand the relation between the Latin language and other languages they speak. We have worked on this part for several years. Actually, it is collaboration between the Latin teacher and the students. During approximately three years the students were asked to prepare a home task: choose 5 Latin words and write them in their native tongue, then translate them into 2-3 other languages they speak and answer the question if these words are alike. Thus, we just needed to work with the material that we have gathered. We acknowledge that it is important for the students' motivation to see the relation between their daily life, other study subjects and Latin. We also pay their attention to the places in Riga where we can see inscriptions in Latin like Anno Domini, In concordia res parvae crescent, etc. Moreover, the students have asked to add some self-checking tests. We have done them, so that the students could check themselves after each theme of the book: nouns, adjectives, verbs, prepositions, clinical terminology. The thematic plan of the course has been changed according to the newest version of the book.

3. RESULTS

During the corona virus crisis we have already reorganized our work so that the complete course content is available in the e- studies. We use Moodle program as well as other sources proposed by our IT specialists to make the study work more efficient. First of all, these are presentations, exercises with keys, video classes. In the future it can help us to coordinate the study process better, more understandable for the students and also for those students who cannot attend the classes for any reason. The new e- study materials should always keep them up- to-date. It can also save the teacher's and student's time because the students can easily get back to the part they don't understand so well and repeat it by themselves.

4. DISCUSSION

The study course "Basics in Latin" for the Public health students has been changed according to the recent requirements. We have taken into consideration the needs of the students, the anatomy teachers' recommendations and methods of distant working.

We will continue collaborating with the anatomy professors in order to introduce new changes into the content of our subject. New terms and/ or parts of material can be inserted in the e-studies.

We also understand the importance of the feedback from the students. Unfortunately, not all of them fill in questionnaire after the end of the course. However, the number of respondents has increased since the year when "Basics in Latin" became an obligatory subject. We can see this from the table below (see the appendix). On the other hand, we can also see that with the changes we started to introduce since the year 2017, the number of satisfied students has increased. The students are also more satisfied with the class e-assignments and class e-tasks and they appreciate the possibility to see the result immediately after their test. We can encourage each student to fill in the questionnaire, but it is still his or her free will. In our course description we stated that the student should fill in the questionnaire after completing the course.

We still work on students' better motivation to learn Latin. It took us a lot of effort and time to prepare a list of general Latin vocabulary for the students to understand that Latin helps them to improve their knowledge of modern languages and comprehend professional literature.

We can also mention the difference between the students of Medicine, Dentistry, Pharmacy, Rehabilitation and the Public health students relating to learning Latin. Usually, the Public health students consider that they don't need Latin to such an extent that the students from other faculties need.

CONCLUSIONS

1. Latin is also important for the study program "Public health".
2. The online end- of course and self-checking tests are up-to-date and a good way to check the students' knowledge.
3. The study program should be changed and modernized according to the student centered approach.
4. We need to be flexible as to the contents of the course.
5. It is very important to cooperate with the professors of other study courses, in case of Latin, these are anatomy teachers.

REFERENCES

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APPENDIX

Year	Field in questionnaires (%)	Satisfied students (%)
2015	30 %	75%
2016	33%	80%
2017	45%	85%
2018	50%	90%
2019	56%	99%

Table 1. Relation between the introduced changes and satisfied students

Main contents of the course “Basics in Latin” for the Public health students:

1. Introduction to the course. Latin alphabet. Phonetics.
2. Morphology of words. Syllabus, short and long syllables, accent. Structure of the anatomy terms.
3. Overview of the Noun, its' declensions, N., G. singular and plural forms of the noun.
4. Structure of the anatomy terms – dependent genitive.
5. Formation of the anatomy terms with the dependent genitive.
6. Overview of the Adjective. Comparative degrees of Adjectives. Anatomy terms with adjectives, formation of such terms, their translation and analysis.
7. Structure of the anatomy terms – agreement of adjective with the noun.
8. Formation of the medical terms containing nouns and adjectives
9. Formation of the adjectives; their endings and suffixes.
10. Revision before the test.
11. Test on anatomy terminology.
12. Overview of the 1st declension nouns. Prepositions with the accusative and ablative case. Latin proverbs.
13. Clinical terms, their structure and formation, analysis, explication. I declension nouns and their Greek synonyms.
14. II declension nouns of masculine gender. Clinical terms. Latin-Greek synonyms.
15. II declension nouns of neuter gender. Clinical terms. Latin-Greek synonyms.
16. I group of adjectives. Clinical terms with adjectives. Latin-Greek synonyms of the adjectives.
17. Overview of the III declension nouns. III declension nouns of masculine gender. Clinical terms, Latin-Greek synonyms.
18. III declension nouns of feminine gender. Clinical terms, Latin-Greek synonyms.
19. III declension nouns of neuter gender. Clinical Terms, Latin- Greek synonyms. Clinical terms, revision. Information about the “Gaudeamus”.
20. Test, clinical terms.