

# Design-Thinking as a Motivating Tool to Learn a Foreign Language in Economics Universities

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## ABSTRACT

The article describes the process of using design-thinking in managing teaching foreign languages in economics universities. The author explains the purpose and principle of this method, describes its specific stages and a possible algorithm for applying its tools to motivate students to learn a foreign language and increase effectiveness of educational programmes.

**KEYWORDS:** design-thinking; foreign languages; effective educational formats; empathy map; customer journey map.

## INTRODUCTION

In the modern world, the term “design thinking” is heard quite often and is used in almost any field: in business, in creativity, in education and even in everyday life. The term “design thinking” was first used in 1969 by Herbert Simon, an American scientist in the field of social, political and economic sciences, in the book “The Sciences of the Artificial” [Simon, 2004].

Since then, this concept has actively developed, and today there are many definitions of this term. In this article, we follow the definition of Tim Brown, CEO of IDEO, a leading consulting company promoting the principles of design thinking, who interprets it as “a human-centered approach to designing innovative solutions. It is based on the tools used by designers and is used to integrate the needs of people, business needs and technological capabilities” [IDEO URL].

The design thinking process is a set of specific stages, the number and names of which may differ slightly from each other in different schools teaching this method. In this article we will use the classic algorithm developed by specialists at the Stanford design school d.school, which includes six stages of design thinking:

- empathy
- focusing
- generation of ideas
- choice of idea
- prototyping
- testing
- storytelling

[D.school Design Thinking Guide URL].

Following this scheme, researchers have the opportunity to look at an existing problem from a different angle, collect ideas and proposals for solving it from team members, then narrow the focus and select a priority

idea that will be subjected to careful testing and testing in practice, and subsequently refined through repeated repetition.

Let us briefly describe each of the stages.

1. Empathy – studying the user with the aim of maximizing immersion in the problem area and user experience.

2. Focusing – processing information about people’s lives and identifying a problem in order to set a specific task for solution.

3. Generation of ideas – proposing ideas to solve an identified problem. The main tool at this stage is brainstorming, during which team members productively communicate with each other, put forward and develop their ideas.

4. Idea selection – analysis and selection of original, promising and viable ideas.

5. Prototyping – creating models (prototypes) for testing the solutions found. Prototypes can be a variety of means and materials: a drawing, a model made of cardboard and tape, a design made from Lego elements, a craft made from plasticine, furniture elements, a role-playing game or a scenario. The main task is to test the idea and gain initial user experience. As a rule, in the process of creating prototypes, new ideas appear and/or previously proposed ones are refined.

7. Testing – receiving feedback from users on proposed solutions, i.e. checking whether the idea works as intended and whether the user gets the expected experience.

8. Storytelling – conclusions from testing, obtaining results and evaluating them.

In the process of design thinking, the team follows the principle “Look - Think - Do”, which is the basis of any design thinking session, allows you to go beyond the established stereotypes and usual solutions and start thinking “outside the box” (thinking outside the box). ). It is important to remember that the stages must be carried out exactly in the above sequence; you cannot move on to the next stage until the previous one is completed. For example, before proceeding to the generation of ideas (second stage), it is necessary that all session participants have the same understanding of the task at hand.

The following question arises: is it possible to apply design thinking to improve the learning process and increase students’ motivation to learn foreign languages? And, if this is possible, then how to do it?

Design thinking as a tool for increasing students’ interest in learning foreign language communication

So, is it possible to use design thinking to improve the learning process and increase students' motivation to learn foreign languages? The answer will certainly be positive, since design thinking tools, when used correctly, allow you to create original and effective educational formats. Design thinking is always aimed at the user, in our case, a student studying a foreign language. Let's consider a possible algorithm for using design thinking tools to solve the problems.

At the first stage of design thinking (empathy), the simplest and most effective tools can be observation, conducting in-depth interviews and the “other people’s moccasins” method, in which the researcher puts himself in the place of the user (student). Before proceeding to this stage, it is necessary to determine the composition of the research team (they can be teachers, department methodological, members of the student council and other participants in the educational process).

At the stage of empathy, members of the research team can carry out the following activities: study and record data on the behavior of students during classes, exams, competitions, etc., conduct detailed interviews with students, try on the role of students, visiting classes of colleagues as students.

All research results need to be processed and a problem formulated that will be solved by a group of design thinkers (focusing stage): it is important to choose the most valuable and record the results for subsequent group work. In this aspect, design thinking uses templates, for example, an empathy map and a customer journey map (CJM), which reflect all the identified insights or insights leading to an understanding of the task and “unexpectedly” finding its solution. It is important to preserve all received information in an undistorted form, so usually all received data is stored in the form of quotes from respondents.

Let us give an example of a possible empathy map for a student studying English as part of obtaining higher education at an economics university, with the qualification “Bachelor” (see Fig. 1).

Rice. 1. Map of empathy of a student studying English as part of higher education at an economics university;

qualification "Bachelor" (example).

It is advisable to supplement the empathy map with a profile of the respondent, which can include the following characteristics: age/gender of the student, course/group, level of language proficiency, period of language study, etc.

The student journey map, another tool used in the focus phase, is used to describe the scenario in which student learning occurs. It must be borne in mind that the student’s journey begins even before he arrives for his first lesson, for example, by visiting an open day, studying the website of an educational institution, submitting an application to a university, etc. Each step of the user’s journey has emotional connotation: negative (real experience is worse than expected), neutral (real experience matches expectations) or positive (real experience exceeds expectations).

All user responses are included in the journey map as citations. Here are examples of possible quotes from students at different stages of their journey.

First lesson:

- “The textbooks are all modern, interesting, some are authentic!”
- “Let’s study business right away! Cool!”
- “In general, everything is fine, but the classes are a bit boring”
- “There are a lot of new terms, it’s difficult.”

Subsequent classes: (month/semester/year, etc.)

- “A lot of general English”
- “Various formats of extracurricular activities, you can take part in interesting events”
- “As we were warned, they take attendance and have to go to class.”

Test/exam:

- “We have to learn a lot of vocabulary”
- “Assessments are not given automatically”
- “The format of the exams is new, it’s not at all similar to what we took at school, it’s difficult to adapt.”

A student’s journey map helps to find pain points that arise during the learning process, to reveal the discrepancy between the user’s intuitive understanding and expectations and his actual experience of studying a foreign language at a university. Each gap found is a new opportunity to improve the educational process.

The work done at these stages helps formulate the work task, often identifying problems that are not obvious, but very significant for users. For example, it may turn out that student respondents are not interested in learning a foreign language because they do not intend to use it in the future. Then the specific task can be

formulated as follows: “How to simply and clearly explain to students why knowledge of a foreign language is of great importance in the life of every modern person.”

Ways to solve the problem are formulated and discussed at the idea generation stage, which usually takes place in a “brainstorming” format, during which participants answer the question: “How can we help the respondent?” All session participants should be involved in the discussion process, interact as a team, listen and complement each other’s suggestions, but in no case criticize.

The research team then moves on to the idea selection stage, where the selected ideas can be combined if they are compatible. The version selected for further implementation must meet the following conditions: be interesting/useful for business (institute), meet the needs of students, be implementable.

After choosing an idea, the team moves on to the prototyping stage and creates a prototype of the idea proposed for implementation, for example, a prototype of a mobile application for communication between students and teachers, or a plan of motivating events, new elements or types of extracurricular work, etc. During creation To create a prototype, you must adhere to the following rules: do not spend a lot of time and resources on creating a prototype, do not become emotionally attached to it, keep the user in mind, ask questions: What do we want to check with the user? What behavior do we expect from him?

After creating a prototype, it’s time for the next stage of design thinking – testing, during which the prototype is tested in practice. It is important to create a testing script, involve users, give them complete freedom, not help, not comment, but give them a time limit. After the test, feedback information must be obtained to further improve the prototype.

The result of a design thinking session of six stages is the seventh - storytelling, within which a team of researchers records the answers to the following questions: What was the problem? How did you set the task? What are the brightest ideas? A description of the prototype is given, conclusions from testing are given, and the results are evaluated.

Conclusion. Thus, we can conclude that the use of the design thinking method to improve the process of teaching foreign languages in economic universities can give a serious impetus to the development of applied teaching methods, increase students’ interest in quality language learning, since these changes will be the answer to their fears, pains and needs. However, it is worth noting that, despite the high potential effectiveness of using design thinking tools in education, before using it, it is necessary to train the members of the future research team, prepare them for an open and unbiased perception of incoming information and a positive attitude towards possible mistakes and failures. Then their work will ultimately yield a sustainable product, which in the context of education implies new effective teaching techniques that make the learning process more interesting, useful, deeper and more effective.

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