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ESP TEACHING AT THE INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN MODERN RUSSIA: PROBLEMS AND PERSPECTIVES

Abstract

The author analyses ESP teaching at the institutions of higher education in modern Russia, explains the main problems and suggests the ways of their solving, details the quality control system of the students' progress improvement, presents the complex approach to interactive ESP teaching and views it as an integral part of up-to-date interdisciplinary training.

Reforming Russian higher education system in accordance with the main postulates of Bologna process is in the spotlight of Russian higher education modernization. European integration as well as labor market internationalization leads to unification of demands to graduates' qualifications in the territory of different European countries.

Concepts of the education system of the Russian Federation evolve. The third generation standards of education help to include our country into the unified educational European space.

At present in Russia there exist two educational paradigms: the Russian one and the Bologna one [3, p. 344]. They can be described as following:

- 1) traditional Russian qualifications (specialists – postgraduates and PhDs – Doctors) – frame of reference of the Bologna process (Bachelors – Masters – Doctors);
- 2) subject-oriented approach – module-oriented approach to curriculum development;
- 3) approach «knowledge – abilities – skills» – competence approach to assessing students' progress;
- 4) National Government education standards – qualification standards valid for the whole Europe;
- 5) academic activity within one higher educational institution, region, state – academic mobility of students and lecturers;
- 6) introduction of the one performance assessing system (courses, curricula, lecturers' workload) in the terms of units clear for both students and lecturers;
- 7) compulsory subjects – individual curriculum modeling etc.

Thus the notion “higher education” is becoming broader due to modernization.

Higher educational institutions in Russia compete to each other, the competition being tough because of the labor market underdevelopment, lack of investments and the forecasted decrease of the potential students' number in connection with demographic problems.

Competitiveness of the higher educational institution depends on the quality of education, which must satisfy the target audience's demands in intellectual, cultural

and moral development, i.e. knowledge base and professional and social skills base forming harmonious personality.

Development, implementation and maintenance of the education quality management system become the necessary conditions for successful survival of a higher educational institution. Quality is viewed as the degree of correspondence of the actual characteristics to the norms demands.

Quality control system of a higher educational institution throughout the world is based on the process-oriented approach. Process means the interconnected activities, transforming inputs into outputs. Thus, managing processes guarantees forecasted quality, from recruiting applicants to their successful employment after graduating from the higher educational institution.

We can apply PDCA (Plan-Do-Check-Act) cycle to all the processes.

The role of the higher educational institution means the following:

- a. assess and satisfy the needs and expectations of the target audience and the stakeholders (higher education employees, undergraduates, their parents, employers, society as a whole);
- b. maintain and improve the higher education institution work.

We single out the four principles of quality management at the higher educational institution:

- meeting the target audience needs (employers' and undergraduates' needs);
- process-oriented approach;
- system approach;
- mutually beneficial relations with the partners.

The main processes are planning of the educational activity, provision of education services, research.

Planning of the educational activity means development of curriculum, instruction books, progress monitoring (rate system, current and final progress testing). This process is implemented by the department of foreign languages of the Balakovo branch of the Russian Presidential Academy of the National Economy and Public Administration at the high level. The department published several instruction books for students, developed rate system monitoring the students' progress, compiled different kinds of tests and exercises for grammar, vocabulary and comprehension check.

Services provision process comprises applicants' recruitment, undergraduates teaching, and further education provision.

Research process means students' and lecturers' research work, taking part in the conferences, publication of abstracts and articles. Students make reports at the conferences of different levels: municipal, regional, national, international; take part in the students' exchange programs.

Additional processes of the higher educational institutions are resources management, personnel management, engineering management. Resources management presupposes instruction books and audio-visual aids availability. It's necessary to note that authentic instruction books are necessary for EFL and ESP teaching. We use Oxford University Press and Cambridge University Press manuals and instruction books comprising authentic texts in English.

Personnel management means upgrade courses for the lecturers according to the certain schedule. ESP teachers often attend upgrade courses organized by the

leading higher educational institutions, take part in trainings and internships thus improving their skill base.

Engineering management means ICT availability. There are two computer classes in our branch, all the students and lecturers have Internet access and can use Internet resources for learning.

ESP teaching presupposes working with adult students (according to the Bachelors' curriculum special courses and faculties in English language are scheduled for the second and the third years of studies). Working with the adult target audience means continuous use of the personality resources of the grown-ups.

Thus, some researchers (D. B. Nikulicheva and others) suggest using cognitive potential of the grammatical system of the foreign language as the model of linguistic self-understanding and verbal self-manifestation of a person in the world [1, p. 310].

Researchers base their conclusions on the fundamental perception of the child's ontogenesis impossible without language and speech practice. ESP study done by a grown-up, according to their opinion, has to solve the similar problem – to form the personality capable to communicate in the foreign language. This helps to achieve spontaneous fluency and authenticity of speech practice. Still it's necessary to note that aspiration to reconstruct child's speech development and growth during the process of teaching adults becomes a kind of simulation.

Lecturers practicing communicative methods of ESP teaching are often reproached for infantilizing the education process due to ignoring cognitive potential of the grown-ups. The goal of the D. B. Nikulicheva's method is to reconstruct such a mode of communication in a foreign language that could help to simulate intensive going through the process of personality development from the baby talk stage to verbal realizing of self-presentation, describing one's aims, values and abilities by means of a foreign language.

It's necessary to recollect and reconstruct emotions of a child who wants to tell something important to the people who are close to him. Then there begins training of prosodic and articulation patterns of the foreign language in the mode of acoustic imitation.

After that the prosodic patterns are filled with the linguistic content presented by wide range of vocabulary variants. At this step the dialogs are implemented, they are reproduced by the students according to the norms of speech fluency and intonation patterns rules. Communication process becomes close to natural one because it comprises relevant content for each person providing discussion of his typical locations, activities, traits, goals and values.

Some grammar rules and structure patterns are being learnt, they are associated with some cognitive models, characteristic of different levels of personality linguistic development.

Later there appear other tasks: precise meaning expression, grammatical, stylistic and pragmatic correctness of speech, denoting different notions by the variety of different linguistic means, capability to use terminology and idioms, fluency and spontaneous character of speech.

Much attention is paid to the development of conversational skills and error correction.

According to the opinion of J. A. Komarova a certain stereotype about structure of general and specific abilities to foreign language learning is already set.

Individual differences in abilities and talents are described by such parameters as:

- 1) synchronism – lack of simultaneity;
- 2) analytical way of thinking – synthetic way of thinking;
- 3) self-regulation – active position;
- 4) consistency – impulsiveness;
- 5) abstract way of thinking – precise way of thinking;
- 6) logicity – integrated perception;
- 7) grasp of the whole phenomena – spatial thinking etc.

Forms of activity of the people having different strategies of ESP learning are determined by a certain set of innate abilities, this makes individual characteristics very stable.

For example, such innate factors can be as following: nervous system specifics, cerebral hemispheres interconnection, the leading type of analyzer and so on.

Researchers studying adult audience, singled out several types of language mastering:

- 1) communicative speech-oriented, cognitive linguistic and the mixed one (communicative linguistic);
- 2) extroverted and introverted;
- 3) impulsive and reflexive etc.

The above mentioned types make it possible to classify educational activity in accordance with three basic programs of differentiation:

- 1) according to the level of linguistic talent and abilities;
- 2) according to the level of knowledge and skill base;
- 3) according to the personality type and social status as well as outlook, external or internal motivation, sphere of interests and aspirations, communicative culture of the students.

Each program of differentiation presupposes highlighting certain aspect of the ESP learning depending on each category of students. Specialists in linguo-didactics pay special attention to terminology recognizing that special vocabulary is subdivided into two layers differentiated by stylistic and connotative features: terms denoting “specialized concepts” and “professionalisms” [3, p. 325]. Studying these two layers is very specific. Ignoring their differences can cause misunderstanding during professional communication. Even terms in actual communication may have synonyms and emotional connotation. Because of this according to S. S. Polskaya implementing every term into speech practice is not easy. In the situation when terms have synonyms they must be both introduced in the active vocabulary of the students. It’s also important to pay attention to the frequency of the term’s usage as some terms remain up to date, others become obsolete. For students learning ESP it’s important to know some “professionalisms”. Certainly it’s hard to learn all of such vocabulary units as they are occasionally used, become obsolete very soon and are not systematized. Criterion of such vocabulary necessity is frequency in mass media. Other terms can be easily learnt after graduates begin their own professional activity.

To overcome the difficulties of communicating with professionals it's easier for those who are competent in different spheres.

The present day researches in different fields have integrated character and are denoted as "interdisciplinary" ones. Modern science is becoming problem-oriented, not subject-oriented. Specialists from different fields accumulate their intellectual resources and cooperate. This helps to solve the existing issues in extraordinary ways.

Interdisciplinary connections are viewed by the researchers as a pedagogical category for denoting synthesizing integrative relationships between objects, phenomena and processes of real life, reflected in the content, forms and methods of the educational process and performing educational and developing functions. Interdisciplinary connections form informational, assessing, projecting, communicative competences viewed as "key competences". Interdisciplinary connections also form "emotional intelligence", i.e. ability to build professional communication on the basis of psychological characteristics of opponents.

Key competences can be acquired by the students under certain conditions: education through activities and simulations, aimed at autonomous and responsible results of the work and organization of productive team work.

Interdisciplinary cooperation during ESP learning must form competences, corresponding to the certain profile.

ESP is a less broad concept than key notion "communicative competence". ESP is developed at the non-linguistic institutions and faculties. It is relatively stable integrated characteristic of an active subject of education, helping to realize the linguistic knowledge and speech performance skills during communication.

It's a combination of linguistic, socio-linguistic and subject sub-competences.

At present teaching translation and interpretation is an urgent question as there exists a new qualification within further education curriculum – translator in the sphere of professional communication. According to this education trend there appeared a shift from elitist translators' training to the mass training of such professionals.

The main task of today is to work out and to implement the best teaching methodology taking into consideration the new challenges and experience of the interdisciplinary approach.

Tasks at courses are variable and depend on the stage of the study and the type of the selected translation. Those tasks presuppose the choice of exercises and their order. Traditionally they single out following types of exercises: linguistic, communicative (conversational), operational exercises and tasks for mnemonics development.

It is advisable to teach ESP translation within the complex approach to interactive method. We view interactive method as harmonizing tutorials having interactive function and computer language-didactics, as synthesis of cognitive and communicative approach to ESP teaching.

We think that the following tutorials forms include interactive function: role plays, business games, simulations, trainings, case studies, Socratic dialogs, Internet surfing for information search, e-mail projects, multimedia manuals, "brain storming", computer tests (on-line and off-line). We categorize the interactive studies according to the functions (current and final control of ESP formation level,

games playing, problem solving); according to the form (group studies, independent computer work, computer tests); according to the didactic purpose in ESP formation (conversation, written dialog, speech performance, language competence, listening and reading skills).

Interactive teaching presupposes indirect and direct cooperation of the active subjects, helping to solve teaching tasks more effectively by using the potential of participants' cooperation and interaction. Interaction means information, activities, values, meanings exchange and personal development as well. Interactive study cycle includes different stages: certain experience (role-play, interactive exercise with feedback, case-study); understanding of this experience; introspection (reflection); new skills practical implementation.

During traditional methods of teaching there are no stages of certain experience and introspection, and new skills practical implementation is replaced by the revision of the learnt material. Traditional teaching offers only generalization, and students become passive listeners, applying foreign language according to the personal degree of interest to the subject. Interactive teaching means teaching of communication by means of communication.

Interdisciplinary approach to ESP teaching helps educators to develop ESP elements: linguistic, sociolinguistic and subject-oriented ones. Linguistic competence is reflected in correct recognition and use of the foreign language forms (presupposes knowledge of different linguistic aspects and becomes a foundation for correct formulation and understanding of the utterance as an act of communication). Sociolinguistic competence is closely connected with the linguistic competence and defines the ability to choose linguistic units in accordance with the communicative situation. Subject-oriented competence is ability to correlate the meaning of the utterance with the professional theme.

ESP competence is multifaceted; it comprises motivation, understanding, and implementation steps. Linguistic knowledge is its quantitative aspect, abilities and skills development is its qualitative aspect. During ESP development students also build their values system as they have to communicate in the simulated situations of professional international events. Thus interdisciplinary approach and complex implementation of the interactive method of teaching can intensify ESP formation and development of the future professionals.

At present training in Russian higher educational institutions is focused at development of students as unique personalities capable to choose sphere of professional interests, to organize work for self-education. The role of knowledge is not minimized but knowledge is not a goal any more, it is means of students' development.

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