




Mejora de las habilidades en idiomas extranjeros de empleados de turismo

Improving foreign language skills of the regional hospitality employees

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to lay the theoretical and methodological foundations for supplementary foreign language training of employees of the regional hospitality industry. Competence-based, systemic, socio-cultural, regional and andragogical approaches constitute the general methodological framework of this research. The research employed the methods of theoretical analysis (analysis of psychological-pedagogical and sociological literature); empirical methods (questionnaire survey, interview); data mathematical analysis methods. The paper overviews the key results of questionnaire survey among employees of the regional hospitality industry, which helped to reveal the problems they face in foreign language communication within the scope of their job duties, assess the degree of their satisfaction with their current knowledge, skills and abilities in foreign language, and consider a possibility of supplementary foreign language training. The authors have identified basic principles for improving foreign-language skills of employees of the regional hospitality industry, determined the thematic content of the English language training program “English for Hospitality Students” developed to accommodate the communicative needs of potential learners. The conclusion presents the methodological substantiation of the program of supplementary foreign language training for employees of the regional hospitality industry.

Keywords: foreign language education, principles, approaches, English language training program, regional hospitality industry.

Resumen

El propósito de este artículo es sentar las bases teóricas y metodológicas para la formación complementaria en idiomas extranjeros de los empleados de la industria hotelera regional. Los enfoques basados en competencias, sistémicos, socioculturales, regionales y andragógicos constituyen el marco metodológico general de esta investigación. La investigación empleó los métodos de análisis teórico (análisis de la literatura psicológico-pedagógica y sociológica); métodos empíricos (encuesta por cuestionario, entrevista); métodos de análisis matemático de datos. El documento resume los resultados clave de la encuesta de cuestionario entre empleados de la industria hotelera regional, que ayudó a revelar los problemas que enfrentan en la

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comunicación en lenguas extranjeras dentro del alcance de sus funciones laborales, evaluar el grado de satisfacción con sus conocimientos, habilidades y habilidades actuales. habilidades en lengua extranjera, y considerar la posibilidad de formación complementaria en lengua extranjera. Los autores identificaron principios básicos para mejorar las habilidades en idiomas extranjeros de los empleados de la industria hotelera regional, determinaron el contenido temático del programa de capacitación en inglés "Inglés para estudiantes de hotelería" desarrollado para adaptarse a las necesidades comunicativas de los estudiantes potenciales. La conclusión presenta el fundamento metodológico del programa de formación complementaria en lenguas extranjeras para empleados de la industria hotelera regional.

Keywords: Educación en lenguas extranjeras, principios, enfoques, programa de capacitación en inglés, industria hotelera regional.

Introduction

In recent decades in Russia, international communications occur in many areas of life. According to the Federal Agency for Tourism, the number of tourist trips of foreign citizens to Russia in a period from 2014 to 2019 consistently exceeded 24,000,000 annually (Statistical indicators of mutual trips of citizens of the Russian Federation and citizens of foreign countries, 2019). The surge in international tourism and business cooperation is seen not only in the capital, but also in the regions of the Russian Federation. Lipetsk region is one of them. In the National Rating of Inbound Tourism-2019, it ranks 27th out of 85 totals, and is referred to the second group known as "the silver group" (National rating of inbound tourism, 2019). In addition, a number of projects for creating special economic zones of agro-industrial, industrial-production and tourist-recreational type are underway on its territory, increasing the investment appeal of the region, which, in its turn, is an important precondition for expanding international business relations.

The inflow of foreign visitors is an important trigger of a need to improve foreign language skills of the region's residents involved in the provision of various services in tourism and hospitality. First of all, it concerns hotel services, as such services are provided to each foreign guest and greatly shape their attitude to the hosting country. Most foreign tourists expect to receive high-quality services in the hospitality industry, including the aspect of communication. At least the basic knowledge of a foreign language, in particular English, becomes a mandatory requirement to the hospitality employees, but its knowledge not always ensures successful communication with foreign tourists (Anzina, 2017). From the linguistic point of view, work in the hospitality industry involves communication in foreign language over the phone and business correspondence with clients, personal interactions, conflict resolution, and so on. The spoken language of hospitality employees' lays bare the need for improving their foreign language skills and upgrading their knowledge of foreign language on a regular basis, which underlines high relevance of the topic under research.

Literature review

In recent years, a number of publications by foreign researchers (Fejes & Nylander, 2019; Formenti & West, 2018) were devoted to methodological foundations of scientific search in the field of adult training and retraining. Researchers-andragologists argue that in the educational process it is important to take into account the life experience of adult learners, their motivation, the need for independence and self-management, their urge to immediately apply the obtained knowledge and skills in practice, as well as high expectations with regard to the quality and results of their training (Milana et al., 2018). Researchers identify psychological barriers faced by adults in the process of learning a foreign language: the barrier of “age”, “social status”, “expectations of failure”, “fear of error”, “individual distinctions” (Matsko, 2018, p. 128-129).

Some researchers point to such difficulties in teaching adult learners a foreign language, as those “associated with the unsuccessful previous experience of learning, lack of sufficient free time, high demands on the duration of training” (Savinova, 2015, p. 274). As a solution to the encountered difficulties scientists propose teaching through cognizing, comprehending and understanding the system of language. Staging the situations of real-life communication in a classroom facilitates the easy learning of the necessary language aspects (Dushina, 2015; Metelkova & Rodionova, 2016; Castañeda, 2016; Michalska, 2015; Pawlak, 2015; Castañeda, 2017; Soltovets et al., 2019). A major role belongs to the intrinsic motivation of adults to learn a foreign language, which helps to build the learning interactions in a most productive way (Bakhtiozina, 2018; Ibragimova, 2017; Chigisheva et al., 2016).

By the other hand, some researchers distinguished the basic pedagogical principles for productive learning of a foreign language by adults: the priority of independent learning, the principle of collaborative activity, reliance on experience, individualization, flexibility in the design of training programs, practical orientation (Kalinina & Kochurina, 2017; Krivonosova, 2013; Semenova, 2016; Tusupbekova et al., 2019). In adult learning the great importance is attached to: the developed self-teaching competence of a learner (Zavyalova, 2014), “I-position” of a teacher, who is not just a teacher, but a partner (Anikeeva et al., 2020; Kozubovskaya & Sentebova, 2017; Rasskazova et al., 2015).

Methodology

The purpose of this research is to lay the theoretical and methodological foundations for supplementary foreign language training of employees of the regional hospitality industry. Its accomplishment required to address the following objectives: 1, assess the role of foreign language training in the professional activities of regional hospitality employees; 2, identify the basic approaches to and the basic principles of improving foreign language skills of employees of the

regional hospitality industry; 3, develop an English language training program for employees of the hospitality industry.

This research employed the tools and methods of theoretical analysis (analysis of psychological-pedagogical and sociological literature); empirical methods (questionnaire survey, interview); data mathematical analysis methods. The methods of theoretical analysis helped us to systematize the existing knowledge on this problem, identify the general framework and methodological principles of foreign language training for adults.

The present research is of both qualitative and quantitative character. Using qualitative analysis, the answers of the survey participants were interpreted, and their characteristics were given. It also made it possible to understand the reasons and motives underlying the desire of the hospitality industry employees to learn a foreign language. With the help of quantitative analysis, specific data on the contingent of workers in the hotel business was obtained and evaluated. For the other hand, this research procedure implied several stages:

Stage 1 (June 2020 - July 2020) - development of the questionnaire for employees of the regional hotel industry; determination of the research base and participants of the study.

Stage 2 (July 2020 - August 2020) - conducting a survey, analyzing and interpreting its results.

Stage 3 (September 2020 - November 2020) - development of the English language training program “English for Hospitality Students”.

At present, there are more than 160 hotels in the Lipetsk region in fifty localities. We conducted a survey among employees of the hotels “Elets”, “Eletschik”, “Tourist”, “Snegiri”, “Basil” in Elets and “Lipetsk 4*”, “Bishotel 4*” in Lipetsk.

The methodological basis for designing and implementing a training program intended to improve the foreign language skills of hospitality employees was the competence-based approach, which makes it possible to fuse together the foreign language training and the tasks of professionally oriented communicative practice (Castañeda, 2016; Kobayak et al., 2018; Ushakov et al., 2020). Reliance on the systemic approach suggests a perception of the process of foreign language training for adults as a single system which components are interlinked. The sociocultural and regional approaches helped to sustain a regional and cultural orientation in the content of foreign language training, while promoting the assimilation of cultural professional values and the integration of students into the system of professional culture. Andragogical approach was useful in identifying the appropriate strategies for effective foreign language training of hotel business employees, and in determining the basic principles of teaching technology (Kulamikhina, 2019;

Tusupbekova et al., 2019). Also, statistical data processing was carried out using the SPSS software-analytical complex.

Results

In July 2020, we conducted a questionnaire survey among employees of the regional hospitality industry. The purpose of this survey was to find out their attitude towards the role of a foreign language in their occupation and towards the foreign language skills obtained in an educational institution. The questionnaire survey covered 25 employees from different levels of hospitality industry: hotel managers (2 people), administrators (11 people), booking and customer service managers (8 people), hotel maids (2 people), barmen (2 people), who could potentially benefit from the knowledge of special English and the business communication skills in their occupation. Thus, 25 people with higher education took part in the survey, including 20 women and 5 men. The ages range from 28 years to 50 years. Among women employed in the hospitality industry, 9 obtained industry-specific education; while 11 completed non-industry-specific education (mostly in humanities). All men confirmed that they graduated from non-industry-specific educational institutions.

The questionnaire included 10 questions which intent was to find out which foreign languages respondents studied at educational institutions, and their attitude to the role of foreign language skills in their occupation. Also, through the questionnaire survey we wanted to reveal whether the respondents felt the need to improve their foreign language skills and which route they would choose to upgrade their qualification. Figure 1 illustrates answers to the first question, which was concerned with finding out which foreign language the potential learners studied at school.

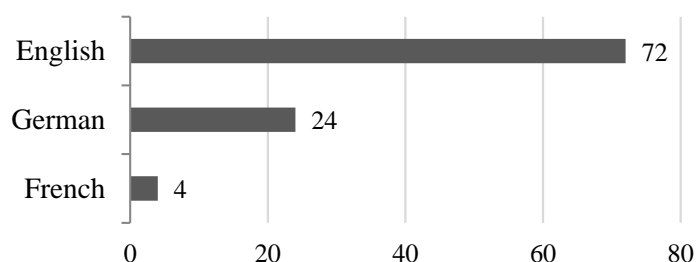


Figure 1. Distribution of answers given by respondents to the question: “Which foreign language did you study at educational institution” (One answer required, %) Source: compiled by the authors

As for the second question “Do you feel the need-to-know foreign languages, if yes, which ones?”, 15 people (60%) answered affirmatively and indicated that English is necessary in modern

life as a “lingua franca”. Answers to the third question “Why do you need to know a foreign language?” were mostly of a pragmatic nature: “The salary is higher than in other industries” (36%); “Good career prospects” (36%); “The hospitality business will always exist, and I will always be able to find a job” (16%). Some respondents (8%) answered that they “like to communicate with foreign guests without help of an interpreter”. Among the answers also was an answer that: “It is prestigious” (4 %). The answer to the fourth question shows how often regional hospitality employees communicate with foreign guests (Figure 2).

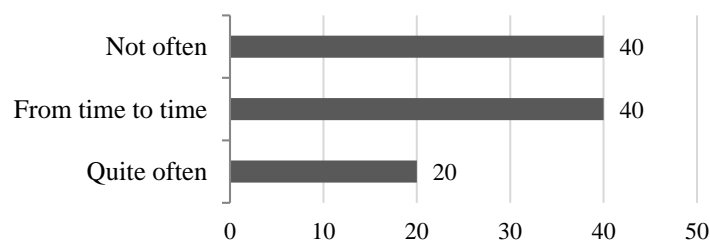


Figure 2. Distribution of answers given by respondents to the question: “How often do you communicate with foreign guests?” (One answer required, %) Source: compiled by the authors.

The answer “From time to time” was supported with the following comments: “In 2019, RUSBORG International Festival of Military and Historical Reconstruction was held in the Lipetsk region”; “Recently the Eletsy Nabat Interregional Festival of Historical Reconstruction was held”; “Foreigners visited the Russian Dog-Hunting Festival Otyezheye POLE, so it was highly important to know English to communicate with foreign tourists”.

The fifth question asked the respondents whether at their educational institution they had special lessons of foreign language in the field of professional communication. The answers to this question were predominantly negative, which could partially be explained by the fact that the discipline “Foreign Language in Professional Communication” is not usually taught as a separate course at universities under the Bachelor's Degree program. A small number of study hours (usually 72 classroom hours per year) is usually planned for a foreign language when the study program is not specialized.

For the other hand, we can observe that, in the sixth question, the respondents were asked to name the topics of special English that are most demanded in communication with foreigners. Then, each of the respondents could name several topics. Summarized answers are presented in Figure 3.

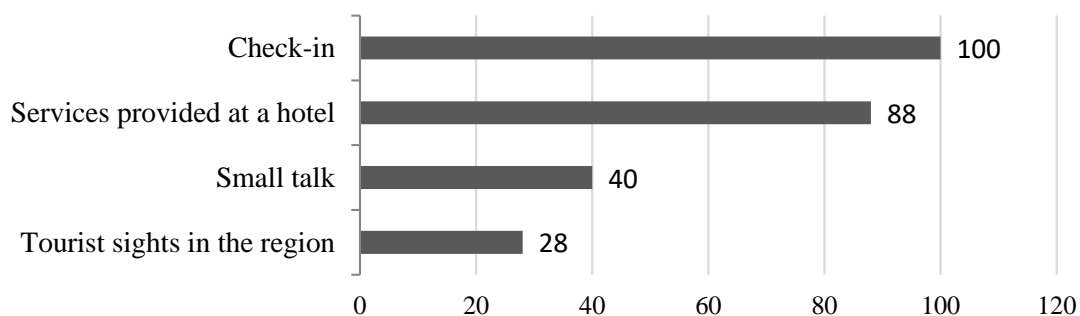


Figure 3. Distribution of answers given by respondents to the question about the most demanded topics of special English in communication with foreigners (any number of answers, %) Source: compiled by the authors.

The purpose of the seventh question was to monitor the knowledge of the most common job-related expressions. Most respondents (84%) successfully managed to translate only the most basic greetings and farewells.

To the eighth question, “Would you like to improve your foreign language literacy? If yes, why?” the answers were mostly affirmative. The motivation of specialists to master professional English is related to the need for obtaining this knowledge to succeed in their job: “Knowledge of English contributes to the higher effectiveness in discharge of professional duties when serving foreign guests”. In addition, the respondents named the particular communication skills they would like to improve in the first place: “establishing a contact”, “requesting and providing information”, “talking over the phone”, etc.

The ninth question, “Which forms of training would you prefer?”, was not a matter of discord. Most responded that they prefer distance learning or evening classes. Meanwhile, the tenth question revealed that group training was more preferable for the respondents (Figure 4).

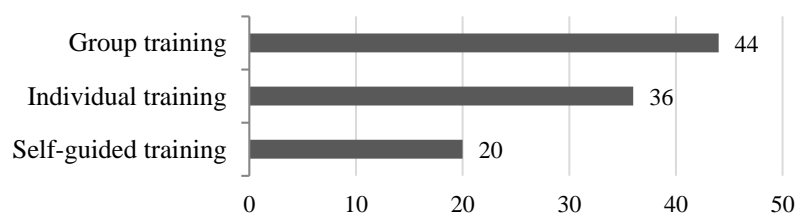


Figure 4. Distribution of answers given by respondents to the question: "What type of training do you prefer?" (One answer required, %) Source: compiled by the authors.

Thus, the results obtained through the questionnaire survey allowed identifying the range of problems the regional hospitality employees face in the workplace as related to communication

in foreign language, to assess their satisfaction with their current level of knowledge, skills and abilities in a foreign language and to determine the way forward for improving the foreign language skills of regional hospitality employees by setting the key milestones.

Relying on the results of the questionnaire survey and the above-mentioned principles of foreign language training, we developed a training program called “English for Hospitality Students” suitable for personnel from any and all departments and levels of the hospitality industry in order to improve their practical communication skills in English. The content and study hours of the discipline “English for Hospitality Students” are represented below.

Topic 1. Presentation (22 study hours): 1.1. Self-presentation by the hotel employees. 1.2. Job duties of the hotel employees. 1.3. Presentation of the region. Tourist sights. 1.4. Small talk.

Topic 2. Checking in a hotel (18 study hours): 2.1. Hotel room booking. 2.2. Functions of administrative staff during guest check-in.

Topic 3. Classification of hotel rooms (22 study hours): 3.1. Types of hotel rooms. 3.2. Infrastructure of hotel rooms.

Topic 4. Complex hotel room service and services provided at a hotel (18 study hours): 4.1. Room and bathroom cleaning. 4.2. Luggage handling services. 4.3. Information desk as a source of information about hotel services, events, intricacies of regional tourism.

Topic 5. Common problems for hotel guests and the ways to fix them (22 study hours): 5.1. An overview of common problems. 5.2. How to fix the problems encountered by hotel guests during their stay at a hotel.

Topic 6. Checking out of a hotel (18 study hours): 6.1. Guest check-out procedure. 6.2. Service cost calculation procedure.

Topic 7. Bar and restaurant services (22 study hours): 7.1. Guest greeting. 7.2. Ordering of food and beverages. 7.3. Customer service. 7.4. Questions related to payment for bar and restaurant services.

The course duration is 144 academic hours over 6 months. Its implementation involves both classroom and distance learning. The course will be delivered on the premises of the Institute of Philology of the Bunin Yelets State University (Yelets).

Discussion

Based on the results of the questionnaire survey and information about the respondents' education, we categorized all potential learners into one of three groups: “Zero Level”, “Basic Level”, “Proficiency Level”. The first group included those employees who do not speak English, but studied other foreign languages (German, French). The second group consisted of those who

studied English at non-language departments/ under non-specialized programs. The third group included graduates of foreign language departments/ trained under specialized foreign language programs. The majority of hospitality industry employees were referred to the second group. In connection therewith, we developed a strategy for improving foreign language skills while mostly focusing on the needs of the respondents belonging to the group “Basic Level”.

One of the main components of any educational technology is a framework of principles, i.e. the guiding ideas that determine the content, the forms, the methods and the techniques of teaching for the learners of a certain category (Logun & Dushina, 2019). Taking into account the psycho-physiological characteristics of adults, and the goals of hospitality employees, we selected the key principles of foreign language training and applied them in our research.

The principle of communicativeness became the corner stone of our research. The observance of this principle lies in learning how to communicate through communication. When the goal is to ensure successful communication of hotel employees with foreign guests, the focus of their training in a foreign language should be not so much on updating their language knowledge, as on fostering their ability and readiness to communicate in the studied language, and on developing their ability to adequately interact with representatives of other cultures and societies (at different levels) (Galskova & Gez, 2008). It implies both linguistic and extra-linguistic levels of communication, the ability to quickly get the gist of a situation, to make a pleasant impression on the interlocutor and to choose language and speech elements most appropriate to the context. Language as a system does not carry any particular value to the learners of the category under scrutiny. They, like many other adults, are interested in the pragmatic side of the process of foreign language learning, which should result in the developed ability to speak a foreign language.

Understanding the goal of learning, the causes and effects of each action, based on their experience of work with adults, is their need and an important leading motive in education. Due to this, we see the principle of conscientiousness as the next fundamental principle. In the context of foreign language education, it implies “understanding certain actions and operations with the language material for solving a communicative task”, “understanding the content of speech production in the communication process”, “understanding the culture of a country which language is studied as compared to the culture of own country” (Mirolyubova, 2010, p. 50).

The principle of engagement is closely linked to the above principles. Engagement, which drives the activity, will allow students to learn the material better and more firmly, by actively using perceptual systems in the verbal and cogitative process. Adults with a strong motivation to learn a foreign language, as a rule, show high engagement in the classroom (Kalinina & Kochurina, 2017). Nevertheless, you should have ready and use active teaching methods that boost the

educational process - case studies, business and role-playing games, discussions, round tables and others.

The training to improve foreign language skills of adults who continue to work while receiving such training will be in high demand, as practice shows, if it takes as little time as possible but yields visible results (Kozubovskaya & Sentebova, 2017). In this connection, the principle of professionally-oriented communication, which implies the selection of content consistent with professional interests of learners, introduction of speech structures most useful in their occupation, reproducing situations typical for the tourism and hospitality industry in dialogues and polylogues, is becoming particularly important.

It is logical that the next principle to pay attention to is the principle of usefulness and sufficiency of the training material. On the one hand, it is associated with the short duration of the training course, and on the other hand, with the eagerness of adult learners to achieve certain results in the field of their occupation. According to this, when adults learn a foreign language, their motivation for learning is fueled by life challenges. Forcing the learning content that is not of any help in responding to personal life challenges may lead to resistance and even refusal to continue learning a language (Milrud, 2016). Thus, the learning material should be carefully selected, but at the same time cover all meaningful situations from real communication in the hospitality industry relevant to the context of this research.

And another significant principle in adult education is, in our opinion, the principle of game-based learning. A role play has a particularly great potential in foreign language training because, by integrating the speech and non-speech behavior of its participants, it reproduces real communication situations. Adults, perceiving it as a kind of entertainment, relax, assume certain roles and begin to effectively overcome the barriers in speech. The game teaches how to better adjust to real-life situations, but with the right to make a mistake that later in practice can be avoided.

The designed content of the English language training program has proven to be useful for effective development of foreign language communicative competence of adult learners in the system of supplementary education. The regional and professional orientation of the training program allows for integration of subject-specific and socio-cultural content in the form of the major topics, contributes to the expansion of vocabulary, memorizing by adult learners of terminology in English and strengthening communication skills in the field of their occupation.

Limitations of the study

It should be noted that the results of the study, presented in the form of a program developed by us to improve the foreign language training of regional hotel industry workers, have a number

of limitations that determine the effectiveness of its implementation. Firstly, the program involves additional training in the English language for adults on the basis of the already existing relevant foreign language education already received at non-linguistic faculties/training profiles. Secondly, its relevance will have a better effect in a small town with a developing tourism sector, where hotel industry workers were initially not focused on foreign language communication and paid little attention to foreign language education, but felt the need for a confident knowledge of the English language in order to successfully fulfill their professional duties.

Conclusion

We have presented the theoretical and methodological foundations for supplementary foreign language training of employees of the regional hospitality industry. The main approaches for accomplishing the stated purpose were: competence-based, socio-cultural, regional and andragogical. The survey among employees working at different levels in the hospitality industry helped us to identify existing problems in the foreign language communication within the scope of their job duties and to identify the main directions in the content of English language training. Besides, we have selected the principles of foreign language training, which constituted the core of the educational technology. We assigned the primary role to the principles of communicativeness, conscientiousness, engagement, professionally oriented communication, usefulness and sufficiency of the training material and the principle of game-based learning.

Taking into account the occupational communicative experience of potential learners and based on the approaches referred to above, we developed the English language training program. Since its content addresses the communicative needs of hospitality industry employees revealed with the help of the survey, and it will be implemented based on the principles we selected with reliance on theoretical analysis and practical experience of work with adult learners, in the most facilitating environment for the learners, we believe, it will contribute to the effective improvement of foreign language skills of the learners of this particular category.

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