EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES AT THE FACULTY OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES: AN EDUCATIONAL ASPECT

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Abstract

The paper considers an educational aspect of extracurricular activities at the department of foreign languages, Voronezh State Pedagogical University, which are based not only upon the language disciplines but also upon pedagogical ones. Using a variety of methods indicated in the research, the authors conduct a poll among the prospective teachers, the sophomores of the faculty of foreign languages, the results of which demonstrate the students’ understanding of priority trends in extracurricular activities with due regard to individual culture. The result interpretation also shows the students’ readiness for their teaching practice as well as “sore points” in their training. The present priority trends, as seen by the students, should be spiritual, moral and patriotic education. Extracurricular activities at university broaden the students’ horizons, hone their observational skills, creative thinking, generate new knowledge, develop teambuilding skills, boost motivation and willingness to learn. The research can be of interest to university and school professionals, scholars and students.

Keywords: extracurricular activities, university, foreign languages, pedagogy, education, morale

1 INTRODUCTION

At present, outcomes of education are evaluated taking into account professionals’ readiness for effective performance. Developing competencies, those of a language teacher being the case, leads to self-realisation and self-improvement both professionally and personally, in the course of classroom and extracurricular activities as well as in the context of life self-determination. It proves essential under free market conditions in a competitive environment.

In relation to the described above, creative self-fulfilment is of importance not only in educational activities, but also in extracurricular, pedagogical ones, which is explicitly stated in Federal Law No 273-FZ “On Education in the Russian Federation” dated 29 December 2012, as one of the priority development fields of a teacher, a prospective teacher, in particular.

All this brings forth the topicality of the research. Education and training intensification calls for various ways
and means that enhance prospective teachers’ competitive performance as early as at university. The use of methods, forms, techniques and means in the course of education and training, which facilitate the development of the individual’s inner potential and promote students’ learning and cognitive activity, leads to the development of a personal ability to compete [1].

The purpose of the study is to describe and analyse the educational aspects of extracurricular activities with students at the department of foreign languages, Voronezh State Pedagogical University. A prospective teacher developing his/her competitive abilities is to be a spiritual, moral and creative person, able to withstand contemporary social challenges. It is also supposed that a person should become kinder and more tolerant when there is peace and harmony within him/her [3].

As a rule, extracurricular activities are organised in students’ free time on a voluntary basis. Various forms and methods can be employed, which contribute to prospective teachers’ maximum involvement in extracurricular work, e.g. contests, academic competitions, research work, etc. Extracurricular activities are carried out within the scope of subject-subject relations. Being of creative nature, they enrich with new knowledge and develop students’ personally significant professional qualities, which also increases their motivation and willingness to learn. Extracurricular work has a positive impact on students’ mental activity; it boosts their cognitive interest and develops such qualities as mercy, moral, modesty, kindness, teambuilding skills and many others [2].

The conceptual fundamentals for the phenomenon under study are reflected in the scholars’ works who research the driving forces, sources, and needs of the individual: R. Costello and M. Lambert [3], M.G. Ballatore, L. Montanaro and A. Tabacco [4], V. Zagvazyinsky [5], I. Murzina, S.V. Kazakova [6], Van Dat Tran [7], S.A. Mirhosseini [8], E. Kalachinskaya [9], A. Shulgina et al. [10].


D. Nasseri discusses the correlation between EFL teachers’ critical thinking and self-actualisation level [14]; R. Al-Jarf focuses on self-improvement for EFL college students [15]; A. Johnson views the ideal of education as means of self-actualisation and awareness of one’s inner potential [16]. Y. Jogsan and M. Chauhan analyse self-actualisation in male and female students [17; 18].

2 METHODOLOGY

The fundamental principles of the research are the philosophical principle of the universal connection of objects and phenomena of objective reality, the principle of determinism and system, when the process and the result of mastering knowledge and skills are influenced by the unity of the system elements as a necessary condition. Also, the purpose was achieved using the following methods: academic literature analysis including content analysis, modelling, annotation, monitoring the students’ performance and generalisation.

3 RESULTS

Extracurricular activities at the faculty of foreign languages of Voronezh State Pedagogical University are carried out taking into account the students’ understanding of the importance of extracurricular activities with schoolchildren, the students’ awareness of different trends of education and of various educational activities from the perspective of extracurricular work, since prospective teachers, in the course of the training process, are focused on the upcoming teaching practice.

As part of the research, the sophomores of the faculty of foreign languages (VSPU) were asked three questions. The following results were obtained.

With respect to the first question, “How do you understand the essence of extracurricular activities?”, 71% of those questioned explained that extracurricular activities are extracurricular work, an integral part of the school educational process, one of the forms of managing students’ free time; 9.6% of the respondents answered that extracurricular activities, the purpose of which is upbringing and socialisation, differ from the classroom system of education; 9.6% of those asked see the focus of extracurricular activities on achieving the learning outcomes; 3.4% of those mentioned only an entertaining nature of extracurricular activities performed under the teacher’s guidance; 6.4% of those questioned view extra-curricular activities as morale building activities performed by a supervising teacher and subject teachers.
Table 1. The sophomores’ responses to Question 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>№</th>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>%</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Extracurricular activities are extracurricular work, an integral part of the school educational process, one of the forms of managing students’ free time</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Extracurricular activities, the purpose of which is upbringing and socialisation, differ from the classroom system of education</td>
<td>9.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>See the focus of extracurricular activities on achieving the learning outcomes</td>
<td>9.6</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>View extra-curricular activities as morale building activities performed by a supervising teacher and subject teachers</td>
<td>6.4</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Mentioned only an entertaining nature of extracurricular activities performed under the teacher’s guidance</td>
<td>3.4</td>
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<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
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The idea of extracurricular activities described above allows for the conclusion of the students’ strong pedagogical bias, which seems natural, since they are students of a pedagogical university on their way to becoming teachers. As for the students who see the entertaining nature of extracurricular activities, they constitute a small percentage of those who are rarely present in class.

As indicated in the reply to question two, “Specify the top priority trends of morale building activities with regard to individual culture”, the following results were obtained: “spiritual, moral, patriotic trends”: 76% of the respondents; “physical culture (recreational)”: 5.4%; “intellectual”: 5%, “labour”: 3.6%; “aesthetic”: 2.9%, “environmental”: 2.8%; “sociocultural”: 2.3%; “legal”: 1%; “economic”: 1%.

Table 2. The sophomores’ responses to Question 2

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<tr>
<th>№</th>
<th>Characteristic</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Spiritual, moral, patriotic trends</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Physical culture (recreational)</td>
<td>5.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Intellectual</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Labour</td>
<td>3.6</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>Aesthetic</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>Environmental</td>
<td>2.8</td>
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<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Sociocultural</td>
<td>2.3</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>Legal</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Economic</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
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</table>

According to the survey, the present top priority trends in education as seen by the students are: spiritual, moral and patriotic; and those in descending order of preference: physical, intellectual, labour, aesthetic, environmental, socio-cultural, legal, and economic. In our opinion, the extracurricular activities mentioned by the students reflect the extracurricular activities of linguistic and pedagogical nature held regularly at the faculty of foreign languages, as well as the extracurricular work of the university on the whole.

When answering question three, “What extracurricular morale building activities would you organise in the course of your teaching practice?”, the sophomores listed numerous activities, which illustrates both the breadth and the depth of extracurricular morale building activities at university and the faculty, in particular. The activities mentioned are as follows: “English literature”, “English Fairytales”, “The skilled hands”, “Eurhythms”, “Vocal singing”, “Poetry”; intellectual games: “What? Where? When”, “Merry phonetics” quizzes: “Let’s celebrate it!”, “English Literature”, “Do you know Great Britain?”; lessons of cultivated speech in Russian and foreign languages; the clubs: “English literature”, “Five o’clock tea”, “English breakfast”; quests in a foreign language; “Days of the English/German languages/of the cinema/theatre”, “Francophonie”, “Francain Mobile”; the projects in foreign languages; morale building events: “My homeland”, “I remember. I’m proud of it”, “A lesson in courage”, “A lesson in mercy”, “A dialogue of cultures”; ecological awareness-raising events; sports events; class meetings (in a foreign language); panel games; the Earth Day.
4 CONCLUSION

Extracurricular activities at the faculty of foreign languages are based on the following circumstances. As a result of the educational reform, new curricula have been introduced with a lower number of class hours. At the same time, the requirements for prospective teachers’ level of training remain unchanged. It is expected that a general measure to redress the present imbalance should be to increase the hours for extracurricular activities. Under the present circumstances, the role of continuous pedagogical assistance in managing extracurricular activities is growing significantly.

To make up for this loss of the class hours, the faculty engage the students in teamwork, which is done regularly or sporadically, and is aimed at developing teamwork skills. The so-called “sporadic extracurricular teamwork” is most often associated with certain dates and related events, in which the students of the faculty participate, e.g., events connected with holidays in English-speaking countries, i.e. concerts, quizzes, panel games, etc. To give just one example, meetings of the English Speaking Club focus on the development of the students’ communicative competence, on the one hand. On the other, they stimulate the students’ creative initiative, acting technique, vocal singing and expressive reading.

Next, the students’ participation in numerous clubs is a regular activity at the faculty. This activity has a considerable advantage: not only does it take into account the students’ interests in club activities, but it also complies with the curriculum and can be altered at any time in the students’ interests. For instance, student faculty association “Insight” promotes practice-oriented and research activities, and is based on the students’ research interests.

It should be mentioned that at a given moment the students’ interests tend to be ignited due to natural predisposition and information asymmetry. The students may fail to have complete and reliable information about a particular subject or type of activity. To fill the existing gap, mass activities are conducted to attract new students. Such work forms can be represented by debates, creative performances, contests, theme quizzes, competitions, etc.

Furthermore, extracurricular activities at the faculty of Foreign Languages are based not only upon the language disciplines but also upon pedagogical ones, such as: history of pedagogy and education; introduction to pedagogical activity and the fundamental concepts of self-education; theory and technology of education; theory and methods of education; cultural and educational workshops and many others.

Moreover, spiritual and moral values are the basis for the students’ personality development; they closely intertwine with the fundamental national values stated in the document “On the Education of the Russian Federation”, and they are an important guideline in the prospective teachers’ university training. In the context of extracurricular activities, the following events have a positive educational impact on the students: participation of the prospective teachers in the annual pedagogical as well as in spiritual and moral culture contests. Contestants deepen their knowledge in the theory and practice, e.g., in Orthodoxy, and develop communicative, research, organisational and teamwork skills. As part of the students' patriotic education, a pedagogical quest widens their knowledge of homeland and hometown.

Also, volunteer awareness rising activities have been carried out by the participants of numerous competitions, during which they shared their impressions and teaching experience with prospective teachers from various departments.

As for research work, it is focused on the topicality of various educational problems with due regard for the students’ pedagogical bias.

Thus, extracurricular activities contribute to the students’ maximum creative self-realisation in extracurricular work and enhance their competitive performance, which complies with government documents, the Federal Law No 273-FZ “On Education in the Russian Federation” dated 29 December 2012. On the whole, extracurricular activities organised in the students’ free time on a voluntary basis, broaden the students’ horizons, form an initial link with scientific activities, hone the students’ observational skills, creative thinking and creativity, generate new knowledge, develop the students’ personally significant professional qualities, boost motivation and willingness to learn, promote learning and cognitive activity and develop such qualities as mercy, moral, modesty, kindness, teambuilding skills and many others. The morale building aspect of extracurricular activities is marked not only by the development of the students’ essential qualities mentioned before, but also by the fundamental educational trends in the context of fundamental culture.

Research has shown that the students, getting ready for their upcoming teaching practice, take into account the experience of the extracurricular activities of linguistic and pedagogical nature at the faculty of foreign languages, as well as the extracurricular work of the university on the whole. The success of extracurricular
activities undoubtedly depends on their organisation and content. An indispensable requirement in this case is the students' interest.

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