

AWARENESS OF A FOREIGN LANGUAGE AS AN IMPORTANT COMPONENT OF THE STUDENTS' ACADEMIC MOBILITY

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Abstract

The globalization process assumes learning different languages. One aspect of the activities of Russian universities is the expansion of academic mobility, which is viewed today as an important task and criterion for the effectiveness of universities. The Russian Federation signed a joint communiqué of the Ministerial Conference on Higher Education "Understanding of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA)," which predetermined Russia's entry into the European educational space.

One of the most serious reasons hindering the process of academic mobility is the insufficient level of communicative competence among students and teachers alike, as well as a lack of disciplines and educational programs implemented in foreign languages. This is very urgent for the Peoples Friendship University of Russia (RUDN University) which maintains stable relations with many foreign universities and international organizations. The University signed more than 200 agreements on cooperation with foreign universities and scientific centres and participates in more than 60 bilateral international programs.

The survey conducted by the authors showed that the students understand the importance of participating in academic mobility programs: among the factors that testify to the need to participate in such programs, students call the opportunity to broaden their horizons and develop professional competencies, in particular intercultural competence.

Trainers, who have received experience of intercultural professional communication through participation in research projects with partner universities, are able to fully complete the final work in a foreign language (double degree program). Such an opportunity predetermines the readiness of the university to implement joint educational programs with foreign partner universities.

Thus, knowledge of a foreign language at high level and intercultural professional communication are very important condition to ensure academic mobility in modern world.

Keywords: foreign language, academic mobility, communicative competence, intercultural professional communication.

1 INTRODUCTION

The Bologna Declaration, signed in 1999 by the European Ministers in charge of higher education provides for cooperation in higher education and aims at harmonizing higher education in Europe as the basis of academic mobility. The Bologna Declaration makes higher education in European countries more attractive for students from all over the world and promotes student mobility between European countries, both during

their studies and in their professional career (Schomburg, Teichler, 2008, p.41-55).

Under academic mobility is meant the transfer of students and teachers to educational institutions in their country or abroad, as a rule, for a period of one semester to a year, with the aim of teaching, practicing, giving lectures, and conducting research.

2 METHODOLOGY

International mobility and international learning in the country of origin can also improve the foreign language skills of students and the overall professional performance of graduates, for example by strengthening their maturity through taking charge of tasks unforeseen. Academic mobility, a necessary component of which is proficiency in a foreign language, is considered as one of the priority areas in international activities of universities. The main purpose of academic mobility is to provide an opportunity for a student of any specialty and area of training to receive "European" education, to get access to the resources of leading scientific schools, to join European culture (Ballatore, 2017, p.79-86.).

There are several types of academic mobility, such as external and internal, as well as vertical and horizontal. External mobility is considered as student studying, the working of teachers in academic institutions abroad, while internal academic mobility consists of student studying and the working of faculty and staff at the leading domestic universities and research centers where leading foreign professors give lectures. Vertical and horizontal mobility provides for the development of joint educational programs by Russian and foreign universities. Vertical mobility is understood as full student education in a foreign university, and horizontal mobility - studying for a semester or a year. One of the main motivations of academic mobility of students and teachers can be not only to obtain additional knowledge in foreign universities, but also to improve the knowledge of foreign languages for participation in student and teacher exchange programs.

The main advantages of academic mobility are the adaptation to a different education system and the ability to build relationships with students of other cultures. A survey conducted by the authors among students participating in academic mobility showed that for 64% of respondents academic mobility was their first independent life experience outside the family, outside their home country; 34% noted that the cultural experience of everyday life in a foreign language and different people surroundings also allowed to take a different look at their own culture; 98% admitted that the year of study abroad strongly increases values of their CV and it grants positive professional consequences. Temporary studies abroad provide some career benefits (Schomburg, Teichler, 2006). Survey results showed that 28% experienced general language problems; 16% experienced difficulties in understanding the lectures (special terminology).

The factors that attract student mobility are: 1) educational (reputation of the institution and the host country, degree of recognition of diplomas, privileged contacts between host and home institutions); 2) practices (cost of living and schooling, quality of reception facilities, housing, language learning devices, general quality of life); 3) cultural (the language used, the historical and cultural proximity of the host country) (Schomburg, Teichler, 2008, p.41-55). International mobility implies interactions between students and researchers at the international level. It enables the intensification of cooperation between universities in different countries and the formation of international networks of researchers, and contributes to the international competitiveness of educational institutions and research laboratories and their international ranking.

Russia, with a 50% increase in five years, is one of the major host countries. In the same way, China recorded an increase of 75% in five years. Yet France remains an attractive country: in 2016-2017 France welcomed 323,933 foreign students. France is progressing, but less than the other major host countries. The number of foreign students in France increased by 12.2% in 5 years (2011-2016) (campusfrance, 2018, p.30). In the modern world, the internationalization of university curricula is underway to facilitate international research (Voin, 2013, pp. 61-79). "The internationalization of higher education is based on modern processes of economic and political integration, as well as on the growing need for intercultural relations and mutual understanding" (UNESCO).

A vivid example of the internationalization of education is the Peoples' Friendship University of Russia (RUDN University), which unites representatives of 155 countries of the world, about 500 nationalities. Therefore, students have a constant language practice, developing language skills not only in the audience, but also outside it. The University is the center of networking between the best universities of BRICS, SCO and CIS countries. A number of university programs were developed under the auspices of the UN, UNESCO, and the Council of Europe (rudn, cooperation).

For the successful implementation of academic mobility of students and teachers, a three-level education system (bachelor, master, post graduate student) and the European scale of the system of grades and points are adopted at RUDN University. The European Credit Transfer System, whose role is to support the academic recognition of periods of study abroad, established in 1988 as part of the Erasmus program, allows students to start a degree in an institution and finish it in another, but tends to evolve towards a credit accumulation system, to facilitate also transactions in terms of qualifications. European training structures try to make their curriculum comparable, via a real convergence of standards.

In general, the implementation of the Diploma Supplement (with ECTS credits), effective in many Bologna signatory countries, remains marked by significant differences from one country to another (agence, erasmus). Since 2007, graduates of the RUDN University have received a document on recognition of higher education in many countries of the world - the European Diploma Supplement.

Russia's accession to the Bologna process and integration into the European educational space increases the relevance of learning a foreign language. The growth of academic mobility in higher professional education is an additional motivation to learn a foreign language. To participate in the academic mobility program, it is necessary to have a level of proficiency in a foreign language of at least "B1 +, B2" on the European scale "Intermediate level" and have a corresponding international certificate. The RUDN University departments of foreign languages have special training programs for passing exams for international certificates. (references, languages).

The discipline "Foreign Language" is an obligatory discipline of the federal component in the cycle of general humanitarian and socio-economic disciplines at the state educational standard of higher professional education. The discipline "Foreign Language" is studied by all students of the 1st and 2nd courses of non-language faculties and institutes. However, the number of hours allocated by the State's Ministry programs is not enough to master a foreign language at the level necessary for academic mobility. Therefore, starting from the first year of study at the undergraduate and graduate programs, those who wish can study a foreign language under the program "Translator in the Field of Professional Communication".

Studying the languages of the additional program "Interpreter in the field of professional communication" offered by the university, students simultaneously with the main specialty study one or several foreign languages and receive a diploma of an interpreter in the field of professional communication. For example, RUDN University students can choose to study both European languages (German, Spanish, English, French, Italian) and Oriental (Chinese, Korean, Japanese, Arabic, Persian). Foreign students studying at the RUDN University learn Russian as a foreign language. Diplomas and dissertations are delivered in both Russian and foreign languages. Since 1978, the RUDN University professors have been teaching the Russian language to foreign cosmonauts and astronauts flying in Soviet and Russian crews.

Teachers of foreign languages are given new tasks, as with the growing role of intercultural relations, the development of intercultural communicative competence, including language and speech skills, familiarity with the culture, customs and habits of the country of the studied language, is of particular importance. In this regard, there is an increasing need to write new books, textbooks and programs aimed at improving the communicative level of students who meet the needs of professional communication in modern conditions, taking into account intercultural competence, understood as the ability of an individual to realize themselves in the dialogue of cultures. The formation of professional communicative competence is assumed within the framework of a competence-based approach in teaching foreign languages.

A significant amount of hours is devoted to studying not only special terminology, but also academic writing, writing skills for essays, annotations, reports, course projects, and dissertations in foreign languages. A foreign language teacher should teach students to structure their written work correctly, emphasizing the special characteristics of academic style of speech. Students master the features of academic speech style, both in their native language and in a foreign language. As part of academic mobility, students improve their listening skills in order to successfully participate in international conferences. Internet resources (audio, video) used not only to listen the academic texts (lectures, discussions, answers to questions), but also help to master the correct linguistic structures of the language being studied (Navartchi, 2007).

In the classroom students learn, first of all, to understand the essence of what they have listened to, further to isolate key information from the stream of speech. This type of work requires many hours of practice. The role of a foreign language teacher is to select and develop an appropriate program, preliminarily clarify new words and expressions, present a system of exercises and set targets for the text you have listened to. Students perform these tasks on their own, and there is a discussion of the material in the classroom. As a control of the material studied, the teacher may offer various types of work, such as conferences,

discussions, writing essays on the topics covered, etc.

RUDN University students have the opportunity to improve their knowledge of foreign languages by participating in international internships at the European Parliament (Brussels, Belgium), double-degree programs, for example, in cooperation with the University of Grenoble (Grenoble, France). For students of RUDN University who are fluent in a foreign language, it is possible to study at Sian Transport University (China), at the Free University of Brussels (Belgium), at the University Sophia-Antipolis (Nice, France) and others (rudn, cooperation). For many years, RUDN University has remained the leader in international cooperation on higher education issues: there are 150 joint educational programs and double degree programs, 250 partnership agreements have been concluded, research projects are being developed with colleagues from around the world, and academic exchanges and internships are being organized. Internships and academic exchanges, education included and joint masters programs, conferences and lectures are considered as successful forms of cooperation that are not possible without possession of good command of a foreign language.

The program of inclusive study in the direction of the master's program "Political Science" (double degree program) with the Institute of Political Studies Sciences Po Bordeaux, with the University of Grenoble-Alpes (France) is implemented at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences. Academic mobility is actively developing and joint research is being conducted with the universities of Palermo and Bologna (Italy), Carleton (Canada), the University of Potsdam (Germany), Jinan Universities (China) (rudn, cooperation).

The international accreditation of RUDN University allows annually reviewing their approaches to the development of new educational programs, as well as identifying directions and tools for improving the implementation processes of existing programs, taking into account the best Russian and foreign educational practices. Currently, the international accreditation procedures are successfully passed by 27 educational programs of the RUDN University. The presence of international accreditation has a positive effect on the status of the University and on the readiness of foreign universities to develop partnerships. So the Space Technology Institute collaborates with the Berlin Institute of Technology (Germany), EPF Ecole d'ingénieurs (France), Universidade Federal Fluminense (Brazil), School of Engineering Copperbelt University (Zambia). Leading foreign professors of partner universities annually give public lectures to students, graduate students and teachers of the RUDN University. A number of educational RUDN University programs for undergraduate, graduate ("International Protection of Human Rights"; "Legal Translation and Interpreting") and postgraduate studies ("Legal sciences. Contemporary International Law") are offered in English (rudn, education).

Under the Double Degree Program, RUDN University works with leading universities in the UK, France, Spain, Italy, the Czech Republic, Germany and China, with more than 130 double degree programs. Double degree programs give students a unique opportunity: to study in two countries. Upon graduation, students receive two diplomas with the successful completion of state graduation exams: a RUDN University diploma and a partner university diploma (rudn). The "Erasmus +" academic exchange program provides students with internship opportunities in various European universities (Bracht, Engel, Janson, Over, Schomburg, Teichler, 2006). For example, this program is actively implemented by universities in Spain, Holland, France and Italy. Law students of the RUDN University who speak foreign languages at a level not lower than B2, regularly participate and occupy top places in professional international competitions: European Human Rights Moot Court Competition, which is held annually by the European Law Students Association with the support of the Council of Europe; The Annual Willem C. Vis International Commercial Arbitration Moot (Vienna, Austria), which is held annually under the auspices of the United Nations Commission on International Trade Law and a number of international arbitration institutions; The Philip C. Jessup International Law Moot Court Competition (Washington, USA); The Manfred Lachs Space Law Moot Court Competition, built on the model of a dispute before the International Court of Justice; Annual Michael Thorsnes International Arbitration Pre-Moot Competition (San Diego, USA) (rudn, cooperation). Participation in such contests increases students' self-esteem (84% of respondents) and the level of proficiency in a foreign language as a language for specific purposes (80% of respondents).

Students annually improve their foreign language skills in summer schools at the University of Salzburg (Salzburg, Austria) and Alliance Française summer language school (Nice, France). Surveys of students conducted by the authors after summer internships show that 89% of students say they are confident in their language skills and abilities, 92% have improved cultural and communicative competences, 69% expressed a desire to continue their studies in foreign partners- universities.

3 RESULTS

Thus, knowledge of a foreign language enhances academic mobility, provides opportunities for transferring from one university to another, provides an opportunity to work in international companies, and increases the competitiveness of specialists in both the Russian and global labor markets. As a short-term program of academic mobility, students can participate in educational, industrial internships in foreign universities, in foreign enterprises. Currently, communication with foreign colleagues is acquiring greater professional value.

A special place in teaching professional foreign language is occupied by “professional communication”, which influences the development of professional qualities and ensures the active participation of trainees who speak a foreign language in symposia, professional-oriented disputes. To achieve a high level of knowledge of a foreign language, many universities in Russia offer students to learn a foreign language on an in-depth program with an increased number of hours. The main task of teaching a foreign language in a higher educational institution is undoubtedly the formation of professional language competence of future specialists. Acquired language skills, skills and acquired knowledge contribute to their academic mobility.

4 CONCLUSION

Collaboration between universities is aimed at the implementation of joint research, academic mobility of students and teachers. The level of development of academic mobility allows judging the degree of integration of the university into the international educational space, the level of accessibility of higher education and is one of the most important indicators of the quality of education. Academic mobility provides an opportunity for students and graduate students to continue their education, to gain scientific experience abroad, participating in educational and research programs.

Foreign language skills not lower than “Intermediate level” is a necessary condition and a mandatory component of the implementation of academic mobility programs. Thus, knowledge of a foreign language at high level and intercultural professional communication are very important condition to ensure academic mobility in modern world. Additional programs of learning foreign languages offered by universities including the program "Translator in the field of professional communication" provide an opportunity to master the language of the specialty at a high level. Students of non-linguistic faculties and institutes of the RUDN University, having passed an advanced foreign language course in parallel with the basic training, participating in international workshops in foreign languages, acquire professional skills in a foreign language in the form of internships, summer schools, research and double diplomas.

International student exchange programs, internships for graduate students, teachers, semester work of students and teachers in other universities, as the basis of academic mobility, contribute to scientific progress, improve the links between scientists from different countries and ensure the further fruitful development of society. The participation of universities in academic mobility helps to find new approaches to research, develop new research methods, become familiar with cultural traditions, enrich knowledge with advanced professional achievements and promote the development of a creative approach to research, which is important in today's global world.

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