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WOULD-BE SPECIALISTS' VOCATIONAL TRAINING WITHIN THE COURSE "ENGLISH FOR ACADEMIC MOBILITY"

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ПРОФЕССИОНАЛЬНАЯ ПОДГОТОВКА БУДУЩИХ СПЕЦИАЛИСТОВ ПОСРЕДСТВОМ КУРСА «АНГЛИЙСКИЙ ЯЗЫК ДЛЯ АКАДЕМИЧЕСКОЙ МОБИЛЬНОСТИ»

Abstract. This article addresses the issues of would-be specialists' vocational training within the course "English for Academic Mobility". The course is an important part of lifelong learning vocational training, which is supposed to provide training for modern specialists who are ready to fulfil their potential and build up their learning curve utilizing up-to-date information, advanced technological platforms and company resources. The authors emphasize that, despite the current world situation, higher education institutions of Russia continue to implement programmes within the framework of international cooperation, and are also looking for new opportunities and directions for academic and scientific partnerships. Thus, academic mobility being a key aspect of any educational organisation activities has not lost its ground under the current circumstances. The article illustrates the implementation of the "English for Academic Mobility" course aiming at preparing the Nizhnevartovsk State University students (would-be specialists) for successful participation in both international academic mobility programmes and competitive labour market in future. The article provides a description of the course developed by the teachers of Nizhnevartovsk State University and defines its importance as one of the links in the professional training of NVSU students in the framework of continuing education.

Keywords: continuous education, professional training, internationalisation of education, international cooperation, academic mobility.

Аннотация. Рассматриваются вопросы подготовки будущих специалистов посредством курса «Английский язык для академической мобильности». Данный курс является важным звеном в процессе непрерывного профессионального образования, которое подразумевает подготовку современного специалиста, готового реализовать свой потенциал, используя существующие информационные и технологические платформы, ресурсы организаций и выстраивая индивидуальную образовательную траекторию с учетом меняющихся потребностей рынка труда. Авторы подчеркивают, что, несмотря на сложившуюся общемировую ситуацию, российские вузы продолжают реализацию программ в рамках международного сотрудничества, а также ищут новые возможности и направления партнерских отношений. В статье отмечается, что академическая мобильность, как ключевой аспект деятельности любой образовательной организации, в современных условиях не утратила своей актуальности. В Нижневартовском государственном университете для подготовки студентов-будущих специалистов к участию в программах международной академической мобильности и будущей профессиональной деятельности был разработан и реализуется курс «Английский язык для академической мобильности» преподавателями кафедры филологии, лингводидактики и перевода (ранее преподавателями кафедры иностранных языков). В статье представлены структура и описание курса «Английский язык для академической мобильности», раскрыта его значимость как одного из важных компонентов профессиональной подготовки студентов Нижневартовского государственного университета в рамках непрерывного образования как для участия в программах международного академического обмена, так и успешной профессиональной деятельности в будущем.

Ключевые слова: непрерывное образование, профессиональная подготовка, интернационализация образования, международное сотрудничество, академическая мобильность.

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Today's labor market poses a number of requirements for would-be specialists, among which the most important are the need to replenish knowledge throughout life, the desire to develop their personality, constantly refreshing and updating their knowledge. Under these conditions, education system is an important link to help them do so, which in turn determines the relevance of continuing or lifelong learning. Continuing education is defined as "the process of increasing the educational (general and vocational) potential of an individual throughout life, using a system of state and public institutions in accordance with the needs of the individual and society" [3; 10].

The concept of "continuing/lifelong learning" is not new; its idea can be traced back to the days of ancient philosophers. The term was first formally introduced in the documents of the General Conference of UNESCO in 1968. Two years later, key provisions of the educational process based on the principle of continuity were presented in Paris. A lot of countries supported the idea of continuing/lifelong learning, which was the main vector of educational reforms. Continuing education was differently perceived by international organisations. Thus, continuing education is regarded to be a tool to equalise the pace of comprehensive development of all countries through education, including their culture, politics and socio-economic sphere. Cultural integration of different countries through the introduction of continuing education is relevant in modern society. As far as the International Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development is concerned, continuing education was interpreted as a way of improving basic vocational training and retraining at a higher educational institution through further vocational training combined with work experience [11].

Today, basic concept of continuing education is the development of an individual in all spheres and at all stages of life.

Summing up different viewpoints on the definition of this concept, we can come to the conclusion that its essence is as follows: “Continuing education is comprehensive and individualised in terms of time, pace and focus, which provides everyone with the right and opportunity to pursue their own lifelong programme of learning and knowledge enrichment” [7]. Thus, continuing education has three main objectives:

1) to prepare an individual for integration in the system of modern relationships, both social and professional;

2) to develop, improve and adapt a person already involved in social relations in an ever-changing world;

3) to develop a personality in a multifaceted way, forming their worldview, as well as aesthetic, moral, physical and other qualities, interests, needs and general culture.

Taking into consideration the above, continuing education, as a process, affects both an individual and various social institution. For an individual, continuing education promotes: 1) formation and satisfaction of spiritual needs; 2) development of abilities at all levels of the educational process through various types and forms of learning; and 3) self-education. As for the state and society, continuing education is the most important sphere of social policy that contributes to: 1) the formation of necessary conditions for comprehensive development of a man;

2) the provision of a mechanism for the reproduction of professional and cultural potential; 3) the formation of conditions for the development of social production. For the world community, continuing education preserves, develops and mutually enriches national cultures, while being an important factor and prerequisite for international cooperation in education and addressing the global challenges of our time [1].

In recent decades, continuing education has been viewed in the context of three components: lifelong learning education; adult education; and continuing vocational education and training.

Depending on the component, this concept has its own specifics.

The pillar of “lifelong learning education” is based on the following principles:

- lifelong learning is considered as learning throughout a person’s life;
- lifewide learning is the learning that focuses on different aspects of a person’s life, helping to improve all necessary activities;
- self-motivation to education implies a conscious desire for intellectual development and improvement of knowledge of a person, allowing them to become competitive not only in Russia, but also on the international labour market.

Adult education is characterised by special requirements for the organisation of training, taking into account time frame as well as the need to combine work and study.

Continuing vocational education and training is aimed at the development of the independence, responsibility and commitment of students, their ability to adapt to the changes in various spheres of human life (education, culture, socio-economic and professional spheres) [2].

In today's professional world, specialists have to update their knowledge and skills and improve their qualifications. Taking the above into account, we can state that the process of vocational education is characterised by the principle of continuity, namely: basic vocational education (bachelor, master, post-graduate), internships, regular professional development, additional vocational education, professional retraining, etc. [9].

Thus, the specificity and the aforementioned principles of the concept of continuing education allow us to assume that academic mobility can be considered as one of its components. Academic mobility is now recognised as a priority for higher education institutions, both in Russia and abroad, and represents a crucial element in the internationalisation of higher education, as well as a promising market for educational services.

Academic mobility develops in two directions: individual and institutional. The aim of individual academic mobility is to build and develop practical skills and competencies that are essential in both everyday and professional life in the current labour market environment. Institutional academic mobility promotes innovative models of administration, adapting learning process to the imperatives of the educational market at the international level. It should be noted that the effectiveness of a country's academic mobility depends on the roadmap adapted by the government of a particular country [6].

In 2012, the document "Mobility for Better Learning. The EHEA Mobility Strategy 2020" was adopted. It consolidates the importance and role of international academic mobility in the global educational space.

This document consolidated measures aimed at the development of international academic mobility, such as: development and promotion of new curricula; introduction of mobility incentives; improvement of foreign language skills of participants of academic mobility programmes; appropriate mobility funding; elimination of migration barriers; creation of special conditions for the mobility of students in need of social support; development of virtual mobility in order to provide an opportunity for non-mobile students to gain international experience without travelling abroad [4].

It should be emphasized that, despite the current global situation, Russian universities continue to implement programmes within the framework of international cooperation, and are also looking for new opportunities and directions for academic and scientific partnerships. Thus, academic mobility being a key aspect of any educational organization activities has not lost its ground under the current circumstances.

Nowadays in the context of the Russian higher education system development, academic mobility represents the most important criterion for the quality and success of a higher education institution.

In Nizhnevartovsk State University (hereinafter referred to as NVSU) this programme is implemented through the "Regulations on individual academic mobility of students, postgraduate students, teachers and staff" which was developed in the context of basic provisions of the

Charter of NVSU, in accordance with international recommendations in the field of higher education.

According to these Regulations, academic mobility of students, graduate students, faculty and staff is designated as one of the priority areas of both international activities of NVSU and would-be specialists vocational training, which serves as a tool for improving the quality of research in higher education, management system as well as inclusion in the internal and external migration relations.

Let us focus on the basic concepts of the Regulations.

Academic mobility refers to students or researchers moving to another educational and scientific institution (within their own country or abroad) for a fixed period of time (up to one year) to study, teach, research or for professional development, after which they return to their home institution.

External (international) academic mobility in NVSU is applied to the study of students at foreign universities, as well as the activities of teachers and staff at foreign educational/scientific institutions.

Internal (national) academic mobility is training of students of all levels, as well as activity of the faculty and staff of NVSU in research centres and scientific institutes within the country (Information of the Department of International Cooperation of the Federal State Budgetary Educational Institution of Higher Education “Nizhnevartovsk State University”. <http://nvsu.ru/ru/medsotr>).

Let us consider the implementation process of the academic mobility at NVSU in accordance with the aforementioned Regulations.

Subjects of academic mobility are students of all levels (undergraduate, graduate, postgraduate), as well as lecturers and other staff of the university. The duration of academic mobility at NVSU can vary from a semester up to an academic year.

Academic mobility is organised by International Office, Office of Training (within its competence), the Department for Foreign Languages (former) (the course “*English for Academic Mobility*” and determination of the English language proficiency of applicants for international academic mobility programmes). It is currently provided by the teaching staff of the Department for Philology, Lingodidactics and Translation Studies.

According to the Regulations, an official invitation from a foreign (Russian) university or research centre is required for participation in academic mobility programmes.

In case of students, the purpose of academic mobility is training through joint programmes for double diplomas (degrees); inclusive education through inter-university cooperation (without issuing a second diploma), which includes academic exchange programmes; internships (e.g. language training); training (research, industrial) internship; participation in summer and winter schools.

Thus, the areas of academic mobility at NVSU have been as follows: *North2North exchange programme for students who study at UArctic member universities*; inter-university

exchange programmes in which students are granted a right to study for a semester/trimester at a foreign university; summer and winter schools in English, Spanish, French, Italian and Chinese; study and internship abroad; scholarship programmes and grants.

NVSU has had bilateral student exchange agreements with University College of Southern Denmark (Obenro, Denmark), University of Barcelona (Barcelona, Spain), JAMK University of Applied Sciences (Jyväskylä, Finland), University College Artesis-Plantain (Antwerp, Belgium), Liepaja University (Liepaja, Latvia).

Studying at a foreign university, students receive such opportunities as to have a unique experience of living in another culture, to apply the theoretical knowledge gained during their studies at NVSU, to improve their language skills while working with the professors at a foreign university as well as communicating with students from other countries, to learn about the tutoring system and teaching methods of the host country, to travel without any additional costs and to get a diploma supplement of training abroad which increases student's significance and advantages in the global labour market.

There is no tuition fee for students participating in academic exchange programmes. First, a student submits an application form to participate in the competitive selection. The applicants are subject to certain requirements, such as being a 2nd to 4th year student, having a high level of academic achievement, taking an active part in the life of their university and having at least an Upper-Intermediate level of proficiency in foreign languages (e.g. English), since the education is in a foreign language [6].

NVSU students participating in academic exchange programmes go through a competitive selection process in accordance with the principles of equality of opportunities, capabilities and achievements in academic and social activities. Compliance with the programme or the exchange agreement is also taken into consideration.

To determine the level of proficiency in English, applicants are invited to take a lexico-grammatical test and an interview with the teachers of the Department for Philology, Lingodidactics and Translation Studies. Students must also prepare Curriculum Vitae, a motivation letter, and letters of recommendation. All the documents are submitted in English.

Over the past decade, NVSU has seen a positive trend towards internationalisation of the educational programmes and the implementation of international academic mobility of students, postgraduate students and teaching (academic) staff.

Thus, for several years, the Department has employed native speakers as lecturers. Our students and teachers are trained in summer and winter language schools in Spain, Germany and China; one- and two-year Fulbright grants have been implemented. In 2013-2016, as a member of the consortium for the implementation of the E3M project "Evaluation of Quality of Cooperation in Education Ecosystem as a Mechanism for Building Professional Competencies", NVSU acted as a project coordinator for the European Commission Tempus IV programme from the Russian side.

To develop the capacity of higher education, NVSU participated in the implementation of the UNISON project “University-Enterprise Cooperation via Spin-Off Companies Network” as part of the Erasmus+ programme project (2016-2019), “Developing Green Skills for Entrepreneurship and Business Based on the EU Experience” (2017-2020) and “Environment, Health and Climate change: Facing the challenges and Adapting to Impacts: Experience of the European Union” (2018-2021) (<http://nvsu.ru/ru/medsotr>).

With the active support of foreign partners, the university promotes international student exchanges and academic mobility. On the basis of the agreements and contracts, university students and teaching staff have an opportunity to undertake language and research internships and professional development programmes under academic mobility programmes in leading partner universities abroad.

It should be noted that international academic mobility programmes are usually in English or in the language of the host country. The language of instruction is quite a problem for both students and teachers, since the quality of the education received at a foreign university depends on the level of foreign language proficiency. Today, modern universities accept international students with different levels of proficiency in the language of instruction, but not lower than B2 (Upper-Intermediate) [12].

Not only for successful study abroad but also for being an equal member of global professional community, Russian universities offer their students various language courses.

To prepare NVSU students for international academic mobility programmes, teachers of the Department for Foreign Languages developed an “English for Academic Mobility” course.

The course is a part of the professional training of NVSU students within the continuing education for participation in international academic exchange programmes. It is specifically designed and offered to the potential applicants for such programmes, but it is not mandatory.

The aim of the *English for Academic Mobility* course is to improve the skills of the English language, develop the ability to use a foreign language in different areas of domestic, cultural, professional and scientific activities, in communication with foreign partners, for participation in academic mobility programmes, as well as for further self-education.

This course provides both for students (with access to education and professional training in foreign universities through international student exchange programmes) and teachers (with the possibility of internships in foreign partner universities; the possibility of participation in international projects; the possibility of being invited to give lectures and share experiences in foreign universities, etc).

The course runs for an academic year (November-June) and takes 100 hours of study. The main forms of learning are group studies and independent extracurricular activities. The specific nature of teaching a foreign language is in practising communication skills and involves working in groups and in pairs within the framework of interactive pedagogical teaching techniques. Simulation of real-life situations will help future participants of the programme to cope with difficulties during their stay abroad and increase their motivation to learn a foreign language [8].

Great attention is paid to various aspects of language (phonetics, vocabulary, grammar) and all types of language activities (speaking, reading, listening, and writing). The main emphasis is on dialogical speech: e.g. business and everyday conversations, role-plays, telephone communication, etc. so that students can understand not only native speakers, but also people of other nationalities for whom English is not their native language [5].

A considerable number of contact hours are spent on writing (completing questionnaires, writing CVs, business letters, essays, abstracts, etc.) and on working with original sources of information (Mass Media, letters, telegrams, advertisements, etc.).

The *English for Academic Mobility* programme is provided with the necessary teaching, learning and information facilities, including professional and refereed journals, academic literature, electronic databases and access to various online sources of information.

As a result of mastering the course “English for Academic Mobility” students should know: lexical and grammatical minimum essential for general and business communication; rules of verbal etiquette and cultural traditions of communication in English-speaking countries; be able to: use a foreign language in communication during their internship; work in an international environment, including English-language sources of information (Mass Media, letters, etc.); make a CV, cover letter, business letter; possess: the basics of speech communication (listening, reading, speaking, writing), write a CV, a cover letter, a business letter; know: basics of speech communication (listening, reading, speaking, writing); skills of working with business correspondence (letter, e-mail, etc.).

The topics covered in the lessons relate to different areas of human life that students encounter while abroad and are presented in the following modules:

Module 1 Meeting People

Module 2 English as a Common Language Module 3 Lifelong Learning

Module 4 Systems of Education Module 5 Studying Abroad

Module 6 Student Exchange Programmes Module 7 International Examinations

Module 8 Business Correspondence (CV, Motivation Letter) Module 9 Making Presentations [6].

At the end of the course, students prepare presentations in English, independently identifying a topic in accordance with the student’s field of study.

The *English for Academic Mobility* course enables students not only to improve their skills in foreign language, but also to learn about linguistic and country-related realities of other cultures, thereby preparing them for academic and professional activity as well as informal communication.

Thus, this course is an important part in the NVSU educational process for both the implementation of Academic Mobility as one of the priorities of a modern university and the main component of would-be specialists vocational training. Moreover, the course is regarded to be on of the aspects of continuing education, which creates conditions for self-education and

comprehensive personal development and provides an opportunity to receive vocational training that meets the requirements of the global labour market.

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