

The Methodology of Creating of a Personal English Course book in Vocational Education and Training

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Abstract

The paper presents the methodology of designing a personal foreign language course book in Vocational Education and Training where a college student acts not only as a passive learner but also as an original co-author. Taking into consideration the number of vocational specialties in the system of Russian Vocational Education and the necessity of further individualization of the learning process in order to improve the learning outcomes, the authors have worked out a 3-stage algorithm that allows achieving higher results in foreign language learning by replacing the source of parent materials, introducing an exact set of requirements for the selection of invariant course elements, laying an all-time great emphasis on independent and creative student's work within the framework of the course. The pedagogical experiment that involved the complete 4-year course of studying led to the expectable along with surprising and highly promising effects that were verified thus regarded as reliable.

Keywords: Vocational education, Learning of foreign languages, Course book, Selection of educational content, Invariant and variant components, The Internet resources and tools.

Introduction

One of the gravest contradictions that still hinders the process of learning foreign languages at Vocational colleges in the Russian Federation is the lamentable discrepancy between the wide range of groups of specialties (26) with narrower further specialization (over 400) [1] and pitiful lack of variety of course books in foreign languages used in class, which in addition often have out-of-date as well as stodgy content. Such set of circumstances has brought us about designing an innovative methodology of creating a foreign language course book for Vocational Education that will combine the following characteristics:

1. The texts [2] that constitute the backbone of the course book should disclose not only fundamental achievements in the vocational field but also feasible possibilities of their application, versatile practical examples, information on innovative trends and problems in the field with a special emphasis on such in the students' homeland;
2. These texts should possess logical and interdisciplinary links with the other subjects of Humanitarian and Socio-economic bunch, which subject 'Foreign Language' belongs to in the National Curriculum of Vocational Education and Training [3], along with Vocational bunch in order to form coherent image of the job;
3. The volume and level of difficulty have to suit students' possibilities and language level. Vocational modules are likely to require special knowledge and skills, intend to develop them thus should be presented coordinately with the correspondent disciplines;
4. Learning materials should be organized so that they facilitate to bring out personal abilities in their vocational interpretation so as to assist to build student's individual vocational trajectory.

In addition, as far as the learning of foreign languages is concerned, the texts used in the course book should be well known to a native speakers' educational and vocational community in a corresponding field that will allow enriching the preparation of vocational students in Russia with a foreign vocational experience, enabling their participation in international exams or contests like WorldSkills and facilitate a potential cross-cultural dialogue between the representatives of the same vocational field.

Review

In order that such texts could be created we have worked out the algorithm of formation of learning module content. Its first stage is the reliability test of the Internet sites and resources for the World web has been chosen as a source of authentic parent materials for the course. The test consists of complete deciphering of web-addresses with the help of machine verification and manual check. It also involves the obligatory check of the target audience of a site or resource for it is highly desirable if it is devised for young people in the 16-20 age band. The second stage of the algorithm is the selection of appropriate content from the Net, i.e. texts, images, videos, audios, graphics etc. in strict accordance with those characteristics, which have been stated in the Introduction here above. At the other end of the spectrum, there are social competencies that according to the National Curriculum of Vocational Education and Training in the Russian Federation are to serve as final outcomes of the foreign language learning in Vocational Education. Thus, we have utilized them as possible thematic guidelines. What is more, we have introduced an additional axiological requirement that should both explicitly and implicitly impose the necessary moral values, present the idea of corporate culture as well as professional ethics.

The third stage of the algorithm is the adaptation of the selected materials. As it has been already mentioned the parent materials selected over the Internet are authentic thus, they can't be possibly exploited for a language learner. Here it is relevant to remark that most of the first- and second-year Vocational college students in Russia have got estimated A 2 level while the college graduates are supposed to demonstrate B 1+ [4]. For the purpose of adaptation, we have worked out three-target approach that includes:

- a) Lexical adaptation that consolidates a student's vocabulary as well as widening his/her synonymic chains;
- b) Grammatical adaptation that simplifies text understanding due to the cancellation of those grammatical constructions that are rare or unusual in a language;
- c) Linkage of foreign realities to the Russian analogues or their interpretation or commenting on them that develops the socio-cultural component of the foreign communicative competence.

The practice manifests that being taken from the correctly selected job-related sites and educational resources of the Internet devised for youngsters, the content does not require much adaptation and remains nearly authentic that evidently adds up to the value of such learning materials.

Results and Discussion

The experimental part of the research took place at a renowned Moscow college where one of its main specialties was Fashion Technology. The study pack included the English course book for Apparel Modelling and Design students, the Workbook, Teacher's Book with meticulous recommendations and lesson planning, testing materials and deliverables. Meaningfully, every module of the course book had its invariant elements that contained basic notions, main ideas, core grammar and vocabulary and variant

ones that a student had a possibility to choose and create while in class and especially out of class or during self-study. First, the students could choose the way they acquired information: though listening or reading for all the texts could be easily changed into a desirable format with the help of selected online converters. Here it is necessary to remark that invariant listening was accomplished with the Internet service that involves animated personages, which act your messages. It was a tremendous success. Second, studying any module (on Corporate culture or New Business) a future textile and fashion industry specialist had to think and ask oneself decisive questions like what type of company s/he would like to work for or whether s/he welcomed the idea of being an entrepreneur. Such questions predisposed a student not only to his/her future job, but also to his/her place in the society. Having made a certain choice, s/he began to study in the particular direction either individually or in group, looking for information, answering questions, reading or listening to stories, writing reports or making presentations on those matters that interested him/her.

Third, special emphasis was laid on out of class work or self-study. As the course book was an electronic one, had a lot of site or resource links, the students could do some tasks when and where they considered most suitable for them. The written works were supposed to be sent to the teacher's email address whereas oral tasks were prepared with the help of the selected online voice recorders that significantly decreased the stress level of speaking in a foreign language and surprisingly enhanced the quality of the skill in terms of pronunciation and speech presentation. According to the later surveys such a progress could be explained with the student's possibility to listen to his/her recordings before sending them to the teacher's email. When listening as they responded, they had been able to hear 'how awfully/indistinctly/unsatisfactorily I was speaking' so they had more often chosen to do another and yet another recording till they had thought 'it was OK to send to the teacher. Such reflection was extremely meaningful and useful: pronunciation, intonation and speech presentation sub-skills were among the most improved ones. Finally, learning of new vocabulary was highly individualized due to a browser build-in dictionaries while reception and personalized online learning tools for memory retention. These were greatly motivating, and we paid attention that the routine process of learning new words that was generally anticipated with little or no excitement was regarded with sufficient enthusiasm by many of the students. Thus, by the end of the four-year course each student from the experimental group had his/her own course book, which reflected his/her thoughts, decisions, interests, abilities and achievements. Such personalization of the learning process greatly enhanced learning motivation, contributed to the development of critical thinking, reflection, self-control and self-evaluation that would be in high demand at the workplace.

Conclusion

The implementation of the methodology of creating a personal English course book has displayed a positive dynamics of development not only of language skills and subject outcomes, but also of students' social, vocational and personal qualities. This

inference is based on the data cluster. First, it is Pearson correlation coefficient χ^2 [5] that proves the overall effectiveness of the course. Second, the additional check of the efficiency of the invariant component of the content was initiated with the participation of independent experts whose assessment was high and appreciative. Eventually, the students' skills and competences were tested during their taking part in National Vocational Qualification exam within the framework of WorldSkills Russia [6]. The participants of the experiment demonstrated high personal results in the 'Fashion Technology' competency, partially due to the developed language skills and interdisciplinary competences.

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