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PROMOTING ACADEMIC MOBILITY THROUGH ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING AND CULTURAL PREADAPTATION

СПОСОБСТВОВАНИЕ АКАДЕМИЧЕСКОЙ МОБИЛЬНОСТИ ПОСРЕДСТВОМ ОБУЧЕНИЯ АНГЛИЙСКОМУ ЯЗЫКУ И КУЛЬТУРНОЙ ПРЕАДАПТАЦИИ

Abstract

Academic mobility is a significant phenomenon in the integration processes of higher education into the world community. Enhancing academic mobility means the development of innovative methods of teaching English and providing cultural preadaptation. This appeal resulted in the training strategy for students and lecturers, promoting and stimulating academic mobility. The implementation of the strategy is also aimed at the development of education quality.

Key words: academic mobility, foreign language training, social and cultural preadaptation.

Аннотация

Академическая мобильность является значительным явлением в интеграционных процессах высшего образования в мировое сообщество. Развитие академической мобильности означает разработку инновационных методов преподавания английского языка и обеспечение культурной преадаптации. Результатом этого стало появление стратегии обучения студентов и преподавателей, способствующей и стимулирующей академическую мобильность. Реализация стратегии также направлена на развитие качества образования.

Ключевые слова: академическая мобильность, обучение иностранному языку, социокультурная преадаптация.

INTRODUCTION

Globalisation has influenced almost all the spheres of human activity. Education is not the exception. The majority of higher education institutions worldwide are going through the period of changes connected with the integration into the European Higher Education Area. It calls for the increase in the quality of education, development of academic mobility, the possibilities of life-long learning, and opportunities of international careers for graduates. Taking this tendency into account, it is clear that using English only as the means of education is not enough. English language should be used as the tool to understand the global culture in general and the culture of the country where the students are planning to work or study in particular. To set the training of internationally active specialists becomes one of the priorities of higher education institutions.

TRAINING STRATEGY

Every year we see more young people receiving additional qualifications, undergoing professional retraining in order to guarantee themselves competitive advantages at the job market. For achievement and maintenance of competitiveness in the internal and external markets for educational services it is necessary for higher education institutions to pursue the policy of education quality, to develop new concepts in education process and to follow them. Achieving conformity with these criteria and improving the quality of teaching which is also focused on acquiring European cultural issues mean introducing a new concept in English language teaching and learning.

The concept is based on the combination of two principles:

- improvement of the English language command by the students and academics;
- informational, social and cultural preadaptation of students and teaching staff taking part in academic mobility.

IMPROVEMENT OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE COMMAND

Foreign language fluency is very important practically in any professional sphere. In order to gain better knowledge of European educational system, to prepare oneself to study and work abroad, and, at the same time, to improve the command of the English language, the training course “English for Academic Mobility”, recommended by the Ministry of Education and Science of the Russian Federation, was developed. A distinctive characteristic of the training course is its multi-functionality. The course is elaborated for the learners whose English is at

Level B1-B2 according to the CEFR. Due to the variety of elaborated topics it is aimed at different categories of learners - students, lecturers and administrative university stuff, participating in the programmes of international cooperation and communicating with the European partners. The course is modular-structured, thus it is possible to make the learning flexible and adapt it to the needs of different groups of learners. For example, the modules devoted to student exchange programmes and the structure of European universities can be interesting for the undergraduate and postgraduate students. For teachers it is necessary to study the modules connected with giving lectures, taking part in international conferences and international cooperation in higher education. Some topics are important for all categories of learners. Among them are the role of English language in the modern world and academic mobility. This selective study of course modules supports its main goal of the strategy – to be of practical use, let the teacher choose the study elements that help to promote academic mobility within a specific group of learners.

In the course each thematic unit consists of a text which suggests various topics for discussion and a set of exercises to practice vocabulary of the unit. Listening comprehension activities include a mini lecture and a dialogue on the topic in question. Writing section is aimed at the development of writing skills, teaches to compose job application letters, business letter and e-mails.

Multimedia supplement is an integral part of the course. It can be used both in the classroom and for students' self-study. The definite strong point of the multimedia supplement is video clips. They include interviews with students, teachers and administrative staff of different European universities. Learners are supposed to give their opinion on the topics under discussion and compare attitudes to various academic problems.

CULTURAL PREADAPTATION

Participation in academic mobility programmes means, as a rule, a rather long period of residing in a foreign country. Even good knowledge of English or the language of a host country cannot prevent a student or a lecturer from social and cultural shock if they are not prepared for a foreign experience. Talking about academic exchanges, adaptation difficulty can be caused not only by peculiarities of educational system of a host country, lack of knowledge of its main customs and traditions, but also inability to communicate in everyday situations.

Each participant of academic mobility faces the necessity of problem-solving in real-life situations and their simultaneous analysis from ‘native culture’ and ‘foreign culture’ positions. It develops certain qualities in a student automatically and often subconsciously: skill to choose the way of interaction with the world around; ability to think in a comparative aspect; intercultural communication skills; ability to recognize insufficiency of knowledge, which determines motivation to study; ability to change self-perception; ability to consider the native country in a cross-cultural aspect; knowledge of other cultures explored from within, etc. All these skills and abilities are acquired more effectively and quickly if the student had a social and cultural preadaptation course at his home university. Social and cultural preadaptation should be conducted in the form of lectures, seminars, role plays, project work, individual and small group consultations.

Propagation of international activity results and achievements is very important. One of the tools of mobility result distribution is public performances of students who have taken part in mobility programmes for the group of fellow students. The students who have this experience can also be involved as advisers on certain questions and problems of academic mobility. Theoretical and practical support of mobility development is usually performed by International Relations Office which manages mobility process, provides administrative and informal support.

For successful functioning of mobility programmes the following conditions should be taken into account:

- effective work of International Relations Office, dealing with mobility programs;
- information network, system of monitoring and feedback in the process of management of academic mobility programs should be developed;
- activity directed at maintenance and support of positive University image at the international level should be conducted in order to attract foreign students and faculty;
- infrastructure for social adaptation of foreign students (hostels, canteens, easy access to the Internet, etc.) should be constantly improved;
- foreign language learning by students and academic staff should be supported and promoted.

CONCLUSION

For academic mobility stimulation, the system, containing the following important elements, should be developed: foreign language training of students and teaching staff combined with informational, social and cultural preadaptation of students and teaching staff.

Due to this system good results in the sphere academic mobility can be achieved. These system elements are interconnected and imply an ongoing work on their perfection. Much work should be done on social and cultural preadaptation of student and academic staff by higher educational institutions in the nearest future.

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