

# PROVISION OF IN-HOUSE TRAINING IN THEORY AND PRACTICE IN FOREIGN LANGUAGES DELIVERY FOR LSP TEACHERS IN TOMSK STATE UNIVERSITY

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## Abstract

The global trend for internationalisation in higher education has set high standards in teaching foreign languages, therefore the problem of appropriate qualifications and training for university staff engaged in delivering courses in a foreign language for specific purposes (LSP) has appeared significant. The National Research Tomsk State University (TSU) at present offers in-house retraining provision for university teachers who deliver the discipline “Foreign language” and demonstrate high proficiency in a foreign language both for academic and specific purposes.

The retraining programme “Theory and practice in foreign languages” sees its goal in building strong teaching competence of university staff involved in teaching foreign languages but who received their degrees in various majors but not in either languages or education. Upon the successful completion of the course the retraining programme participants obtain a new qualification which enables them to teach foreign languages for specific purposes in higher educational institutions.

The paper discusses the retraining programme design, the specifics of its curriculum and delivery. The organisation of the retraining programme provision starts with a needs analysis and finishes with feedback and monitoring efficiency of the programme. The process of building methodological skills comprises the implementation of modern approaches to the training provision based on context-based teaching, case-study and individual teaching experience analysis, class observation and self-reflection. The analysis of the survey data of the programme participants conducted at the beginning and at the end of training is given. The authors also define the prospects of further work on the programme, some options for its modernisation and development in response to the needs of the programme teachers and participants. This paper is based on the results of the theoretical analysis, questionnaire, teaching and learning materials analysis, and final qualification paper material analysis.

Keywords: methodical competence of the teacher, training provision in a foreign language, pedagogical interaction, questionnaire method.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The global trend for internationalisation in higher education has set high standards in teaching foreign languages, therefore the problem of appropriate qualifications and training for university staff engaged in delivering courses in a foreign language for specific purposes (LSP) has appeared significant. Teaching professional languages is really demanding and requires high proficiency both in general and specific aspects of the language, therefore it takes time and effort for a young teacher to gain expertise in LSP.

The role of teachers delivering LSP classes and courses is typically varied and, as stated in [1], it comprises the following ones: teacher, course designer, materials provider, collaborator (with subject specialists), researcher and evaluator of courses, materials and student learning.

First of all, delivering classes and courses as a primary role of LSP teacher is often expanded by designing the course and its curriculum, as, in comparison with general language practice, there are not enough deliberately developed ready-made courses for LSP which can be used in class by practitioners. Course goals, outcomes and topics very often must be designed to meet the needs, language proficiency and requirements of the institution for the course.

Then, general language teachers do not experience much of a problem with teaching materials as many high quality commercially course books and web-site resources, self-study materials for learners and teachers' guide books are available. There exist several directions in LSP, especially English for

specific purposes (ESP), which are finely equipped with teaching and learning materials, including text-books and audios, such as Business English or English for IT, etc. Unfortunately, in less popular language aspects or in languages other than English, LSP teachers have to develop their own teaching and learning materials.

In order to ensure the materials are efficient and relevant to the modern state of the language in the specific field and topics of the knowledge area, LSP collaborate with field specialists in seminars and tutorials. Such methods of enhancing the language itself and materials as looking things up, reading books or journals, asking questions to colleagues, talking to other teachers are also mentioned by LPS practitioners [2, 3]. The role of a researcher is also proved by some peculiarities of the audience, so LSP teachers are involved in analysis of both needs and specialist discourse as described by D.R. Hall in his research [4].

So, training LSP teachers and retraining language in-service teachers for their work with languages for specific and academic purposes in higher education requires a special approach, though reviewers also confirm the fact that literature on teacher education for LSP is quite limited [3]. Each course on LSP teacher education is often to be developed for the needs of a particular group of participants.

Moreover, the new professional standard for educators in the Russian Federation forces all Russian universities to finalise the process of retraining in-service teachers in order to align their qualifications and the subjects they deliver. This is quite often the case that content teachers with a qualification in a specific field which is other than languages, who are proficient in a foreign language, are invited to teach LSP classes in groups of domestic, international and mixed groups of students. Their professional experience and expertise enable their students to receive recent information from the field and get explained the details referring to the field of knowledge rather than the language. This introduces some elements of content and language integrated learning into the traditional LSP teaching. A gap in EAP-specific teacher qualifications is noticed by international researchers, too. In EAP, as a part of broader LSP, “practitioners’ educational backgrounds may vary greatly, from no formal qualifications to teach English, to doctoral level practitioners with specialisms in EAP” [2].

To meet the requirements of the professional standard and the internal needs in staff training, the National Research Tomsk State University (TSU) at present offers in-house retraining provision for university teachers who deliver the discipline “Foreign language” and demonstrate high proficiency in a foreign language both for academic and specific purposes. The programme audience reaches specialists of various qualifications but engaged in LSP teaching. The programme “Theory and Practice in Foreign Languages Delivery” for LSP teachers has already run twice so the details of its planning, delivery and survey analysis are described further in the article.

## **2 APPROACHES TO PROGRAMME DESIGN**

Approaches to curriculum design of LSP are quite various as described in teacher education literature. English for Specific Purposes, as one of the most popular courses, is often considered as a “purely pragmatic enterprise, an atheoretical, methodologically-driven set of practices concerned exclusively with practical outcomes” [2] This statement is disproved by other researchers who recommend their approaches for LSP programme curriculum design; thus, the following approaches are described: practical, classroom-oriented approach to ESP issues [1]; the reflective model of teacher education, which is particularly suited to in-service LSP teacher education [3]; a ‘socioliterate’ approach to teaching, where ESP practices raise “students’ consciousness of the connections between forms, purposes, and participant roles in specific social contexts” (Ann Johns, 1997 quoted from [5]); orientation of ESP materials to general English and placing needs analysis as the basis of the ESP programmes [6].

Studies in the field of implementation of advanced training and retraining programs in teacher education recommend formulating competently defined goals on the basis of educational results planning in the form of competencies [7]. International practice in LSP, for instance the CFTEAP in 2008 or the TEAP Accreditation Scheme in 2014, focus on descriptions of competencies in four main areas:

- academic practice (academic contexts, disciplinary differences, academic discourse, personal learning, development and autonomy);
- EAP students (student needs, student critical thinking, student autonomy);

- curriculum development (syllabus and programme development, text processing and text production);
- programme implementation (teaching practices, assessment practices) [8].

The programme “Theory and Practice in Foreign Languages Delivery” for LSP teachers in TSU states the following competence-based course objectives:

- 1 professional teacher competencies:
  - a) in the field of general language education:
    - to distinguish the essence and regularities of the processes of teaching and learning foreign languages;
    - to implement the means and methods of professional activity of a foreign language teacher;
    - to use textbooks, teaching aids and didactic materials on a foreign language to develop new teaching materials on a particular topic;
    - use the achievements of domestic and foreign methodological heritage, modern methodological directions and concepts of teaching foreign languages;
    - to solve specific methodological problems in teaching practice;
    - to critically analyze the educational process and educational materials in terms of their efficiency;
  - b) in the field of research:
    - to set and solve research tasks in the field of education via systematic theoretical and practical knowledge;
  - c) in the field of project activities:
    - to design new programme and course curricula;
- 2 specific skills in theory and practice of foreign language teaching:
  - theory and practice of foreign language teaching methods;
  - fundamentals of psycholinguistics;
  - basics of pedagogy;
  - modern educational technologies;
  - competence-based approach in education;
  - assessment of learning outcomes.

Modern requirements governing the education system regards the well-developed methodological competence as an essential part of the professional competence of a university teacher. Thus, if professional competence is described as “an integral characteristic of a personality, which allows determining the measure of its professionalism” [9], then by the methodological competence of a foreign language teacher we mean the possession of the methodical techniques aimed at introducing, consolidating and training the language material in a certain sequence and focused on building skills in language activities (reception (listening and reading), production (spoken and written), interaction (spoken and written), and mediation (translating and interpreting) and assessment of their proficiency [10]. The well-developed methodological competence comprises the ability to organise teaching and learning in a foreign language as a process and its successful management; skills in educating students and developing their personality; the ability to operate the key functions of the teacher: to design and plan, to organize, control and assess.

This brings us to the consideration of the teacher’s professional activity in the pedagogical context where the category of methodological mastery - “a high degree of mastering various ways of achieving pedagogical goals by the teacher” is interpreted as the basis for the success of the future or in-service teacher [11].

### **3 LSP RETRAINING PROGRAMME CONTENT DESIGN**

Designing content for a teacher education programme is a crucial issue, which affects its success with attending and future participants. Content planning has to consider such aspects as theory, best practices and challenges the teachers experiences in their work.

Thus, the identification of skills and areas of knowledge (teacher needs) can be used as a basis for determining topics for teacher education [3]. Focusing on the direct needs turns highly efficient and attracts programme participants who are ready to get some ready-made solutions and share their own experience of dealing with particular challenges. Research also shows needs analysis is not always the case for the basis of ESP teacher education programmes as it is in Indonesia, though collaboration with subject specialists is valued high as it is in China [6].

Topics for LSP teacher education programmes do not greatly vary; they normally cover the areas of the language, specificity and purpose, and the curriculum comprises pedagogy, context-embedded language and discourse, and management [4]. Some theoretical aspects may also be covered, such as, branches, characteristics and rationale of ESP, as well as approaches and issues in course design [12].

The teacher of English for academic purposes (TEAP) scheme describes five main modules in the content: academic practices; the student; course delivery; programme development; professional development, research and scholarship; and an optional module: TEAP mentor and assessor [13].

The programme "Theory and Practice in Foreign Languages Delivery" for LSP teachers in TSU is delivered during the academic year on the job. The total amount is 520 hours, including 284 teaching hours. Teaching sessions are held in the form of lectures and seminars. The programme consists of 11 modules: introduction to linguistics; theory of intercultural communication; speaking and writing skills development; cultural studies; introduction to the teaching profession; psycholinguistics; theory and methods of teaching foreign languages; methods of teaching English (French, German, Chinese, Japanese, Korean) language; modern teaching technologies; competence-based approach in education; assessment of learning outcomes. The given set of disciplines is included into the programme curriculum to ensure the improvement of the methodological competence of the participants.

## **4 PROGRAMME PROVISION**

The programme "Theory and Practice in Foreign Languages Delivery" for LSP teachers ran twice in academic years 2016-2017 and 2017-2018. The target audience for the programme were 30 LSP teachers of the Faculty of Historical and Political Studies in TSU. Mostly they were teachers of two subdivisions: Department of International Business Communication and Department of Oriental Studies. Both departments provide language training for undergraduate, graduate and postgraduate programmes. The Department of International Business Communication provides students with LSP classes in three foreign languages: English, German and French. The Department of Oriental Studies teaches three foreign languages: Chinese, Japanese and Korean.

### **4.1 Programme participants**

Most programme participants received their higher education training in the areas of "International Relations" and "Foreign Regional Studies" and had the qualification of a master or specialist in international relations or regional studies, respectively. A minor part of the participants originally had a qualification in "Translation Practice and Theory of Translation". It is important to note that the participants of the professional retraining programme "Theory and Practice of Teaching Foreign Languages" are more than professionals in the field of international relations, linguistics and foreign regional studies; they are also in-service teaching staff of a university. They can be characterised as a community of like-minded people who pursue the same goal and express willingness and ability to discuss the issues raised. This greatly contributed to the success in mastering the content of the retraining programme.

## 4.2 Teaching methods

To achieve the goals of the professional retraining programme, the most appropriate are teaching technologies that ensure the personality development and change its position in the teaching and learning process so that it becomes its active participant [14]. The specificity of the target audience and their needs as teachers determined the choice of teaching methods:

- teaching of the content was delivered with the refraction tactics through the prism of the existing teaching experience of the programme participants; thus, comparing the existing practical experience with the pedagogical theory was considered crucial;
- the dominating approach to training in the programme was the concept of contextual learning by A.A. Verbitsky [15]. The pedagogical situation unfolded through active teaching methods - case studies, problem situations, discussions, and group work;
- peer-observation and self-reflection revealed a lack of diverse teaching techniques and methods used by the programme participants to maximize the potential of students within the framework of the subject taught. To solve the challenges, the problematic issues were discussed in plenums and in groups and allowed the exchange of available experience. The programme participants talked over some basic principles of LSP provision and the conceptual issues of didactics and came to the conclusions they needed more support for their teaching in specialized pedagogical and psychological knowledge, knowledge of current trends and requirements for teaching and learning in the existing university framework. It was also stated in peer-observations and discussions that the participants could not always achieve the planned learning outcomes and even did not fully fulfill the class objectives due to lack of proper class planning. So the course and class design must consider the psychological and pedagogical conditions and features of students; the latter, in their turn, must be regarded as adults; thus, they are able to independently overcome the difficulties encountered in the development of foreign language and culture skills. Most programme participants were recommended to regularly attend training sessions and design their classes with the principles received in the programme due course. The functions of the LSP teacher do not come down to bringing interesting subject content to the student attention, but also control the assimilation of the knowledge gained and assess the development of competencies.
- the proper pedagogical interaction in LSP classes is facilitated by the specifics of the subject itself; the pedagogical interaction can be successfully carried out at an intuitive level. Indeed, one of the key categories in LSP teaching and learning is correctly built communication both within one culture and intercultural one. In pedagogical interaction, it is also important to perceive each other as subjects and to establish subject-subject relations, as this approach contributes to the recognition of the value of another person. Thus, the appropriate education and qualification contribute to the fact that the programme participants feature the well-developed teaching tact, the educational nature of the personality [16].

In general, the concept of “professional retraining program”, as reflected in the current Law on Education, is determined as a programme aimed at acquiring “the essential competencies to carry out a *new* type of professional activity, the acquisition of a *new* qualification” [17]. The provision experience of the programme in TSU demonstrates it does not provide its participants with a fully new type of activity, but is considered as “a programme for additional qualifications development”. The programme is distinguished by the principle of advancing in-service practice of an educator before a thorough theoretical, quasi-professional training in this field. This, on the one hand, undoubtedly turned out to be an advantage for successful mastering the content of the program, on the other hand, it allowed to enrich professional activities with the acquired additional knowledge and skills.

## 4.3 Final qualification paper analysis

In accordance with the requirements of advanced training and retraining programmes, the participants prepare the final project - the final qualification paper, which summarises the knowledge gained, personal experience in teaching LSP and demonstrates the developed materials. The final qualification paper in this programme comprises three chapters: didactic, methodological and practical ones. Thematically, the final qualification papers are devoted to the peculiarities of teaching LSP to students of non-linguistic majors at TSU and touch upon the specifics of using active teaching methods, improving oral and writing skills, developing communicative, and country study competences

in groups of students with varying levels of foreign language skills. The programme participants describe generally accepted approaches to solving the selected problem, determine the most appropriate technologies and methods, present their own lesson plans and provide their developed teaching and learning materials for either class activities or independent work of students.

The final qualification paper organized in the described above way, becomes a methodological product, which is based on a specific methodological solution required to develop both the lesson itself and the teaching and learning materials for the discipline as a whole. Analysis of the methodological products of advanced training and retraining programs allows us to talk about the achievement of the goals set for the programme.

The analysis of the final qualification papers showed a lack of both methodological literature and research on certain aspects of teaching LSP to support the work. For instance, the development of students' phonological competence in oriental foreign languages is very poorly observed in the available materials, therefore the final qualification papers in Chinese, Japanese and Korean languages rather based on real teaching experience than theoretical studies. There is an urgent need to develop and provide classes with high-quality modern educational materials, including not only printed texts, but also audio and video materials which are not always accessible in LSP. A review of the lesson plans and exercises developed in the final qualification paper demonstrated some difficulties of goal-setting and planning the results of the lessons, as well as some sticking points in developing criteria for evaluating tasks aimed at improving skills in writing and speaking (essays, summaries, debates, discussions, etc).

A number of participants had an opportunity to test and evaluate the developed lesson plans and sets of exercises in groups of students before the paper defence. They shared their own analysis and recommendations on the correction of the final qualification paper on how to adjust the plans and materials prepared. The exchange of teaching and methodological experience, of course, enriches participants who have many years of practice in the implementation of classes in LSP. Some group participants took part in conferences with the results of their research [18, 19].

In general, the analysis of the final qualification papers prepared by the programme participants allows concluding that they have achieved the goals set in the training framework.

## **5 SURVEY RESULTS**

As a method of identifying interests and needs of the programme participants, we have chosen a survey method to quickly interview a large number of respondents and identify a mass pattern [20]. In order to determine the initial attitude and compare the expectations of the participants with the results obtained during the programme, a survey was conducted both at the beginning and at the end of the training course. During the two years of the program, 93% of the enrolled students were successfully qualified and received their certificates. 25 out of 30 responded to the questionnaire. These were in-service LSP teachers with different teaching experience (from 1 year to 20 years), who were offered questionnaires containing detailed instructions for completing them. For this study, two questionnaires were compiled, consisting of 9 and 3 questions, respectively.

The questions of the needs analysis were designed to reveal the experience of participants in teaching activities, if they had any teaching and learning materials, like teaching aids, or text-books developed for their LSP classes, which teaching methods they used in the teaching process, as well as their wishes for the content of the retraining programme. The results of the needs analysis are listed in Table 1.

Table 1. Results of the needs analysis.

	Result	Percentage
1	Developed e-learning courses	8%
2	Currently work on e-learning courses	12%
3	Do not use electronic educational resources in teaching	18%
4	Developed text-books / teaching aids	30%
5	Developed course syllabi	90%
6	Use a short plan for each class	100%
7	Use a detailed plan for each class	4%
8	Never practiced project-based teaching	30%
9	Were trained in developing e-courses	40%
10	Regularly develop their methodological competence in enhancement courses in Russia and / or abroad	92%
11	Describe their teaching practice as a combination of traditional and innovative	10%
12	Imitate their teachers in their own teaching practice	90%
13	Expect their teaching skills to be improved after the course	92%
14	Are forced to participate in the programme by their superiors	8%

The needs analysis questionnaire consisted of the following entries:

- 1 *General information:* surname, first name, patronymic (it was proposed to indicate at will); general and pedagogical work experience. The general and pedagogical work experience ranged from 1 year to 14 years, while in some cases the total length of service slightly exceeded the pedagogical one (1–5 years). 90% of respondents preferred to fill out a questionnaire on an anonymous basis, which, to a certain extent, could contribute to obtaining more truthful data.
- 2 *Teaching methods analysis.* The question referred to the use of active / interactive teaching methods, problem-based and project-based teaching technologies in the teaching process. The results revealed the following methods used: project-based teaching and learning, business / situational / simulation games in classes, as well as information and communication technologies. According to the survey, 18% of respondents do not use any electronic devices and resources in teaching, 30% have never implemented project-based training in their classes.
- 3 *The experience in developing teaching and methodological support for the subjects taught.* 30% indicated they had developed teaching and teaching aids and had them published, 90% participated in the compilation and updating of course syllabi.
- 4 *Development of e-courses.* Only 8% of respondents had developed electronic courses for their disciplines (modules) and used them in the teaching and learning process, while 12% were in the process of working on electronic training courses.
- 5 *Advanced training experience.* 40% of the surveyed teachers had underwent advanced training in the design of distance learning courses. Low performance on the results of training in such seminars is associated with a lack of motivation of teachers to create electronic courses. It should be noted that the majority of participants (92%) regularly improved their teaching competencies by participating in various advanced training programs in the field of teaching foreign languages in both domestic and foreign educational institutions.
- 6 *Lesson planning experience.* All participants (100%) designed a brief lesson plan with an indication of its topic, teaching aids and exercises. A detailed plan indicating the topic, goals, stages of the lesson, knowledge and skills that should be developed during the lesson, the exercises, and the time planned for each part of the lesson was mentioned by only one respondent (4%). These indicators are explained by the large amount of work in higher education institutions performed by the faculty, whose duties, along with teaching, include other activities, such as research, administrative work and other responsibilities. Design of detailed lesson plans is a time-consuming process, however, it is highly desirable as the detailed plan structures the class more effectively, methodically determines how to achieve the goal of the

lesson. This practice is especially recommended for young specialists, since it facilitates their teaching and also allows mentors to identify possible methodological inaccuracies in planning and conducting a lesson and help correct them in a timely manner.

- 7 *Teaching styles.* 10% of respondents described their teaching activities as a combination of traditional and innovative ones; 90% preferred imitating teaching styles of their teachers. The latter is quite a frequent case in the Russian teaching tradition, especially in higher education, as it builds the foundation for the future teaching style [21].
- 8 *Expectations from participating in the retraining programme "Theory and Practice of Teaching Foreign Languages".* 92% of participants mentioned a desire to acquire new knowledge in order to improve their methodological skills; 8% noted that participation in the programme was a forced necessity for them.
- 9 *Suggestions on the content of the programme.* Among suggestions on the content there were the following ideas mentioned: to explore new methods of teaching foreign languages; to introduce interactive classroom practices; to study some ways to clear psychological barriers that prevent students from mastering conversational skills; to learn how to use effective methods of communication with students, to observe methods of effectively motivating students to study; to sort out the issues of proper planning of classes, in particular, changing the types of speech activity and retaining students' attention during the course. The programme participants preferred active practice in classes with the analysis of problem situations and discussion of the possible solutions. The special request was about the work in groups of students with mixed abilities and proficiency in a foreign language and groups of international students who do not speak either English or Russian with intermediate proficiency.

The survey results helped to identify the compliance of expectations with the results obtained during the training, and certainly represented valuable data for the reflection of teachers involved in the organization of the teaching and learning process. We can state the successful implementation of the tasks set by the teachers: 92% of students indicate that their expectations from participation in the retraining programme were fully met, expectations of 8% of respondents were not fully justified, which is connected, in their opinion, with a busy schedule of work, which did not allow effectively combining work activities with training within the framework of the proposed programme. In general, the participants expressed their gratitude to the organisers and teachers for the work done; one respondent expressed a wish to replace the final qualification paper with testing which not, though, possible due to the regulations.

The data obtained from the questionnaire survey was provided to all teachers involved in the implementation of the retraining programme in order to more effectively organise training.

## 6 CONCLUSIONS

So, the conducted research has confirmed the relevance and necessity of the implementation of professional retraining programmes aimed at development of the methodological competence of LSP teachers. The competences of the participants, declared in the programme have been developed. However, the degree of their development in both the linguodidactics and research areas is different. The programme participants were willing to devote more time to self-development in general, and to improve their methodological competence, in particular. In our opinion, only 65% of participants have fully achieved the goal of the programme. Such a conclusion has been made on the basis of an objective analysis of the quality of the final qualification papers prepared; the possibility of the results obtained to be applied in the real teaching and learning process has been assessed. In addition, the need to expand the audience of students has emerged: in the following academic year, the contingent of participants will include not only teachers, but also students and undergraduates enrolled in the areas of Regional Studies and International Relations. This is due to certain difficulties in finding employment in language schools, both in Russia and abroad, in particular, with new qualifying requirements for teachers - a qualification confirming the appropriate training background of the teacher in the specific field, so the timely retraining can facilitate their future employment.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The presented work and the current paper are funded within the framework of realisation of Strategic Programme on Faculty of Historical and Political Studies Transformation and Competitiveness as well

as within the framework of National Research Tomsk State University Competitiveness Enhancement Programme in the Group of Top Level World Class Research and Academic Institutions.

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