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**ACADEMIC MOBILITY AS AN INTEGRAL COMPONENT OF  
MODERN EDUCATION**

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***Abstract***

The study is devoted to the involvement of Russian higher educational institutions in international academic mobility programs. The academic mobility programs are typical for modern education since they serve an efficient and productive tool that develops professional competences of future experts. Besides, such programs improve professional skills of research and academic staff. The study analyzes the experience of international students' cooperation organized and financed by the German government within the SPRINT cultural educational program and participation of one teaching staff member in Erasmus+ International Credit Mobility Program for research and academic staff associates within the international grant of the European Union. The paper highlights the key components of the SPRINT program, their role in the development of students' communicative competences, motivation for educational and future professional activity. In the second part the paper summarizes the practical experience gained at the University of Bergamo (Italy), describes specific working conditions of a teacher at a European higher educational institution. The received results fostered the development of a hybrid course in the *Russian Language Phonetics* for students learning Russian as a foreign language. The course includes theoretical aspects and some exercises aimed to master and consolidate the theoretical knowledge. It gives recommendations on teaching the above course. The course evaluation showed that the suggested material ensures the consolidation of gained knowledge and modernization of phonetic, lexical and grammatical content, as well as the development of communicative foreign language skills at a higher level. The study is based on description, observation and synthesis.

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## 1. Introduction

The academic mobility programs become an integral part of modern higher education (Teichler, 2017). For some higher educational institutions this serves a factor to increase their international competitiveness (Arsenyev, 2016), for others – a way to integrate an educational institution into the international educational space and a means to optimize the educational process (Ostanina, 2014; Garusova, Sukhaya, 2014). The academic mobility gains special importance within foreign language training of future experts whose professional activity is focused on cross-cultural communication (Leask, 2009), which in turn justifies the development of not only linguistic knowledge, but also abilities to overcome stereotypes and to adapt to the changing conditions when dealing with the representatives of various cultures (FSES HE 45.03.02 Linguistics). On the other hand, a student learns the culture more deeply during his introduction into a foreign culture. According to Galskova and Gez (2004), the role of initial culture as a learning tool of not only foreign, but also your own culture is extremely high.

Another important factor of successful and effective activities focused on professional competences of students is a certain level of teachers' competences. The level of professional competence of research and academic staff of higher educational institutions is maintained by several complex measures implying not only stationary work of a teacher with scientific and methodical literature, internal or remote professional development courses, but also active participation in academic mobility programs.

## 2. Problem Statement

### 2.1. Cross-cultural experience of future foreign language experts

One of the main objectives of teaching foreign language experts is to develop universal cultural, general professional and professional competences of students throughout the study. During the design and implementation of educational programs any higher educational institution is focused on specific types of professional activity for students based on the labor market demand, available research and material resources. The development of professionally focused competences is the guarantee of successful career of graduates.

However, efficient development of professionally focused competences of students implies not only the study of the corresponding disciplines within the curriculum, but also the participation in international programs, including academic mobility programs. These programs become the integral part of modern education and ensure the integration of a personality into foreign and national cultures.

Let us appeal to the experience of students' mobility at the Foreign Languages Department of the Pushkin Leningrad State University. In 2019, the students studying *Pedagogical Education* (44.03.01) took part in the SPRINT international program organized by the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs together with Deutsche Auslandsgesellschaft Lübeck e.V. Within this program, having received a scholarship of the German government, students become part of the cultural educational program aimed to develop educational and professional motivation, as well as to master communicative competences.

The SPRINT includes several indispensable conditions.

First, the participants – students from Belarus, Denmark, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Poland, Russia, Finland, Sweden, etc., live in German families and thus tap into German life and family

traditions, foreign culture becomes part of their real life. This certainly contributes to the development of students' communicative competences. A communicative competence in this case is considered as a multicomponent unit encompassing language, speech and sociocultural elements.

Second, a student gets a unique opportunity to visit schools and educational organizations of Lubeck, learn about the German educational system and compare it with the education in Russia. The discussion of classes directly with the teachers of German and with the teachers of higher educational institutions, participation in master classes on teaching German as a foreign language fosters the development of professional and educational motivation of students, i.e. transformation of already existing broad educational motives (fragmentary, impulsive, unstable, determined by external stimuli, momentary, unconscious, ineffective) into a mature motivational realm with stable structure (Mamaeva & Agapova, 2008).

Finally, an integral part of this program is its regional geographic component: acquaintance with landmarks of Lubeck, Hamburg, Kiel, etc. The program also includes a visit to museums and theaters where students can see modern and classical performances based on the famous works of German authors. Joint lunches or dinners allow creating an insight into the German national cuisine.

Thus, the SPRINT program gives students not only a real opportunity to master a foreign language alongside with the understanding of a different world of linguocultural community, but also motivates them for their future professional activity.

## **2.2. Teaching mobility**

The academic mobility of the faculty is first of all aimed at the development of new teaching approaches and their introduction into the educational process (Pherali, 2011; Walker, 2015).

The study below describes the participation of a teacher of the Foreign Languages Department of the Pushkin Leningrad State University in Erasmus+ academic mobility program for teaching and research staff. During this program two hybrid phonetic courses for 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> year bachelor students and 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> year master students of the University of Bergamo (Italy) were developed and piloted.

Teaching conditions at a European university (large group of students (50-70 people), duration of classes (at least 2 clock hours), small hourly load for a course (up to 4 clock hours), lack of division of classroom hours into lectures and practical classes with the corresponding number of students each, which is typical for Russian higher education, as well as the staff request of the host university to include certain aspects in a course made it impossible to present the material declared in the application in the traditional form that implies lectures and practical classes. The so-called hybrid phonetic course considering the specifics of teaching at a European higher educational institution was thus designed.

The hybrid course implies a unique concentrated combination of theoretical and practical material. For bachelor students the course covers theoretical information on the specifics of phonetics as a science in general, on the process of production of speech sounds, on features of the Russian phonetic system, etc.

Theoretical aspects were delivered through video presentations including clearly stated basic ideas of a lecture, a scheme, a diagram, tables, drawings, video fragments ensuring the best perception of the material. Some information in the presentation was given as handouts to students so that they could take notes during classes.

The course is delivered in Russian and is intended for students knowing Russian at the elementary level. The material is delivered with presence and active participation of a lead teacher – a native language speaker who, if necessary, helps to translate the corresponding material from Russian.

Each theoretical block is followed by practical tasks. The change of activity is a necessary condition to keep students' attention on a training material and to master theoretical aspects.

The following may be used as exercises demonstrating the development of speech sounds: "A general physician, examining a patient, tells him: "Open your mouth". Then adds: "Say "a-a-a"? Why this additional request is needed? And why "a-a", but not "i", "u", etc.?" (Norman, 2006). What happens in the formation of other vowels?

"How would the following phrase sound if a person has a stuffy nose: *Мама мыла раму. На маме новый фартук. Много дела, мало слов. Наша мама на рынке* (Mother washed a frame. A mother has a new apron. Lots of work but less words. Our mother is in the market.)" Explain.

The following exercises may be used to strengthen knowledge on the phonetics of consonants and vowels of the Russian language.

"Read a fragment from a story by V. Dragunsky *The Bewitched Letter*, where small children are trying to pronounce correctly the word "шшшшшш" (cones), but fail since they have no front teeth: "This is a very simple word. I stopped and clearly said:

- "Никакие не сыски. Никакие не хыхки, а коротко и ясно: фыфки!" (Not syski. Not hyhki, but short and clear: fyfki!).

Whether the author is right considering that the loss of front teeth makes the pronunciation of a sound [ʃ] (sh) difficult? The pronunciation of what Russian sounds is difficult in this case?"

Besides, the students were asked to specify a word form following the description of phonetic characteristics of sounds within a particular word and then, to make word forms themselves and ask other students to define them using tables of vowels and consonants.

The tasks are accompanied by the active use of tables of vowels and consonants. Such exercises demonstrate specific features of a foreign-language phonetic system and prepare a student for its conscious perception.

It is recommended to consult the teachers – carriers of a foreign language working with a group when developing exercises so that the language material used is first, clear and comprehensible for students, second, the phonetic form of used units does not coincide on sounding, for example, with offensive words of the students' native language.

Master students with good language fluency are offered to study the suprasegmental units. This includes the problems of stress in the Russian language, features of intonation of various functional styles of speech, as well as the specifics of phonetic stylistic means.

The inclusion of these aspects allows explaining some critical phenomena in language practice. For example, a "strong" dynamic stress in the Russian language causes reduced vowels in unstressed position. There is no vowel reduction in unstressed position in the Italian language due to less vigorous stressed syllable, therefore the pronunciation of reduced vowels is one of the most complex tasks for the Italians learning Russian. The information on functions under stress is also important. The distinctive function deserves particular attention. Other interesting and important aspects in the language practice include stress

in a phonetic word, including the concept of clitic, secondary and non-standard stress in the Russian language.

The next part of the hybrid phonetic course is the analysis of prosodic features of various functional styles. A theoretical part includes the characteristic of functional styles. This includes the description of the purpose of a message, functional form of such texts, prosodic parameters caused by communicative intension of a speaker and a situation. The description is followed by a video fragment, within which the prosodic parameters described above, are implemented. Practical group work with a video implies that the students listen to a text, read it multiple times thus imitating the corresponding intonation and do some exercises to practice their intonation.

The last aspect can be optional. It implies that the students learn some types of phonetic stylistic means of the Russian language and features of their realization in texts. The students get acquainted with such concepts as assonance, alliteration, onomatopoeia, with different rhyme types, including a punning rhyme, etc. Within practical classes a teacher together with students read fragments of texts and analyze them thus paying attention to the stylistic function of the considered phonetic expressive means. Other phonetic phenomena studied earlier can be highlighted: reduction of vowels, stress, etc. Then the students are given a text fragment for independent stylistic analysis. It is recommended to organize practical group work by including students with different level of proficiency in Russian into one group so that more advanced students help students with lower level of proficiency.

The work with phonetic exercises at the level of texts, selection of illustrative material reflecting real communication to the maximum make it possible not only to repeat and master earlier studied material, but also to develop communicative competences within foreign language training.

### **3. Research Questions**

Due to the above features of modern development of education a special emphasis is placed on the one hand, on the development of professionally focused competences of future foreign language experts, and on the other hand, on the ways to increase the professional competence of the teaching staff.

### **4. Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the study is to prove the need for participation of research and academic staff and students of higher educational institutions in international academic mobility programs.

### **5. Research Methods**

The study is based on such general scientific methods as description, observation and synthesis.

### **6. Findings**

A typical feature of the present stage of development of the Russian education is active participation of higher educational institutions in international academic mobility programs.

Higher education is focused on training of creative, flexible, socially oriented and competitive graduates (Kotsiubinskaia & Listratkina, 2017). A transition from formal knowledge transfer to the development of practical skills and abilities becomes an indispensable condition of such education.

Participation of students in international programs fosters the development of communicative and cross-cultural competences, motivates them for educational and professional activity.

The inclusion of the faculty into the academic mobility programs ensures the development of their professional competences, design and implementation of new training courses into the educational process. Thus, the design of such hybrid phonetic course only became possible as a result of the academic mobility program when a teacher got acquainted with realities of the European higher education, requirements imposed to teaching within foreign higher education. At present, the course is being adjusted to the conditions of Russian higher education.

## 7. Conclusion

The international academic mobility programs become an integral part of modern higher education since they serve an efficient and productive tool that develops professional competences of future experts thus preparing him for successful self-fulfillment in further professional career. On the other hand, the educational path of a graduate depends on competences and professionalism of research and academic staff, which in turn causes the need for regular professional development of teachers. The participation in academic mobility programs undoubtedly contributes to the growth of professional skills of the staff of higher educational institutions.

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