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THE EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITY: A KEY TO IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF FOREIGN LANGUAGE TRAINING

Abstract. The present paper disentangles the theoretical issues of the extracurricular foreign language training and develops a practical perspective on the organization of extracurricular activities as a part of educational technologies.

Key words: extracurricular activities, foreign language training, academic process.

Problem setting. The quality of foreign language training today is justly considered as a prerequisite for the professional self-identification of graduates. Given the current autonomy of higher education institutions, trainers are grappling with the design and implementation of pragmatic educational techniques that would fit the formats of the training process at specific foreign language chairs. This is why the issue of intensifying the extracurricular activities urgently cries for action, especially now that foreign language training in higher educational institutions with professional focus is becoming increasingly shorter and is often limited to 2-3 first semesters of bachelor programmes. On the top of this is a discrepancy between the steadily rising requirements regarding the expected foreign language command level for professionals and their *de facto* inability to apply the knowledge in their professional career. All these considerations point to the need for expending ever more effort on the quality of foreign language training and explain the importance of the issue at hand.

Literature review. There is a vast array of works dedicated to key concepts of extracurricular training activities (I. Zimnyaya, O. Verbitskiy, V. Yakunin, A. Rubanik, A. Godlevs'ka, A. Kaps'ka and others), such as the definition and structure of extracurricular training activities (L. Sokolova, V. Lis, L. Petrychenko, L. Smerchak, O. Stoyan, G. Ovcharenko), the relevant organizational approaches (L. Onuschak, L. Yakushkina), and the role of extracurricular training activities in students' personal development (T. Ivanaiska, M. Donchenko, I Karpova, N. Galeyeva, N. Rudenko, O. Tepla).

The extracurricular foreign language training activities are commonly defined as a means to intensify foreign language training and to encourage students' personal and professional development (L. Luzhnyk, E. Kravchenko, O. Obdalova, N. Skrypnyk). For all its indisputable value, this definition however tends to downplay the complementarity of extracurricular training activities and in-class foreign language training.

The objective of the present paper is to address the theoretical issues of the extracurricular foreign language training especially with regard to its complementary nature with the in-class training process, as well as to present a practical perspective on the organization of extracurricular training activities.

Key argument. There exists a broad consensus to the effect that the instructional systems of specific university chairs arise out of the combination of the teaching and educational processes, each of which bears the imprint of discipline-specific peculiarities. The vast academic, pragmatic and educational potential of foreign languages allows for a balanced synthesis of the mandatory in-class instruction and targeted extracurricular activities. Given that the training in foreign languages offered at specialized higher educational institution is rather condensed in terms of the number of credit points and in-class course hours, the extracurricular educational activity takes on a major role in improving the quality of students' foreign language proficiency, especially with a view to ensuring the continuity of the foreign language instruction process and improving the skills and competencies over the course of the entire instruction period.

Setting up an extracurricular activities system requires clarity about the term “extracurricular activities”. The term can be taken to mean any student activities undertaken outside the academic process, with a view to reinforcing students’ personal development and interests, expanding and deepening their professional knowledge and competencies [1].

Extracurricular training in foreign languages is especially effective if naturally integrated in students’ leisure activities, for the latter allows students to cater to their own needs, thereby giving a boost to their self-actualization, self-affirmation and self-improvement. Extracurricular training within students’ leisure activities hence presents a setting where knowledge, skills and competencies – either acquired during the in-class instruction process or auto-didactically – come to be experientially embedded. It is in this context that scholars refer to the essential educational, developing, stabilizing, integrating and compensating potential of the extracurricular foreign language training [3] and indeed view it as a unique social and cultural phenomenon underlying the self-development and self-realization of students’ creative competencies [9].

The organization of extracurricular foreign language training activities must do full justice to the peculiarities of the foreign language training outside the class room. It has to complement the relevant in-class instruction process and be aligned with the logic and requirements of the in-class training process. Among these, the key elements are academic nature, relevance to day-to-day life, socially useful orientation, and pedagogical suitability [7]. Thus the basic component of extracurricular foreign language training is a conglomerate of various activity types organized outside the in-class training process [9].

The efficiency and the effectiveness of the extracurricular training in foreign languages have been found out to depend on the following principles [2]:

- students’ language proficiency and consistency with the respective in-class training;
- age peculiarities and interests of students;
- focus on communication;

- combination of collective, group and individual forms of instruction;
- interdisciplinarity factors [3, 5].

Any instructional system exhibits interdependencies between objectives, content, forms, and methods of the teaching and educational process. The end objectives of the extracurricular training in foreign languages can be taken to include, *inter alia*:

- expansion and deepening of knowledge, skills and competencies in foreign language communication proficiency;
- enhancement of professional, academic, lingual and cultural nature;
- development of individual creative skills and establishment of individual behavioral style of students;
- strengthening of students' interest and motivation for foreign language learning, encouragement of cognitive and linguistic interests;
- increasing the creativity level of the educational environment;
- creative interaction with students;
- promotion of students' experience in intercultural interaction and cooperation;
- improvement of students' linguistic, intercultural and professional knowledge;
- comprehensive personal development, including intellectual, emotional, spiritual and moral aspects.

The extracurricular training in foreign languages typically fulfills a set of the following interrelated und mutually reinforcing functions [1]:

- 1) teaching function (establishment and improvement of language competency; repetition, deepening, expansion, and reinforcement of the training material, establishment of intra- and inter-disciplinary connections);
- 2) developmental function (encouragement of intellectual and spiritual growth of students, development of their attention, memory, thinking process, speaking abilities, activation of cognitive capabilities etc.);

- 3) educational function (establishment of positive educational motivation, confidence and readiness to undertake professional activity, strive for learning, cultivation of discipline, assertiveness, patience, resistance etc.)
- 4) diagnostic function (identification of language proficiency of students, identification of the absorption levels at each training stage, problem-shooting and identification of training effectiveness);
- 5) management and planning function (contrasting the planned and attained results; fitting the didactic process to the level and individual peculiarities of students);
- 6) assessment function (assessment of students' activities and achievements from the extracurricular training);
- 7) motivational function (creation of positive motives and incentives, activation of the deliberative process, stimulation of students' initiative, cognitive interest for learning) [1; 8].

These functions serve as guideposts for the extracurricular training and are attainable by a variety of means that must be lined up the specific nature of extracurricular training activity. Being supra-individual, the in-class training process is typically tightly regulated by stipulations laid out in various curriculum plans and programs. In contrast, the extracurricular foreign language training is deeply individual and marked by the absence of such normative elements [10].

The expansion of the extracurricular training structure may significantly magnify students' motivational environment and cognitive activity. Teaching and educational routes must accordingly target specific objectives while being informed by content-, activity- and values-related preferences of each individual. The latter in particular ensures students' self-expression. The extracurricular foreign language training draws on the core idea that the entire process of extracurricular activity revolves around a central cognitive objective contextualized by a student's independent approach to its achievement [4]. The individual component thus plays a key systematic role.

An extracurricular training event is evidently contingent on unfolding and demonstrating students' creative potential, as well as on developing their creative thinking. This provides an inner impetus to form and articulate a thought in a foreign language, as well as a desire to take part in the communication process, thus building the foreign language communication competence [6]. Extracurricular training events make foreign languages into tools of learning and development.

Developing the foreign language competence is centrally implicated in the major objectives of the modern education which include not only the transmission of the necessary knowledge to students, but also the enablement of students to effectively implement the acquired knowledge in their professional and social life, as well as to synthesize new knowledge and develop creative independence [2].

The upshot of the above argument is that the teacher is called upon to ensure the complementarity of the extracurricular training activities with the in-class training process in terms of both the training contents and the identification of the respective difficulty level of the selected materials. This enables not only a rational and comprehensive application of theoretical knowledge and practical skills in the students' respective professional realm but also a seamless integration of students' communication competency into their professional knowledge, while reinforcing students' self-education skills and competencies, intellectual mobility, critical and creative thinking.

Prior to students' immersion into the extracurricular training the teacher should provide full instructions covering training assignments and objectives, content of the assignments, timeframes, approximate workload, expected results, and evaluation criteria. In the course of the instruction process the teacher should also point out typical mistakes made during the assignment, consecutively switching the roles of a facilitator, coordinator and moderator.

Members of the foreign language teaching staff of the Tavria State Agrotechnological University apply various forms and methods of extracurricular training, *inter alia*:

- encouraging students participation in scientific research activities, especially on competitive basis (groups of specialized translation, preparation of scientific publications, PowerPoint presentations, pecha-kucha and video presentations for student conferences, as well as foreign language poster sessions);
- organization of the so-called “Foreign languages decade” (encompassing podium discussions, colloquia with the involvement of native speakers; the foreign language essay competitions; press-conferences with native speakers, university faculty members and international scholarship holders; intellectual contests (e.g. “Brain ring”); theatrical mini-performances; quiz-sessions; placement of entertaining content on the chair’s website),
- regular group discussions on current topics with experts and native speakers in the framework of the English discussion club “Ukrainian Youth for Sustainable Development”.

Conclusions. In summary, the complementary combination of the in-class and extracurricular training systems in the foreign language teaching generates a variety of valuable results, such as improving the level of students’ foreign language proficiency, advancing their personal development as well as creativity, innovation, and pragmatic orientation. All these results drive home the point that the teachers’ ability to strengthen creative out-of-the-box thinking on the part of students will be a strategic determinant of the quality of education in the future.

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Мунтян С.Г. Позааудиторна діяльність як засіб підвищення якості іншомовної підготовки студентів

У статті проаналізовано теоретичні засади іншомовної підготовки студентів у позааудиторний час й надано узагальнення практичного досвіду організації позааудиторної діяльності як складової освітньої технології з іноземної мови.

Ключові слова: позааудиторна діяльність, іншомовна підготовка студентів, навчальний процес.

Мунтян С.Г. Внеаудиторная деятельность как средство повышения качества иноязычной подготовки студентов

В статье проанализированы теоретические основы иноязычной подготовки студентов во внеаудиторное время и представлено обобщение практического опыта организации внеаудиторной деятельности как составляющей образовательной технологии по иностранному языку.

Ключевые слова: внеаудиторная деятельность, иноязычная подготовка студентов, учебный процесс.