CONTEMPORARY PSYCHOLOGICAL CHALLENGES OF EDUCATORS TEACHING L2 TO PUBLIC RELATIONS STUDENTS

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Abstract: The article deals with the psychological problems of the educators of the second language (L2) facing a sudden break with the traditional mode of teaching. The situation was caused by the COVID-19 pandemic which entailed the abrupt transition to distance education. Not all educators and learners were ready to respond to the new challenge instantaneously. The purpose of the research is to discover how to facilitate the psychological readiness of L2 educators in the sphere of public relations teaching to overcome the hindering forces preventing them from easily accepting the challenges of time. A study was conducted among L2 university educators who were offered a set of five questions to determine the major obstacles to their immediate acceptance of change. As a result, the article offers several recommendations on how to prepare L2 educators for the state of psychological readiness for changes. The procedure presupposes the detection of the reasons and ways of overcoming the psychological problems.

Keywords: readiness, psychology, online education, binary field force model, professional training, ESP

INTRODUCTION

2020 was a year of extraordinary transformations. Upon the announcement of the coronavirus pandemic declared on March 11, 2020 there followed a lockdown almost all over the world with the drastically reconfigured educational process. Since Antiquity education has been a face-to-face activity with numerous pupils or undergraduates filling in various kinds of classrooms who listened and followed the instruction of their Masters who directed and supervised the process of knowledge acquisition. It was a mandatory concept of human society to transfer the knowledge that had been stored for centuries, from one generation to another. The educational process was kept alive by knowledgeable professionals who were given the role of the students' supervisors. Traditionally teachers defined their usefulness in relation to the defense of knowledge within the educational realm. Schools and universities, i.e. specially arranged buildings, meant physical presence of teachers and their pupils. Education has always been the primary concern of society aimed at establishing and developing a progressive and prosperous nation as well supporting social ties (Bereziuk, Koptseva, Fil'ko, 2020). Educators have always been most advanced and prepared to meet the need of the changing environment and fit their curricular into the demand of time. For this purpose, one best recently suggested approaches is the multimodal process of teaching and learning (Mayer, 2001; Mayer, Moreno, 2003; Jewitt, 2009; Forceville, 2011; Ereshchenko, et al., 2019).

With the announcement of social isolation, traditional higher schools started to look old-fashioned despite the ambiguous attitude to e-learning (Tallen-Runnel, 2006; Clark, 2014; Clark &Mayer, 2016). It has become clear that COVID-19 has created a stable trend towards the ubiquitous introduction of distance learning (Bernard, et al., 2004; Bernard, et al., 2009; Knox, 2014). For this purpose, instructions concerning distance education were given to university professors and tutors without asking about their psychological readiness to respond to the contemporary challenge of the time and react adequately to it. As illustration of the psychological readiness of educators the authors of the article regard the case of L2 university educators teaching English to students majoring in public relations, which traditionally poses certain linguodidactic challenges (Minyar-Beloroucheva et al., 2020).

Some researchers are convinced that "Overwhelming evidence has shown that learning in online environment can be as effective as that in traditional classroom (Bernard et al., 2004; Sun & Chen, 2016) even in case of theatrical elements being used in L2 instruction (Vishnyakova et al., 2020b). Second, students' learning in the online environment is affected by the quality of an online instruction (Wiest, 2012; González-Valiente & Macedo, 2020). Some scholars also point at greater possibilities of second language educators (L2 educators) mastering their knowledge abroad (Tajeddin & Shayehhi, 2019; Wernicke, 2020; Obenchain et al., 2020; Pennington, 2020; Kennedy-Karpat, 2020). It should be added in this connection that in the course of e-learning both teachers and students have been confronted with the opportunity to check and improve some of their skills and get new information as referred to various fields of languages teaching, extensively discussed in literature on linguistics and teaching methods, for example, in the domains of LSP, including new communicative trends in functional approach to scientific English and professional languages acquisition (Khramchenko, 2019; Malyuga (ed.), 2020; Malyuga & Ponomarenko, 2012) as well as multimodality application within the educational domain (Fadel, 2008; Vishnyakova, 2020).

It goes without saying even for an amateur user of state-of-the art digital technologies, that on-line teaching, especially in terms of L2 acquisition offers novel techniques to facilitate the learning process. Yet, scientists mention certain obstacles on the way of full adoption of the new ways of teaching by university educators. As Elske Ammerwenwerth notes, the traditional role is changing from "sage on the stage" to "guide on the side" (Ammerwerth, 2017). The question arises to what extent the role of the university teacher is to be reconsidered. The traditional role of the teacher, as mentioned above is to guide, to instruct to bring knowledge to the students, long cherished and tested by previous generations. Taking the psychological approach to changes in the medium of instruction and the shift to online teaching we are to speak of the educators' psychological readi-ness for change. The assumed factor prevailing the topic is the inability of teachers to give up the established methods and embrace the novelty, as that process demands leaving the 'comfort zone' (Minyar-Beloroucheva, 2016a; Mihut, 2019; Vishnyakova et al., 2020a; Lipkova et al., 2020) to promote sustainable education (Sergienko et al., 2021).

When posing the question of the educators' readiness to embrace changes, we are to speak about literal abolition of traditions, values and patterns, embedded in the well-established educa-tional sphere as well as tackling complex human problems (Ter-Minasova, 2015, 23). Traditionally the notion of readiness to be ready for change is discussed in the sphere of business, economy and Human Relations (Armenakis et al., 1993; Wisniewski et. al., 2017; Utami & Triady, 2019) in the aspect of company employees to be ready to embrace the organizational changes. There are four aspects revealed by scholars in this regard to be adopted for the present research in the university environment. The first issue deals with the opposition of Readiness vs. Resistance to be ready for changes. The psychological aspects of the educators and their attitudes are given a special promi-nence. The second aspect deals with finding out the level of their readiness to be ready for changes. The third is the combination of urgency and the participants' readiness to be prepared to accept the changes. Finally, the results of the experience can reveal who immediately and voluntarily embraces the changes.

METHODS AND METHODOLOGY

For the research the psychological theory of binary field force was applied to identify the educators' readiness to be ready for change and wherein the roots of this phenomenon are. The methodology presupposes identification and lifting of the blockade hindering the educators from readiness to be ready for changes. Theoretical and methodological study of educators' readiness to be ready for change is connected with their psychological ability to answer to the challenges. Cre-ativity, flexibility and awareness of the novelty become an inevitable competence of L2 educators.

Interviews were conducted with Lomonosov Moscow State University educators to find out the major fears and obstacles on the way of mass adoption of the new technologies as well as their categorization (Stokoe, 2012). The oral answers were recorded, transcribed and translated for analysis and synthesis. The methods of interview, survey, data analysis, their calculations and de-scriptions were used to interpret and present the results of the research (Wernicke & Talmy, 2018).

Ethical Considerations

Before starting to interview their colleagues, the authors asked them for permission and re-ceived their informed consent on condition to remain anonymous. A questionnaire was distributed via electronic means among L2 educators, where they gave their answers. Some of the responses were registered in a telephone interview. L2 educators in focus were informed that their answers

would be used for further analysis and research. The participants were informed about their rights and benefits of the study. The authors made their intention clear to use their answers in the research article to contribute to a better understanding of the consequences caused by the Covid-19 pandemic to provide a better environment for L2 education. All the participants eagerly answered the given questions and spoke freely about their challenges. The whole education community was unprepared for the unusual situation of lockdown and the forced switch into distance education. The case study presented in the article concerns L2 PR educators in particular, but can be illustrative for L2 educators at large.

FINDINGS

Binary field force model diagnostic theory

Diagnosing the educators' readiness to be ready for change became possible after lifting the lockdown. The process is significant because it can show the flaws connected with putting into life innovative teaching methods. To understand the reaction of the L2 educators to the challenge of time, it is necessary to turn to works of Kurt Zadek Lewin who developed *a field force analysis* (Lewin, 1946), that besides being applied to social sciences, psychology and management, it can be used in education to find out the extent of the L2 educators' readiness to be ready for change.

K.Z. Lewin's theory dwells on the idea of a binary *field force model,* according to which life is in the constant motion, never-ending, and in this perpetual swirl of ideas and circumstances people want to preserve something steady. To simulate the idea of stability, they choose one thing that should never be changed and cling to it despite everything. Few persistent individuals want to have an island of stability among the whirl of change. This subconscious reaction is revealed in the people's opposing to everything new in their life and work. The absence of psychological readiness of some L2 educators for change is the matter of mind that can be explained by K.Z. Lewin's twofold *field force model,* which implies the existence of two *fields, one of which is the* field of *hindering forces,* the other one is the helping forces. When both fields are in the state of balance, the readiness to be ready for change is blocked. Only the conscious approach to the purpose of change can unblock the field *of hindering forces* to intensify one force and restrain the other. To prepare L2 educators for psychological readiness to be ready for change it is necessary either to *thrust helping forces* or limit *hindering forces* to break the *equipoise of forces.* To promote changes and to accept them with readiness it is important to focus on the weakening of *hindering forces field* to enhance the *helping forces* that increase the opposition to changes. It is known that the force of action is equal to the force of reaction.

The attitude of L2 educators to changes entailed by COVID-19 pandemic, that demonstrates their psychological readiness for the change is not only delineated by the results of the transformations, but by the idea to how accurately they can meet the educational needs and to what extent the situation can be controlled. In this connection it is important to underline that the awareness of the achievement of innovative mode of teaching is not defined by the circumstances, but by the discrepancies in attainment of what was anticipated and what was actually realized as the result of those changes. These things do not always coincide. Not to be disillusioned by the outcome of the changes L2 educators prefer not to give up the mode of teaching they are accustomed to, so that not to be dejected in their readiness to be ready for change. The categorization of *hindering forces field* and *helping forces field* can either hamper or fuel the forces of change. To facilitate the process of being psychologically ready for any changes in the present or in the future, L2 educators should know what to do to be ready to cognitively perceive the necessity of changes. The psychological

readiness of L2 educators for change should not only be concentrated on the external factors that cause change (information), but on the inner incentives, too, such as motivation (MacCallum et al., 1999; Marushkevych et al., 2019). To prepare people to confront unexpected circumstances is essential to avoid heterogeneity in professional discourse (Bezuglova et al., 2017).
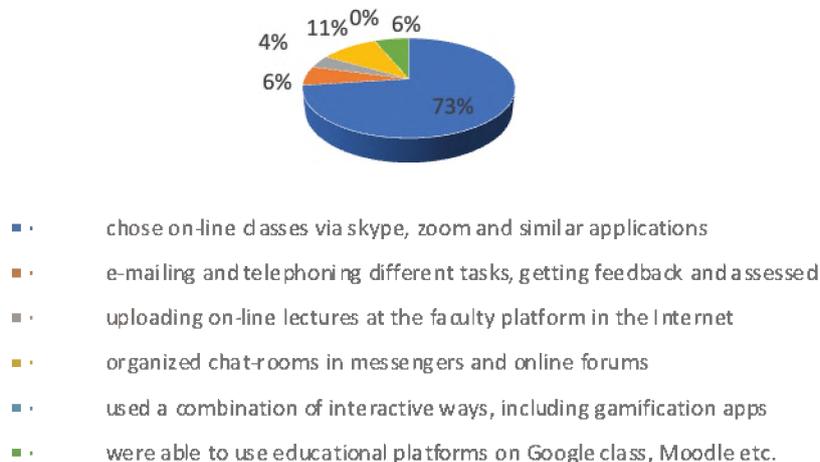
Modes of reaction

With the force majeure circumstances caused by COVID-19 that was unforeseen and insurmountable at the beginning of the pandemic, the switch to remote learning for the universities of the world became a must.

The educators at Lomonosov Moscow State University were offered several options of how distance learning can be organized on the basis of their preference and the facilities available. When asked the preferred way, the educators pointed at the following variety of work mode chosen:

- chose on-line classes via skype, zoom and similar applications
- e-mailing and telephoning different tasks, getting feedback and assessed
- uploading on-line course materials at the faculty platform in the Internet
- organized chat-rooms in messengers and online forums
- used a combination of interactive ways, including gamification apps
- were able to use educational platforms on Google class, Moodle etc.

Picture 1. Correlation of the chosen modes of work

The percentage of educators preferring a certain mode of work

- chose on-line classes via skype, zoom and similar applications
- e-mailing and telephoning different tasks, getting feedback and assessed
- uploading on-line lectures at the faculty platform in the Internet
- organized chat-rooms in messengers and online forums
- used a combination of interactive ways, including gamification apps
- were able to use educational platforms on Google class, Moodle etc.

According to the pie chart, 90 % of L2 educators expressed their psychological readiness for change and started to give online classes. It means that the helping forces field dominated over the hindering forces field in their cognitive perception of reality. It should be underlined, 10% remained within the hindering forces field, which halted them to respond to the challenge of time.

The results of the survey revealed that not only the preference of the educators matters, but also the undergraduates' technical opportunity to support the chosen mode, especially including groups with foreign students not having the Google platforms or those with no stable internet connection at all. The inclinations were different also regarding prior knowledge and availability of the software on the part of the educators. Some of them preferred to work with the undergraduates

by emailing to them tasks and getting their done homework in response. Others, instead of giving lecture on-line, uploaded them to the website of the Department, so that to avoid the contact with the undergraduates even on-line. This very fact showed that not all the university lecturers and tutors were psychologically ready for this unexpected novelty. It means that not all the educators can mobilize their inner forces to start doing something new. It can be explained that in the main, the majority of who chose the most advanced types of interactive communication in not very high. The majority opted for the familiar ways of writing e-mails (telephoning) to give assignments and render assessments. This switch to distance learning demonstrated that not all the educators were psychologically ready for the new mode of teaching.

The survey has displayed that readiness of the educators to be ready for change does not depend upon the age or gender. It should be emphasized that the educational sphere in L2 teaching is dominated by females. Out of the respondents 97% are females, and only 3 % are males. As for the age, the more experienced the educators are, the more willingly they express their readiness not only to be to be ready for change, but to completely change their mode of life and work to keep pace with the introduced innovations. However, according to the survey the educators in their prime more often than any other age-group of the educators claimed about their impossibility to give classes on-line under different pretexts. Nothing could be done to change their decision. This very fact indicates their mental rigidity and their position in the hindering forces field. The question arises to what extent it is possible to make them mentally more flexible. i.e. to move them to the helping forces field. Such educators never welcome innovative teaching methods or textbooks containing novel approaches to L2 teaching. They covertly oppose all the teaching novelties, which was exposed explicitly during COVID-19 pandemic, when they continued their resistance and worked by e-mailing and telephoning different tasks, getting feedback and assessed and uploading the text material of their lectures at the faculty platform in the Internet.

The youngest generation of the educators, those who do not part with their gadgets and computers and can be called digital nomads, eagerly work with their undergraduates via skype, zoom and similar applications, combine different interactive ways, including gamification applications and use educational platforms on Google class, Moodle etc. – are within the helping forces field, according to the K. Lewin's binary field forces model theory.

As it has become clear, that not all the educators are ready to act in the force majeure circumstances, i.e., their readiness to be ready for change is reaching a zero level. In practice it turned out that they are not only practically unable, but totally reject to use computer technologies to continue the educational process, as they are within the hindering force field.

It is evident that readiness to be ready for change is a mental category and demonstrates the cognitive activities of the educators, their ability to critical and creative thinking and well-developed professional competences. Cognitive activity as such, corresponds to the perception of reality by the educators, their ability to change the methods of teaching with the introduction of the on-line technologies and taking a new reality as a matter of fact. The readiness to be ready for change reflects the cognitive perception of the educators to assess the real matter and react to it with deep and clear understanding of their professional actions for the good of the undergraduates not to feel deprived of their traditional face-to-face way of getting knowledge.

To help the educators understand what is going on, questions are employed, as they are considered to be effective index of the cognitive perception of reality.

For purpose of the present research the educators were given a questionnaire containing 5 questions regarding the unexpected change in the mode of teaching and their attitude towards the change:

Question 1:

How long does it take you to start online classes or communication with the students using digital technologies?

Officially two weeks were given to the educators at Lomonosov Moscow State University to get prepared, both psychologically and physically, for online classes and further interaction with students, after the traditional face-to-face educational process was interrupted. The majority (over 90 %), corresponding to the pie chart in Picture 1 were able to comply by the instruction. The remaining 10% were unable to carry out the distance education, and preferred either to communicate with the undergraduates either through e-mail (6%) or to upload text material of their lectures into the faculty's online platform (4%).

Question 2:

Did you have any previous experience to give classes online or computer-facilitated educational process. What are the existing facilities for that?

4% of the respondents answered they were familiar with distance education in terms of higher education and had previously given online classes to the faculty undergraduates, using various Internet platforms (Skype, Zoom etc.).

10% of the respondents were persistent in their desire to work with the students, by e-mailing avoiding any online contact.

The remaining majority (86%) of the educators were new to this mode of teaching and had to get acquainted with the technology on the spot.

Question 3:

How helpful are the recommendations and support of the faculty to start giving online classes?

73% of the respondents found the provided educating lectures helpful to a great extent, as they introduced new information concerning the platforms and their interface, essential to give classes in them. Within the field force model the educators found themselves in the helping forces field.

10% were unable to overcome the psychological block, remaining in the hindering forces field.

17% had previously worked using the suggested Internet platforms and there was no need for their further instruction. Moreover, they were employed to help and assist their colleagues to conduct their classes online.

Question 4:

Did your expectations of distance education correspond to the outcome of the online classes?

17% eagerly responded they were happy to work in the new environment and give online classes.

73% of the respondents found it more difficult to give online classed, as it was more energy exhausting than face-to-face education.

10% of the educators who gave classes via e-mail or uploaded the texts of their lectures at the faculty platform, answered positively, because they were not engaged in the real distance education. It should be emphasized, that it is really more time and energy consuming to give online classes.

Question 5:

How do you assess the whole experience by the end of the semester? How effective was the online work with students in terms of their knowledge acquisition?

17% of educators testified the effectives of the new mode of teaching with the knowledge acquisition being at a good level.

10% of the respondents, having no possibility to work online, were still satisfied with their academic communication with undergraduates via e-mail.

73% of the educators, for a short period of time, during the force-majeure situation it a good a way out to continue the educational process not to miss the time and give the undergraduates the necessary knowledge.

The five questions posed to the educators helped find out that the majority of the educators expressed and implemented their readiness to be ready for change. That is estimated at 90 %, whereas 10% proved the necessity to be worked with to overcome their psychological problems, as they were quite young, but remained in the hindering forces field. In this regard, time is needed to persuade them by demonstrating the use of distance education during the force-majeure circumstance.

To find out the reasons for the absence of educators' psychological readiness for changes it is essential to diagnose the mental operations that accompany this process. Educators are not always happy to proceed to innovative teaching methods. In certain circumstances, the changes can be so radical that not all the educators can accept them immediately. In certain circumstances, innovative teaching method can substitute the traditional ones, as it can be the only obligatory way for achieving the desired effect in the new circumstances that emerged so quickly that there was not any possibility to diagnose the educator's attitude to the novelty beforehand.

DISCUSSION

COVID-19 has put colossal pressure on the universities of the world, which have begun to offer online solution to educational needs. However, with the lack of information the psychological problems are about to get particularly severe. Although online-education providers have revolutionized higher-education, some L2 educators are still in power of the hindering forces field because they are unaware of whole range of the state-of-the-art facilities and digital instruments aimed at facilitating the educational process. At the results of the questionnaire show, constant institutional support, clarification and detailed information are a must for L2 educators to overcome the hindering forces field and enter the helping forces field. Clear language, repeated explanation of the situation, technical trainings are needed to facilitate the process of accepting the change. The effective L2 professionally-oriented knowledge acquisition in the new environment depends on the state of psychological readiness of L2 educators to engage into the new approaches to instructing and professional behaviour.

CONCLUSION

The analysis of the material shows that psychological readiness for change is a mental category that can be explained by the assessment of the real situation, by the causative readiness, by the individual readiness of the professional aspiration to implement novel teaching ideas and technologies. One of the most significant issues in this connection is the multimodal approach to the processes of teaching facilitate the process of education and material acquisition.

It should be noted, that online classes were accepted by the majority of educators, although not all of them started using them immediately. Time was the major criterion necessary for some individuals to meet the challenge of the moment. It means that psychologically they prefer to stay within the familiar inner circle, or the helping field forces, leaving all the innovations beyond it. However, some L2 educators did not immediately expresses their psychological readiness for change. It took some time for them to overcome the hindering field forces, that included hesitation, doubt, uncertainty and fear blocking their psychological readiness. The research has shown that the overall attitude to the necessary change of the modes of teaching of L2 PR educators has been

positive and the favourable professional environment and institutional support contribute to the constant success.

Conflict of interest
The authors declare there is no conflict of interest

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