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Competency-Based Approach to Training Humanities Students at East Siberia State University of Technology and Management

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Abstract

The state program of the Russian Federation "Development of Education" for 2013-2020 provides for content upgrade of the vocational education and enhancement of its quality. In connection to this, the paper considers the provisions of competency-based approach the content side of which lies in consolidating its practical constituent in the process of vocational training of students.

The paper describes the process of teachers and students' interaction as a result of which knowledge, abilities and skills are transferred and adopted that promote quality and production activity of students as future professionals. Special attention is paid to the content of education correlated with definite professional competencies provided for by the educational standards. Forming of key competencies in students encouraged the leading teachers to start searching for efficient teaching methods allowing to establish active joint interaction, communication and self-fulfillment of learners.

1. Introduction

Establishment of federal state educational standards of the third generation in 2009 set implementation of competency-based approach in higher educational institutions as a strategic target of national policy in the field of

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education. Revival of competency-based approach can be accounted to the fact that federal state educational standards of the third generation determine expected results of higher education institutions graduates' training as acquired cultural and professional competencies that are necessary for their future work activity.

In the early 2000s, I.A. Zimnyaya determined two main reasons for necessity of competency-based approach implementation into Russian education. First, it is due to European and world integration tendency, globalization of the world economy, second, - to change of educational paradigm (Zimnyaya, 2004, p. 8-9). She also gave the definition of the notion "result of education". It is a human himself who has received training in a definite educational system. His experience as a total of formed intellectual, personal, behavioral qualities, knowledge and skills allows him to act appropriately on the ground of this knowledge in any situation (Zimnyaya, 1997).

There is no doubt that students' formed competencies alongside with the obtained knowledge, skills, capability of independent activity will be a certain planned product of the educational process. We think Yu.G. Tatur (2004) has better revealed the essence of a higher education professional's competence "… It is practically demonstrated intention and capability (commitment) to fulfill one's potential (knowledge, skills, experience, personal qualities, etc.) for successful creative (productive) activity in the professional and social fields, recognizing its social importance and personal responsibility for this activity results, necessity of its continuous improvement" (Tatur, 2004, p. 9).

Improvement of vocational education based on student personality's key competencies must contribute to improvement of their specialized training by consolidating the practical constituent aimed at formation of an integral system of knowledge, understanding, capability of independent solution of professional problems and assessment of the actions performed.

The competency-based approach should promote establishing the correspondence between students' professional training and professional and qualification skills required by modern employers.

2. Methodology

Theoretical-methodological basis of this research is points of competency-based approach as educational paradigm, activity-based approach to organization of learners' academic and cognitive activity according to which they take active part in the academic process, and technology-based approach that has allowed using specific forms of teaching aimed at development of professional positioning via trainings, imitation and study dialogue technologies.

The object of the research is higher education institution students' professional training within the framework of bringing into life the competency-based approach. The subject of the research is the content and organization of basic competencies formation process in humanities students.

The goal of the research is to establish connection between basic competencies formation in students and the practical orientation of their curricular and extracurricular activity.

To attain the set goal, we used methods of theoretical investigation (analysis, synthesis, comparison, correlation, generalization, systematization, modeling), methods of empirical investigation (observation).

When conducting our study, we were guided by the main ideas of the competency-based approach: a) the content of educational program is built on mastering the key competencies that allow being mobile under change of the labor market; b) the vocational education is continuous and promotes persistent improvement and self-development of personality in its gaining the practical experience; c) there is transition from subject teaching to cross-curriculum and modular one ensuring the flexibility of the vocational education. The principles of the competency-based approach have allowed creating optimum conditions for organizing the methodological structure of the research.

The research was conducted in the Federal state budget-funded educational institution of higher professional education "East Siberia State University of Technology and Management" (Russia, the Republic of Buryatia, Ulan-Ude) as base.

The research was conducted during 3 years, with full-time bachelor's degree students of the faculty of law in the direction of training "Personnel management" of years 3 and 4 and full-time master's degree students in the direction of training "Personnel management" of year 1 participating. For 2 years, full-time 4th-year students of "Social work" speciality and full-time 3rd-year bachelor's degree students in the direction of training "Social work" of ecology and the humanities faculty were also engaged in the research.

The research was carried out during organizing and performing the main forms of students' academic activity: practical classes and independent work.

To investigate and analyze competences to be formed we used interactive methods of education. That is to prepare presentation on given topic and its defense, business role-playing game, artificial modelling of professional situations.

3. Discussion of the research outcomes

3.1 The role of interactive classes in professional competencies forming

In the course of development of main educational programs, implementation of the competency-based approach suggests the use of active and interactive forms of classes in the academic process. The educational process of students majoring in "Personnel Management" implies a broad use of interactive teaching methods, which is determined by the specific nature of disciplines studied.

An efficient way for students to master the professional competencies consists in such interactive teaching methods as competitions of practical works, discussions, games, trainings, analysis of situations, moderation which allow organizing the active communication of learners. Interactive teaching methods allow intensifying the process of adoption and creative application of knowledge in solving practical problems due to more active involvement of the learners into the process of obtaining and directly using the knowledge, as well as enhancing the motivation and involvement of students in solving the problems under discussion that give an emotional impulse for their subsequent search activity. It also allows opening up new possibilities of learners and it enables them to realize the participation in individual and team cognitive activity for accumulating the practical experience and the ability to establish interpersonal communication [4, Stupina, 2009].

One of the interactive forms of classes is a group presentation followed by discussion. During the first class of the course "Organizational culture management" students of the speciality "Personnel Management" carry out a practical work: "Improvement of a company's organizational culture". Students are divided into groups, each group chooses a really existing organization that is most familiar to all group members, and prepares its own presentation.

The goal of the practical class is to ensure students' understanding of the main regularities in the formation and maintenance of the enterprise organizational culture, to impart practical skills for efficient management.

Input requirements include the knowledge of lecture material on "Principles and Methods of Organizational Culture Formation", "Organizational Culture Change Technology", "Maintenance of Organizational Culture".

The lecturer puts the following tasks to the students:

1) to give a brief organizational and business characteristics of the organization (to describe its legal form, development history, main activity type, organizational management structure);

2) to diagnose the organizational culture (to determine its strength, separability and the type of organizational culture); to provide an analysis of the difference between the parameters of actual and required organizational culture; to identify the factors having the greatest influence on the formation of the organizational culture;

3) to work out proposals for changing and maintaining the organizational culture (to perform determining and forming new values, norms and ideals of the organizational culture, to justify the change required, and to design the corporate culture translation and maintenance system).

For resolving the study problems, the students use research methods such as analysis, synthesis, generalization, systematization, comparison.

Duration of the teamwork is one hour. During the second hour groups defend their presentations and discuss them actively. The practical work of students is assessed by the teacher according to the following criteria: the degree of

mastery of the theoretical material, thoroughness of the presentation; the relevance of the proposed solutions; the validity of conclusions and proposals. The assessment is carried out individually in accordance with the results expected and competencies being formed.

The main task of the teacher in conducting interactive class is the creation of didactic and psychological conditions where an educational process participant can demonstrate intellectual, communicative and cognitive activity, show his personal social position.

The functions of the teacher during these classes are: setting directions and assistance in information exchange; identifying the multiple points of view; taking into account the personal experience of participants; supporting the activity of the participants; providing the interrelation of the theory and practice; mutual enrichment of the participants' experience; facilitation of perception, learning of the material, mutual understanding of the participants; encouragement of creativity and independence of the participants (Stupina, 2009, p. 13). Taking into account the difficulty of group processes, the teacher acts as a moderator and as a participant if required during the group work.

This practical work creates the following competencies in students: the ability to find organizational and management decisions, to develop algorithms for their implementation (generic cultural competencies); the ability to form and maintain effcient organizational culture (professional competencies) [5].

Such interactive teaching method as a game has become very popular in the educational process, because it is a good means of students' activation during classes and it helps them learn the generic cultural and professional competencies. In practice such kinds of games are used as case studies, projects, scenarios, simulation games, etc. [6, Platov, 1991].

Simulation games have been applied in numerous teaching strategies including game elements. They are role-play, conflict and business games, games for decision making, computer simulations based on business games, etc. Simulation games combine such elements as competition, cooperation, with their rules reflecting characteristic features of reality.

Business games have particular importance in learning. A business game is imitational modeling of various situations (economical, corporate etc.) which can be faced by the game participants in the real professional activity. A business game consists of two components: the game model and the game itself. The model defines limits of the game and thus establishes the basis for the game, so the players can make decisions within the corresponding model.

The business game "Holding a business meeting" is used in studying the discipline "Ethics of business relationships" in practical classes. The object of modeling in the study business game is the procedure of holding a business meeting. The agenda of the meeting is listening to the report for the previous month of the company's work and discussing the plan for the following month. The participants are divided into three groups and each group models its meeting and demonstrates it. The aim of the business game is teaching management and business communication techniques to the participants, their acquisition of practical skills in organizing meetings and making the best option decisions in various situations.

The use of this game is intended to form and develop the following cultural and professional competencies: the ability to defend one's point of view without destroying relationships; the ability to perform business communication: speaking in public, negotiations, holding business meetings; the commitment to ethical values – respect for human dignity, honesty, openness, justice, decency, goodwill, tolerance; the ability to ensure observance of ethic norms in relationships within an organization [7].

When preparing a meeting, the participants decide on the quantity of people at the meeting, time of the meeting, aims of agenda items, sufficiency of the materials required for conducting the meeting, and seating the participants.

The game includes the analytic part, i.e. analysis of organization activity for the last month and identification of "bottlenecks", and the functional part – development of organizational and technical measures of the work plan for the following month. The final part of the game contains mutual review and team assessment of each team's actions. With regard to this, it is important to answer the following questions. Was the composition of the business meeting participants selected correctly? Were the business meeting participants seated in a correct manner toward each other? Were the participants interested in the subject of discussion? Did the participants have any contradictions between the individual and group goals? Were there any contradictions, conflicts between participants? If yes, what was the

reason? Was the discussion positive or was its course chaotic and incorrect? Was any time spent on looking for causes and the guilty ones or on looking for meaningful decisions?

The cognitive function of the game is ensured through students' getting acquainted with the main provisions of communication theory, the ability to use the obtained knowledge in their own professional activity, performance of local-scale research in business communication, and participation in working on agreed decision-making. During the game students acquire skills of work in the creative group, they develop positive thinking, spatial imagination, communicativeness, and the ability of making independent decisions. Games as a form of class are characterized by the motivation for learning, absence of constraint, as well as by the individualized aspect. They allow their participants to reveal themselves, to learn taking an active stance and to test themselves for professional suitability. It is in games that behavior norms are better acquired [8, Livshits, 1989].

3.2 Situational tasks within the logic of competency-based approach as a method of forming the key competencies

In implementation of the study course "Psychology of personnel management", tasks are used the content of which includes a number of situational problems (tasks). Solving these problems forms and develops the following competencies: management, organizational, socio-cultural, strategic ones that rely on the tactical and operative components. For instance, observations show that during organization of learning the solution of situational problems is expedient for studying and consolidating the main questions of the course topic "Psychological theories of management". Each situational problem is focused on making management decisions with regard to their temporal characteristics (strategic, tactic, operative), and it also reveals the type of individual psychological personality orientation in the process of management. The main goal of the class is to ensure students' understanding and subsequent use of the main rules of management psychology and acquisition of practical skills of effcient managerial activity. The generic cultural competence "the pursuit of individual and professional self-development, the ability to set priorities, to set personal goals and the ability to study by own experience and that of others", provided for by the Federal state educational standard (FSES) in the speciality "Personnel management" is formed during performance of such a task.

It should be noted that the development and use of such tasks help to meet the objective of checking the knowledge of theoretical course questions, because conscious practical actions prove one's having certain knowledge. This also helps assessment of the students' future professional behavior, their ability to act situationally; readiness for critical reflection of managerial decisions from the standpoint of professional ethics. Hence additional stages such as analysis of situations, discussion of them and recommendations development are necessary. At the last stage, a group chooses three situations they would like to discuss and develops the plan of analysis thereof. The work is continued in microgroups where the prevailing style of management is defined, the combination of styles is revealed, and mistakes made during decision-making are found. Then a list of recommendations depending on spheres of activity is offered. Here we can speak about developing and forming of such professional competency as one viewed by the FSES as "ability and readiness to consult in forming a well-coordinated and results-oriented work team (relationships, moral and psychological climate)".

Assignments of this nature can act as an empirical part, because they allow evaluating how well the required competencies are formed. Also, the work practice in this area shows that this approach helps to address one of the main objectives of educational activities - the active involvement of all members of the group into the learning process, because solving the managerial problems involves individual performance and group discussion of the situation on the basis of the forms and methods of polylogue and dialogue. Observations show that the conducting of classes in the proposed format may be considered as a factor of successful implementation of the learner-centered education principles in the logic of competency-based approach.

Taking into consideration the complexity of organizing the group activities, an important requirement is the emotional involvement of the teacher who acts as a consultant, directing and organizing the creative team interaction between participants.

3.3 Organizing the students' independent work in the competency-based approach paradigm

Within implementation of the competency-based approach, there appeared the necessity of re-thinking the significance and role of students' independent work for activating the cognitive activity in the entire system of students' training. When solving this problem, both students and teachers have become an innovative principle, in particular, in determining the kinds of students' independent work oriented to the formation of competencies. For example, in the process of learning a student may propose topics for individual tasks and forms of their implementation, agree his individual schedule for submitting the tasks, determine the level (profoundness) of studying the material as approved by the teacher. Here two ways of solution are possible: testing the developed test and measurement material in each kind of independent work – or using the proven criteria of assessment of creative tasks. However, this should never be a mere statement of the fact that the work has been done. It is solely the leading teacher who is to solve this question. Given the teachers' large scope of work during the period of formation of the system of educational standards, the development of new test and measurement materials taking into account the revealing of professional competencies formation extent has not been priority one so far. Special attention has to be paid to controlling the students' performing independent work that is possible with two constituents borne in mind: the development of test and measurement materials with assessment criteria determined and testing thereof.

Students' independent work occupies the main place in using the score-rating system of education. The rating for this type of work should not just fit into the scoring system, it should also have an estimated weight proportional to time consumption. This will add significance to independent work, self-teaching in the eyes of students, as well as improve the quality of tasks performed. Judging by the work performed, the teacher will be able to reveal the students' discipline topics learning level, the weak and strong points in their training, their readiness for independent solving of the study problems, their ability to work with study and special literature, periodicals and legal documents.

Independent work of students plays an important role in the score-rating system of education. The rating for this type of work should not just fit into the scoring system, it should also have an estimated weight proportional to time consumption. This will add significance to independent work and improve the quality of tasks performed, respectively, which will allow the teacher to reveal the students' discipline learning level, the weak and strong points in their training, their readiness for independent solving of the study problems, their ability to work with study and special literature, periodicals and legal documents.

Therefore, regular monitoring of quality of learning the abilities and skills in the academic process, the implementation of the planned volume of independent work will allow not only assessing the students' work, but also timely conducting corrective work with non-conformities. This will help reach higher levels of achievement, better course teaching quality, formation of competencies. Proceeding from the above, it follows that the process of students' independent work must be planned and organized (see Table 1). Based on the provisions set forth in the table three phases of independent student's work planning can be determined: preparatory, basic and final one.

In the first phase the study and methodical kit, working program of the discipline and test and measurement materials are worked out or the existing fund of assessment tools, types of students' independent work are analyzed, and methodical guidelines for studying the subjects, lecture material and assignments for seminars and practical classes are developed (or adapted). A special feature of this phase is mandatory testing.

Table 1. Goals and objectives of the organization of students' independent work

Goal: Maintain and improve the quality of graduates training	
Student	**Teacher**
Objective: Understand where and what competencies are formed, criteria of learning, how to build one's educational path	**Objective:** Instructional Design
Problems: Low motivation and competition	**Problems:** Not tested results of teaching (knowledge, ablities,

Adaptation and "catching-up knowledge"	competencies)
	Problems with compiling test and measurement materials
	Disproportionate system of students' assessment

In the second (main) stage the program of a discipline is implemented, the results of curricular and extracurricular students' work are recorded. The work on student assignments is coordinated. At this stage, it is possible to remake individual tasks, taking into account socio-economic, legal and regulatory change in the society. Such updating is especially necessary in the disciplines of the social and humanitarian cycle as legal and regulatory base of discipline is updated, and development programs in various areas of social development are approved. If necessary, individual schedules of independent work are drawn up for students.

Based on the experience of teaching the subject "State Youth Policy" practice-oriented tasks were developed, because students performing them apply theoretical principles for creating a database for further professional training. Students' activity in doing the problem and search tasks comprises several stages: clarification of the content / meaning of concepts and terms; problem determination, involving statistic data; analyzing the problem and consequences and finding out the connection between them; searching for additional information; description of the solution method and explaining it to the group. Independent fulfillment of tasks allows students to master the competencies: the abilty to find practical and managerial solutions in various non-typical situations and readiness for innovative activity and its optimization in the social field. On top of that, the tasks which need a higher system level improve the cognitive motivation of students, widening their "scope of understanding" of the situation. This forms new abilities and readiness to act.

In the same way the work in discipline "Management in the system of social services" is built in order to solve case-studies successfully during the final assessment. A student shows competencies associated with decision making in a modeled situation with a client. He determines if the social service client needs to be placed to a social welfare institution; if the assistance cannot be rendered at home, the student offers the type of institution, where the client has to address listing all admission documents and other standard procedures set forth in Federal Law № 442 of 28.01.2013 "Concerning the Fundamental Principles of Social Service".

At the third finishing stage the teacher carries out the review of results, systemizes them, assesses the efficiency of the program, used methods and techniques, kinds of independent work that have been offered to students. Proceeding from this, the teacher determines the optimization directions. This concerns first of all the academic activity of students; he corrects the thoroughness of the study material submitted, reconsiders the approaches to presentation of the study material, and elaborates the test and measurement materials. No doubt, it is not only the professional level of a teacher but also his experience of teaching this particular discipline that influences the education quality enhancement via organizing the students' extramural work.

4. Conclusion

Thus we can state that the activity approach principles can act as a background for bringing the competency-based approach into life, because the methods of modeling are used, and the conditions for designing, forecasting and self-determination are created accompanied by the development and organization of professional competences in students in the course of practical classes and independent work organizing.

The interactive teaching methods used in practical classes are an efficient tool of teaching which improves mental activity, develops students' competencies, and shapes incentives to mastering the knowledge in disciplines under study. The organization of students' independent work is a compulsory constituent of the educational process that allows enhancing the competency-based paradigm of the modern education.

The considered teaching technologies found their way into the learning and teaching base of study disciplines developed, work programs of courses, methodical recommendations for teachers and students for organizing the study of disciplines.

Using the teaching technologies described in this paper in forming the competencies in humanities students will allow performing higher quality training of qualified, flexible and competitive professionals meeting the demands of today's employers.

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