Developing the conception of the lifelong learning in the academic discourse of Russia

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Abstract

There is certain statistics that shows the positive tendency of using lifelong learning principles by different educational and social institutions in Europe. We are fully aware of the fact this educational principle is rather productive and efficient for the development of the modern Russian society. Still it is too early to confirm that LLL has been accepted as a key concept for the postuniversity education in Russia. The main issue here is the way to manage lifelong learning at universities as basic educational centers in Russia. Since our specialty is intercultural communication we devote our time and effort to compile productive programs in foreign languages addressed to adult learners basing them on such principles of lifelong learning as gaining knowledge and skills by interactive practice, by the exchange of each other’s experience, using the gained in one’s work and life.

1. Introduction

The notion of the lifelong learning entered the European educational discourse at the beginning of the past century, and has been quite a debatable issue ever since. According to Mark K. Smith’s ‘Lifelong Learning’, the encyclopedia of informal education the idea of lifelong learning “was fully articulated in the twentieth century by Basil Yeaxlee (1929). He and Edward Lindeman (1926) provided an intellectual basis for a comprehensive understanding of education as a continuing aspect of everyday life” (Smith, M.K., 1996, 2001). Later on this notion was introduced into a series of key documents issued by UNESCO. As Koichiro Matsuura, Director General of UNESCO (1999 – November 2009), stated in the foreword to The Global Report on Adult Learning and Education (2009):

“Since the First International Conference on Adult Education in 1949, UNESCO has worked with Member States to ensure that adults have the basic right to education. In 1976, the UNESCO General Conference approved the

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Nairobi Recommendation on the Development of Adult Education which enshrined governments’ commitment to promote adult education as an integral part of the educational system within a lifelong learning perspective” (Matsuura, Koichiro, 2009).

There were also two other ‘landmark documents’ mentioned, namely the Faure Report (1972) and the Delors Report (1996), which promoted a framework of lifelong learning and defined the main strategic tasks including stimulating and propaganda of acquiring new knowledge, uniting business and education, overcoming social marginalization. 1996 was announced as the European Year of Lifelong Learning. The Fifth International Conference on Adult Education (CONFINIEA V) in 1997, the project “Lifelong Learning for Equity and Social Cohesion: a New Challenge to Higher Education” launched by the Council of Europe in 1998, the Dakar World Education Forum in 2000 affirmed the importance of lifelong learning.

At the beginning of the twenty-first century Europe entered a new epoch, “the Age of Knowledge”, the conception of the lifelong learning was introduced into the educational policy of the European Union; it became a philosophy confirming the necessity to motivate citizens to develop themselves as well as to involve them into the economic development of the European society. According to Jorgen Bang the European Union lifelong learning strategy has been developing and is considered now “both with personal fulfillment and enterprise; employability and adaptability; active citizenship and social inclusion” (Bang, Jorgen, 2010). There emerged a new educational paradigm, a new strategy of learning, which might be viewed as an essential factor of the social harmonization since it provides people with learning opportunities irrespective of their age and nationality. Being as such, in our opinion, the lifelong learning presents a happy combination of civil rights for self-development and the state’s strategic goals.

The main reason for our close attention to this problem is the necessity to elaborate a certain strategy of introducing the LLL into the post university education in Russia. In our paper we will try and estimate how essential the conception of the lifelong learning is for the state and individual education strategies. We will move from general issues (the way they observe the LLL principles on the state level) concerning the object of our study to more specific and local ones (the description of our own local experience).

2. The principles of the LLL in the state educational strategies of the Russian Federation

The notion of the lifelong learning entered the political discourse in Russia in early 2000s. In his annual Message to the Federal Assembly (2001) the President of the Russian Federation Vladimir Putin emphasized that “the rapid development of modern economy, science, information technologies requires shifting to the continuous, lifelong education” (Putin, V.V., 2001). The Federal Program of the Russian Federation “The Development of Science and Technologies” in 2013-2020, signed on 20th of December, 2012 by the Prime Minister Anatoly Medvedev, has already become a key document for the Russian universities as it helps to form a normative basis for the institutional development of the research in Russia. According to the Program the starting point for the definition of the state’s political priorities should be the fact that the leading powers of the world are striving nowadays to build an innovative society, an economy based primarily on the generation, dissemination and the use of knowledge. Moreover such key tasks, prescribed by the Federal Program, as the development of the science and education integration and the provision of the facilities necessary to integrate Russia’s science and technologies as competitive agents of the world economy (Federal Program, 2012), encourage Russian educators in their research work.

We may speak today of, at least, two directions of the LLL development in Russia: social and academic. On the initiative of the social non-commercial organization “Knowledge” (“Znanie”) of the Russian Federation there have emerged more than 50 regional branches (in such Russian towns as Moscow, St. Petersburg, Krasnodar, Stavropol, Vladimir, Kirov, Chelyabinsk, Yakutsk, Novosibirsk, Irkutsk, Vladivostok, Chita, and many others) whose main purpose is to provide the third age population of Russian cities and towns with wider opportunities to be active participants of the country’s social, political, economic, and cultural life. (Znanie)

The majority of the Russian politicians, businessmen and social workers admit that nowadays the requirements to the educational system are growing in quality and quantity: the number of people willing to gain new knowledge is increasing, there emerge new branches of science, and the role of the interdisciplinary activities is getting more sufficient (SPBU, 2010). Olga Oleinikova, the head of the Centre for the Professional Education Issues, believes that the conception of lifelong learning might become “a key to the new post crisis economy” in Russia where now, as she reasonably states, there is only little percentage of those who would either follow the principle of LLL or
provide lifelong learning services (Oleinikova, Olga, 2010). The study of the experience gained in Europe and the USA helps Russian educators elaborate programs of additional education for the adult learners at the universities. What has been achieved by so doing is the definition of the modern education objective and the conditions necessary to pursue this goal. The latter should include the state support in elaborating all possible formats of learning, developing the culture of learning and its high value.

3. Lifelong learning in the academic discourse of Russia

Russian scholars are fully aware of the fact the LLL principles prove to be rather productive and efficient for the development of the modern Russian society. Since 2002 a number of international conferences on Lifelong Education have been held in St. Petersburg. The proceedings of these conferences contain various points of view concerning the issues of LLL and education, but this variety does not at all deny that “lifelong learning has no alternative since it is a global international process and every person living in the 21st century ‘is destined’ to learn all their lives” (Proceedings, 2002).

The term ‘lifelong learning’ has not been given a clear definition so far. There exist several ways of its interpretation found in the works by Russian scholars. I.B. Strelkova tries to summarize the terminology used by S.I. Zmeev, I.A. Kolesnikova, G.L. Iliin, T.Yu. Lomakina to present ideas of lifelong learning in their books and textbooks (Strelkova I.B., 2010). There exists an explanatory dictionary compiled by N.A. Lobanov and V.N. Skvortsov in 2002, whose aim is to introduce a new area of academic interests that is lifelong learning.

In different works devoted to LLL we can come across either the word for word translation of the term ‘lifelong learning’ into Russian ‘обучение на протяжении всей жизни’ (obuchenie na protyazhenii vsei zhizni) or its semantic equivalent – ‘непрерывное образование’ (neperyvnoe obrazovanie) that might be translated into English as ‘continuous education’. The latter presupposes that there should be continuity in learning at different stages of the personal development beginning with the pre-school stage up to the higher education level. In the Russian version of the World Bank report on Lifelong Learning in the Global Knowledge Economy: Challenges for Developing Countries (published in 2006 in Moscow) there is a footnote that explains the difference observed in the semantic value of the given terms: “… the term ‘lifelong learning’ emphasizes the learner’s activity while the term ‘continuous education’ could be rather referred to the activity of the educational institutions” (World Bank report, 2006). We consider these two terms different in their meaning, but we should admit that the Russian academicians very often interchange them in the papers.

Since our specialty is intercultural communication we devote our time and effort to compile programs in teaching English addressed to adult learners whose age is over 35. While elaborating the programs we consider two facts: the bare fact that a foreign language proficiency is included into the list of the basic skills necessary for a person to become an active and competitive participant of the political, economic and social life; the plain fact that the majority of Russian academicians, at regional universities in particular, lack the ability to communicate their own ideas and theories internationally, they miss the opportunity to become competitive at the world research market.

The practice of teaching English to adult learners – our University scholars who have already gained their degrees in different sciences – has become a motivating impulse for us to introduce the following principles of the LLL into our work: gaining knowledge and skills by interactive practice; the exchange of each other’s experience; using the gained knowledge and skills in one’s work. While teaching English to our colleagues we tried to refer to those paradigms of knowledge, which were the most familiar to them due to their scientific qualification. This approach proved to be rather productive and rewarding. Alongside with the profound knowledge of lexical, grammatical and stylistic techniques necessary to construct their academic speech in a foreign language our adult students gained some conceptual “bonuses”. One of them is in the use of terminology: the adult learners obtained a clear understanding of the ways they interpret the scholarly terms once borrowed from the English language.

Among extra linguistic factors that cause terminology borrowings a Russian linguist L.P. Krysin names a social and psychological factor, that is choosing a foreign word as a “more prestigious one” to name an object or phenomenon (Krysin, 2000). This tendency leads Russian scholars to ambiguity when they try to present their views back in English. In the articles devoted to pedagogy, for instance, we may come across such terms as ‘person-oriented technologies’ in the meaning of ‘person-oriented training or education’; ‘objective control’ in the meaning of ‘unbiased/ impartial control/ expertise’ used to estimate a learner’s progress; ‘supplementary education’ in the
meaning of ‘post-university education’, etc. These are just a few cases, which prove once more that even distinguished scholars should correlate the notions and borrowed terms they use to signify them.

4. Conclusion

Thus, teaching English to university professors according to the key principles of the lifelong learning help us pursue main objectives not only of the individual growth but those of the national education policy – the development of the Russian universities capable of providing high-quality education based on the current achievements of the world science. Through our own experience we have been once more convinced that there should be close cooperation between the state authorities, social and educational institutions in our attempt to satisfy our burning ambition to become economically and technologically competitive at the world market.

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