

Andragogical principles in teaching professional foreign languages: challenges and perspectives

Natalia Aleksandrovna Naumova^{1*} and *Natalya Vladimirovna Yudina*²

¹Vladimir Branch of Financial University under the Government of the Russian Federation, Department of Philosophy, History, Law and International Communication, Vladimir, Russia

²Financial University under the Government of the Russian Federation, Department of Foreign Languages and Intercultural Communication, Moscow, Russia

Abstract. The research shares the experience of the Vladimir branch of Financial University under the Government of the Russian Federation in applying the andragogical principles in distance learning and teaching a professional foreign language for part-time and night school students. The research is aimed at considering the specific social and psychological features with a different nature of goal-setting, learning process and its outcomes in the adult student environment which are likely to cause the barriers, as well as the ways to reduce them during the pandemic of COVID-19 and an overall switch to distance learning. The subject matter is focused on the specific obstacles which prevent adult students from successful building of language skills. The research methods include monitoring, interviewing and content analysis. The outcomes showed that the andragogical principles of the adult students, including a student-oriented motivation, focus on personal individualization, mutual interactive activity with the teacher, immediate implementation of learning outcomes, might be available to eliminate the barriers and shift the focus to practical ways of learning and teaching a professional foreign language. The outcomes of the research have practical use in arranging online learning of part-time and night school students in the Vladimir branch of Financial University. The experience is recommended to be considered for the adult target audience to enhance their motivation for building professional foreign language skills.

Keywords: andragogics, andragogical principles, distance learning, professional foreign language, foreign-language communicative tasks, language learning barriers

1 Introduction

Globalization and current tendencies of the society make it obvious for most businesses and companies to go forward and keep up with the worldwide trends in economy, politics and

*Corresponding author: nanaumova@fa.ru

culture. It boosts the popularity of learning foreign languages and keeps employees motivated to upgrade their qualifications, advance their skills and get extended education and training not only at the start of their career but also in the way of accumulation of their work experience.

Regarding adult education and learning, educational standards of high schools and universities, including the Vladimir branch of Financial University under the Government of the Russian Federation, provide such environmental benefits of the teaching and educational process, which make it possible for the first- and second-year students majoring in economics and management of full- and part-time curriculum to learn a foreign language for interpersonal communication and professional activity.

2 Methods

Social and psychological needs of this student environment are likely to be characterised by a specific nature and require to implement or apply various educational strategies. The age of the target audience may range from seventeen to forty-five and affect their learning and behaviour. It is obvious that cognitive incentives of such students, their initiative, creativity and productivity, vocational and job-oriented skills and focuses are directly dependent on their age group.

The study is based on theoretical methods, representing analysis, generalization and systematization of scientific works on the problem of the study provoked by the pandemic of COVID-19. Innovative models of adult learning are developed and implemented by andragogics and its principles which have obvious differences from methods of children and youth learning [1-13]. The main distinctive feature of teaching, in this case, is the will dominance of an adult student who often considers a teacher as a consultant and tries to make their own strategy of learning [14-16].

This dominance makes it possible to single out the following andragogical principles of adult learning and teaching: 1) individualization of learning (personal experience, purposes of learning, cognitive and psychophysical features); 2) shared and interactive communication and contextual education (shared activity of a teacher and a student regarding their professional focuses); 3) consistency and awareness of education (contents and ways of learning regarding its objectives and expectations); 4) on-the-spot implementation of skills and knowledge (putting them right ahead into practice); 5) focus on the experience of a learner (their own source of knowledge) [17-20].

3 Results

The surveys that are carried out in the Vladimir branch of Financial University, help indicate the level of psychophysiological willingness and availability to learn foreign languages with the adult audience before enrolling at the university part-time program and in the way of their study. The target group usually includes about one hundred and twenty part-time freshmen and senior students who are learning a professional foreign language in accordance with the curriculum of the educational vocational university program. The survey consists of twenty “yes-or-no” questions focused on indicating some basic obstacles to learn foreign languages:

- Do you have difficulties with authentic listening to foreign words?
- Do you have difficulties with reading unknown foreign words?
- Are you quick to look up a foreign word in the dictionary?

- Do you have difficulty to repeat the word pronounced by the speaker?
- Do you have difficulties to visualize foreign words?
- Do you have difficulties to spell foreign words?
- Do you have difficulties to memorise foreign words?
- Do you have difficulties to speak a foreign language?
- Do you often feel shy to speak a foreign language?
- Do you often have to communicate with native speakers?
- Do you often feel scared to speak a foreign language since you are scared to make a mistake?
- Do you often feel awkward and like a laughingstock when you speak a foreign language?
- Are you willing to speak and communicate with foreigners?
- Is it easier for you to write than to speak a foreign text?
- Is it easier for you to read than to speak a foreign text?
- Is it easier for you to do grammar than to speak?
- Is it more essential for you to speak than to know grammar rules?
- Is it common to feel the lack of time to learn a foreign language?
- Is it common to sacrifice your foreign language practice time for the sake of your household chores?
- Are you always available for offline classes at the university?

The results show that most part-time students have obvious barriers to learn foreign languages in the university environment.

The physiological barriers are obstacles that relate to ageing memory, aural and visual perception of information and bring down the brain ability to assimilate a foreign language code (11% of the respondents). *The emotional barrier* makes adult students feel awkward and not at ease about any mischiefs of learning, and be too sensitive and shy to communicate with native speakers openly fearing to make a mistake and seem ridiculous or stupid (19% of respondents). *The stereotypic barrier* is an obstacle that relates to the fact that adults often have their own vision of learning and teaching (37% of respondents). Current communicative methods of learning in real life situations may scare adult students. They feel more at ease in the common grammar-reading-translation modality of learning. *The barrier of social errands* makes adults feel restricted in their freedom and privacy because of various family, household and professional duties. It results in a trivial lack of time to learn a foreign language (21% respondents). *The territorial barrier* relates to the fact that most part-time and night school adults are nonresident students that often makes it impossible for them to be available for offline classes at the university during the sessions (12% of respondents).

4 Discussion

The pandemic of COVID-19, mass transferring and adjusting to the online and distance learning detected some factors which appeared to be effective to get down most barrier features in learning adult target groups and shift the focus on the key andragogical principles regarding the first-hand learning and consuming of a foreign language in accordance with the education process and curriculum of the Vladimir branch of Financial University.

At the end of the academic year, the adult students were involved into another diagnostic survey which showed the following results. The distance learning format has significantly affected the territorial barrier and the barrier of social errands (by 2% and 3%

respectively). The students claim that the opportunity to be available for online classes help get more focused on the objectives and expected outcomes from the process of learning since they feel free to participate in classes at any time and place. Moreover, the physiological and emotional barriers are believed to get less noticeable (by one and a half times, on average) that promotes the andragogical principle of the individualised learning. Firstly, online classes are unlikely to break the psychophysical features of an individual. Secondly, online classes make a student stay behind the shield when he or she communicates in a foreign language. It helps take speaking mistakes easy, feel relaxed, less confused and encourage themselves not to be shy and try to do a communicative task again and again.

It comes out that the opportunity of immediate visualization of the interactive materials via various Internet resources, available listening or video watching in the run of the online class makes the principle of shared communication and contextual interaction between students and a teacher highly significant and productive. In its turn, it gets down the barrier of the stereotyped model of learning a foreign language (by 8%). The students claim to feel more motivated and confident regarding their abilities to communicate in a true-to-life foreign language and apply their newly-acquired skills and knowledge right ahead. To this extent, such interactive apps and services as Quizlet, Anki, LearningApps, Memrise get special attractiveness since they make the process of memorising of lexical and grammatical language units much more enjoyable and easier. Moreover, the method of rendering of a news report using some available Internet resources (like News in Levels at www.newsinlevels.com) is considered as one of the most popular methods of processing the authentic data. This teaching technology helps develop thinking, communication and discussion skills. Senior students often remark the effectiveness of the project method when they face the challenge to make a presentation of a subject matter using their language skills, creativity, research and communicative abilities.

5 Conclusion

The results of the study indicate that online-learning of a professional foreign language arranged in the way suggested and reviewed above, is proved to be the key component for the part-time and night school distance learning and education of adult target groups in the Vladimir branch of Financial University under the Government of the Russian Federation.

The social challenges revealed by the pandemic of COVID-19 have positively enhanced the implementation of the key andragogical principles aimed at direct and immediate overcoming the communicative and social barriers and encouraging the motivated and focused learning of a professional foreign language.

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