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Refresher Courses for School Teachers of English at Tomsk State University

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Abstract

This paper examines the reasons for the development of English for foreign language teachers' (EFL teachers) refresher courses at Tomsk State University. The emphasis is on some topical issues of the organization and content of training courses for EFL teachers to develop their language teaching strategies and assessment skills to evaluate students' written answers according to the required checking and assessment criteria of the Unified State Examination (USE) in English. The author describes the training procedures carried out at Tomsk State University and specifies the methodological support and efficiency of educational arrangements.

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1. Introduction

The introduction of the USE has been a very important step in the Russian education system. University admission is now awarded on the basis of the Unified State Exam tests that serve both as a school final examination and for university matriculation. The exam gives potential students the opportunity to apply to several universities simultaneously, permitting student mobility to increase significantly. The higher the points, the more opportunities; high scores might open the doors of elite universities to school leavers and increase their chance for getting a state-budgeted place. Having analyzed the range of those educational establishments benefiting from high USE scores, we

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can distinguish two groups. The first group comprises the secondary schools: the more graduates with high USE scores they have, the better the schools' reputation. The second group is the universities. Freshmen with more than 70 points (out of 100) are considered to be high-performance students, while, freshmen with less than 50 points are the opposite. All Russian universities are interested in enrolling applicants with high scores. The interdependence of universities and secondary schools is obvious and encourages their cooperation in EFL instruction to satisfy the needs of the present-day society.

It is important to note that the Russian Unified State Examination in English is an exam with the tasks in a standardized form based on monitoring and measuring materials (MMM). Successful fulfillment of the tasks students can determine their proficiency level according to the federal state standard for complete secondary education. The MMM in English are of pragmatic character and are developed based on communicative-cognitive and competency-based approaches. The above materials test not only the students' knowledge about the foreign language but their language proficiency as well. The requirements for school leavers within the framework of the USE have considerably influenced the content of school education in foreign languages. Since the USE is a part of the regional education quality monitoring system, the objective of the present article is to consider teachers' training in adequate evaluation of written answers in the context of the regional education quality monitoring system.

From the very beginning, the principal position of the Federal Institute of Pedagogical Evaluation in Moscow in relation to the USE helped to avoid mistakes that are typical of national exams in foreign languages in some countries where the exam consists only of computer-marked tasks. Tasks with full answers constitute an important part of the exam in foreign languages in Russia since only these tasks check productive skills and increase the differentiating capability of the MMM. Thus, they help to ascertain the leavers with the highest level of language educational results. The inclusion of such tasks in the USE structure makes the criticism on the part of those who consider the exam a slot-machine process of matching unfounded.

It is necessary to say that tasks with full answers are especially significant for humanitarian disciplines since they enable examination experts to check the quality and achievement level of complicated intellectual communicative skills: to write a coherent text; to formulate ideas logically and consistently; to give arguments and counterarguments; to make conclusions and support them with examples. In this paper we will examine the framework of the school teachers' training course designed to meet the challenges of our modern educational system.

2. Teachers' training course design

2.1. Target competences

Nowadays, communicative competence is said to cover the following competences: speech competence i.e. the ability to use the language we learn as a means of communication and cognitive activity; a language/ linguistic competence i.e. language acquisition in accordance with topics and the field of conversations; sociocultural competence (including sociolinguistic) i.e. knowledge about the sociocultural specificity of other countries, the skill to create the models of both verbal and non-verbal behavior according to the above specificity, the skill to understand and interpret the linguocultural facts adequately; compensatory competence i.e. the ability to find a way out when speaking a foreign language but having a deficit of linguistic means; educational cognitive competence i.e. further development of academic skills to improve a foreign language proficiency and use a foreign language for education and self-education.

This relationship between the formation of a communicative competence and personal enhancement is emphasized in the federal component of the Federal Standard for General Full Education where in addition to the acquiring of a communicative competence another goal is set as the "development and training of the ability for personal and professional self-determination, social adaptation; formation of social activism of a citizen and patriot as well as the subject of intercultural cooperation; development of such personal traits as communicational culture, the ability to work in collaboration including the process of intercultural communication; development of the ability and willingness for self-studying a foreign language and with its help for further self-education in various spheres of knowledge; acquirement of creative and research experience with the help of a foreign language to be used in other subject fields" (The Federal State Educational Standard for the Secondary (Full) General Education 2012). On the

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