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Variety of Engineers' Needs in the Foreign Language Usage as a Basis for their Training Diversification

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Abstract

The variety of conditions for use of a foreign language within the engineers' professional activities leads to diversification of their foreign communicative needs and the necessity of improving their foreign language comprehension. Diversification of foreign communicative needs with the engineers has been confirmed during the study. The results of the latter show that the needs of engineers in using the foreign languages vary depending on the types of engineering activities implemented and the types of organizations they are employed at. The variations of needs according to types of engineering activities are mostly connected to the speech genres utilized in spoken and written texts used by engineers. This requires from the engineers professional communicative competence in a foreign language of various content. Differences in needs of engineers depending on types of organizations can first of all be seen in the various levels of engineer's communicative competence in a foreign language required for the purpose of speech activity in a foreign language in organizations of different types. Diversification of foreign language communicative needs with engineers is one of the principles explaining the necessity of foreign language training diversification in the course of engineer training which can be viewed as one of the directions for its development and a condition for ensuring its continuity.

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1. Introduction

Globalization processes, as well as internationalization of economies and Russia being integrated into the global community promote the international contacts in the engineering labor sphere. Temporary and permanent international teams appear in the Russian economy, and the professional activities within such groups are carried out not only in the native language, but in a foreign language as well. The role of foreign language communication in the activities of engineers is increasing, and the professional communicative foreign language competence of an engineer is becoming more and more significant and important component of the engineer's professional competence. Consequently, the requirements towards the foreign language comprehension level of engineering specialists are becoming stricter.

Meanwhile, versatility of conditions for technical higher education institutions graduates to use foreign languages is particular for the modern phase of development of the society. The current variety of conditions for an engineer to use a foreign language is determined by a number of factors: specific character of the economy branches, particularities of various engineering activities, growing number of foreign manufacturers, joint ventures and transnational corporations.

The variety of professional conditions for use of a foreign language leads to diversification of existing professional foreign language communication needs of modern engineers. Under the professional foreign language communication needs we understand needs of performing a foreign-language speech activity which are related to the solution of professional problems when satisfied. Given this, if a particular engineer gets promoted or changes the place of occupation due to occupational mobility, the new individual communication needs arise, which requires further improvement of professional foreign language communicative competence. The desire of engineers to improve its level is one of prerequisites for the necessity of continuous training in a foreign language. This provision is confirmed by the data of our research which has revealed that over 50% of respondents with various work experience find it necessary to raise their level of professional foreign language comprehension.

However, the foreign language training currently available in the Russian engineering education in spite of the attempts made by some higher educational institutions to introduce a multilevel approach is unified and ignores the diversification of engineers' foreign language communication needs. The results of foreign language training demonstrated by students during final exams at the end of the basic course keep remaining at a rather low level. This requires improvement of the foreign languages training system in technical higher education institutions.

Further improvement of foreign language training system in engineering education, on the one hand, has to take into account the diversity of the utilization conditions of a foreign language by the engineers and, on the other hand, has to ensure the continuity of such training. Under these conditions, one of the areas of foreign language training upgrade in engineering education can be diversification thereof.

Diversification of higher education is among the fundamental global trends of its development (Towards an Agenda 21 for Higher Education, 1998; Bajdenko, 1999; Lomakina, 2006). Under diversification an "expansion of activities of the educational system and the acquisition of new forms and functions previously not familiar to the system" is understood (Lomakina, 2006, p.74). This trend is directly related to the diversity of manufacturing activity conditions in the broadest sense of the word and, as a consequence, with a vast range of social needs for experts in different fields.

Diversification of higher education covers various educational levels and is expressed in a variety of institutional structures and forms as well as the models of higher education, curricula. It should be emphasized that the diversification of education is closely linked to its flexibility, i.e. to the ability of higher educational institutions to respond quickly to new demands of society (Towards an Agenda 21 for Higher Education, 1998). It is the diversified education that can provide freedom of choice for an individual and the conditions to better meet his cognitive needs. Diversification of higher vocational education while influencing all its levels can also be extended to the training of engineers in a foreign language as a subsystem of engineering education. It can ensure a variety of training programs depending on the various needs of students.

Diversification of higher vocational education is closely connected to other global trends of high school development, in particular, with lifetime education. Diversification is viewed as the principle of development of continuous education system in modern social and economic conditions, as it is diversification that allows creating

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