FORMATION OF RESPONSIBILITY AS A PROFESSIONALLY IMPORTANT QUALITY AMONG STUDENTS AT HIGHER EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

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Abstract

The paper analyses pedagogical conditions of responsibility formation among students in the learning process. The authors consider responsibility as a component of professional competence of specialists of any field. The relevance of this study is explained primarily by the economic, political and social situation in modern society in which humanity bears responsibility for its present and future. In addition, the trend of continuing education, spread throughout the world, requires responsibility of each educational process participant - both a student and a teacher.

The phenomenon of responsibility has been studied by scientists - philosophers, psychologists, sociologists, educators, that testify to the complexity of this phenomenon. In our research, we rely on the competence–based approach, which originated in the USA and is recognized in many European countries, including Russia. The majority of models of education process are based on the concept of "key competencies", which include some common cultural and professional ones. The level of mastering these competencies is the criterion for the assessment of the professional efficiency of specialists. However, personal qualities of a specialist, including responsibility, are of equal importance.

We have developed and successfully applied a pedagogical technique of responsibility formation among students of technical University in the course of foreign language learning. The paper introduces some techniques to transfer teacher's control into the mutual control and learners' self-control in the course of learning a foreign language, which are effectively applied at the Don State Technical University.

Keywords: responsibility, formation, competence, self-control, module, specialist.

1 INTRODUCTION

Modern society makes high requirements on a person both as an individual and a professional. He or she needs to be mobile, creative, full of initiative, communicative, etc. But above all, he or she must bear responsibility for the results of their work and for their lives. Responsibility thus becomes a strategic component of all human life spheres.

The twenty-first century is marked by such scientific discoveries and achievements, which are of progressive significance for humankind but might become a threat to its existence. Consequently, the social responsibility of scientists for their research activities increases.

The education throughout the world has become continuous, which implies an ongoing process of self-development, and each learner is responsible for personal progress. The introduction of open distance education, courses to receive additional qualification, skills training and other innovative forms of learning at higher schools rearranges the focus from teaching to student learning activities, self-learning and self-control. The agents of educational process in the University share equal responsibility for the learning progress.

And finally, the society needs competent specialists, responsible for the results of their activities. All models of a specialist worked out by the bachelor and master curriculum developers in higher education were based on the competence approach. J. Raven defines competence as a “specific ability required for the effective implementation of specific actions in a particular domain and includes highly specialized knowledge, a special kind of subject skills, and ways of thinking and awareness of responsibility for their actions” [1]. The above-mentioned thoughts underline the urgency and necessity of developing responsibility both as a personal quality and a component of professional competence of a specialist. Our research sets the task to develop the model and principles of responsibility formation among students of technical university as a component of their professional competence.
2 METHODOLOGY

In the process of developing a model of responsibility formation, we were guided by competence-based and personality-based approaches in education. Responsibility is considered to be the most important indicator in models of specialists in all spheres, so we can assume that this personal quality forms a component of professional competence of a specialist of any professional field.

According to the teachers, traditional education, common in Russia, develops not "free" but "disciplinary" responsibility, which is formed by accurately planned control (tests, examinations, etc.) on the part of teachers. We believe that high-standard education can be achieved only if a student takes responsibility for his learning outcomes. His responsibility should be not the external (disciplinary) one, controlled by the teachers, but the internal (personal) one. So the pedagogical problem of achieving high-quality education can be solved by shifting the students' locus of control.

Scientific and pedagogical background for this problem solution lies in the personality-based approach of culturological type (E. V. Bondarevskaya, V. V. Serikov) [2], [3] and by spiritually - focused approach (T. I. Vlasova) [4], as these approaches directly deal with internal development of the personality.

Relying on the competence- and personality-based approaches, we'd like to introduce our understanding of the basic concept of this research: "Being a professional competence component of any specialist, responsibility is the quality of a mature personality which is based on an internal (spiritual) locus of control and allows the person to perform professional functions, dialectically combining individual freedom and social necessity " [5].

Thus, we have developed a system of responsibility formation, which is effectively used in the educational process of the Don State Technical University (DSTU), Russia. The system focuses on the following goal – to form internal responsibility of students at individual, social, cultural and professional levels. The dominant tool in this process is self-monitoring as a mechanism for the development of responsibility, the shift of students' locus of control from external to internal one.

The tools and methods of responsibility formation in the educational process are divided into two directions: improvement of educational process methods and forms and educational contents focusing on the harmonious development of the personality and responsibility formation.

The first direction implies creating training situations for the manifestation of responsibility; improvement of the forms of control and practical training at the enterprises.

Depending on the diagnosed level of responsibility formation of a student, the educational process comprises several stages. Pedagogical analysis and teaching experience have proved the necessity of preparatory stage – formation of the external (disciplinary) responsibility. Stage 1 is a formation of responsibility on the personality level. Stage 2 is a formation of internal responsibility as a component of professional competence.

Let us consider the contents of different stages of responsibility formation in detail.

As responsibility is a quality of a mature personality, and the students entering the University are mostly teenagers, the preparatory stage is usually a must.

At this stage we form the learners’ external disciplinary responsibility i.e. responsibility to other persons (parents, teachers, groups) for the results of their learning activities, for their decisions. The indicator of the external responsibility formation is the awareness of the need for a responsible attitude to the learning progress; and the tool to form the external responsibility is the external control.

The next stage is aimed at responsibility formation on a personality level i.e. the responsibility of the person to oneself, to other people and the world, for the decision-making, for the individual achievements, for one’s own development, for one’s life. The indicator of the responsibility formation at this level is the awareness of responsibility as an important personal quality, taking responsibility as a value.

The tool to form responsibility at this stage is the external control, mutual students’ control and partially self-control depending on the level of responsibility formation.

And finally at stage 3 we form the internal student's responsibility as a component of professional competence. The indicator of the responsibility formation at this level is the awareness of responsibility as a professionally important quality and a component of professional competence of specialist; taking
responsibility as a vital value. The tools of responsibility formation here is to shift the locus of control from external one to self-control.

The second group of tools and methods of responsibility formation is connected with the contents of educational process which should be aimed at personal self-development in contrast to the one focused on academic scientific and technological development.

3 RESULTS

As we have said, responsibility formation is carried out in 2 stages. In this part of the paper we'll show how these stages are included in the process of foreign language learning at the Don State Technical University.

Stage 1 corresponds to the 1st -2nd years of studying at the University. At the very first lessons we make psychological diagnosis of students. It is advisable to diagnose the level of responsibility formation of students, the locus of control, motivational sphere and naturally to test the students' foreign language competence.

Diagnostics of the level of responsibility formation is necessary to determine at what stage of responsibility formation we have to start. If a student has a low level of responsibility formation, he has to undergo a preparatory stage, resulting in disciplinary external responsibility formation. After that you can proceed to stage 1 – personal responsibility formation. If a student has a medium level of this quality formation, the work is going according to stage 1 plan. If a student has demonstrated a high level of responsibility formation, we recommend implementing stage 2 of the system.

Diagnostics of the locus of control is necessary to determine the vector of the students’ responsibility. It is important for the efficient development of the control system, for determining the share of external control, mutual and self-control of students’ progress.

Diagnostics of the motivational sphere is aimed at determining a leading motive of students learning activity, which the teacher should take into account.

Diagnostics of the students’ foreign language competence helps to form homogeneous groups. We recommend testing learning styles, psychological characteristics and other individual peculiarities of the learners.

Let's consider the results of 1-4 year students' diagnostics at the DSTU. We'll start with the analysis of motivational sphere as the needs, values, motives and goals are the core of any activity.

Our research shows that the leading motives of 1-year students’ educational activity are professional and academic values. But they are somewhat idealized and determined by their social importance awareness rather than personal values, so the learning motivation is external. Thus, the external control has to be used and it's necessary to rely on the disciplinary form of responsibility. In this period it is appropriate to support interest in foreign language learning.

We also carried out a survey to determine a correlation between a responsible attitude to learning and the academic subject. According to the obtained data, the students study the subjects related to their future profession with more enthusiasm than fundamental ones and their attitude to them is more responsible.

In the 2nd and 3rd years of studies the learners are less motivated, their cognitive interest and learning progress significantly fall. During this period, the students experience a "syndrome of frustration."

We believe that in this period it is crucial to maintain cognitive interest to the subjects, to use innovative teaching methods stimulating the students' creativity, to discover their personal potential, to promote their initiative. In this period, the responsibility of students decreases as a rule while the external control is no longer an incentive for its development.

We believe that at this stage it is advisable to apply group forms of work and to introduce elements of mutual control, to create the situation of interdependency. The teachers should try to skillfully apply such techniques of pedagogical interaction with students as trust and respect combined with reasonable demands. This period can be considered to be a transition from external responsibility to internal one. The teachers should focus their efforts on teaching the self-control techniques and encouraging students' independence.
In the undergraduate year, the leading motives are professional ones. Answering the questions concerning motives of educational activity, 95% of students named the following motives: to become a highly qualified specialist, to ensure the success of future professional activity. It is also advisable to demonstrate the importance of studying certain disciplines, their role in the formation of professional competence.

Our researches of the 4th year students show that professional orientation, and, therefore, professional responsibility is directly related to the efficiency of students learning activities. We come to the conclusion that the 4th year students are supposed to have formed internal responsibility, and it’s time to change the external control into mutual and self-control of students.

The ultimate goal of the University education is to train the students in professional activities. The indicator of this competence is the high level of responsibility and the students’ readiness to self-control.

The DSTU assesses the 1-3 year students learning progress using the module-rating system, based on learner-centered and competency-based approaches. Module-rating system is developed in such a way that a student has to work regularly during the term to get a good final grade. This system of progress control includes two current testing periods conducted during the term. The rating system has a number of advantages over the traditional assessment of progress according to the results of tests and examinations, held once a term. According to the majority of teachers and students, strict current control encourages responsible attitude to learning, trains the students to systematic work, and develops punctuality, diligence, and discipline.

The Foreign Language (English) Curriculum at the DSTU contains 3 modules.

Module I of the curriculum includes the study of General English. Basing on the principle of alternativeness, the teacher can offer students several textbooks, according their language competence. The teachers of our university apply Oxford or Cambridge courses designed on the basis of personality-oriented approach.

Module 2 of the English language learning is professionally-oriented English language course (English for Special Purposes). The course of professionally-oriented English language encourages the interest to the profession. Teachers targeted at responsibility formation have to convince the students that responsibility is a professionally important quality of any specialist.

At this stage, the teachers use the texts about the responsibility of scientists for the results of their research. Reading the texts of professional orientation, students are aware of the responsibility of scientists, professionals and every person for the protection of environment, they discuss the relationship of technology and ecology, the impact of science on the development of civilization etc.

We also use video materials in this course as well. The teachers offer the students various documentaries in English, the contents of which promote acceptance of responsibility as a personal value. For example, we work on a series of films "The Future", "Elegant Solution", which are devoted to the problems of responsibility in science and technology. The students are encouraged not only to see these programs in English, but also discuss them, imagine what consequences the advances in science and technology can lead to, without a responsible attitude of people. We arrange role-plays, conferences, discussions, and other creative types of work with video materials, with the purpose of exteriorization and exteriorization of responsibility.

Teachers do their best to develop the students’ skills of mutual and self-control, training them to work independently with videos. For example, the students work out the topics for discussion, make up the plan of the films, ask questions, learn the techniques for conducting discussions, etc.

The final form of control in Modules 1 and 2 is the exam in English. So, in the preparatory and first stages of responsibility formation process, we apply the external control, as the level of responsibility of the 1-year students is low or middle. The form of control is the rating testing and an exam. Conducting the rating control, we also assess the students’ diligence, attendance, activeness. Students are getting used to regular checks, new requirements of University education, acquire the skills of self-control, learn to plan their learning activities, to distribute hours needed to prepare for the classes.

Our research shows that most students acquire the skills of mutual control by the end of the 1 year of studies. Students are aware of the need for a responsible attitude to learning; understand that much of the responsibility for their success is their own responsibility. But the self-control skills are not developed enough yet. 80% of the first year students prefer current control, 13% - end-of-course
test and 7% of the students prefer to make self-control. At the same time, at the end of the 1st year, most students (70%) try to use independent analysis of their actions and deeds. 15% of students discuss their progress with friends, 10% - with teachers and 5% of the respondents talk with parents about their progress.

The research proves our assumption that strict external control is effective for the development of external disciplinary responsibility of the younger students, but only mutual and self-control of students are appropriate for the formation of personal internal responsibility.

Module 3 of the English language training is a course "Business communication in English" (Business English), which is taught to the 2-year students. The system of control is rating system, intermediate and final control in the form of credits.

In the course of Business English we teach business correspondence, negotiations, telephone conversations, keeping conversations on professional topics. The course contents contribute to the formation of the students' conviction in the need for personal responsibility, acceptance of responsibility as a value and a professionally important quality of a future specialist.

Teachers try to demonstrate to the students the responsibility of specialists for the results of negotiations, translation of business correspondence, etc. We can reflect on the example of linguistic errors what they can lead to, discuss these situations, convincing students of the need for a responsible attitude to the quality of translation.

One of the aims of the course "Business communication in English" is intercultural competence. We draw the students' attention to the need to overcome cultural stereotypes; we emphasize the responsibility of future specialists dealing with intercultural communication.

This module also includes a course "How to do business in different countries". To form responsibility we offer students to choose: 1) the form of work – individual, group or class; 2) the form of control work – a presentation, a paper, or a traditional form of a test; 3) contents of the course (for example, to choose a country to study – usually one of the English-speaking countries). Making their choices, students bear responsibility for the results, they are more active, interested, motivated. According to students and teachers, these creative kinds of works and tasks stimulate the development of mutual and self-control skills.

As practice shows, students with a high level of responsibility prefer creative tasks. Every year DSTU hosts scientific-practical conferences in foreign languages, where students make presentations on various topics. They are usually devoted to the development of science and technology, intercultural communication, linguistics and translation studies. Such conferences are of great importance for the personal responsibility formation of students. Firstly, they raise the general culture of students, their interest in learning foreign languages and cultures of other countries. Secondly, the conferences develop their academic competence as students learn to work with different sources of information, to use computers and Internet. Thirdly, the conferences improve language competence of students. Moreover, the speakers have the opportunity to display their creativity, be active and initiative, and develop as individuals, which is extremely important for the formation of personal responsibility. In addition, students acquire the skills of self-control, and therefore they develop responsibility for the results of their activities.

If a student successfully delivers a presentation, he receives extra points to the rating. It is important for students as most of the participants get a moral satisfaction that creates a positive attitude to the subject "Foreign languages", stimulates the development of cognitive interest. After successful presentation a student gets the opportunity to speak at the regional or international students scientific-practical conferences. Being a representative of the University, defending the honor of the University is a high responsibility.

Preparing for a conference, the teacher can use the educational potential of the group mutual responsibility. Trusting one of the students to make a presentation at the conference, you can discuss this in group; involve the whole group into the preparation activities for the performance. This is called "responsible dependency". In our experiment, we assigned a "strong" student with high speaking skills to make a "ready-made" presentation at the conference as a representative of the group. All the others took an active part in the preparation of the report. The students picked up the material, designed the visual aids, all together made up the speech, and took an active part in its discussion. All the students were interested in the positive result of their activities; each was responsible for one's own "area of work".
Thus was created a situation of "responsible dependency". When the presentation had been made up, the speaker started preparing for the performance; he trained his speech in front of the group. During such "rehearsals" the trainees asked questions to the speaker which was a good language practice and a kind of mutual control of students.

As a result of such work the responsibility of all the members of the group raises. This kind of work develops the skills of mutual and self-control, promotes a friendly atmosphere in the classroom and team unity. In addition, the activeness of students with different levels of foreign language proficiency goes up, self-esteem of "struggling students" increases. "Strong students" acquire an adequate self-esteem.

Finally, this type of work enhances the cognitive interest to a foreign language. The teacher should monitor and actively participate in the work to prevent possible negative moments. The teacher has to distribute properly the "areas of work" taking into account individual peculiarities of students. It’s important to discuss the progress marking the contribution of each student, to encourage the most active ones. A lot depends on the skill and creativity of the teacher.

As we mentioned in the beginning of the paper, 3-4 years of University studies are the best time for the implementation of stage 2 of responsibility formation on the individual and sociocultural levels.

We believe that at this stage we can improve the model-rating system of control which was used in the 1-2 years. As practice shows, this system has some drawbacks when it comes to internal responsibility formation as this system is based on disciplinary control. The model-rating system of control cannot take into account the individual characteristics of the students. So we decided to introduce the so-called self-regulatory rating system. This system allows the students and teachers to choose the form of control, the amount of check points. Students and teachers set their own deadlines, timetable and form of taking tests in their groups according to the approved program of training. We usually conduct final test at the last lesson. As practice shows, the majority of the students has a sufficient level of responsibility and self-control, prefers current control and divides the learning material to be tested into the parts, in agreement with the teacher.

The experimental application of the self-regulatory rating system and our model of responsibility formation was a success. The total numbers of students taking part in the research amounted to 300. At the beginning of the experiment we had 47% of participants with low responsibility, 24% - with medium level of responsibility and 10% - with high level. 10% of the students could be characterized as "irresponsible". At the end of our experiment, which took 4 years, "irresponsible" students displayed responsible attitude to learning. We had 9% of students with disciplinary responsibility, 11% with medium level and 80% - with high level of responsibility.

4 CONCLUSION

Thus, we have experimentally proved that the techniques we have developed are effective to foster responsibility of students in the process of foreign language leaning. The basic pedagogical conditions to implement these techniques in the educational process are the following: 1) orientation of the teaching system on the internal locus of control; 2) a high level of professional competence and responsibility of teachers; 3) learner-centered approach which takes into account students individual characteristics, their learning needs and cognitive interests, motives of their activities, age, gender, levels of intellectual development, etc. The authors consider self-control to be an effective means to foster responsibility of students, particularly at the last stage, when the level of learner's responsibility is high enough.

REFERENCES