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33

INFLUENCE OF CORPORATE DISTANCE TRAINING IN ENGLISH ON THE EFFICIENCY OF INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION DEVELOPMENT

INFLUENCIA DE LA FORMACIÓN A DISTANCIA CORPORATIVA EN INGLÉS EN LA EFICIENCIA DEL DESARROLLO DE LA COOPERACIÓN INTERNACIONAL

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ABSTRACT

In modern conditions, a large part of professional life is occupied by the information space and innovative educational technologies of distance and e-learning. Distance learning is becoming equivalent to full-time education, but is implemented with the help of various online services. However, it exists not only in universities but is also very relevant and convenient for companies that are engaged in the development of their staff through corporate training. The study analyzes corporate training in a professional foreign language, as well as the possibilities of distance learning in the system of corporate training. Based on a survey, the study identifies current trends in the use and organization of corporate training of personnel in a professional foreign language in Russian companies, as well as the factors affecting the quality of corporate training in the distance mode. The article concludes that corporate training in a professional foreign language can meet the needs of each specialist in accordance with the specific requirements of their job.

Keywords:

Professional foreign language, corporate training, distance learning, online learning, online platforms.

RESUMEN

En las condiciones modernas, una gran parte de la vida profesional está ocupada por el espacio de la información y las tecnologías educativas innovadoras de distancia y e-learning. El aprendizaje a distancia se está volviendo equivalente a la educación a tiempo completo, pero se implementa con la ayuda de varios servicios en línea. Sin embargo, no solo existe en las universidades sino que también es muy relevante y conveniente para las empresas que se dedican al desarrollo de su personal a través de la capacitación corporativa. El estudio analiza la formación empresarial en una lengua extranjera profesional, así como las posibilidades de formación a distancia en el sistema de formación empresarial. Basado en una encuesta, el estudio identifica las tendencias actuales en el uso y la organización de la capacitación corporativa del personal en un idioma extranjero profesional en las empresas rusas, así como los factores que afectan la calidad de la capacitación corporativa en el modo a distancia. El artículo concluye que la formación empresarial en una lengua extranjera profesional puede satisfacer las necesidades de cada especialista de acuerdo con los requisitos específicos de su puesto de trabajo.

Palabras clave:

Lengua extranjera profesional, formación empresarial, educación a distancia, aprendizaje en línea, plataformas en línea.

INTRODUCTION

The problem of developing the foreign language competence of Russian specialists is linked to the expansion of Russia's economic relations in the world market, which necessitates professional communication with foreign partners. However, different branches of the Russian economy currently experience a shortage of specialists with the level of foreign language competence necessary for effective operation in the international market. In this regard, the needs of the modern labor market determine the social order for a new type of specialist and determine the requirements for the content of foreign language teaching in universities. Mastering professional foreign language (PFL) should enable specialists to communicate in the professional and labor and administrative and legal spheres in appropriate social and communicative roles.

Over the last decade, the system of specialist training in higher education has undergone significant changes, including in foreign language training. However, according to a study by E.V. Meshcheryakova et al. (2019), 70% of employers believe that graduates of non-language universities cannot use foreign languages in professional communication, and only 30% of employers note a sufficient level of foreign language proficiency among their junior specialists.

Consequently, on the one hand, the relevance of this study is conditioned by the need for postgraduate training of specialists at specific workplaces to ensure a level of foreign language competence sufficient for effective work in international markets. On the one hand, the topicality of the problem is determined by the virtual absence of studies aimed at the theoretical substantiation of particular features of the specified training in the conditions of corporate training.

One of the main factors that drive the constant search for a more effective system of forming specialists' foreign-language communicative competence is the need for professionals who are familiar with new trends and technologies in their professional sphere and can apply them. This is demanded by the needs of the enterprise, the intensity of the accumulation and use of knowledge, as well as objective competition. The aforementioned needs compel many enterprises to actively implement professionally-oriented systems of training and retraining of their staff, particularly with regard to foreign language learning, using their models of corporate training (Magyar et al., 2022).

Corporate training should not be considered an alternative to traditional university training. Proponents of corporate training emphasize that they are two components of a continuous learning process (Sekerin et al., 2022). Due to

ample financial support to bring the latest achievements of science and technology into the educational process, as well as the finest teachers, the forms of corporate training are among the most effective in today's system of higher education (Medeshova et al., 2022). Today, leading foreign companies spend from 2 to 10% of their payroll on the professional development of their staff (Veiga, 2021).

Corporate training assumes the organization of specialists' training that can be performed both by the organization's employees and by external specialists. According to Castellano & Hinestroza (2021), qualified university professors, scientists of research institutes, and alike can be brought in to conduct classes directly at the production site. Some large enterprises are experimenting with the introduction of positions of specialists in staff training, although here the decisive role is played by the personal qualities of people who hold such positions, their desire to work, language skills, teaching skills, knowledge of terminology, and background knowledge of the company as a whole, its structural units, and the functional responsibilities of the trained staff (Yu et al., 2022). The potential efficiency of corporate training is determined by the fact that despite basic training, most professional experience is gained by specialists in the process of work and real labor activity; only after gaining this experience do they become qualified specialists (Hong et al., 2022).

Corporate training of specialists in a PFL can be considered as a set of targeted, planned, and systematic measures implemented to develop the foreign language communicative competence of specialists to achieve professional goals (Sergeeva et al., 2022ab).

The organization of corporate PFL training for specialists requires studying a range of objective and subjective factors that are influential in this process. The formulation of training goals requires consideration of the company's strategy, the specifics of the audience, the content of specialists' professional activities, functions, actions, and so on (Malyuga & Petrosyan, 2022). To ensure the efficiency of PFL learning, it is expedient to establish the levels of foreign language proficiency that the course listeners are expected to reach in corporate training in advance. The effectiveness of corporate training is also majorly conditioned by other factors, such as the social, production, and personal limitations typical of a particular contingent of specialists, which also require special study before the development of the content of said training (Escobar Fandiño et al., 2019).

Other conditions for the efficiency of corporate PFL training are its planned and systematic nature. To ensure the quality of the process of PFL training for the potential trainees

of a particular enterprise, it is advisable to plan it by stages, the potential substance of which can be defined as follows: establishing the nature of potential trainees' needs for using the PFL to solve problems that may arise in professional situations (Kravchenko et al., 2021); defining PFL learning objectives (Fatima et al., 2021); development of the content of corporate PFL training, i.e. defining the general approach, selecting the material, compiling the set of exercises, choosing the method of assessing the results of training, etc. (Evsikova et al., 2022); organization and implementation of corporate PFL training (Shutova et al., 2020); assessment of the results of corporate training and correction of its content based on the results of such assessment (Xin & Singh, 2021).

As a rule, corporate PFL training involves training during the workday or after hours, which enables effective alignment of the training period with the rhythm of production and its conditions (Zenin et al., 2021). However, the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic and the introduction of temporary restrictions rendered this process impossible. One of the options for solving the problem was distance (online) training in the corporate training system, which relies on modern information technology, covers all forms of training, and allows the instructor and trainees to be in geographically different locations during the learning process (Sergeeva et al., 2022a).

The role of online learning, in particular the use of online platforms, leading to a reduction in costs associated with corporate training is investigated in the work of Sergeeva et al. (2022b). The study reveals that enterprises are faced with rising costs of doing business, while top management is looking for ways to reduce costs and make savings in their organizations. The authors find that the introduction of online learning can save costs on employee training and development.

Kovalenko et al. (2022), explores modern technologies in corporate training, the advantages and disadvantages of modern approaches to the organization of the corporate system of education, and the stages of evolution and prospects for further development of corporate training. Bank et al. (2022), investigate the formation of personnel competencies based on their use in the corporate process and compare the effects of the introduction of digital corporate training methods in combination with traditional ones.

A study into the implementation of digital technologies in the process of corporate training is presented in a paper by Bank et al. (2022), which shows the new challenges in corporate training, the principles of formation of a modern model of corporate training, and selection criteria

for innovative forms of training given the requirements of the digital environment and the rapid development of the educational services market due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Meanwhile, trends and features of corporate distance (online) training of personnel in a foreign language are virtually unexplored areas.

Given the above, the purpose of this study is to analyze current trends in the use and organization of corporate foreign language training in Russian companies in a distance format in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study employed the systemic method, literature analysis was conducted through the methods of comparative analysis and generalization. The methods of sociological expert survey and observation were applied when surveying company employees on the organization of distance learning. The scientific and applied analysis utilized the methods of formalization, deduction, and induction.

To study current trends in the use and organization of corporate training of personnel in a PFL in Russian companies, we conducted a survey in Google Forms distributed on the social networks VKontakte and Odnoklassniki. The survey was addressed to the workers whose companies organized corporate PFL training. The study involved 52 respondents of varying ages, experience, and job levels, the characteristics of which are given in Tables 1 and 2.

Table 1. Distribution of survey respondents by the types of the company's economic activity.

Type of the company's economic activity	Share of respondents, %
Education	21.2
Information and telecommunications	11.5
Finance and insurance	11.5
Public administration and defense; compulsory social insurance	9.6
Industrial production	7.7
Professional, scientific, and technical activities	7.7
Administrative and support services	7.7
Wholesale and retail trade; repair of motor vehicles	5.8
Operations with real estate	3.8
Art, sports, entertainment, and recreation	3.8
Agriculture, forestry, and fisheries	1.9
Transportation, storage, and postal and courier services	1.9
Healthcare and social assistance	1.9

Media and mass information	1.9
Temporary housing and catering	1.9

Table 2. Characteristics of survey participants.

Company headcount	Share of respondents, %	Age	Share of respondents, %	Career level	Share of respondents, %	Working experience	Share of respondents, %
under 5 people	23.5	under 20	15.4	Intern/beginner	13.5	under 1 year	23.5
50-200 people	41.2	21-30	61.5	Junior specialist	40.4	1-3 years	47.1
200-500 people	11.8	31-40	23.1	Specialist	34.6	4-7 years	13.7
500 people and more	23.5	41 and older	-	Head of division	11.5	8 years and mode	15.7

Statistical data processing was performed in Statistica 7.0. The considered factors affecting the quality of PFL corporate training in the distance (online) mode were ranked according to the number of mentions. Next, the information obtained from the survey was processed to determine factor weights and construct a rank transformation matrix and then calculate the arithmetic mean of the individual weights for each of the factors. The resulting values of the factor determine its importance from the respondents' point of view.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The survey results reveal that 86.5% of the companies did carry out distance PFL training during quarantine and 13.5% did not. Most respondents noted that the COVID-19 pandemic facilitated the use of distance training in a PFL in companies, while the lack of change is reported by 17.6%.

Analyzing the spheres of activity of companies conducting distance learning a PFL, we find this type of training to be most popular in IT and programming (36.1%), HR (25.5%), finance and management (25.5%), and design and multimedia (21.3%). Online learning of a PFL is also in demand in administration (14.9%), sales and marketing (10.6%), engineering and manufacturing (10.6%), and law (4.3%).

The respondents' answers also give insight into the platforms used by employers for corporate PFL training. Google Meet (43.5%), Telegram channels (37%), and Teams (17.4%) enjoy the greatest popularity among modern companies. In addition, Saba Cloud Learning (6.5%), Tovuti (2.2%), Webex (2.2%), and Classroom (2.2%) are also used in the process of training staff in a PFL but are not as common.

Regarding tuition fees, 30.6% of specialists receive training for free, 61.2% – at the company's expense, and 30.6% pay for it themselves. The efficiency of learning a PFL online is pointed out by 84.3% of respondents and 17.7% believe this format of training to be ineffective, referring to their inability to apply the obtained knowledge in the workplace because of self-isolation restrictions.

The disinterest and low motivation of a modern employee in learning are often conditioned by the use of methods that are obsolete, monotonous, or ineffective in distance learning. It is therefore worth paying attention to the presentation of the material to ensure that it is informative and original.

The survey also demonstrates that to organize corporate training in the distance (online) mode effectively, many factors need to be taken into account. The most influential factors defining the quality of corporate training in a PFL, as suggested by the respondents, are the following (Table 3).

Table 3. Factors affecting the quality of corporate PFL training in the distance (online) mode.

Nº	Factor	%	Rank	Weight
1	Duration of the training course	78.8	1	0.27
2	Training time (class schedule)	73.1	2	0.23
3	Duration of each class	67.3	3	0.18

4	Practical lessons between theoretical modules	61.5	4	0.14
5	Number of participants	53.8	5	0.11
6	Communication established between each participant and the educator	40.3	6	0.07

Note: data obtained from the survey results.

Among the factors affecting the quality of corporate distance PFL training, the greatest importance is attributed by respondents to the duration of the course. This is consistent with previous research, which indicates that the ideal duration of a course is no more than 12 weeks – enough to solidify the new skills (Evsikova et al., 2022). Another important factor in the efficiency of PFL learning is the time of training, which refers to the dependence of learning efficiency on human biorhythms. Studies suggest that the most efficient time for learning is 9.00-13.00 and 16.00-18.00 when people are better able to absorb information (Zenin et al., 2021).

The duration of each class is also considered by the respondents to influence the efficiency of corporate distance (online) training in a PFL. A study by Escobar Fandiño et al. (2019) suggests that study sessions have to be no longer than 3 hours, as most people cannot maintain focus in front of a screen for longer. Two three-hour sessions (with mini-breaks between them) can be attended on the same day, one in the morning and one in the evening if they contain different exercises and workshops. In learning a PFL, as suggested by respondents, of special importance are practical language lessons between theoretical modules. This opinion is supported by researchers, who argue that having practical sessions between each section of training should be the golden rule in a company (Hong et al., 2022).

Over half of the survey participants note the number of participants as a factor in quality corporate distance PFL training. Research also indicates that if a study session includes more than 12 people, not all of them will be able to make a contribution and receive personal attention from the instructor (Shutova et al., 2020). Notable significance (weight) is also attributed to establishing communication between each participant and the teacher. In the first session, participants typically hesitate to speak, especially if they have not met before, so the teacher should introduce special exercises which allow students to build trust both in the instructor and each other (Shutova et al., 2020).

It should be noted that distance PFL learning can utilize not only platforms but other digital personnel training tools. These instruments can be distinguished into categories by their purpose and functions:

- Learning management systems (LMS) are critical instruments in corporate training. LMS software creates a platform to arrange and combine all the information into an intuitive learning path. It is a virtual space where the processes of learning, cooperation, and knowledge testing take place. The choice of an LMS should be based on the price and customer and function support, which should meet the company's needs in training. Examples of the best cloud software of 2022, according to the independent business software survey site G2, are Docebo, 360Learning, Absorb LMS, SAP Litmos, TalentLMS, and Lessonly by Seismic (Kovalenko et al., 2022). If a company prefers to host its LMS on its servers or in a private cloud, eFront should be used. With built-in enterprise features and integration, this system is secure and meets the unique needs of the enterprise.

- Video- and audioconferencing tools, which host online translations of the foreign language teacher through a platform for listeners. These instruments allow course participants to not just hear but also see (in the case of a videoconference) the teacher and offer the features of screen sharing and recording if someone cannot make it at the scheduled time. The most popular among these instruments are GoToMeeting, Zoom, Google Meet, and JoinMe (Bank et al., 2022).

- Microlearning platforms are interactive learning tools that are useful when a company needs to attract new employees, improve existing knowledge, or train remote teams. They are flexible and easy to use for both the enterprise and the staff during training. An example of a modern, effective microlearning platform is TalentCards. This accessible, innovative, and intuitive tool allows one to quickly and easily create snippets of information called “cards”, which employees can access when they need to. A major advantage is that TalentCards is available on mobile devices (Kovalenko et al., 2022).

Corporate PFL training conducted in the distance (online) mode in the period of restrictions can be provided at the expense of either the company or the employees wishing to improve their knowledge. Among such employees are specialists who interact with international firms; work with foreign partners and suppliers; communicate with foreign customers; are promising for the development of foreign business with the prospect of opening branches; are associated with foreign investments; participate in international exhibitions, forums, and conferences.

Each entrepreneur who invests their own money can later return the cost of the courses to the budget of the organization if the trained specialist decides to quit. If such a goal is determined, an additional agreement must be

signed with the employee, an addendum to the employment contract. It should be noted that the cost of employee training reduces the tax burden. In any case, the money invested in personnel training eventually returns a hundredfold and translates into their successful work and ability to promptly replace a departed specialist. Certainly, there is the option of trying to oblige full-time employees to learn the language themselves or seeking applicants with language skills. This, however, will complicate the search for niche specialists and increase the time required for it, as well as disrupt the work process, and may not yield any results at all. Group language training for staff, especially in times of restrictions, is a much better alternative that will ensure the quality of the business process going forward.

Corporate training in English is a great bonus that can be used to encourage promising employees, retain them, distinguish them from other colleagues, and make them reconsider switching to another company.

There is another important advantage of corporate foreign language training to bear in mind. FL training programs increase the interest of candidates in the employer, elevating the company's rating in comparison to its competitors. The respect of partners, customers, and other stakeholders also increases.

At present, most companies transition to this exact type of advanced training of employees instead of looking for already trained specialists. The policy of personnel development within the company has proven ineffective and investment in employee training becomes the optimal way to create a strong competitive team.

CONCLUSIONS

In today's conditions, highly qualified personnel are a significant factor in the efficiency of an enterprise and a certain indicator of its competitiveness and development. For this reason, many companies believe that the key function of human resources management is planning personnel development. During the COVID-19 pandemic, distance learning became an essential tool in the development of staff in Russian companies.

The research findings indicate that the most promising options for improving the professional training of workers are postgraduate education systems, in which training in a foreign language is provided in a clear professionally-oriented context. These characteristics are most fully demonstrated by corporate training. Corporate PFL training can meet the needs of every employee in line with the specific requirements of their jobs.

Contemporary employers need to introduce digital instruments and methods in the practice of corporate personnel

training. These measures will prevent inefficiency and enable the company to go beyond traditional training methods and form strong partnerships to support continuous employee development.

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