TEACHING FINANCE TO FOREIGN STUDENTS: A NEW METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

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Abstract

Novosibirsk State University (NSU) has several international projects which give stimuli of development for the new educational programs. Department of Economics of NSU is one of the leading departments in this type of university's educational activity. A new program, which started three academic years ago, was the educational program "International Finance" for the Bachelors' level students of the Chinese-Russian Institute at Heilongjiang University, Harbin, China. This program has been put into practice for the last year, and NSU's teachers have faced some challenges. To realize this program is necessary to pay attention to several items. They are as follows: to keep a high level of teaching financial courses for the students, with a different level of a basic economic knowledge; to adopt the courses using up-to-date situations in finance all over the world and in the countries which it concentrates on; to use some methods of teaching the Russian language in a specific field to the foreign students; to use an intercultural communication theory to deal with the management of the Chinese university and its students.

Keywords: International project, educational program, finance, intercultural communication.

1 TEACHING FINANCE AT THE ECONOMICS DEPARTMENT OF NSU

Nowadays teaching finance at the Economics Department of NSU in “Economics” and “Business Administration” subdivisions has two main directions:

- teaching the general idea of finance and financial systems;
- providing specialisations in some finance fields.

In a way teaching finance at the Bachelor’s level is based on the ideas of international principles, but a modern geopolitical situation demands using new ideas with taking into consideration some regional and national peculiarities.

Basic financial disciplines for the Bachelor’s level are “Financial Markets and Financial Institutions” and “Corporate Finance”. Moreover, there are a lot of electives such as “Essentials of Commercial Bank Management”, “Modern Stock Market”, “Financial Modelling” and other disciplines.

2 PARTNERSHIP OF NOVOSIBIRSK STATE UNIVERSITY AND HEILOUNGJIANG UNIVERSITY (HARBIN, CHINA)

Last several years one of the priorities for the universities of Siberia became development of collaboration with Asian universities that stipulated geographical location of them. For instance, in Novosibirsk State University a new international project has been started recently which includes realisation double-degree programs in some NSU’s departments. The partner university is Heilongjiang University in Harbin, China. For this purpose the Chinese-Russian Institute was founded.

The program “International Finance” was designed by the professors of Economics Department according to our partner's requirements. This program includes basic financial disciplines (Tab. 1) which cover different topics in finance such as financial markets, financial instruments, corporate finance, financial calculation and financial payments.

Financial disciplines start in the fourth semester after some basic economic courses such as Microeconomics, Macroeconomics, Econometrics, and the Russian Language as well. The language of teaching the financial courses is Russian.
Tab. 1. The financial disciplines of “International Finance” program in the Russian language for the students of the Chinese-Russian Institute.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Disciplines</th>
<th>Semester</th>
<th>Hours</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Essentials of Commercial Bank Management</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>The place of this discipline in the program is better to be after the discipline “Financial Intermediaries”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theory of Insurance</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>The place of this discipline in the program is better to be after the discipline “Financial Intermediaries”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International Economics</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>It is not a financial course but a very important one for comprehension the role of international finance in a modern world economy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corporate Finance</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>The place of this discipline in the program is better to be after the discipline “Financial Engineering”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Investments and Stock Market</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>The place of this discipline in the program is better to be after the discipline “Financial Markets”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial Intermediaries</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>This course is better to place at the beginning of the financial program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International Law</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>It is not a financial course but a very important one for understanding the international financial payment system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International Investments</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>The place of this discipline in the program is better to be after the discipline “Financial Markets”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial Engineering</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>The place of this discipline in the program is better to be after the discipline “Financial Markets”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial Markets</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>This course is better to place at the beginning of the financial program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central Bank Management</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>The place of this discipline in the program is better to be after the discipline “Financial Intermediaries”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There are some peculiarities and difficulties of teaching financial disciplines for the foreign students for the professors of Economics Department of NSU. University teacher has to master several skills which are as follows: 1) to keep a high level of teaching financial courses for the students with a different level of a basic economic knowledge; 2) to adopt the courses using up-to-date situations in finance all over the world and in the countries which it concentrates on; 3) to use some methods of teaching the Russian language in a specific field to the foreign students; 4) to use intercultural communication theory and psychology to deal with the management of a foreign university and its students that is very important for the Chinese case.

The process of negotiation with Chinese University management precedes the teaching process, so it is an essential part of preparing an educational product of high quality. It is necessary to say that Chinese people are not the plain negotiators. Sometimes it is difficult to predict the result of collaboration. For instance, Tab. 1 reflects the order of the financial disciplines of “International Finance” program which is not logical enough from our point of view, but corresponds to the Chinese University management requirements.
3 IMPORTANT POINTS IN PREPARING EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS IN FINANCE FOR FOREIGN STUDENTS

According to the Russian language level the foreign students at NSU can be divided into two categories.

The first category consists of the students from the former republics of the USSR. Some of them have Bachelor’s degree of Slavonic Universities and know the Russian language well, others have opportunities to ask for some extra classes of Russian at NSU. These foreign students study in the academic groups with the Russians. It is not necessary to prepare any special material for them.

The second category consists of the foreign students who have never spoken the Russian language before their studying at the university. The example is the Chinese students at NSU. Before studying special financial disciplines the students of the Chinese-Russian Institute spend three semesters to master Russian. However, as usual, their knowledge is not enough to understand all the topics of the disciplines, or it is too general.

Taking into consideration all the issues given above, it was necessary to revise the methodology of teaching financial disciplines for the foreign students. The most important points are as follows:

1. All the financial disciplines of the program have to use common financial terms, or unique terminology. It is better to avoid synonyms and give a precise explanation to each financial term. This is particularly important for the first semester financial courses given because the foreign students could have difficulty with understanding a lot of different terms of the same sense. When the students become familiar with many financial topics and lots of financial terms, it could be possible to introduce synonyms and more complicated notions step by step.

2. The educational material for all the financial disciplines of the program has to be organized the same way. It could comprise presentations for the lectures, adopted texts for the discipline topics (textbook or electronic version), handouts for the seminars, tests and other types of control and feedback on them.

3. Texts for the course topics have to include terms and their explanation, as well as “important financial expressions” which mean some useful word combinations, and “important financial knowledge” which mean some phrases for the topics of the discipline. Learning by heart these logical and correct word combinations and phrases is a good way to get good results. Especially it works in the case with the Chinese students.

4. The first week of studying all the disciplines has to be devoted to teaching the course principles and terminology. Then, a professor decides what the best way is to organize a course according to its aims and objectives, and the level of the students’ knowledge as well. There could be different types of activity such as problem solving, case studying, up-to-date situation discussing, listening tasks, and watching video.

5. It is reasonable to use different methods of teaching foreign languages in teaching finance for the foreign students. It helps to improve students’ skills in a proficient reading, writing, listening and speaking. For instance, there are different types of tests which could be used. They are multi-choice test, finding a correct answer, true or false expressions, etc. Reading activity aims on improving pronunciation and understanding some discussion topics.

When the study process is being organized it is important to pay attention not only to an educational program design but also other issues of educational process. One of very important issues of the educational integration process is the problem of intercultural communication. What the difference are between the Chinese culture and the Russian one? What psychological factors are necessary to take into consideration when the financial courses are being designed? We were guided by the Hofstede Model of six dimensions of national cultures to compare these two cultures.

4 METHODOLOGICAL RECOMMENDATION FOR TEACHING CHINESE STUDENTS

There are a lot of investigators from different countries who claim that the Chinese students have their peculiarities influenced on the results of studying. Such interest of the analysts is stipulated by the social, political, economic, and educational factors, and the fact that the Chinese society is becoming more open to the rest of the world. Every year a number of the Chinese students as the foreigners at the universities all over the world have increasing. Investigators note that the Chinese students
have good progress in study as usual. For instance, Chuang-shen Chen and others [4] searching the motives for good results account for such factors as very high value of higher education in China and industry and diligence of the Chinese students.

In China, from the ancient time, educated people are considered having prospects and respected. So, nowadays, Chinese pupils of 7 – 10 years old have the aim of their life to get higher education. In the condition of a fast economic growth in China a high quality education determines a student’s mobility and competitiveness on the inner labour market as well as on the international one [4]. Chinese people become hard-working from an infant age. They frankly believe that they will make good results if they work a lot. This firm belief is passed on from one generation to another and “programmes” the youths to be hard-working in order to get succeed in their career. Stevenson’s investigation [5], which was based on the Chinese mothers’ opinion poll, displayed that they ranged the factors of being successful as follows: persistence, child’s personal talents which s/he was born with, and finally, good luck. On the contrary, the American mothers value the most of all such factor as child’s personal talents which s/he was born with.

The value of higher education and the Chinese students’ yearning for working a lot are the main factors of their behaviour. Volet and Renshaw noted in their investigation [6] that the Chinese students’ behaviour has three key features: they want to know a subject perfect, aim on the result, do all their homework and read a lot of scientific literature not only the main reading.

To add the scientific works under consideration we decided comparing the Chinese and the Russian cultures using six dimensions of the Hofstede Model (Tab. 2). The most of the indexes for both cultures are close in their meanings. It is necessary to notice that Chinese people have such positive characteristics as a sense of purpose and pragmatism. They are very purposeful that reflects by high level of “Masculinity vs Femininity” index. The low level of “Uncertainty Avoidance” index means that Chinese people are confident in themselves in many difficult situations. These features are very helpful for the Chinese students in studying the Russian language and the special subjects in Russian.

The analysis of Hofstede Indexes, some investigations used, and our experience of working with the Chinese students let us make some methodological conclusions. For working with the student groups with regard to the Chinese culture, to our mind, it is very important to pay attention to the following:

- To prepare the material to lectures and seminars thoroughly and send them partly to the students in advance - it gives them an opportunity to examine the material, to prepare some questions and be ready to discuss it.
- To prepare adopted texts and some extra reading for all the topics of the program disciplines, to explain students the most important issues and pay more attention to reading.
- To give more attention to the discussion of modern economic problems in finance field, the analysis of practical situation (cases) and the individual presentations. The collective tasks have to be designed carefully.
- To include the tasks with an accent to the elements of the national financial system; it gives the opportunity for the students to demonstrate their knowledge of the national economic problems.
- To estimate student’s work very carefully. The system of marks should be absolutely clear for all of them. The students should have an opportunity to display themselves in any kind of tasks.
- To take into account psychological issues - the professor for this kind of student groups has to be not only a coordinator but also an expert and a source of great amount of information and knowledge.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indexes</th>
<th>China</th>
<th>Russia</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Power Distance</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>The indexes are close in their meanings. They are of a high level. It means that the students’ attitude to the teacher is respectful. The teacher is an expert, s/he has to know a lot and, as a rule, s/he is the main figure in educational process.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uncertainty Avoidance</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>The indexes are completely different. It means that Chinese people are psychologically strong enough. They are ready to any challenges and feel confident in difficult life situations. They are positive and usually have good mood.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individualism versus Collectivism</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>The indexes are close in their meanings. They are low. The level of individualism is a little higher for the Chinese culture. The family is very important for Chinese people.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Masculinity versus Femininity</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>The level of masculinity for the Chinese culture twice as high as for the Russian one. It is connected with ambitions that focused on career, results, progress, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long Term Orientation versus Short Term Orientation</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>The indexes are close in their meanings. Any kinds of a result are connected with a current situation and time of the events.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indulgence versus Restraint</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>The indexes are close in their meanings. Social restrictions are often in both cultures. People in these types of cultures are considered to be inclined to pessimism and cynicism. They do not pay much attention to their spare time quality.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: [7] – indexes; authors’ comments

5 CONCLUSIONS

Novosibirsk State University’s professors have to adapt to a new reality and have skills in university teaching, linguistics, psychology and intercultural communication in order to provide high quality service in education designing new programs. It is necessary to use some linguistics methods in teaching special subjects such as finance for the foreign students. Moreover, we needed to revise our financial courses teaching for the Bachelor’s level to take into account the foreign partners’ requirements.

REFERENCES


