

LEARNING OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES AT COLLEGES OF HOTEL MANAGEMENT IN THE CONTEXT OF KNOWLEDGE APPLICATION IN PRACTICE

Ljiljana Kosar, Mihaela Lazović

***Abstract:** The specificity of management in hospitality requires a vast variety of knowledge and skills of employees. The heterogeneity of the professional profiles correlates with numerous and various services which are integrated in a hotel product. Besides the practical, technical, marketing and managerial knowledge, in recent years a due attention has been paid to communication skills in direct contact between hoteliers and guests. The fundamental goal of colleges of hospitality management is to master the functional knowledge based on the optimization of the relationship between theory and practice. The curriculums of such institutions focus on foreign language learning. The approach to teaching foreign languages must synthesize basic professional expertise in hotel management, with special emphasis on communication skills. The organization of foreign language teaching, the content of the curriculum and leveling of skills will be presented in this paper on the example of The College of Hotel Management from Belgrade. Mastering communication skills in foreign languages is a priority goal of foreign language teaching at The College of Hotel Management. This objective is, in part, realized by organizing and implementing student practical training abroad, where, in direct contact with guests, the students apply their knowledge.*

***Key words:** hospitality, foreign language learning, knowledge, communication, application*

Introduction

Human recourses are an important component of quality in all domains of tourism. Their significance is especially prominent in providing services. In this context, hotel and tourism industry can be singled out due to their specific qualities. Particularly the hotel services are heterogeneous and spatially and functionally incorporated in an integral whole. Numerous basic and supplementary services are provided in hotel facilities in order to meet different needs of tourists. The quality of their services represents the quality of the hotel product. Professional and qualified personnel signify a condition for an excellent realization of the mentioned services. The diversity of services requires heterogeneous professional profiles. Specialized knowledge and skills of the staff are prominent in the hotel industry. This fact directly influences the quality of the hotel product. The dynamic changes of 21st century life style

have a direct impact on the needs and requirements of tourists and hotel guests. This means that the quality of the services must be adjusted to accommodate these changes. In other words, the knowledge and skills are to be conceived as dynamic categories which may undertake constant changes and innovations. In this sense, educational institutions in the field of tourism and hospitality have a great responsibility to adjust their curriculums and theoretical and practical courses to the contemporary demands.

Professional education in the field of tourism and hospitality takes place at different levels of the educational system: secondary vocation schools and university education which may involve studying at colleges and universities. The education must be correlated with the specific characteristics of the profession. The quality of the education must be perceived as a complex progression. The courses may be theoretical, practical and field. The evaluation of courses involves a complex analysis of economic conditions, teaching materials and aids, characteristics of teachers and students. The students' role is more and more important in the process of evaluation of the quality of education. This is why the students are actively involved in the evaluation process in order to improve the quality of education and to adapt it to their professional needs. The fundamental objective of the educational system in the field of tourism and hospitality is to train professionals for working in the industry. This is why we insist on practical knowledge.

It has been said numerous times that people are the essence of tourism. The education provided by tourism and hospitality educational institutions should present competent professionals who will prove the importance of the human factor in providing good service and meeting the needs of tourists. Due to the fact that tourism is a global phenomenon which implies constant verbal communication between people from different countries, the foreign language learning is an essential skill without which a successful business cannot exist. For this reason, foreign language learning at the tourism and hospitality universities represents a crucial part of the learning process. It is necessary for the students to master the language of their profession during their education. This means that language teachers need to know the essence of tourism and hospitality and the way they are manifested in practice.

The Features and Components of the Quality of the Educational Process in the Tourism and Hospitality

Educational institutions which train students for working in the tourism and hospitality industry are numerous all over the world, especially in Europe, which continues to be a leading global tourism destination. This fact

shows how much attention is paid to the development of tourism as well as its contribution to national economies. EU countries focus their new political strategy on solving the unemployment problem, and in this context tourism has been recognized as an activity that can seriously contribute to solving this problem. It is logical that an adequate education precedes employment.

Young people are extremely interested to study at the mentioned institutions. It is primarily a result of certain conceptions about associating work and travel, making contacts with different cultures, as well as staying at attractive locations and luxurious hotel facilities. These conceptions are often one-sided because of the unawareness of the specific requirements in terms of mastering a variety of complex and multidisciplinary knowledge as well as working conditions that require a variety of mental and physical efforts.

Bearing all this in mind, a precondition of a quality education is an adequate selection of future students. This includes testing their psychological and physical abilities and aptitudes, and pointing out the most important features of working in the tourism and hospitality industry. Thus, activities that precede the teaching process should streamline future students and give them clear notions about their future careers. These activities have become common in education fairs organized in major cities, and where the interested young people can inform themselves about the most important issues about their final career choice.

All educational institutions tend to enroll more students with a clear and unambiguous choice, and less undecided, who have "accidentally" chosen to study tourism and hospitality. In this way, we create a favorable climate for the realization of our goals and the achievement of high quality education. One of the initial goals of such education is to create a positive attitude towards the profession, to encourage motivation for continued learning and active participation in class, as well as to achieve a vision of the future where young people see themselves not only as successful business people, but also as good tourism and hospitality professionals.

The complexity and diversity of tourism and hospitality industry gives rise to different teaching conceptions. In secondary vocation schools, a due notice is paid to mastering the basic general knowledge and techniques, i.e. elementary operative skills depending on the fields of specialty which exist within the tourism and hospitality profession. College and university educational system insists on acquirement of organizational, creative and managerial skills. Depending on the concept of teaching, there is a comprehensive approach that seeks to form a general profile of tourist and hotel experts, as well as a specialized approach that focuses on particular segments of this business. Specialized approach is particularly evident in the

hotel industry, where the learning process is directed towards the accommodation sector, restaurant industries, gastronomy, and within these sectors it is further subdivided.

Contemporary teaching trends in the field of tourism and hospitality industry indicate a growing orientation toward specialization. This is the result of monitoring the economy needs by the educational institutions that are the creators of curriculums and the ones who implement them. Specialized curriculums have a specific structure that implies certain correlation between theory and practice. Consequently, the fulfillment of certain conditions for the performance of both types of instruction is requisite. It is particularly important to provide the financial conditions for conducting practical courses. This implies that adequate space and equipment for practical tourism and hospitality courses must be provided. In developed countries, tourism and hospitality colleges and universities have their own restaurants and travel agencies where the students work with practical training instructors. Such objects, even though they represent school laboratories, often operate commercially, which means that they are designed for all types of customers. However, to successfully incorporate students into practical work during their studies, a prior training period without customers must be provided. Consequently, it is necessary to organize a good preparatory practical training with small groups, in order for the instructors to be able to devote adequate attention and time to each student. For putting this into practice, it is necessary to have an adequate number of well-equipped training classrooms and good instructors who will be able to recognize the special qualities and preferences of individual students and encourage them to further widen their knowledge and skills, as well as strive to rectify the weaknesses, if there are any.

The specific method of acquiring knowledge and skills is field work. There are well-chosen and appropriate facilities where the acquired theoretical and practical knowledge is applied. In this way, interactive teaching is provided; it includes the application of knowledge gained in the classroom.

The material quality components involving the practice space and equipment are publically available so the potential students can inform themselves. Curricula with the names, purposes, and program content are also available as well as adequate basic textbooks and supplementary reading materials.

The Law on Higher Education, which presupposes the fulfillment of basic criteria for the accreditation of higher education institutions in Serbia, creates professional bodies and organs that prescribe mandatory standards,

the fulfillment of which is a necessary prerequisite for executing the curriculum. These standards are fully applied to the educational process and all of its tangible and intangible components are reduced to a measurable size. The mentioned standards presuppose available space for teaching and learning for every student, this space is equipped with modern teaching aids, including computer technology and the Internet, rich library and a reading room. Particular attention is paid to the expert assessment of the quality of manuals. In this sense, it is very important that the manuals are compatible with the curriculum, volume textbook, user-friendliness, clarity, adjustment to the students' needs in terms of special emphasis on what is the most important. The analysis of case studies is considered a particular quality of a textbook. Case studies involve problem solving; they offer choices and provide the most suitable solutions. In addition to case studies, tourism and hospitality textbooks should contain diagrams, illustrations, tables, and similar enclosures that will best contribute to acquiring the specific knowledge and skills. This especially applies to foreign language textbooks, where the practical examples allow the students to easily apply their knowledge in the direct contact with guests from abroad.

The teaching process must favor the students. Therefore, it is of particular importance to evaluate the very progress of the teaching process in the direct communication between the teachers and the students. Given the fact that the commitment to study at a higher education institution is a specific expression of free choice of a young adult, students are considered to be competent to assess the quality of the teacher. This is why the students' assessment is one of the key components of the quality of teaching.

The standards for the accreditation of higher education institutions established a mandatory evaluation of education by the students. This is accomplished via periodic anonymous surveys according to a standardized questionnaire. It elaborates nine basic criteria for assessing the quality of teachers' work in direct contact with students:

1. The teacher explains in a clear and understandable manner
2. The teacher explains unambiguously and highlights what is the most important
3. The teacher presents the curriculum at an appropriate pace during the semester
4. The teacher comes to class well prepared
5. The teacher teaches according to the agreed timetable and is never late for class
6. The teacher encourages the involvement and participation of students in class

7. The teacher provides useful information about the student (after term papers, exercises, activities in class)
8. The teacher responds to student's questions and takes into account the students' comments
9. My previous grades in this subject are in correlation with the knowledge I attained.

The first five criteria represent the basis for further improvements of the quality of teaching and establishing interactive cooperation between the teachers and the students. They refer to the teacher's ability to present the curriculum in a comprehensive way. This is reflected in the clarity and intelligibility of the presentation, selectivity, good lesson plan and acknowledgement of the established timetable. In this case, not only the professional, but also the basic pedagogical quality of teachers whose own example and professional attitude towards teaching influence the behavior of students and their future attitude towards work.

The following three criteria are related to teacher's creativity and his/her ability to stimulate the students' creativity, respect their individuality, recognize their specific areas of interest, and support their views and opinions. These criteria represent a novelty in the teaching process. Their adequate application implies the students' seriousness and maturity as well as the appropriate professional and pedagogical quality of teachers. The appliance of these criteria emphasize both the teachers' and the students' intellectual potentials and their interactive communication.

The last criterion refers to the objectivity of giving grades. The application of this criterion is the result of the new approach, which includes periodic checks of the acquired knowledge during the teaching process, by means of colloquiums, term papers, homework, etc. This is particularly important for education in the tourism and hospitality industry because it allows continuous testing of knowledge and skills as well as evaluation of their application in practice. This approach allows the teacher to monitor the development of each individual student and to objectively record his progress, stagnation or decline. This enables the identification of a problem and provides an opportunity to resolve it during the semester.

The Importance of Foreign Language Learning for the Hospitality Management Students

Language is a vital tool that we use to communicate with other people in our daily and working lives. Good communication in foreign language becomes so crucial in today's world due to the impact of globalization. For

global competitors, the most important factor is the ability to communicate on a wider, quicker and clearer basis. Knowledge of foreign languages plays a very important role in the hospitality industry. Hotels and tourism represent a major source of income. Consequently, effective communications are significant for sending messages to potential customers. Foreign languages are used in promotions, invitations and service provision.

Furthermore, foreign languages are important in making a first impression on tourists. Consequently, foreign tourists and visitors will come back again to visit the country.

In terms of communication, foreign languages are very important for business administration, so communicators should not make too many mistakes, since these can cause problems and delay business. Managers must use the language properly and communicate effectively. It is their duty to speak concisely and clearly to their staff or customers. Conciseness and clarity represent a means to achieve success. If managers do not assign work clearly, the staff might misunderstand the message which might cause some conflicts between the managers, the staff and the customers. Then, communication at work is not only an issue of the knowledge of a foreign language but it also means that the managers need to know how to use it properly with respect to different contexts and situations. This will help managers manage and prevent conflicts that can happen in the workplace. Communication at work should be pursued carefully because, in the world of business, mistakes or misunderstandings during agreeing on working conditions or signing contracts can lead to expensive and long-lasting problems. In brief, communication in workplace should involve as few mistakes as possible.

Furthermore, the importance of foreign languages should be emphasized because of the increasing number of foreign customers. Hotel managers and staff must be able to communicate using foreign languages when required. Fluency in foreign languages makes customers satisfied.

In addition, foreign languages may also be used for communication within the hotel or restaurant mostly in cooperation with foreign administrators, managers, employers and other foreign employees.

Moreover, foreign languages can be used as means of obtaining information about foreign customers, foreign employers and employees and their cultures. It helps managers understand other cultures better which may reduce potential conflicts.

Various foreign languages used in different service industries like tourism, hotel and food industries are of great importance. Hospitality industry combines different service industries that include restaurants,

lodgings, theme parks, event planning, transportation and other additional fields in the tourism industry. Most hospitality units like restaurants and hotels comprise of different groups of facility maintenance, marketing, management, human resources and direct operations (housekeepers, servers, porters, kitchen workers and bartenders). In all these departments, different foreign languages are used in order to ease the communication between the visitors, mostly tourists, and the employees. The knowledge of different foreign languages and communication skills are of great importance for the hospitality industry because it may ease the communication and help in fulfilling the guest's requirements. Furthermore, the success of hospitality and tourism sectors is partially dependent on the employees' foreign language communication skills.

It is well known that language is one of the most powerful tool for communication. With the recent emerging of world globalization, people who speak two or more languages have a variety of advantages to their benefit. The various foreign languages used in the hospitality industry include English, German, French, Italian, Spanish, Japanese, Russian, Persian, Arabic, Chinese etc.

The Organization of Foreign Language Teaching at The College of Hotel Management from Belgrade

Besides the practical, technical, marketing and managerial knowledge, in recent years a due attention has been paid to communication skills in direct contact between hoteliers and guests.

The fundamental goal of the College of Hotel Management from Belgrade is to master the functional knowledge based on the balance between theory and practice. The curriculum of this institution focuses on foreign language learning. The approach to teaching foreign languages must synthesize basic professional expertise in hotel management, with special emphasis on communication skills.

This part of the paper will present the organization of foreign language teaching, the content of the curriculum and leveling of skills at the College of Hotel Management from Belgrade. Mastering communication skills in foreign languages is a priority goal of foreign language teaching at our College. This objective is realized by organizing and implementing student practical training abroad, where the students apply their knowledge in direct contact with guests.

Five foreign languages are taught at the College of Hotel Management: English, Italian, German, French, and Russian. All the students must learn two foreign languages. Business English language is obligatory and it is

taught throughout all three academic years. Business Italian, German, French, and Russian are elective languages. Students elect one of the mentioned languages in the first semester and learn it throughout the rest of their education at the College. The curriculum is unified for all five foreign languages taught at the College of Hotel Management.

The aim of the foreign language learning is to familiarize the students with the professional language and business terminology, as well as with intercultural communication. The acquired foreign language competence is expected to enable an efficient communication in the workplace, as well as the use of professional literature written in a foreign language.

Foreign language lessons are divided into two parts: theoretical and practical.

The theoretical frame of Foreign business language taught during the first year of study involves: description of different types of accommodation, hotels, rooms, bathrooms, description of hotel facilities: dining facilities, recreational facilities, conference facilities, etc., the hotel organization: hotel divisions and departments, job descriptions in the hotel industry, job applications, eating establishments and types of restaurants with basic terminology connected to food service, laying the table, food and meals, menu, verbs connected to food preparation and methods of cooking, communication with the guest, description of a meal.

Practical frame of Foreign business language taught during the first year of study involves: communicational skills and practical usage of a foreign language by means of dialogues and monologues, class discussion, student's project work and PowerPoint presentations.

The theoretical frame of Foreign business language taught during the second year of study involves: levels of service and hotel categorization, reservations, registration or check-in, check-out and paying the bill, hotel services, complaints, dining-room staff, obligations and commitments of the employees, communication between and with the employees in a restaurant: expressing obligation, permission, proposals, orders, offers... types of service, parts of a meal/courses (hors d'oeuvre, appetizer, entrée, soups, main course, dessert, savoury...), the structure of a menu, names of meals, description of dishes (main ingredients, method of preparing and cooking, method of serving), national specialties, kitchen staff, hygiene and safety, kitchen utensils, verbs connected with cooking and preparing food, recipes.

Practical frame of Foreign business language taught during the second year of study involves: communicational skills and practical usage of a foreign language by means of dialogues and monologues, class discussion, student's project work and PowerPoint presentations.

The theoretical frame of Foreign business language taught during the third year of study involves: advertising materials, hotel brochures, promotion of a hotel, describing a resort hotel, front office communications, hotel switchboard, a telephone conversation, hotel reception documentation, informing the guests about the hotel services and amenities, business correspondence (formal letter, e-mail, fax, etc.) description of national cuisines, contemporary gastronomy trends, beverage service in bars and restaurants, wines and wining, cheese, human resources (selection and recruitment).

Practical frame of Foreign business language taught during the third year of study involves: communicational skills and practical usage of a foreign language by means of dialogues and monologues, class discussion, student's project work and PowerPoint presentations.

The Application of Foreign Language Learning in Practice

As it has been previously mentioned, mastering the foreign language communication skills is one of the essential goals at The College of Hotel Management. This aim is realized during student practical training abroad. It gives our students an opportunity to apply their knowledge of foreign languages in the direct communication with the guests, managers and coworkers.

In the last year, over 150 of our students attended practical training abroad.

The following table shows the countries, places and cities and the total number of students who attended practice there.

Table 1. Students' practical training abroad, 2012

Country	Place / City	Number of students
France	Adriatic coast	7
Mexico	Cancun	6
Greece	Khalkidhiki, Crete, Athens	50
Slovenia	Kranjska Gora	5
Slovak Republic	Bardejovske Kupele	4
Macedonia	Lake Ohrid	7
Russia	Sankt Petersburg	11
Poland	Kielce	6
Spain	Marbella	21
Germany	Immenstaad, Fehmarn, Hamburg	21
USA	Block Island, Dickinson, Highlands, Northeast Harbor, New Jersey, Pittsburgh	29
TOTAL		167

Source: The College of Hotel Management, Belgrade, Serbia

When asked to elaborate on their use of foreign languages during practice, the students usually answered that they mostly used the language spoken in the country they went to. This was an opportunity for them to practice communication in English, Italian, Russian, German, and French. If they did not know the language spoken in the country, they mostly used the English language, some of them even learned to communicate at the beginner's level in the language of the country they had practice in.

Depending on the job assigned to the students, they actively used the language they learned at our College.

Some of the students were working at the reception. They engaged in the conversation about different types of accommodation, hotel rooms, bathrooms, they informed the guests about the hotel services and amenities, their job involved front office communications, hotel switchboard, telephone reservations, they were in charge of hotel reception documentation, i.e. they created control books, wall charts, computer files, guest history records, reservation diaries, arrival lists, etc. Consequently, they were in charge of making reservations, registration or check-in, check-out and settling the bill, and guest complaints.

Other students worked at a restaurant, thus they used basic terminology connected to food service, food preparation and methods of cooking and serving, menu, laying the table. In the direct communication with the guests they described parts of a meal/courses (hors d'oeuvre, appetizer, entrée, soups, main course, dessert, savoury...), menu: the structure, names of meals and beverages, description of dishes (main ingredients, method of preparing and cooking, method of serving), national specialties. Those who worked at the bar learned the names of different beverages and how to prepare and serve cocktails.

All the students who attended the practice considered the knowledge of foreign languages attained at the College of Hotel Management very useful in real and professional life.

Conclusion

The quality of education is a basic prerequisite for the achievement of educational goals in the field of tourism and hospitality, which is to educate competent professionals who will use their knowledge and skills well and who will be able to respond to all challenges. Comprehensiveness and measurable quality of teaching lies in its tangible and intangible components which provide the possibility for the students to evaluate their teacher's work. This aims to continuously improve the quality of all the participants in the learning process. Responsibility of foreign language teachers is

particularly important because the students must be able to use their knowledge of foreign languages in communication with foreign guests. On one hand, there is the contact and communication with foreign guests in the student's own country or in the region where the communication with managers and employees exercised their native language. And on the other, is the student's summer practice abroad, where the application of knowledge of foreign languages is realized in two dimensions: in communication with guests as well as with managers and other employees. Apart of the knowledge of the English language which has become a global means of communication in between people, it is important to insist on knowledge of language spoken in the country where the students reside during the practice.

Therefore, the main goal of The College of Hotel Management from Belgrade is to continually improve the student's knowledge of foreign languages, insisting on all the components of the quality teaching, as well as preparing students for international competitions and summer practice. Raising the level of students' knowledge of foreign languages, from the point of application in practice, is an important condition for the further strengthening of international cooperation of The College of Hotel Management, both with similar educational institutions, and with the hotel companies.

References

- Deming, W. E. 1996. *Kako izaći iz krize*, Beograd, Grmeč.
- Kosar, Lj., Rašeta, S., 2005. *Izazovi kvaliteta*, Viša hotelijerska škola, Beograd.
- Kosar, Lj., 2012. *Hotelijerstvo I*, VHŠ, Beograd.
- Maslov, A., 2004. *Psihologija u menadžmentu*, Novi Sad, Adozes.
- Milojević, Lj., *Nova EU turistička politika: Ka jačem partnerstvu u evropskom turizmu*, Stručni časopis iz oblasti turizma "Turistički pregled", br. 5, p. 57-62.
- Milosavljević, G., 1997. *Organizacija treninga*, Službeni glasnik, Beograd.
- The Law on Higher Education, Službeni glasnik RS 76/05.
- Acreditation Report, 2012. The College of Hotel Management, Belgrade.
- Documentation about the Student Practical Training, The College of Hotel Management, Belgrade.

NOTES ON THE AUTHORS

Prof. dr. LJILJANA KOSAR (The College of Hotel Management, Belgrade, Serbia, ljliljana.kosar@gmail.com) graduated and obtained her Magister's and Doctor's degree at the Department of Tourism at the Faculty of Sciences, University of Belgrade. Since 1979. she has been working at Universities. She was elected full professor in 2003. at the University of Novi Sad (Faculty of Sciences,

Department of Geography, Tourism and Hotel Management). Scientific fields of interest: hotel management, classification, categorization, standardization of accommodation facilities, the structure of hotel product, management of quality in the hotel industry. She is the author and coauthor of about 100 scientific papers and 10 textbooks. She participated in numerous national and international conferences.

Dr. MIHAELA LAZOVIC (The College of Hotel Management, Belgrade, Serbia, laz_13@yahoo.com) is a full professor of English language at The College of Hotel Management in Belgrade.

She obtained the title Professor of English Language and Literature (2003) as well as the title of Magister in Linguistics (2009) and Doctor in Linguistics (2012) at the English Language Department at the Faculty of Philosophy, University of Novi Sad.

She published over 20 scientific papers in the field of comparative linguistics and participated in many national and international conferences.

She is also a published translator (English, Romanian and Serbian).