



METHODS OF TEACHING RUSSIAN AS A NATIVE, NON-NATIVE, FOREIGN LANGUAGE

МЕТОДИКА ПРЕПОДАВАНИЯ РУССКОГО ЯЗЫКА КАК РОДНОГО, НЕРОДНОГО, ИНОСТРАННОГО

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Research article

Developing professional Russian communication skills for hospitality internships through service-learning: a case study from Vietnam

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Abstract. Internship readiness is critical for language majors preparing to enter the hospitality industry, yet little research has explored how service-learning supports this development in non-English language programs. In Vietnam, the rising demand for Russian-speaking hospitality professionals underscores the need for effective, discipline-specific pedagogical models. This study investigates how a service-learning project embedded in a Russian for Specific Purposes (RSP) module enhances students' internship readiness through applied language use, reflective learning, and professional skill acquisition. A qualitative single-case study was conducted involving ten third-year Russian majors at a Vietnamese university. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, reflective journals, and bilingual materials produced during a semester-long community-based service-learning project. Thematic analysis was guided by Kolb's experiential learning theory and the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) career readiness framework. The findings indicate that service-learning facilitates internship readiness by enhancing context-specific Russian language use, increasing students' reflective awareness of communicative challenges, and fostering transferable skills such as teamwork, initiative, and intercultural competence. Students also reported increased self-confidence and a clearer understanding of their future professional roles. The study provides empirical evidence for the pedagogical value of integrating service-learning into RSP instruction. It demonstrates that experiential, community-engaged learning can effectively support both linguistic development and career preparedness. These insights offer a transferable model for vocational language education and contribute to broader discussions on employability-oriented curriculum design in non-English language programs.

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Introduction

Vietnam has undergone rapid economic and social transformation over the past three decades, emerging as a dynamic middle-income country. Education has played a vital role in supporting this transition by equipping the workforce with the skills necessary to meet evolving national and international demands (Parajuli et al., 2020). However, Vietnamese higher education continues to be largely theoretical, with limited emphasis on practical skills, communicative competence, and critical thinking (Le et al., 2020). These limitations are especially pronounced in applied disciplines such as hospitality and tourism, where success depends not only on technical expertise but also on the ability to communicate effectively across languages and cultures.

To address these challenges, national education reforms have promoted a shift toward competency-based and student-centered learning. Key policy instruments, such as Resolution No. 29/NQ-TW, Decision No. 1982/QĐ-TTg, and Circular No. 17/2021/TT-BGDĐT, encourage pedagogical models that emphasize applied learning and job readiness (MOET, 2021¹). Within this context, service learning has emerged as a promising approach that integrates academic content with community engagement. Defined as a form of experiential education grounded in reciprocity, service learning supports discipline-specific learning, soft skill development, and civic responsibility (Jacoby, 2015). In Russian for Specific Purposes (RSP), it offers a pedagogical framework through which students can contextualize language instruction and apply their learning in real-world scenarios (Hellebrandt et. al., 2003).

Despite growing demand for Russian-speaking professionals in Vietnamese tourism hubs such as Nha Trang and Đà Nẵng, most RSP programs still lack structured opportunities for authentic language use and workplace application. While prior studies have addressed general curriculum issues in RSP, few have examined how experiential learning models like service learning can support

¹ Ministry of Education and Training (MOET). (2021). *Circular No. 17/2021/TT-BGDĐT on university program workload and pedagogical innovation*.

job-specific communication. This study seeks to fill that gap by examining how a service-learning project embedded in an RSP module can enhance students' internship readiness, a set of cognitive, linguistic, and behavioral competencies required to perform effectively in hospitality settings (Dare et al., 2009; NACE, 2020²).

The novelty of this research lies in its application of the service-learning model, originally conceptualized by John Dewey and later formalized by scholars such as Furco (Furco, 1996), Eyler and Giles (Eyler, Giles, 1999), and Jacoby (Jacoby, 2015), to the underexplored context of Russian for Specific Purposes in Vietnam. While previous studies have demonstrated that service learning can enhance civic engagement, deepen language acquisition, and foster the development of transferable soft skills such as teamwork, adaptability, and critical thinking (Eyler, Giles, 1999; Jacoby, 2015; Culcasi, Venegas, 2023), most of this research has been situated in English-medium or interdisciplinary programs. There remains a significant gap regarding its application in non-English language instruction, especially in professionally oriented disciplines such as tourism and hospitality. This study addresses this gap by extending established theoretical frameworks to investigate how service learning promotes internship readiness in RSP through the integrated development of linguistic competence, reflective awareness, and intercultural sensitivity. In doing so, it introduces a context-responsive model of experiential learning tailored to the Vietnamese higher education landscape, with the aim of informing future curriculum design and enhancing the professional relevance of language education.

The topicality of the research is reinforced by current shifts in Vietnamese higher education policy, which increasingly emphasize outcome-based education, employability, and internationalization. In a post-pandemic tourism recovery era, demand for Russian-speaking professionals remains high in key coastal destinations, yet curriculum development in RSP has not kept pace with these needs. The integration of service learning into language education thus addresses an urgent gap in both teaching practice and workforce preparation. The relevance of this research lies in its alignment with national educational priorities promoting competency-based education and its response to an underexplored area in language pedagogy.

The study contributes both theoretically and practically to the literature on experiential learning and RSP. Theoretically, it builds on a robust body of research that conceptualizes service learning as a pedagogical model integrating academic instruction with community engagement. Originating from the experiential learning philosophy of John Dewey (Dewey, 1938), service learning emphasizes the centrality of experience in education. Dewey's work laid the foundation for later theorists such as Furco (Furco, 1996), who differentiated service learning from other forms of experiential education by highlighting its reciprocal structure and dual focus on learning and service. Eyler and Giles (Eyler, Giles, 1999) further

² National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE). (2020). *What is career readiness?* <https://www.nacweb.org/career-readiness/competencies/career-readiness-defined/>

advanced the theoretical framework by identifying the elements of high-quality service learning, including reflection, community partnership, and curricular integration. Jacoby (Jacoby, 2015) elaborated this model by emphasizing civic learning and the intentional design of reflection to foster critical thinking and personal growth. These foundational scholars underscore that service learning is most effective when it is systematically embedded into the curriculum and aligned with both academic content and community needs.

In the domain of language education, particularly English as a Second or Foreign Language, service learning has been associated with increased motivation, pragmatic competence, and soft skill development (Hellebrandt et al., 2003; Schneider, 2018; Culcasi, Venegas, 2023). Research shows that community-based learning facilitates authentic language use, improves intercultural communication, and enhances learners' professional identity. For example, studies by Tilley-Lubbs (Tilley-Lubbs, 2004) and Perren and Wurr (Perren, Wurr, 2015) have shown that service learning in second language acquisition contexts supports linguistic gains as well as socio-emotional and civic development.

However, the implementation of service learning in non-English language programs, particularly in Russian for Specific Purposes, remains underrepresented in the scholarly discourse. While Russian language education has traditionally emphasized grammatical precision and literary comprehension, scholars such as Talipova (Talipova, 2024) as well as Ndyay, Nguyen and Grunina (Ndyay, Nguyen, Grunina, 2020) have advocated for a shift toward communicative and task-based instruction. These authors highlight the need for pedagogical innovation in Russian language teaching, especially concerning global mobility, labor migration, and shifting geopolitical interests. Moreover, methodological studies from the Russian academic context, including works by Kapustina (Kapustina, 2020), Gizdulin and Nuridinov (Gizdulin, Nuridinov, 2023), support the integration of professional language training into broader curricular goals, emphasizing the role of situational learning and authentic materials.

Yet, despite these developments, the intersection of service learning and Russian language pedagogy has not been systematically examined. This study addresses that gap by applying the service-learning model to the RSP context in Vietnam, a setting where Russian continues to hold strategic economic and diplomatic value, especially in tourism and hospitality sectors. It demonstrates how experiential learning principles can be adapted to non-Western, non-English contexts and aligned with sector-specific needs.

Practically, the study provides actionable insights for curriculum designers and educators in RSP. It outlines how service learning can be integrated into coursework through partnerships with industry stakeholders, the co-creation of bilingual promotional materials, and guided reflection sessions. These activities not only reinforce linguistic and pragmatic competence but also foster employability-related competencies such as teamwork, adaptability, and intercultural awareness. In so doing, the study contributes to a broader educational

shift in Vietnam toward competency-based and applied learning models (MOET, 2021³).

In sum, this research contributes to the growing body of literature advocating for experiential, context-sensitive pedagogies in foreign language education. By situating service learning within the underexplored terrain of RSP in Vietnam, it offers a model for other language programs seeking to increase the relevance and impact of their instruction in an increasingly globalized labor market.

The aim of this study is to investigate how service learning contributes to internship readiness among Russian language majors preparing for careers in the hospitality sector in Vietnam. It focuses on the intersection between applied language use, reflective practice, and the development of professional skills in an authentic learning context.

To achieve this aim, the study addresses the following research questions:

1. How does service learning facilitate context-specific Russian language development relevant to hospitality internships?
2. In what ways does service learning contribute to the formation of professional competencies, such as teamwork, adaptability, and intercultural communication?
3. How do students reflect on their learning experiences, and what evidence is there of increased readiness for professional engagement?

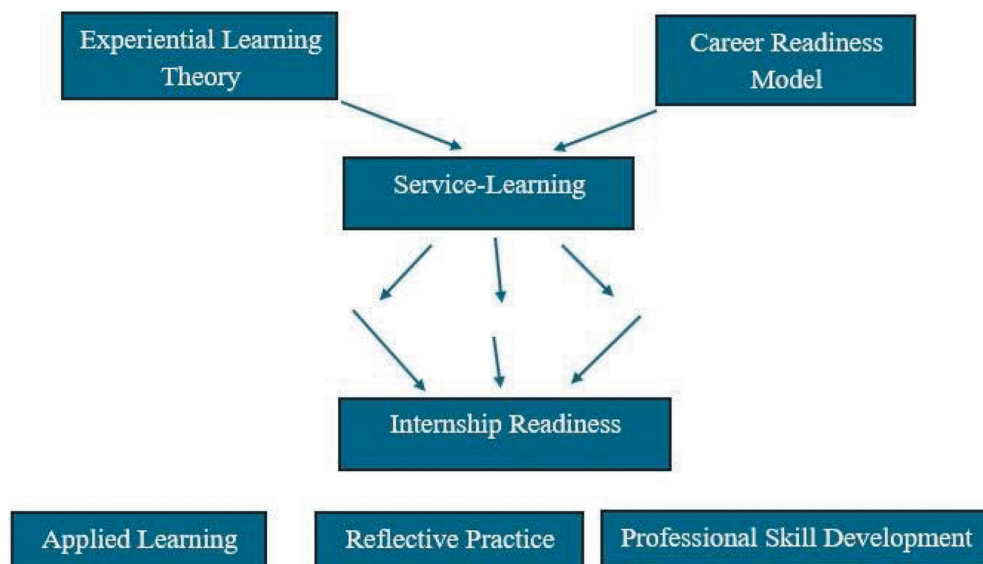
Methods and materials

This study is grounded in Kolb's (Kolb, 1984) experiential learning theory, which conceptualizes learning as a cyclical process involving four interrelated stages: concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation.

The analytical framework is built around three interrelated dimensions (fig.):

- **Applied Learning:** Tasks such as assisting Russian-speaking tourists or translating promotional content provide students with opportunities to use Russian in meaningful, real-life scenarios. These experiences help consolidate theoretical knowledge while fostering real-time communication, problem solving, and time management (Eyler, Giles, 1999; Hong et al., 2024).
- **Reflective Practice:** Structured reflection allows students to evaluate their communicative performance, analyze linguistic choices, and connect experience to academic content. In RSP contexts, this enhances metacognitive awareness, pragmatic flexibility, and ethical sensitivity (Hatcher, Bringle, 1997).
- **Professional Skill Development:** Through community engagement, students cultivate soft skills such as adaptability, teamwork, and intercultural competence, while also improving their confidence and linguistic precision (Bawica, 2021; Choi, Han, Kim, 2023).

³ Ministry of Education and Training (MOET). (2021). *Circular No. 17/2021/TT-BGDĐT on university program workload and pedagogical innovation*.



Conceptual Framework: Service-Learning and Internship Readiness

Source: compiled by N.T. Nguyen, T.P.T. Truong

This research employed a qualitative single-case study design to explore how a service-learning project embedded in an RSP module supported undergraduate students' readiness for hospitality internships (Yin, 2018; Merriam, 2009). The case study method was selected for its capacity to capture the complexity of language development, identity formation, and professional skill acquisition in a naturalistic educational context. Unlike most existing literature that focuses on English-medium instruction, this study offers a novel contribution by investigating experiential learning in Russian language education in Vietnam, a setting with limited prior research.

The participants comprised ten third-year undergraduate students (seven female, three male), aged 20 to 21, enrolled in a Bachelor of Russian Language and Culture program at a Vietnamese university. All students had completed at least four semesters of Russian and were enrolled in the RSP module during the study. Their estimated proficiency ranged from B1 to B2 on the CEFR scale. None of the participants had prior internship experience, making this project their first exposure to using Russian in a professional setting.

Participants were selected via purposive sampling based on three criteria: enrollment in the RSP module, prior completion of foundational Russian courses, and active participation in the Introducing Russia to Vietnamese Audiences service-learning project. Under faculty supervision, students worked in teams, collaborated with tourism professionals, and produced translated materials and reflective journals. Informed consent was obtained from all participants. Ethical safeguards included confidentiality, voluntary participation, and approval from the university's institutional review board.

The study utilized two primary data sources: semi-structured interviews and student-generated artifacts. Ten interviews were conducted in Vietnamese, lasting 45 to 60 minutes, and designed to elicit students' experiences in three areas: use of

Russian in professional contexts, collaboration with external stakeholders, and reflections on skill development.

In addition to interviews, the researcher collected artifacts created during the service-learning project, including translated texts, bilingual brochure drafts, and reflective journals. These documents offered insight into students' language use, project execution, and professional identity formation.

All interviews were transcribed and translated into English. Thematic analysis followed Braun and Clarke's (Braun, Clarke, 2006) six-phase process, including data familiarization, code generation, theme identification, theme review, theme definition, and reporting. A hybrid coding strategy was employed, combining deductive categories derived from the conceptual framework with inductive codes emerging from the data. NVivo software was used to support data organization and coding.

To enhance trustworthiness, an audit trail documented the coding and interpretive decisions. A second researcher reviewed a subset of transcripts to ensure inter-rater reliability. Member checking with four participants was conducted to validate the findings. Rich, contextual descriptions were used in the final write-up to preserve the depth and authenticity of participants' narratives. Emerging themes highlighted how students negotiated meaning in translating hospitality-related vocabulary, addressed cultural-linguistic ambiguities, adapted tone and register for specific audiences, and developed greater confidence in using Russian professionally.

Results

RQ 1: Findings indicate that the service-learning project provided students with authentic, purpose-driven contexts to apply their Russian language skills in professional hospitality scenarios. The transition from decontextualized classroom practice to real-world language use was evidenced through students' translation artifacts, interviews, and teacher-assessed rubrics. Analysis of student outputs revealed that 80% of participants improved in their ability to produce idiomatic and context-sensitive translations. Rubric scores showed growth in accuracy, tone, and genre alignment over the course of the semester. Peer and instructor feedback loops were instrumental in supporting this development. Qualitative data reinforce this shift. SL1 reflected: *"When I translated materials about Russian Orthodox churches and folk villages, I had to choose words that made sense to Vietnamese tourists... I had to think about how to explain them clearly without losing meaning."* This demonstrates engagement with both lexical decision-making and pragmatic accommodation that are core competencies in Russian for Specific Purposes (RSP). SL7 added: *"I used to just memorize Russian words for tourist sites, but this project made me think about how to describe experiences in an attractive way,"* indicating a deepened understanding of stylistic function and audience orientation. External validation by stakeholders created meaningful accountability. SL4 recalled: *"We had to redo our brochure after the tour company said the first version was too formal."* Post-revision rubrics confirmed significant improvements in tone and

cultural relevance. Additionally, student motivation increased in response to the real-world applicability of their work. As SL6 noted: *“Knowing our translations would be used by a real company made me double-check everything.”* This statement reflects growing ownership and professional responsibility. Taken together, these results confirm that the service-learning model created conditions for applied language use aligned with Kolb’s (Kolb, 1984) experiential learning cycle. Students progressed beyond controlled knowledge recall toward adaptive, audience-aware, and professionally anchored linguistic performance — essential for internship readiness in hospitality contexts.

RQ2: Thematic analysis of student journals, small-group debriefs, and interview transcripts highlights the role of structured reflection as a cognitive and emotional bridge between experience and skill development. Reflection activities facilitated critical self-evaluation, goal-setting, and problem-solving — practices central to career readiness. Eight out of ten participants demonstrated increased metacognitive awareness in how they evaluated and adjusted their communication strategies. SL3 noted: *“I realized I had used too many formal expressions... our discussion helped me see that it should sound friendly and accessible for Vietnamese tourists.”* SL2 described a cultural translation challenge: *“I struggled with the phrase ‘Золотое кольцо’... I explained it as a route of historical towns near Moscow. That helped me think more about how language carries culture.”* Such accounts reflect growing intercultural and pragmatic competence. Journals also documented increased self-monitoring. SL5 wrote: *“I made many errors in my first draft... but now I check verb endings and aspect more carefully.”* This growth aligns with Bandura’s (Bandura, 1997) theory of self-efficacy development through reflective mastery experiences. Professional identity formation was another outcome. SL10 explained: *“Reflecting on how we revised the script after the travel agency’s feedback helped me understand how to deal with criticism professionally.”* This highlights reflection as a mechanism for attitudinal learning and behavioral flexibility — key traits in the hospitality sector. In summary, structured reflection not only enhanced students’ communicative strategies but also supported the internalization of workplace norms. It enabled learners to integrate feedback, refine language use, and adopt a growth-oriented mindset — critical for long-term career development.

RQ 3: Service learning facilitated the development of transferable competencies associated with internship readiness, especially in teamwork, adaptability, and initiative. Rubric-based assessments of group tasks confirmed that 90% of participants demonstrated effective collaboration, task-sharing, and communication under pressure. Team-based translation tasks offered practice in leadership and negotiation. SL8 shared: *“When others gave feedback... I had to defend my choices but also compromise. It felt like I was in a real team at work.”* These scenarios provided authentic rehearsal for team dynamics common in hospitality environments. Problem-solving emerged through content-related challenges. SL9 said: *“I had to research monasteries and saints... and decide what to include. I realized how important it is to understand your audience.”* These

episodes show students' ability to synthesize cultural research and adapt meaning across languages — a vital competence in client-oriented communication. Leadership potential was also observed. One student remarked: *"I didn't expect to lead, but I saw it as a chance to try," referring to their role in organizing and editing brochure content.* These moments of initiative reflect the authentic leadership development encouraged by experiential models. In client-facing interactions, students practiced formal Russian and professional demeanor. SL5 described a project presentation: *"I had to speak clearly in Russian and be ready to answer questions about our choices... That really tested how professional I sounded."* In total, the project served as a "safe rehearsal" space for real-world communication, decision-making, and teamwork. Participants applied Russian in client simulations, responded to real feedback, and began to see themselves as competent pre-professionals, confirming the service-learning model's utility as a preparatory platform for multilingual internship contexts.

Discussion

The findings of this study affirm the pedagogical value of service learning as an effective model for developing communicative competence and professional readiness among Russian language majors preparing for hospitality internships. The results are grounded in Kolb's (Kolb, 1984) experiential learning theory, which conceptualizes learning as a cyclical process of concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. This model underpins the design of service learning, which combines real-world engagement with structured reflection to reinforce academic knowledge and promote practical skill development (Jacoby, 2015; Eyler, Giles, 1999).

In addressing the first research question, the data reveal that students were able to apply linguistic knowledge in authentic tourism and hospitality contexts, moving from passive acquisition to active language use. Participants negotiated translation challenges, made stylistic decisions, and adapted their communication to diverse audience needs. These outcomes align with Kolb's model, wherein real-world application and iterative refinement deepen conceptual understanding. The practical use of Russian in collaborative, client-oriented settings stimulated cognitive engagement and linguistic problem-solving — core aspects of internship readiness.

The second research question explored the role of structured reflection in supporting communicative and professional development. Findings demonstrate that reflection served as a critical metacognitive scaffold that helped students monitor progress, revise strategies, and internalize soft skills such as adaptability, emotional regulation, and professionalism. In Kolb's terms, reflection enabled students to interpret their experiences and abstract generalizable lessons, thereby bridging theory and practice. This process also fostered self-efficacy, in line with Bandura's (Bandura, 1997) theory, and reinforced the transformative potential of service learning as described by Hatcher and Bringle (Hatcher, Bringle, 1997).

The third research question focused on the development of transferable workplace competencies. In this respect, the study employed the career readiness framework proposed by the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE, 2020⁴), which outlines eight essential competencies for professional success—including communication, teamwork, professionalism, and critical thinking. Participant accounts and performance artifacts indicate growth in each of these areas. For instance, students engaged in collaborative production of bilingual materials, handled feedback professionally, and presented confidently in Russian to tourism partners. These competencies reflect the practical relevance of service learning when aligned with structured industry-facing goals.

To assess internship readiness, the study also adopted a multidimensional definition informed by Dare and her colleagues (Dare et al., 2009) and Culcasi and Venegas (Culcasi, Venegas, 2023), viewing it as a composite of cognitive, behavioral, and emotional preparedness. Within this framework, students demonstrated their ability to apply academic knowledge in field settings, navigate unpredictable communication tasks, and self-assess performance through guided reflection. The inclusion of these multiple dimensions strengthens the analysis of how service learning promotes workplace preparedness, particularly in high-contact, multilingual service industries.

In sum, this study supports the effectiveness of combining Kolb’s experiential learning model with the NACE career readiness framework in evaluating and enhancing student development in Russian for Specific Purposes. It also highlights the importance of integrating theoretical models into both the design and analysis of service-learning experiences, ensuring that academic language instruction remains relevant and responsive to the professional demands of the tourism and hospitality sector. As Vietnam’s foreign language programs increasingly seek to align with international standards and employer expectations, the findings here offer a replicable model for meaningful curriculum innovation in applied language education.

Conclusion

This study examined the contribution of service learning to internship readiness among Vietnamese undergraduates enrolled in a Russian for Specific Purposes module. Drawing on qualitative data from reflective journals, interviews, and project artifacts, the study demonstrated that service learning functioned as an effective bridge between academic instruction and the practical language demands of the hospitality industry.

The key findings can be summarized as follows:

Service learning created authentic conditions for students to apply Russian in real-world tourism and hospitality contexts.

Participants developed applied linguistic skills, including lexical accuracy, pragmatic awareness, and audience-sensitive stylistic choices.

⁴ National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE). (2020). *What is career readiness?* <https://www.naceweb.org/career-readiness/competencies/career-readiness-defined/>

Structured reflection enhanced students' metacognitive awareness, intercultural sensitivity, and confidence in navigating professional communication.

Team-based project work fostered transferable competencies such as collaboration, initiative, and client-oriented problem solving.

Feedback from tourism partners reinforced student accountability and helped align translation products with industry expectations.

Overall, the research confirms that service learning is not simply an add-on to language instruction, but a purposeful pedagogical strategy that enhances employability and professional preparedness. In the specific context of RSP education, service learning enables students to integrate communicative proficiency with the applied demands of client-facing roles in tourism. The findings also show that experiential learning frameworks — though often underexplored in non-English language education — can be meaningfully adapted to support the development of multilingual and intercultural competencies.

Future research should pursue several directions. Longitudinal studies are needed to assess the sustained impact of service-learning participation on students' internship performance and post-graduate career outcomes. It would also be beneficial to incorporate the perspectives of tourism partners and employers to evaluate the perceived effectiveness and relevance of student contributions. Comparative studies across different languages or regional contexts could provide further insight into the scalability and adaptability of this model. As Vietnam's tourism sector continues to expand globally, integrating service learning into RSP curricula offers a promising, practice-oriented pathway for aligning foreign language education with evolving labor market needs.

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Научная статья

Развитие профессиональных навыков общения вьетнамцев на русском языке в сфере гостиничного бизнеса

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Аннотация. Готовность к прохождению стажировки критически важна для студентов языковых специальностей, планирующих карьеру в сфере гостеприимства. Тем не менее мало что известно о том, как обучение служением (service-learning) может способствовать этому процессу в неанглоязычных образовательных программах. Во Вьетнаме растет спрос на специалистов гостиничного бизнеса, владеющих русским языком, что создает острую необходимость в разработке эффективных педагогических моделей. Рассмотрено, как проект обучения служением, встроенный в модуль «Русский язык для специальных целей», способствует формированию у студентов готовности к профессиональной практике через язык, осмыслению опыта и развитию профессиональных навыков. Реализован качественный эксперимент с участием десяти студентов третьего курса, обучающихся по направлению «Русский язык» в одном из университетов Вьетнама. Данные собраны с использованием полуструктурированных интервью, рефлексивных дневников, а также анализа двуязычных материалов, созданных студентами в процессе подготовки семестрового проекта, ориентированного на работу с сообществом. Тематический анализ данных проведен с опорой на теорию опытного обучения К. Колба и модель карьерной готовности, разработанную Национальной ассоциацией колледжей и работодателей США (NACE). Результаты показывают, что обучение служением способствует подготовке к стажировке за счет совершенствования навыков владения русским языком

в профессионально-специфичных контекстах, развития рефлексивного понимания коммуникативных трудностей и формирования гибких навыков, таких как работа в команде, инициативность и межкультурная компетенция. Исследование вносит вклад в интеграцию обучения служением в преподавание русского языка для специальных целей и подчеркивает педагогическую ценность практико-ориентированных проектов в подготовке студентов к профессиональной деятельности в сфере гостеприимства во Вьетнаме.

Ключевые слова: обучение служением, готовность к стажировке, русский язык для специальных целей, обучение русскому языку во Вьетнаме

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