

DEVELOPMENT OF PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCIES OF HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY SPECIALISTS WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF ACQUISITION OF EDUCATIONAL MODULE “ORGANIZATION OF HOSPITALITY SERVICES”

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Abstract. *According to the SWOT analysis on the Latvian Tourism Marketing Strategy 2010-2015 carried out by the Tourism Development Agency in 2010, the lack of skilled labour force in tourism and hospitality industry, as well as the low level of professional qualifications are mentioned as one of the potential threats. The aim of the research is to examine and analyse the development of professional competencies of hospitality industry specialists within the framework of completion of the interactive educational module “Organization of Hospitality Services”. The tasks of the research are: to examine the theoretical aspects of formation, application and significance of interactive educational modules; to determine requirements, aim, structure and position of the interactive educational module in the education process. In the paper, the theoretical aspects of formation of interactive educational modules are examined; the content of the interactive educational module “Organization of Hospitality Services”, which is implemented within the framework of the study programme “Hospitality Management”, is offered; requirements, aim, structure and position of interactive educational module in the education process are determined. The opportunities of application of the interactive educational module “Organization of Hospitality Services” are wide enough: it may be applied not only in the training process of hospitality industry specialists, but also in order to raise the qualification level of managers at the intermediate level. A pilot research study concluded that completion of theoretical studies is not sufficient enough in order to acquire professional competencies at the highest level. The authors of the paper suggest acquiring practical skills, which is extremely important. The research methods: the logical and constructive methods, the scientific induction method, synthesis, document analysis, the monographic method, the graphic method.*

Keywords: *educational module, guest service, hospitality, interactivity, professional competences.*

JEL code: A2

Introduction

Creation of the common European Higher Education Area, achievement of conformity between the academic quality and

international labour market needs, increase of the employment among the graduates, as well as development of international and cross-cultural competencies have become especially important issues. Development and implementation of joint study programmes in cooperation with foreign higher education institutions may be regarded as the response to the challenges of globalization and internationalization in the sphere of higher education. (Description of the Hospitality..., 2011). Rezekne Higher Education Institution is implementing the study programme "Hospitality Management" which is developed in cooperation with Utena College within the framework of the project "Utena College Feasibility Study regarding Business and Management, as well as the Areas of Tourism and Recreation in the International Joint Study Programme of Development and Implementation", project code No. VP1-2.2-ŠMM-07-K-02-022. The authors of this research paper are also both the authors and developers of the module "Organization of Hospitality Services" of this study programme.

The main aim of the joint study programme "**Hospitality Management**" is to train a professional who is able to work in dynamic and multicultural, as well as in local and international markets, who understands communication, organization and management of services in hospitality industry and is able to work/act in a responsive, creative and innovative manner, ensuring the quality of the services provided. (Description of the Hospitality..., 2011).

During the implementation of the module for 1st year students in the second semester of the academic year 2014/2015, the authors carried out the research, realized the approbation and summarized the theoretical results.

Topicality of the research: Sustainable development, which is based on knowledge, is necessary for Latvia. People who want to apply their knowledge in order to increase their personal prosperity and work productivity, as well as people who have set specific goals in their lives and are able to fulfil them are very important for our country (LR reģionālās attīstības un pašvaldību lietu ministrija, Latvijas Nacionālais attīstības plāns 2007–2013). A wide range of competencies (a body of knowledge, skills and attitude), for instance, language knowledge, competencies and practical skills in the field of information and communications technologies, communication and cooperation skills, working skills, entrepreneurial skills, civic consciousness, creativity, as well as ability to think critically, plan finances, evaluate the risks and find solutions to them, is necessary in order the person would have an opportunity to get a respectable job, fend for oneself and relatives and

contribute to development of the country (Pārresoru koordinācijas centrs., Latvijas Nacionālais attīstības plāns 2014-2020).

Nowadays, an employee in the hospitality industry must have both theoretical knowledge and practical skills that enable him/her to get a job in the hospitality companies shortly after graduation from the higher education institution. With the development of economies, which is based on knowledge, competition is steadily increasing not only in the market of goods and services but also in the labour market. (Izglītības un zinātnes ministrijas Profesionālās izglītības administrācija, 2007)

The aim of the research is to examine and analyse the development of professional competencies of hospitality industry specialists within the framework of completion of the interactive educational module “Organization of Hospitality Services”.

The research methods: the logical and constructive methods, the scientific induction method, synthesis, document analysis, the monographic method and the graphic method.

Hypothesis: learning efficiency during studies will be of higher quality if the interactive education modules providing students with possibilities of joint interaction and independent decision making will be included in the course along with the traditional teaching methods.

Within the project, study materials for e-learning in the courses “Accommodation Services” and “Catering Services” were developed aiming at the obtaining of theoretical knowledge by the students. During the research, the authors have carried a pilot survey to measure students’ theoretical knowledge, using the section “Check your progress” included at the end of each study topic of the course.

Requirements, aim, structure and position of the module “Organization of Hospitality Services” in the education process

Employers are becoming more demanding towards the professional competence of their employees; every individual acquires the initial level of professional competence in appropriate institutions of professional education. Professional activities are influenced also by employee’s ability to take responsibility (Lūka, 2007).

Such factors as the conformity of employees’ education with the labour market needs, training of the specialists who meet the employers’ needs, employees’ ability to think analytically, civic feeling of responsibility in relation to the processes in a multicultural society, as well as active participation in decision making and seeking for solutions are becoming more important (Aleksandrou et al., 2005; Rozenblats, 1998; Hargreaves, 2004).

Under the circumstances of modernization of higher professional education, increasing attention is paid to innovative methods in organization of the study process, which would help to form the students' professional competencies as efficiently as possible. Training of highly-qualified specialists in the hospitality industry may be realized based on implementation of interactive educational modules. The concept of interactivity is based on the ability of mutual cooperation. Mutual cooperation in the study process is examined by Lanka A. (Lanka, 2005), Zogla I. (Žogla, 2001), Rubene Z. (Rubene, 2004), Radigina J. (Радыгина, 2014), and it may be considered in several aspects:

- mutual cooperation with the cognitive field – the knowledge base, the content of the study course to be taken;
- mutual cooperation with a lecturer – a moderator of the study process, who not only forms the informative field but also organizes the environment of acquiring professional skills;
- mutual cooperation with other participants of the study process – the students.

During the study course, the process of interactivity includes not only search for information, exchange of it between the students and acquisition of knowledge but also formation of mutual relations between participants of the process, as well as specific development of the personality (Wichard et al., 2015). On the basis of theoretical knowledge and practical skills, interactivity facilitates the formation of understanding and awareness of importance of professional activities in the process of professional training, which is an essential part of personality's professional and social competence.

Interactive educational modules are study projects, business simulation games and role-plays, stimulators and social exercises during which the students are engaged in common activities and make independent decisions (Anestis et al., 2015).

The content of interactive educational modules shall meet the following requirements:

- the module shall be reproducible, i.e. it is possible to implement it repeatedly at a particular stage of educational process regardless of the personal qualities of the audience or lecturer;
- implementation of the module shall achieve the educational results determined by a lecturer, i.e. achievement of particular professional competencies;
- taking the module shall be based on the mutual cooperation between the students. It must be mentioned that the acquisition of professional competencies is possible only by imitation of the circumstances of professional activities (Кацева, 2009);

- professional competencies to be acquired by the students in the study process shall be required by the employers, thus guaranteeing success of future professional activities. (Радыгина, 2012)

In order to gather information about the professional competencies of tourism specialists, the professional standards in tourism industry, which are listed in the Classification of Occupations of the Republic of Latvia (Latvijas Republika Labklājības ministrija, Profesiju klasifikators, 2010) and in the Professional Standards (Valsts izglītības satura centrs, Profesiju standarti, 2008), are analysed.

On the basis of the mentioned requirements, an interactive educational module “Organization of Hospitality Services” is developed. The module is included in the study programme “Hospitality Management”. The module is implemented during the 1st year of studies and is integrated in the study process successfully. Taking the module is based on the study courses “Organization of Accommodation Services” and “Organization of Catering Services”, which establish the basis for taking other courses.

The methods of guest service form a part of the hospitality cycle (i.e. study courses from the basic (professional) part in the curriculum); therefore, implementation of the module is realized in the context of stages of hospitality cycle and involves learning guest service organization before studying hospitality management processes, as well as learning the following procedures: guest service (i.e. meeting, reception, taking of seats, service, accommodation, departure, resolving of conflict situations) (Figure 1). The aim of taking the module is to form the knowledge system on different methods of guest service, as well as technologies and skills to serve guests in the contact zone.

During the students’ activities, a real situation of guest service is imitated (in a training laboratory) – guest’s arrival at a hotel or restaurant. The learning process of the module consists of interconnected stages, for instance, the content of the study courses “Organization of Accommodation Services” and “Organization of Catering Services”: theoretical insight into guest service, an analysis of the blanks and forms of accurate record-keeping, the preparation stage, the stimulation of guest service process with the help of different role-plays, feedback.

Taking the module involves specific theoretical knowledge, comprehension of the content of hospitality cycles and learning the methods of guest service. During the training process, usage of video recording is advisable, so that the participants of the process could evaluate their conduct and activities.

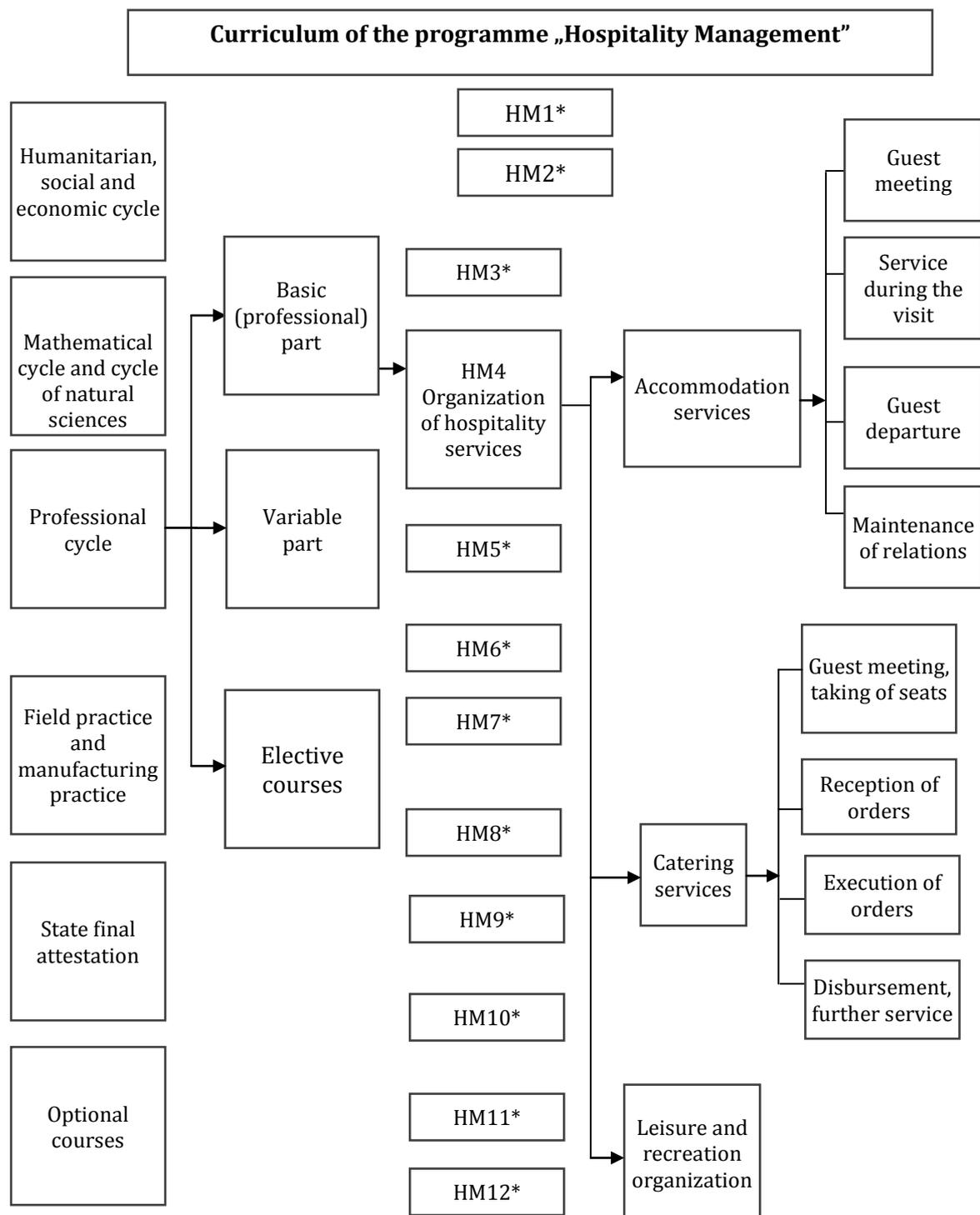


Fig.1 Position of the module in the education process
*(Source: formed by the authors based on Inovatīvas pieejas
 vispārpedagoģisko..., 2013)*

*HM1– Basics of Hospitality Industry; HM2– Communication I; HM3– Communication II; HM5– Business Environment Research; HM6– Marketing; HM7– Hospitality Business Finance and Law; HM8– Hospitality Services Management; HM9– Sustainable Development and Hospitality; HM10– Intercultural Communication and Cooperation; HM11– Organizational Behaviour or Personnel Development; HM12– Hospitality Project Development and Management).

The following levels of learning the content of the module exist: reproductive (procedures of guest service, imitation according to the example), standardized (independent quality control of the execution of the process), productive (usage of creative elements during the process of guest service) (Anestis et al., 2015).

The module may be taken by 6 – 12 students at the same time. During the learning process of the module, the students arrange into pairs in order to play a guest or service staff role. The participants who are not involved in a role-play are observers-experts and point to imperfections. Such organization of the process ensures cooperation and involvement of all students.

Figure 2 represents the content of the theme “Guest Service” which is learned during the study courses “Organization of Accommodation Services” and “Organization of Catering Services” within the framework of the module “Organization of Hospitality Services”.

The following stages of implementation of the module are offered:

- 1) determination of the aim and tasks, planning of the results of taking the module (at this stage, the students evaluate the expected results after taking the module, the link with the previously learnt material is realized);
- 2) acquisition of theoretical knowledge (theoretical studies, individual or group activities, composition of a summary, learning the execution of documents);
- 3) development of practical skills (work in pairs, imitation of the stages of guest service process);
- 4) feedback (exchange of the ideas; evaluation of performance of practical exercises; consolidation of the learnt material; analysis and correction of the mistakes which were made during the service process; description of the most difficult situations during the guest service);
- 5) seeking for solutions to the exercise of the situation (analysis and seeking for solutions to the exercises of the situation, analysis of imaginary or self-experienced situation);
- 6) monitoring of the results (exchange of ideas, evaluation of the results after taking the module, execution of the report, final testing) (Радыгина, 2012 (b))

The content of each stage is discussed in Table 1.

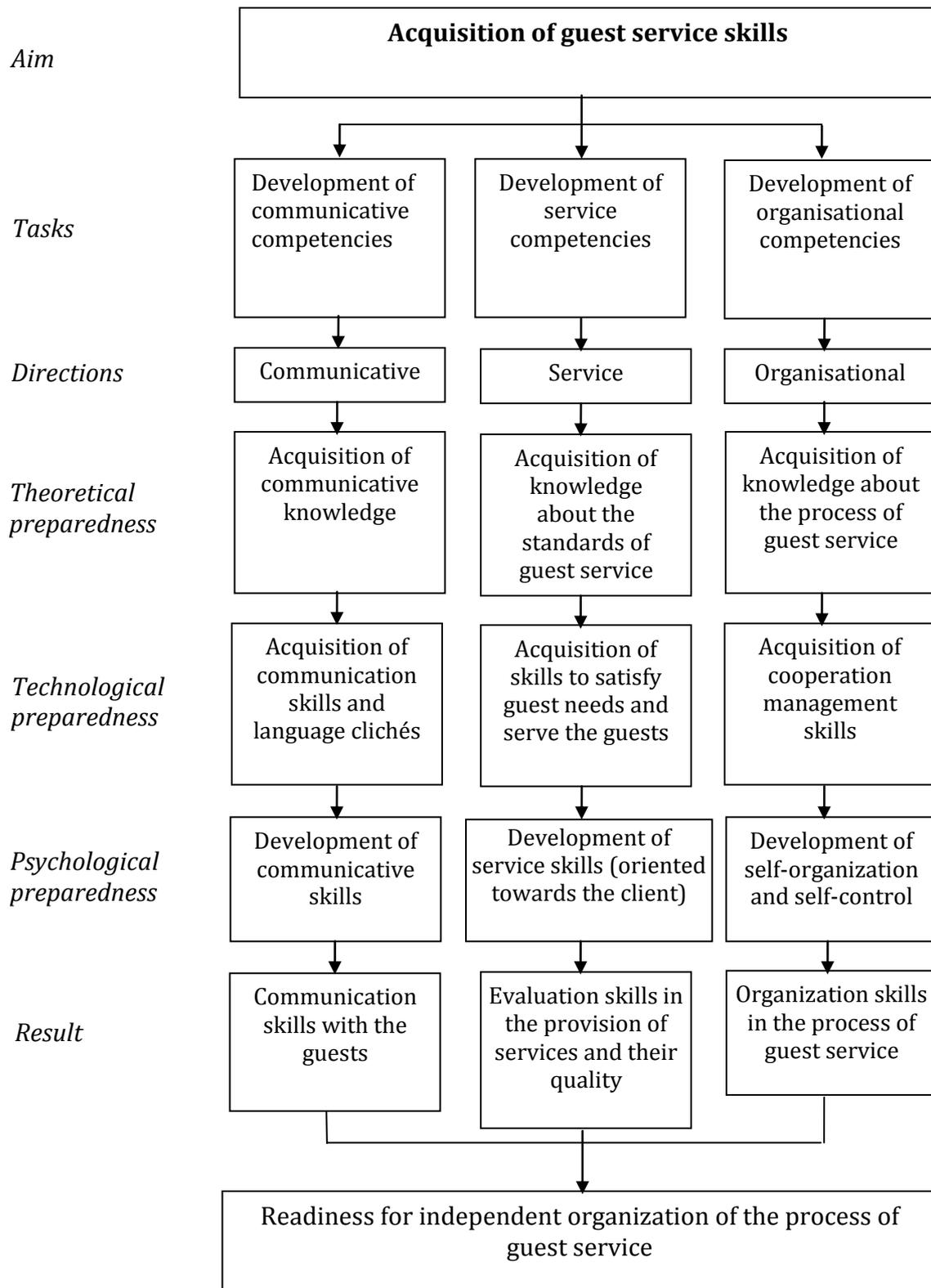


Fig.2 The content of the theme “Guest Service” learned during the study courses “Organization of Accommodation Services” and “Organization of Catering Services” within the framework of the module “Organization of Hospitality Services”

(Source: formed by the authors based on *Inovātīvas pieejas vispārpedagoģisko...*, 2013; *Радыгина, 2012a*)

Table 1 The content of implementation stages of the theme “Guest Service” which is learnt during the study courses “Organization of Accommodation Services” and “Organization of Catering Services”
 (Source: formed by the authors based on *Inovātīvas pieejas vispārpedagoģisko...*, 2013; *Радыгина*, 2012a)

<i>Stage</i>	<i>Directions</i>	<i>Form of implementation</i>	<i>Lecturer's activities</i>	<i>Result</i>
Determination of the aim and tasks, planning of the results of taking the module	-	Evaluation of students' expectations after taking the module, realization of the link with the previously learnt material	Organization of the process, information of the students about the stages of taking the module and the requirements of the final result	Stimulation of student motivation
Acquisition of theoretical knowledge	Theoretical preparedness	Lectures, individual or group activities, composition of a summary, examination of document types	Transmission of knowledge, organization of training, consultation	Acquisition and accumulation of theoretical knowledge
Project activities	Technological preparedness	Customer service individually or in groups, organization of the process	Consultation, control of organization of the process	Common view about the organization of the service process, classification of the main stages
Development of practical skills	Technological preparedness	Work in pairs, imitation of the stages of guest service process	Control of the process and filling in the documents	Acquisition of practical skills of guest service
Feedback	Psychological preparedness	Exchange of the ideas, evaluation of performance of practical exercises, consolidation of the learnt material, the correction of the mistakes, description of the most difficult situations during the guest service	Control of the compliance with the principles of the process, time frame and feedback; evaluation of students' satisfaction with the process	Student self-assessment in relation to the quality of performance of the exercises, preparedness to organize the registration process independently

Seeking for solutions to the exercises of the situation	Technological and psychological preparedness	Analysis and seeking for solutions to the exercises of the situation, the analysis of a manufacturing or self-experienced situation	Selection of the situation and manufacturing exercises, organization of the process of seeking for solutions to the exercises	Acquisition of mutual cooperation skills in non-standard situations
Monitoring of the results	-	Exchange of the ideas, evaluation of the results after taking the module, execution of the report, final testing	Evaluation of the effectiveness of taking the module, development of the materials for control testing	Final attestation of the students

Taking the module requires four practical classes in each of the study courses, but it may be used also as an exercise throughout a study year. Interactivity may be observed over the course of the entire module – activity, involving the students in individual and mutual cooperation, guarantees successful acquisition of theoretical knowledge and acquisition of professional cooperation skills.

The activities of the organizer (lecturer) are as follows:

- determination of the aim and tasks, selection of the materials, elaboration of evaluation criteria for the exercises, including assessment of situations and tests;
- organization of the process of mutual cooperation, informing the students about the stages of taking the module and the requirements for the final result, control of the time frame in taking the module;
- transmission of knowledge, consultation, assistance for the students during performance of the exercises;
- monitoring of the process of taking the module, correction of the content of the module according to the peculiarities of the group and the development level of the professional competencies, organization of feedback, evaluation of students' satisfaction with the process;
- evaluation of the effectiveness of taking the module. The authors have carried out pilot research to find out if the efficiency of studies using e-learning materials is sufficient or it is necessary, along with the classical studies, to introduce interactive education modules providing students with

possibilities of joint interaction and independent decision making.

The pilot research results of approbation of the module “Organization of Hospitality Services”

As the authors of the paper have already mentioned, the module is implemented during the 1st year studies; it is integrated in the study process successfully and consists of three study courses “Accommodation Services”, “Catering Services” and “Leisure and Recreation Organization”, which establish the basis for taking other courses.

Within the framework of the project, educational materials were developed by topics in each study course according to the programme elaborated; they are available in e-environment. The following components are included in the educational material:

- Aims and objectives;
- Theoretical material;
- Check your progress;
- Summary;
- Lesson activities;
- Questions for discussion;
- Check your progress – answers;
- References.

The material for the study courses “Accommodation Services”, “Catering Services” and “Leisure and Recreation Organization”, which is available in e-environment, is intended for acquisition of theoretical knowledge. Within the framework of this research, the authors have carried out the evaluation of theoretical knowledge, using the component *Check your progress*, which is included in each topic of the study course.

Example. The evaluation of theoretical knowledge on the topic “Preparation for Service”, which is included in the study course “Catering Services”, was carried out. Twelve students were tested at the beginning and at the end of the lecture. They were asked 20 questions.

Table 2 The pilot research results of learning theoretical material on the topic “Preparation for Service”, %
(source: formed by the authors)

Right answers	Number of the students before explanation of the topic, %	Number of students after explanation of the topic, %
Answered 80-100%	8.3	16.7
Answered 60-79%	16.7	41.6
Answered 40-59%	25	16.7
Answered 20-39%	33.3	16.7
Answered 1-19%	16.7	8.3

The research results have demonstrated the following: at the beginning of the class, when no information was provided on the topic, the correct answers (80%-100%) were provided only by 8.3% students (including randomness principle), which was a very small number. When the test was repeatedly carried out at the end of the class, after the study material was explained, the number of students providing correct answers (80%-100%) increased up to 16.7%. 41,6% of students gave answers with insignificant mistakes. It may be concluded that learning the theoretical material is not sufficient enough in order to acquire professional competencies at the highest level. The authors of the paper suggest acquisition of practical skills, which is extremely important.

Conclusions and suggestions

The organization of the process of guest service during the performance of the exercise, the analysis and elaboration of solutions to the organizational problems of the process and testing may serve as an attestation of completing the module. Compiling the results of learning the theme "Guest Service", which is included in the study courses "Organization of Accommodation Services" and "Organization of Catering Services", the following factors are taken into consideration:

- quality of learning the theoretical material, the volume of knowledge acquired, the accuracy of performance of the exercises;
- accuracy of application of the methods for guest service process;
- the results of performance of the practical exercises, quality of professional cooperation skills acquired in the imitated contact zone;
- the results of analysis of the solutions to situations, including imaginary situations, and exercises; simplicity and efficiency of the solutions, which are offered in relation to the problems analysed;
- quality of feedback, existence of reflection, self-assessment and awareness of self-development process, determination of the aims for further self-development.

The results of learning the theme "Guest Service", which is included in the study courses "Organization of Accommodation Services" and "Organization of Catering Services", are taken into consideration by evaluating the student's knowledge in the module "Organization of Hospitality Services".

The opportunities for application of the interactive educational module "Organization of Hospitality Services" are wide enough: it may be

applied not only in the training process of hospitality industry specialists, but also in order to raise the qualification level of managers at the intermediate level and organize competitions of professional skills. The module may be supplemented and complicated, using additional elements, for instance, imitation of the registration process of a group, a guest who tends to conflict, a VIP guest, a guest-disabled person etc. In such a situation, taking the module may be oriented towards the solution of specific imaginary situations, as well as formation on staff actions in non-standard situations.

The research results have demonstrated the following: at the beginning of the class, when no information was provided on the topic, the correct answers (80%-100%) were provided only by 8.3% students (including randomness principle), which was a very small number. When the test was repeatedly carried out at the end of the class, after the study material was explained, the number of students providing correct answers (80%-100%) increased up to 16.7%. 41.6% of students provided answers with insignificant mistakes.

It may be concluded that learning the theoretical material is not sufficient enough in order to acquire professional competencies at the highest level. The authors of the paper offer the acquisition of practical skills, which is extremely important, proving that the hypothesis is confirmed.

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VIESMĪLĪBAS NOZARES SPECIĀLISTU PROFESIONĀLO KOMPETENČU PILNVEIDE IZGLĪTOJOŠĀ MODUĻĀ „VIESMĪLĪBAS PAKALPOJUMU ORGANIZĀCIJA” IETVAROS

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Kopsavilkums

Latvijai nepieciešama uz zināšanām balstīta, ilgtspējīga attīstība. Tai vajadzīgi cilvēki, kas vēlas savas zināšanas izmantot personiskās labklājības celšanai, sava darba ražīguma paaugstināšanai, cilvēki, kas izvirzījuši sev dzīvē pavisam konkrētus mērķus un ir spējīgi tos īstenot.

Rēzeknes Augstskolā tiek īstenota programma “Viesmīlības vadība”, kura izstrādāta kopā ar Utenas Kolēģiju projekta “Utena College feasibility study regarding Business and Management, as well as Tourism and Recreation areas of study of international joint study program development and implementation” ietvaros, projekta kods Nr. VP1-2.2- ŠMM -07-K-02-022.

Pētījums veikts, tā aprobācija un rezultātu apkopošana notika 2014./2015.mācību gada moduļa īstenošanas laikā 1.kursa studentiem 2.semestrī.

Pētījuma mērķis ir izpētīt un analizēt viesmīlības nozares speciālistu profesionālo kompetenču attīstīšanu interaktīva izglītojoša moduļa „Viesmīlības pakalpojumu servisa organizācija” apguves ietvaros”. Pētījuma uzdevumi ir izpētīt interaktīvo izglītojošo moduļu veidošanas, pielietošanas un nozīmes teorētiskos aspektus, noteikt interaktīvi izglītojošā moduļa prasības, mērķi, struktūru un vietu izglītības procesā. Rakstā tiek pētīti interaktīvi izglītojoši moduļu veidošanas teorētiskie aspekti, tiek piedāvāts interaktīvi izglītojošā moduļa „Viesmīlības pakalpojumu servisa organizācija” saturs, kas tiek īstenots programmas „Viesmīlības vadība” ietvaros, tiek noteiktas interaktīvi izglītojošā moduļa prasības, mērķis, struktūra un vieta izglītības procesā. Interaktīvā izglītojošā moduļa „Viesmīlības pakalpojumu servisa organizācija” izmantošanas iespējas ir pietiekami plašas: to var pielietot ne vien viesmīlības nozares speciālistu sagatavošanas procesā, bet arī vidējā posma menedžeru kvalifikācijas paaugstināšanā un profesionālās meistarības konkursu rīkošanā. Moduli var papildināt un sarežģīt ar papildus elementiem, piemēram, modelējot viesu grupas, uz konfliktiem tendēta viesā, VIP viesā, viesā-invalīda utt. reģistrācijas procesu. Šajā gadījumā moduļa apguve var tikt orientēta uz konkrētu ražošanas situāciju risināšanu, kā arī personāla rīcības nestandarta situācijās algoritma veidošanu.

Pilotpētījuma rezultātā secināts, ka pilnīgai profesionālo kompetenču veidošanai nepietiek tikai ar teorētiskā materiāla apguvi, bet nepieciešama arī praktisko iemaņu attīstīšana, ko raksta autori piedāvā rakstā.

Izmantotās pētījumu metodes: loģiski konstruktīvā metode, zinātniskās indukcijas metode, sintēzes metode, dokumentu analīze, monogrāfiska metode, grafiskā metode.

Atslēgvārdi: *interaktivitāte, izglītojošais modulis, profesionālā kompetence, viesmīlības vadība, viesu apkalpošana.*