

CONTENT FOR FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING FOR GEN Z STUDENTS OF TOURISM¹

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ABSTRACT

This article deals with the procedure of choosing content and suggests topics for teaching foreign languages (FLT) to generation Z students in the field of tourism in higher education, according to the action-oriented approach and specific principles for FLT at non-linguistic universities. The changeable variables for selecting themes and topics for student-centered and market-oriented FLT are assessed by a qualitative study with interviews in foreign language classes (N 87) in North Macedonia in 2021, and by global occupational needs through research of literature and online resources about current and future trends of the tourism industry, both influenced by generational characteristics. Topics like 'Responsible travel to untouched areas', 'Marketing through digital Gen Z influencers', 'Employment in special business units for targeting Gen Zs', are identified. Elaborated are also the additional requirements for choosing content as providing comprehensible input and facilitating tasks, involving use of digital technology, starting with one's own country.

KEY WORDS: Foreign language teaching, higher education, tourism, content, Gen Z

INTRODUCTION

Competences in foreign languages are necessary for those working in the field of tourism and hospitality, therefore learning foreign languages is an integral part of study programs on faculties educating students in the field of tourism.

¹ original research paper

Teaching foreign languages (FLT) on non-linguistic faculties, and thus on the faculties of tourism, should “lead to students acting in and with the language during their studies in such a way that they can later communicate with people of the target culture and the target language inside and outside of their profession” (Lévy-Hillierich&Serena, 2009,p.7). This is particularly relevant to the tourism sector, where interaction with people, respect for foreign cultures and mediation between different worldviews is paramount. (Baric, Serena &Čickovska, 2012).

This article deals with the principles of choosing content for FLT for tourism students in higher education and suggests topics through a study of the interests of tourism generation Z (Gen Z) students and assessing the occupational needs through research of literature and online resources of current and future trends of the tourism industry influenced by Gen Z (Chapter 2). The additional requirements for choosing content and materials for the appropriate topics and suggestions for preparing for FLT can be found in the third chapter.

The role of content and its selection is closely related to the implemented foreign language teaching and learning approach and the specific principles arising from the specifics of teaching students at non-linguistic faculties. Even though the teaching approach is defined through contemporary didactics and methodology for FLT and the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) - the action-oriented approach, the principles of FLT on non-linguistic universities are not defined or not uniformly defined for the teaching of all foreign languages. For teaching German as a foreign language at non-linguistic universities (StudienbegleitenderDeutschunterricht - SDU) the principles and guidelines for university-specific and university-adequate German foreign language teaching are defined in Framework syllabuses for German as a foreign language for non-linguistic universities (Rahmencurriculum für Deutsch als Fremdsprache im studienbegleitenden Fremdsprachenunterricht an Universitäten) adapted and translated in many European countries (RC, 1998-2014). They could be the basis for designing suitable foreign language teaching and learning materials for higher education students of the other foreign languages. As a participant in the development of the Framework syllabuses and in the project of developing teaching materials for the same purpose I will refer to these principles. Content, i.e. themes, topics and materials should be defined,

chosen and implemented according to action-oriented, university-adequate, student-centered and market-oriented principles. (Cickovska et al., 2013; Cickovska, 2013)

One of the main principles of FLT at non-linguistic faculties is student-orientation. The students are at the center of the teaching process which takes into account their starting level and previous knowledge, and their interests and needs, as well as occupational needs, when choosing topics (Cickovska et al., 2013, p.53). Learner-oriented foreign language classes offer the learners “topics and content picked up on their personal experiences and interests and motivates the learners to engage with the content thoughtfully and thus also linguistically (meaningful learning)” (Timm, 2009, p.55). Teaching content should therefore be selected in such a way that it stimulates to learn in an emotionally committed manner, i.e. motivationally and cognitively, in a way that enriches knowledge (Bach & Timm, 2009, p.20). Motivation and ‘rich input’ are the two prerequisites for foreign language acquisition (Bleyhl, 2009, p.38).

Action-oriented teaching implies performing communicative actions in class “in the context of authentic, i.e. closely real or lifelike accepted situations” (Bach & Timm, 2009, p.13). To achieve situations which are perceived as real or closely real and as meaningful for the students, the themes, topics and content should be selected according to the needs of the students and the students’ generation and according to current and future trends of the target market, in this case the tourism and hospitality sector. Assessing students’ needs and determining appropriate topics are the starting point in defining strategies for adapting teaching and content (Boldizsár, 2003, p.23; Willis & Willis, 2007, p.196).

Under the influence of social, economic and technological changes, the generational characteristics (Dimock, 2019) of students change as well as the market conditions. Consequently, educators can not work with the same topics and content for years. Textbooks provide a fixed canon and many topics are no longer aligned with students’ generational preferences and the current state of the tourism sector. New content and materials must be selected, relevant to the current generation of the students and the current and future market trends.

Generation Z is the generation which is currently studying at the universities and have already entered the labor market. “Generation Z is progressively taking the center stage as employees in the tourism industry, as traveler and as financiers of the future“ (Robinson & Schänzel, 2019 p.128). The current trends in tourism are changing and are directly affected by Gen Zs. In this article the procedure of choosing content according to Gen Zs is presented, but in future new generations, (like the Alpha generation) will enroll the universities and influence the trends in the tourism industry. The principles of choosing content for other generations would be the same like the ones presented in this article, but the topics and content would probably be different.

According to Willis & Willis (2007, p.23) the planning starts with identifying topics suitable to student needs. In this article students’ needs are divided into students’ interests for defining themes and students’ occupational needs for defining topics.

DEFINING THEMES AND TOPICS FOR GEN Z TOURISM STUDENTS

Changeable variables influencing the selection of themes and topics for an action-oriented and thus student-centered and market-oriented foreign language teaching are the interests and preferences of the students and the current and future trends of the tourism sector.

The students’ interests can be defined through conversations or questionnaires with the students enrolling the faculty. Market trends and specifics are the expertise of colleagues at the faculties, who teach specific subjects in the field. Market trends and specifics can be determined with these colleagues, students in senior years and through browsing suitable information on the internet. In this study the students’ interests are determined by interviews and the market trends through research in literature and online recourses.

Assessment of students’ interests - themes

Research methods

The interests of the students are defined through a qualitative study with Gen Z students in German language classes (N 48) at the Faculty of Tourism and Hospitality in Ohrid, North Macedonia and the Faculty of Tourism and Business

Logistics in Stip, North Macedonia (N 22). The study is conducted with online interviews and conversations in 2021 and partly in 2022 (N 17). The question asked is: What interests do you in relation to tourism and would like to cover during your foreign language classes? The interview question and answers were further clarified with sub questions on the same theme. The interests are considered to define the themes that should be covered during classes and would attract their attention and curiosity.

Results

The most prominent themes that arise and are repeatedly mentioned about tourism students' interests in relation to tourism are presented in chart 1. They are presented by number i.e. frequency of occurrence.

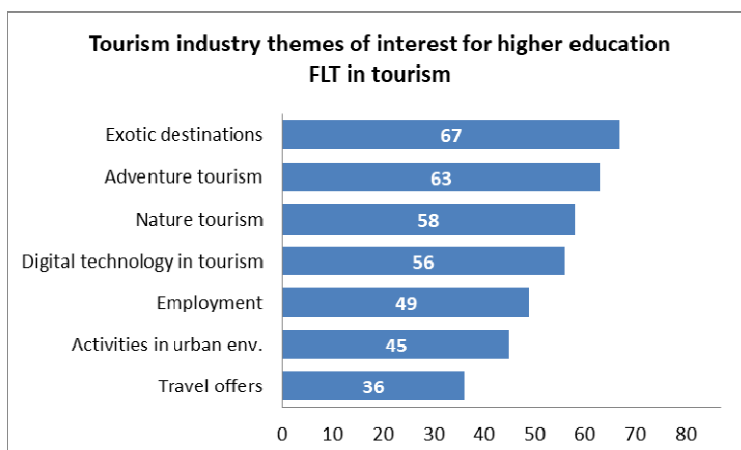


Chart 1. Tourism industry themes of interest for higher education foreign language teaching (FLT) in tourism

The tourism students expressed most interest for 'Exotic destinations' (77%) and 'Adventure tourism' (72,41%) to cover during foreign language classes. As exotic destinations they define unique places, unusual places, far destinations not affected by mass tourism, meeting the locals of the unique cultures. In 'Adventure tourism' they imply preparing offers to attract tourists with multiple activities like rafting, kayaking, zip-lining, paragliding, hiking, exploring. Nature tourism with 66,66% refers to responsible travel to untouched areas,

natural attractions, camping, secluded beaches. Digital technology in tourism is a theme of high interest for the students (64,37%). It refers to the impact of digital technology on the tourism market, apps, tourist reviews and blogs. The students are also interested in employment in the tourism market. 56,32% of them say that interesting working positions in the field would be a theme with which they would like to cover in during foreign language classes. Activities in urban environment like nightlife, sightseeing, gastronomy and other events are mentioned by 51,72% of the tourism students. Students are also interested in travel offers 41,38%.

The study is limited to Gen Z students from North Macedonia, which means that it might not apply to other countries. Interests of students should be a subject of study more often and can be conveyed on a small scale in each faculty with students at the beginning of their first semester.

Assessment of students occupational needs – topics

Once the themes are defined according to the students' interests of their studies, the choice of topics need to be according to the current and near future market trends. In this way they will get “acquainted with the complexities of pragmatics, intercultural communication and discourse, i.e. they have to learn both the language for tourism and the language of tourism” (Pireddu, 2021, p.2-3).

In the foreign language classroom we have the future travelers and the ones who will be responsible in and for the future of the tourism industry (Cickovska, 2020, p.286). The topics and content should be also linked to the same generation of current travelers and employees, if they are already working in the field. That is the case with the current generation of students, Gen Z. These fact is a great opportunity for the student-oriented approach and for involving and engaging Gen Z students in content and tasks closely related to their field of study, to real life, to their interests, needs, expectations. Topics in how, what for and where to travel would be suitable topics linked to the themes of interest of the students.

Specific unique offers for Gen Z tourists are suitable topics for foreign language teaching of tourism students. Research results (Monaco, 2018) show a

trend from undifferentiated mass tourism to more variable custom-tailored experiences and unconventional destinations. Tourism industry is working on ways to reach Gen Zs and to align offers to them. “These immersive adventurers are looking for trips that offer a unique cultural immersion, personal growth and local experiences. Survey data shows they are prepared to spend more on doing this than pre-Covid“ (TrovaTrip, 2022a). According to the TrovaTrip survey data in 2022, consisting of 51,500 respondents from across the globe, Gen Zs on vacation want to: spend time on the beach and chill, try new foods and beverages, learn more about local cultures and history, see nature and wildlife, have more outdoor adventures. It is consistent with results on preferred in-destination activities from the ETC study (2020, p.47) where most popular with over 60% are to: try locally-produced food and drinks, learn about the urban culture, do cultural activities; and over 50% are to: learn about local traditions, heritage, stories and crafts, attend a local cultural event, experience night life, engage in outdoor activities in nature. Being accustomed to making travel arrangements in real-time has increased expectations among Gen Zs of highly personalized services (ETC, 2020, p.24).

Gen Z grew up with technology, the internet, and social media and “due to their connection with technology, Generation Z makes clear its preferences when traveling through online comments and interacting in social media networks” (NTG Blog, 2020). **The impact of social media on tourism, reports of Gen Zs and Gen Z tourism influencers** are further topics to conduct with in the classroom. Social media is an important channel of communication about tourist behavior and experience. Through social media well-targeted, personalized travel options can be offered that relate to a person’s lifestyle (Hysa, Zdonek&Karasek, 2022, p.4). Marketing through digital Gen Z influencers on social media is one of the most successful ways to attract Gen Zs. “The hotel industry is benefiting greatly from using influencers in marketing campaigns, particularly among younger travelers, who can be significantly influenced on where they plan their trip based on someone else’s vacation social media posts and photos” (Ristova&Angelkova, 2019, p.3).

Other example of a topic that Gen Z students of tourism are interested in from the theme ‘**Employment**’, related to the previous topics, is ‘The need of tourism providers to have **special business units**’. Their aim is to create, use and follow non-traditional “travel product marketing strategies” for Gen Z like to real-time

live feed from multiple travel destinations, local events for a specific activity at a specific destination et c. (Dimitriou&AbouElgheit, 2019, p.327). According to Dimitriou&AbouElgheit “those types of product marketing solutions could prove to be much more effective than traditional digital ads targeting Gen Zers”.

Sustainable tourism could be another topic for the students, but it does not literally appear in the answers in the interviews. It is also a priority amongst Gen Z travelers and according to TrovaTrip (2022b) it has impact on the way they plan their trips and at the same time these young travelers are raising the standards for sustainable tourism.

Following are examples of topics for student-centered teaching of Gen Z tourism students, briefly summarized from the above listed poll of possible topics:

- Destinations appropriate for Gen Zs - unconventional and unique destinations,
- Customized tourism offers for Gen Zs - preferred in-destination activities, adventure tourism, nature experiences, local cultural events and the development of new tourism products,
- The impact of Gen Zs on the tourism industry - how and why the market is changing, influencers in tourism, technology and social media impact,
- Promotions/marketing suitable for Gen Z –influencers, social media, destination-related mobile apps,
- Employment opportunities- materials about successful Gen Z employees, positions with interesting working tasks like in the special business units for Gen Z attractions,
- Sustainable tourism - way of traveling, (development of) socially, ecologically and environmentally responsible tourism products.

Covering topics of such areas and aspects of the reality that are subjectively important and significant to the students are up-to-date, applicable and demonstrate ‘I-closeness’ and ‘I-reference’ present the essential conditions for successful learning (Storch, 1999, p.332).

CHOOSING MATERIALS AND PREPARING FOR THE SPECIFIC CLASSROOM

The procedure for choosing appropriate content is not completed with defining themes and topics. The chosen themes and topics provide the required “corpus made up of input which contains sufficient and appropriate raw material for learners to generate the insights they need about the target language to enable them to operate effectively as language users” (Willis & Willis, 2007, 189). Materials about the topic contain appropriate vocabulary which covers the domains in which the learners are likely to operate and makes them interested. For choosing content i.e. materials suitable for specific groups of students in classroom additional requirements must be met.

The content should be comprehensible in order to relate to the learning processes. Comprehensible input, which is at least understandable for the learner, is the basis of any language acquisition (Timm, 2009, p.51). The situational and contextual global understanding, supported by corresponding previous experiences and previous knowledge, plays an important role. Learning material must be open in the sense that learners can bring their different previous experiences and language levels into the learning process (Hölscher, Piepho & Roche 2006: 20).

Working with authentic materials in FLT demands knowledge-driven understanding processes. Comprehensible input means that it has to verbalize previous knowledge of the students, knowledge of the world and at least some language knowledge (Storch, 1999).

Conditions in foreign language classrooms at non-linguistic faculties show that the levels defer widely and that there are many students with low levels of language knowledge. It is difficult to find authentic materials which would answer to the previously mentioned requirements, especially the comprehensibility.

In order to achieve comprehensibility of content for all the different levels, language knowledge including almost beginner, the materials should contain content which can be globally and selectively understood, without much linguistic understanding but through knowledge of the world.

Materials about one's own country are suitable for that purpose. They have comprehensible input because they can be understood through the knowledge of the world. The students already have prior knowledge of the information included in such materials. The knowledge of the world should only be activated correctly, and the process of understanding guided by what is known and guided by the context can lead to the discovering new linguistic meanings in the foreign language. The newly 'discovered' vocabulary is integrated mentally and contextually into the prior knowledge of the world and can be used in a similar context for productive output. (Storch, 1999; Cickovska, 2017).

A wide range of contextualized vocabulary, such as general information about a particular country, its landscapes, sights, natural beauty, cities and destination activities are built as the basis for further engagement of other related topics.

The preparation for teaching with the appropriately chosen content lies in 'facilitating tasks' (Willis & Willis, 2007). The planning starts with deciding about a target task or tasks, which closely reflect activities which the student may engage in the real occupational world. (Willis & Willis, 2007, p.23) A target task for content about one's own country would be, for example, the preparation of an online multimedia presentation in the target language about the one's own country as a destination for Gen Zs. A target task for the topic 'Specific offers for Gen Z tourists' could be, for example, to create such an offer for the home town. The target task is a field of action that contains action chains. These action chains should be integrated into holistic, goal-oriented and action-oriented task chains in the classroom. They represent action scenarios with an established, reality-related action structure that "can be played through in the same way as a real causal connection and process" (Piepho 2003: 42), and can be mastered step by step in class. Such tasks offer a rich context for language learning; are cognitively complex and enable visible learning progress; contain a work plan, put an emphasis on content-related learning, from which linguistic action follows. (Cickovska, 2017)

In the earliest task sequences, to help learners to focus on the topic, and engage their knowledge of the world and to concentrate on 'islands of understanding' educators have select the islands of understanding and the new vocabulary which the students can anticipate from the context, via internationalism, via

well-known words and their previous knowledge, knowledge of the world and language knowledge. The 'islands of understanding' are necessary for understanding and for learning new vocabulary. "It is important to focus on what one understands. [...] The learners should approach a foreign-language text in such a way that they compensate as much as possible with their contextual knowledge for the lack of linguistic knowledge" (Storch, 1999, p.122).

The materials should be extracted from online resources and social media. The tasks should also involve creative ways of embracing digital technology inside and outside of classroom. (Cickovska, 2020)

CONCLUSION

The themes and topics for foreign language teaching on non-linguistic faculties should at least be changed according to generational research –taking into consideration the significant change of the social, economic and technological conditions and generational characteristics. Generation Alpha is on the horizon and will be enrolling higher education approximately in 2028 and will enter the working market in the thirties.

Higher education institutions have autonomy in relation to study programs and subject syllabuses. Foreign language teaching on non-linguistic faculties does not have a unified status and is taught by educators employed at the faculties or at the foreign language departments of philological faculties. There is no organized concept for regular training and support which leaves them on their own in terms of all aspects of decision-making regarding teaching. The didactical and methodological concepts for FLT at non-linguistic faculties are completely different at every faculty for all the foreign languages and they are not precisely defined. The goals, content, methods and evaluation, i.e. exams, for the foreign languages taught vary depending on educators.

It is necessary to unite higher education language centers and foreign language educators working at non-linguistic faculties on an organizational level, through which teaching of foreign languages in higher education can be coordinated. Support in terms of training educators to implement contemporary didactic and methodological concepts which would lead to comparable learning results and

appropriate quality needed in teaching and in the contemporary environment needs to be provided.

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