

Original article

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Optimizing Professional Training of Penal System Employees

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Abstract

Introduction: the article deals with the problem of improving the professional level of penal system employees and optimizing their professional training. In this regard, one of the priorities of the Federal Penitentiary Service of Russia should be to support its specialists at all stages of their official activities, which involves both fundamental training and a practice-oriented approach with the effect of immersion in official activities, professional development of employees. The article presents a pilot professional training program for citizens first recruited to the penal system that includes the use of digital educational technologies, training workplaces, training grounds, training work routes, etc., implemented by highly qualified practice-oriented teaching staff of educational organizations of the Federal Penitentiary Service of Russia. *Purpose:* obtaining objective information about the level of training of employees in the framework of vocational training (initial training) for further optimization of the educational process and improvement of the learning process quality. *Methods:* a review and analytical method consisting in the theoretical analysis of scientific sources on the subject of research; an empirical method including employee questionnaires; analysis of primary statistics data; a method of generalization and comparison. *Results:* according to the results of the study, the average score in the pilot group amounted to 4.41, which is 1.14 points higher than the entry control level. At the same time, the average score in the control group amounted to 3.68, which exceeds the entry control level by only 0.66 points. When taking a final exam, the experimental group participants, as a rule, had no problems with either the theoretical or practical part of the qualification exam, while sometimes inaccuracies in the wording were allowed. Solution of situational problems did not cause great difficulties. The control group participants showed an average level of knowledge in the theoretical part, while the practical part of the qualification exam caused difficulties for most of them; only 17.6% of the surveyed succeeded in it. In addition, the analysis of the assessment of the professional activity of a young penal system employee shows that those who were part of the experimental group received higher ratings from managers than those who were part of the control group. In this regard, during practical training, it is necessary to widely apply both active and interactive teaching methods based on modeling situations of official activity and developing skills and abilities to solve certain professional tasks in conditions as close as possible to real conditions of service. *Conclusions:* the implementation of an experimental professional training program for citizens first recruited to the penitentiary system with a differentiated approach allows us to determine

necessary conditions for optimizing professional training of penitentiary staff, which will contribute to improving their professional level and effectiveness of their official activities in the penitentiary system.

Key words: penal system; correctional institutions; educational organizations of the Federal Penitentiary Service of Russia; employees; vocational training; experimental program; optimization of vocational training.

5.8.1. General pedagogy, history of pedagogy and education.

5.8.7. Methodology and technology of vocational education.

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Introduction

The development of the penal system of the Russian Federation has a direct impact on the personnel competence level and their training for the penitentiary system. The specifics of service in the Federal Penitentiary Service is related to the ever-increasing demands on personal and professional qualities of employees, their moral and emotional-psychological stability, physical exertion, responsibility, etc. Nevertheless, practice indicates an insufficient level of formation of professional competencies of penal system specialists, which has a negative impact on the performance of their professional activities in accordance with requirements of the legislation [1–4].

Thus, the results of the survey of employees first recruited to the service show that they do not sufficiently know basic legal acts regulating activities of the penal system, have difficulties answering questions about emergency actions and the procedure for using physical force and firearms, are not familiar with the rules of paperwork, etc. In this regard, it is necessary to search for ways to optimize professional training of penitentiary staff, which is presented as a continuous process of improving effectiveness of the existing educational space (methods, approaches and technologies), focused on continuous improvement of knowledge, skills and abilities necessary for successful fulfillment of tasks and independent professional performance of employees.

Thus, the priority task of the Federal Penitentiary Service of Russia is to support specialists at all stages of their professional activities in order to improve their professional level and create conditions for obtaining fundamental practice-oriented training that promotes professional development of employees [5–7].

Coverage of the problem under study in the scientific literature

In Russian pedagogy and psychology, the competence-based approach assuming students' willingness and ability to independently perform professional and official duties has been highlighted in works of V.A. Adol'v, A.G. Bermus, V.A. Bolotov, V.I. Zvonnikov, I.A. Zimnaya, and others [8].

Relying on activity-based (L.S. Vygotskii, A.N. Leont'ev, G.K. Selevko, G.A. Tsukerman, V.D. Shadrikov and others) and practice-oriented (O.I. Vaganova, D. Varneke, I.V. Vyatkina, Yu.B. Luneva and others) approaches, one can consider professional training and mastering of educational programs by students of educational organizations of the Federal Penitentiary Service of Russia in conditions close to real professional ones, to form necessary competencies for them by performing real practical tasks during training [5].

Pilot professional training program for citizens first recruited to service in the penal system

In 2019, at the interdepartmental meeting of departments of the Saint Petersburg Institute for Advanced Training of Employees of the Federal Penitentiary Service of Russia (since February 2020, the University of the Federal Penitentiary Service of Russia), it was decided to introduce a pilot vocational training program for citizens first recruited to the penal system (co-author E.V. Bodrova [9]).

The study was conducted at the University of the Federal Penitentiary Service of Russia, the Vologda Institute of Law and Economics of the Federal Penitentiary Service of Russia, the Kirov Institute for Advanced Training of Employees of the Federal Penitentiary Service of

Russia (covered 6,814 people) and provided for continuous gradual introduction of the program into the educational process during the academic year. Direct participants in the study were 263 persons first recruited to the penal system undergoing vocational training: enlisted

personnel and junior commanding officers (136 people, 6 groups of 18–25 people each); middle and senior commanding officers (127 people, 6 groups of 17–25 people each). There were 6 experimental groups (138 people) and 6 control groups (127 people).

Table 1

Calendar schedule of the pilot program

Place of study / form of training	Week	Cycle name						Total classroom hours	Independent training	Total academic hours
		general professional disciplines		specialized disciplines		elective disciplines				
		classroom hours	independent training	classroom hours	independent training	classroom hours	independent training			
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
Stage I										
At the place of service / DOT	1	6	4	4	2			10	6	16
	2	6	4	4	2			10	6	16
	3	6	4	4	2			10	6	16
	4	6	4	4	2			10	6	16
	5	4	2	4	2	2	2	10	6	16
	6	4	2	2	2	4	2	10	6	16
	7	2	2	4	2	4	2	10	6	16
	8	2	2	4	2	4	2	10	6	16
	9	2	2	4	2	4	2	10	6	16
	10	2	2	4	2	4	2	10	6	16
	11	2	2	4	2	4	2	10	6	16
	12	2	2	4	2	4	2	10	6	16
	13	2	2	4	2	4	2	10	6	16
Total		46	34	50	26	34	18	130	78	208
Stage II										
At an educational organization of the Federal Penitentiary System / full-time	14	2 (entry control exam)						40	4	44
		8	2	24	2	6				
	15	6 2 (pass/fail exam)		26	4	4	2	38	6	44
	16			28	2	12	2	40	4	44
	17			202 (pass/fail exam)	2	142 (pass/ fail exam)	2	38	4	42
	18			8 (final exam)				8		8

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
TOTAL		16	2	100	10	38	6	164	18	182
TOTAL hours		64	36	150	36	72	24	294	96	390
Total labor intensity		100		186		96		390		

The study was based on the use of a pilot program for vocational training of citizens who were first recruited to serve in the penal system and to further optimize the educational process and improve the quality of the learning process.

The pilot program lasted 18 weeks (87 academic days): Stage I – 13 weeks (65 academic days) at the place of service using distance learning technologies (DOT) before starting training at an educational organization of the Federal Penitentiary Service of Russia; Stage II – 5 weeks (23–24 academic days) at an educational organization of the Federal Penitentiary Service Russia (the calendar schedule of training is presented in Table 1). The total volume of the pilot program is 390 hours, including 164 hours of full-time training, 130 hours of DOT training, and 96 hours of independent training.

The pilot program included general professional, specialized, and elective disciplines, as well as a final exam. The list of elective academic subjects specified in the pilot program is of a recommendatory nature.

The pilot program is designed for all employees of the penal system: enlisted personnel and junior, middle and senior commanding officers (secondary/higher professional (non-legal) education), middle and senior commanding officers (secondary/higher professional (legal) education). It is aimed at the formation of professional competence, i.e. the ability, based on the legislation of the Russian Federation and international legal acts, to regulate the procedure and conditions for the execution and serving of sentences, including in conditions involving the use of physical force, special means and firearms, as well as in emergency situations, to provide assistance in social adaptation to convicts, determine means of correction of convicts, and protect their rights, freedoms and legitimate interests. It includes a special (operational and technological) and professional psy-

chological, pedagogical and ethical-behavioral component.

Stages of the implementation of the pilot vocational training program for citizens first recruited to the penal system

Stage I (training at the place of service) is devoted to the study of general professional, specialized, and elective disciplines. The training included lectures and seminars conducted using LMS Moodle, as well as online video lectures with duplication of their recordings in the electronic information and educational environment of an educational organization of the Federal Penitentiary Service of Russia for students who, for various reasons, could not attend the lesson. At the same time, students completed teacher assignments using a workbook with a series of creative and interactive tasks (flash animation, interactive presentations, mental maps, infographics, etc.), practical independent work with situational tasks, crosswords, etc., contributing to the formation of key competencies for solving official tasks [10–12]. Each topic has a QR code for trainees to view multimedia materials on the topic.

The implementation of this educational activity helps to boost motivation to study special academic disciplines and intensify the educational process. Stage II – training in an educational organization of the Federal Penitentiary Service of Russia. Upon arrival of trainees at the educational organization of the Federal Penitentiary Service of Russia, on the first day of training, the experimental group took an entry control exam to identify the level of knowledge received at the first training stage and shortcomings in the implementation of educational activities at the place of service, and thus to individualize training. The implementation of the competence approach provides for the widespread use of active and interactive forms of teaching in educational activities in combination with extracurricular work in order

to form and develop professional skills among students [13]. The pilot program used forms and methods used in both individual and group forms of education (Table 2).

Forms and methods recommended for the use in the educational process during the pilot program implementation

Table 2

Forms and methods used in individual learning		
– practical tasks		
– trainings		
– self-testing		
– computer testing	digital education technologies	
– interactive quest		
Forms and methods used in group learning		
Discussion	– group dialogue (conversation, discussion, discussion of a problematic issue)	
	– demonstration, illustration	
	– analysis of practical situations (cases)	
	– “case method”	
	– “brainstorming”	
	– development and defense of multimedia presentations (project method)	
	– debates	
	– “PRES-formula”	
	– walking around “virtual penitentiary institutions” with assignments and their discussion	digital education technologies
	– binary methodology	
	– methodology of integrated (interdisciplinary) classes	
Game	– didactic games	
	– creative games	
	– business games	
	– role-playing games	
	– organizational games	
	– screencast	
	– quizzes	
	– interactive quests with the use of AR-VR-technologies	digital educational technologies
Training	– communication skill training	
	– business communication training	
	– creation of surveys, questionnaires, tests	
	– moderation	

During the training, students used full-text resources of the electronic library system – an electronic library with unlimited access to publications on legal disciplines, social sciences and humanities.

As part of classroom sessions, there were meetings with practitioners from institutions and bodies of the penitentiary system, veterans of the penal system, representatives of government and public organizations. The pilot pro-

gram was realized by teachers and managers of educational organizations.

Stage III (generalizing) consisted in carrying out analytical, statistical processing and interpretation of the survey results, drawing conclusions, preparing methodological recommendations, and describing the experience. At this stage of the research, the difference between the experimental (they were trained under the pilot program) and control group (they were

trained under the sample program) in the results achieved is identified.

During the period under study, various pedagogical methods were used to study the initial education level of trainees before their training at the place of service in the form of testing and solving practical problems; the training level of trainees based on the results of the first stage of training (at the place of service) in the form of the entry control exam in an educational organization of the Federal Penitentiary Service of Russia. Then employees' level of knowledge, skills and abilities acquired and readiness for professional activity were tested after 2 weeks from the beginning of the training, after the training (qualification exam, interview, solv-

ing case problems when evaluated by the employer (heads of institutions and bodies of the penitentiary service who had sent employees for training), as well as 3 months after the end of the training (solution of situational problems and evaluation of professional activity of an employee by his/her direct supervisor).

Results

At the first stage of the survey, the initial level of knowledge, skills and abilities of penal system employees was determined before the start of the first stage of training (at the place of service). For this purpose, a testing method was applied, which includes 20 theoretical questions and a practical task (Table 3).

Table 3

Initial level of knowledge, skills and abilities of penal system employees before the start of the training at Stage I (at the place of service)

Components of the assignment	Maximum score	Experimental group		Control group	
		average score		average score	
		junior commanding officers	middle commanding officers	junior commanding officers	middle commanding officers
Theoretical questions	5	2.97	3.16	3.02	3.19
Practical task	5	2.20	2.32	2.34	2.21
Total grade point average	5	2.59	2.74	2.68	2.70
		2.67		2.69	
Total grade point average	5	2.68			

Based on the information in the table, it can be concluded that the level of initial knowledge, skills and abilities of participants of experimental and control groups is equally low.

Then penal system employees started training (Stage I). The control group was trained at their place of service according to the Instruction on the organization of professional training of penal system employees under the guidance of mentors [14] (this document became invalid on January 1, 2024). The experimental group also studied under the guidance of mentors, used specially prepared materials (electronic information and educational environment) of the educational organization of the Federal Penitentiary Service of Russia (University of the Federal Penitentiary Service of Russia, Vologda Institute of Law and Economics of the Federal Penitentiary Service of Russia, Kirov Institute

for Advanced Training of Employees of the Federal Penitentiary Service of Russia).

The knowledge level of trainees after the training at the educational institution of the Federal Penitentiary Service of Russia was assessed during the qualification exam. At the beginning of the training at the educational institution of the Federal Penitentiary Service of Russia, there were 138 people in the experimental group. During the study period, 3 people were expelled due to illness. The control group accounted for 125 people, 6 people were expelled (2 people due to illness, 1 person at his request, 3 people for not mastering the curriculum).

A final exam included checking trainees' theoretical knowledge (test) and professional skills (complex practical tasks) in the disciplines "Legal and organizational foundations of the ac-

tivities of institutions and bodies of the penal system” and “Fundamentals of professional activity of employees”.

According to the final exam results, the average score of the experimental group subjects was 4.41 (junior commanding officials – 4.34, middle commanding officials – 4.49), which is 1.14 points higher than the entry control level. The average score of the control group was 3.68 (junior commanding officials – 3.66, middle commanding officials – 3.71), which exceeds the entry control level by only 0.66 points.

During the final exam, the experimental group participants, as a rule, had no problems with either the theoretical or practical part of the final exam, while sometimes having some inaccuracies in the wording. They coped with situational tasks and were able to prepare relevant documents on the facts. The control group participants showed an average knowledge level of the theoretical part, while the practical part of the qualification exam caused difficulties for the majority. Only 17.6% of the control group participants were able to fully solve situational tasks (middle commanding officials – 14; junior commanding officials – 8), while this indicator for the experimental group participants was 36.29% (middle commanding officials – 27; junior commanding officials – 22).

After completing professional training, a penal system employee was required to undergo an interview at the place of service, during which the employer evaluated the quality of received knowledge. According to the head's assessment of professional activities of a young penal system employee, the experimental group participant received higher marks from the authorities than the employees who were part of the control group.

Subsequently, psychological and pedagogical support was provided in both groups of employees in the performance of their official activities [14].

Thus, in order to optimize professional training of specialists for the penitentiary system, it is necessary to search for ways and methods, and to promote implementation of the developed pilot training program in educational organizations and territorial bodies of the Federal Penitentiary Service of Russia. Training should be carried out in institutions and bodies of the penitentiary system under the guidance of

practitioners of territorial bodies of the Federal Penitentiary Service of Russia and teaching staff of educational organizations of the Federal Penitentiary Service of Russia. The educational process should be brought as close as possible to real conditions of service using training workplaces, training work routes, including using AR and VR technologies. Along with this, it is necessary to conduct field classes in institutions and bodies of the penitentiary system with the involvement of practitioners. These measures will help optimize the training process and improve their professional level and performance in the penitentiary system.

The results of the study are reflected in the description of the positive experience “Using a special wagon for transporting convicts in vocational training for citizens newly recruited” (2021) and best practices “Organization of practice-oriented training in educational institutions of the Federal Penitentiary Service of Russia using augmented and virtual reality” (2022); development of a Concept for improving (modernizing) the electronic information and educational environment at the University of the Federal Penitentiary Service of Russia (2021), methodological recommendations for the implementation of educational programs for vocational training and additional professional education in the penal system (2020).

Conclusion

The implementation of a pilot vocational training program for citizens first recruited to serve in the penitentiary system, which includes the use of digital educational technologies, training workplaces, grounds, and work routes, implemented by highly qualified practice-oriented teaching staff of educational institutions of the Federal Penitentiary Service of Russia, allows us to determine necessary conditions for optimizing professional training of penitentiary staff. They are the following: expanding the range of professional competencies formed in the learning process; using elective disciplines; applying scientific, methodological, pedagogical, material and technical capacities of educational institutions of the Federal Penitentiary Service of Russia; ensuring a practice-oriented educational process with the introduction of modern digital learning; increasing terms of training, etc.

The application of the developed pilot vocational training program for citizens newly employed in the penal system will contribute to further optimization of the educational process and improve the quality of the learning process.

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