

DEVELOPMENT OF INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE THROUGH STUDENTS' SOCIO-CULTURAL ACTIVITY

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Abstract: This article focuses on the problem of development of intercultural competence in multicultural students' groups. The author argues that socio-cultural activity is one of the best ways to successful communication.

New tendencies in the reformation in the Russian educational system, the process of its modernization occurred due to the country's accession into the Bologna convention on the recognition of the qualification concerning the Higher Education in the European Region. This fact gives the verification opportunity to get education in any university of the European region and at the same time it causes the necessity of getting new types of knowledge – the competence in intercultural communication.

In spite of the fact that this problem has been studied for a long time, it remains one of the relevant and unsolved. Linguists study this process from the position of interrelation of language and culture. The ethnic and cultural analysis of language conscience is getting much wider as it has moved away from analyzing and comparing only speech presentation to the discourse research, e.g. cultural communicative behavior of a person as a member of a certain society. Psychologists studying the problems of intercultural communication pay special attention to the cognitive resources of discourse activity and describe special features of cognition. Philosophy, culturology and ethnology argue that the values, norms, and history knowledge of different cultures and religions lead to successful intercultural communication.

All these studies have unacceptable influence on the methods and methodology of the intercultural competence development as immanent condition in solving the problem.

As it is known, the basis of the intercultural competence is the background knowledge of an educated person of a certain lingua-cultural society. The linguistic explanatory dictionary gives the following definition: "background knowledge – information that is essential to understanding a situation or problem in the course of communication" [8, p. 498].

Russian and foreign authors undertake a number of attempts to describe background knowledge of typical member (representative) of lingua cultural society. The idea of cultural literacy was exhausted by E.D. Hirsch, who composed cultural literacy dictionary, enclosed basic information of world and American history, literature and culture. But this dictionary was meant for Americans and missed toponyms, modes

of everyday life, values and norms, which are very important for those who learn American English [14].

One of the most simple and easy to use models for foreign culture analysis was proposed by H. Hammerly, who distinguished: 1) informational culture (knowledge of geography, history, and every day realities), behavior culture (values, norms, idioms and specific features of non-verbal communication), 3) traditional culture (fine arts) [12, 13].

Home researchers also points out the significance of background knowledge. Furmanova V.P., for example, speaks about the following necessary background knowledge: 1) historical background (including the main cultural life facts of a certain society in its historical development, 2) socio-cultural background, 3) ethno-cultural background (including information about everyday life traditions, feasts and holidays, rites and rituals), 4) semiotic background (including knowledge of symbols and specific features of verbal and non-verbal communication) [11].

The major part of scientists classify actual according to extra linguistic factors – geographic, cultural, historic, political and ethnographical [10].

One of the interesting positions puts out V.P. Konetskaya, who considers actual both as a thing of objective reality and as a specific referent – element of objective reality, having its reflection in the mind in the form of language equivalent [7]. According to this position we can distinguish three main groups of Britain cultural community in accordance with Russian one: 1) universals (phenomena) – referents, which are identical in their essential and accessory indications in comparing cultures (sun, air, water); 2) quasi-realities – referents which are identical on their essential indications but different on accessory ones (grant – стипендия, Teachers' Training College – педагогический институт); 3) proper realities – referents, which are unique on their essential and accessory indications and are immanent to one of the comparing cultures.

The above-mentioned and similar models may be used as a good base for adopting students to a new world-view in cultural-based learning objects.

It is known that mastering language simultaneously with the studying of culture is based on using one of the social functions of language – a cumulative function. In this case any language is a binding agent between generations, a depository and a tool of transmission non-verbal community experience, because it does not only reflect modern culture, but also records its previous being. A cumulative function is characteristic for all language units, though it is clearly seen in vocabulary: in words, phrases and aphorisms [3]. Under this point of view, the semantic structure of nominative units of the language has extra-verbal content, which is straight and ingeniously reflects ethnic and national culture. This part of the word meaning ascending to the history, geography, traditions, folklore – in other words to the culture of the country, is called national cultural component and nominative units of the language keeping this component is usually called ethno-cultural semantics.

Inter-cultural competence (cross-cultural competence), has generated its own share of contradictory and confusing definitions, due to the wide variety of academic approaches and professional fields attempting to achieve it for their own ends. One author identified eleven different terms with some equivalence to 3 C: cultural survey, astuteness, appreciation, literacy or fluency, adaptability, terrain, expertise, competency, awareness, intelligence, and understanding. This type of competence “makes it possible for a person to get out of his own culture and to gain qualities of culture mediator without losing his original cultural identity [5, p. 6–7]. In such a case a person is able to communicate with other nation representatives, based on knowledge of the vocabulary with ethno-cultural component and use it in intercultural communication adequately.

But it is not sufficient to have good language and some knowledge of cultural-based learning objects. People often make mistakes of behavior. The main problem is in proper interpretation of an action. Sometimes the meaning of the action is hidden in traditional notions about what is right and normal (these notions are diverse not only in different cultures, but in socio-cultural groups as well). Above all any situation of intercultural communication in whole also determines our communicative behavior with “drifting iceberg” [4] which is not only poetic, but clearly reflects the real position. The image of iceberg shows that the larger part of our behavior models are used mechanically and our perceptions of other culture behavior models are also automatic, so our reactions are immediate and spontaneous.

As we know culture is a shared system of symbols, beliefs, attitudes, values, expectations, and norms of behaviour. It refers to coherent groups of people whether resident wholly or partly within state territories, or existing without residence in any particular territory. Hence, these principles may have equal relevance when a tourist seeks help, where two well-established independent corporations attempt to merge their operations, and where politicians attempt to negotiate world peace. Two factors have raised the importance of this topic:

- improvements in communication and transportation technology have made it possible for previously stable cultures to meet in unstructured situations, e.g. the internet opens lines of communication without mediation. Experience proves that merely crossing cultural boundaries can be considered threatening, while positive attempts to interact may provoke defensive responses. Misunderstanding may be compounded by either an exaggerated sensitivity to possible slights, or an exaggerated and over-protective fear of giving offence;

- some groups believe that the phenomenon of globalisation has reduced cultural diversity and so reduced the opportunity for misunderstandings, but characterising people as a homogeneous market is simplistic. One product or brand only appeals to the material aspirations of one self-selecting group of buyers, and its sales performance will not affect the vast multiplicity of factors that may separate the cultures. It is also important to note that intercultural competence includes both the sphere of knowledge and the sphere of skills, as the last ones lead to the “right” immediate reaction and thus the successful process of intercultural communication.

According to researches of intercultural competence development this process is very difficult even for those who study foreign languages as occupation, and as for the rest of higher students, the matter is practically unsolved. Nevertheless a group communication may be more successful if its participants try to adopt their communicative skills to the specific terms of the group. It is also important to remember that each of the parties should know and respect cultural values both sub-groups’ participants. Special features of “stranger” perception, new communication mechanisms, and difficulties in adaptation make the main barrier for successful communication.

Researchers usually allocate six types of reaction on another culture: denial of cultures distinctions, protection of own cultural superiority, minimization of cultural distinctions, acceptance of existing cultural distinctions, adaptation to a new culture, integration in native and in new cultures [6, p. 26–34].

Studying different types of reaction, the major part of scientists come to the conclusion that adaptation and integration into a new culture are based on not so much on language knowledge, values, norms and traditions how much on personal interest of understanding them and on emotional contact with its representatives. So it is not sufficient to have some knowledge about a new culture, it is necessary to master it through thoughts and feelings [1, 2].

Although most of the situated and socio-cultural approaches are grounded in the writings of L. Vygotsky, the perspective includes the ideas of learning a new culture as a situated process, as a process of changing participation, as mediated by cultural tools and as the joint construction of knowledge [16, 17].

The supporters of social-constructivism point out that learning cannot be understood as a process that is solely in the mind of the learner [15]. Knowledge is distributed over mind, body, and its surroundings (and is constructed in settings of joint activity). Learning is a process of participating in cultural practices, a process that structures and shapes cognitive activity. The socio-cultural perspective gives prominence to the aspect of mutuality of the relations between members and emphasizes the dialectic nature of the learning interaction. Construction of knowledge takes place in a social context, such as might be found in collective activity which gives us leisure.

Socio-cultural activity may be considered both as a sphere of non-governmental practice and a branch of didactics. Within the socio-cultural activity all the work is planned in order to give students the opportunity to go outside the classroom and "live" the language that they are learning and experience what they meet in life. The activities usually take place during free time.

We consider that communicative situation constructing in mastering art of intercultural communication should be more productive, if we try to organize this work in a group within common socio-cultural activity of different cultural sub-groups. Such multicultural group (like any other association) has the common aims of activity which promotes their cognizance and what is more all participants form a new community which has additional norms and traditions. Such situation helps to overcome interference of occasional factors. Thus socio-cultural activity is the best way to avoid artificial situation inherent to any training courses of mastering new cultures.

This type intercultural communication within the socio-cultural activity is one of the most leisure productive contacts, possessing powerful potential [9, p. 134].

Among this leisure communication is a major factor for adjustment contacts from plan of psychology. As we know in every community there is a need – or rather a cluster of needs for the following: 1) need for public space where people can watch or do culture; 2) need for opportunities and facilities to do non-professional culture (amateur art or related leisure activities and training); 3) need for people dedicated and/or trained for catering for the cultural needs (animators, managers etc.); 4) need for the recognition and reflection of the above-mentioned needs. The reason of this lies in the situation that within the leisure, people meet each other not as representatives of a certain organization or hierarchy step that is why this type of communication possesses openness and emotionality. Thanks to freedom and voluntariness of leisure communication students join the net of interrelations in a favorable for them form. So, the freedom and voluntariness are conditions for individual self-realization, self-education and relaxation, understanding representatives of another culture.

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Формирование межкультурной компетенции в рамках социально-культурной деятельности

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Ключевые слова и фразы: культурное многообразие; межкультурная компетенция; социально-культурная деятельность; успешная коммуникация; формирование.

Аннотация: Рассмотрена проблема формирования межкультурной компетенции студентов в мультикультурных группах. Выдвинута идея о том, что социально-культурная деятельность – один из наиболее перспективных способов формирования межкультурной компетенции студентов.

Formierung der interkulturellen Kompetenz im Rahmen der sozial-kulturellen Tätigkeit

Zusammenfassung: Es ist das Problem der Formierung der interkulturellen Kompetenz der Studenten in den multikulturellen Gruppen betrachtet. Es ist die Idee darüber vorgebracht, dass die sozial-kulturelle Tätigkeit eine der perspektivsten Weisen der Bildung der interkulturellen Kompetenz der Studenten ist.

Formation de la compétence interculturelle dans le cadre de l'activité sociale et culturelle

Résumé: Est examiné le problème de la formation de la compétence interculturelle des étudiants dans les groupes multiculturels. Est exposée l'idée du fait que l'activité sociale et culturelle est un des moyens les plus perspectifs pour la formation de la compétence interculturelle des étudiants.

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