

INTERCULTURAL AWARENESS AS A COMPONENT OF FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING

МІЖКУЛЬТУРНА ОБІЗНАНІСТЬ ЯК СКЛАДОВА ВИКЛАДАННЯ ІНОЗЕМНИХ МОВ

The article considers the problem of intercultural awareness in today's specialist training, substantiates the importance of making changes in learning materials, namely, filling them with cultural and cognitive content to motivate students to study their history, culture and its features, customs, traditions, norms of behaviour, as well as the formation of their respect for the culture of the country the language of which is being studied. The author emphasises the impact of globalisation on further higher education reformation to meet the labour market demands, in particular, the reaction of educators and scholars to the intercultural content of foreign language curricula with emphasis on developing students' intercultural communication skills for successful professional development. Based on the analysis of domestic and international sources, the author emphasises culture's inseparable relationship with language, history, religion, music, art, as well as national cuisine and traditions, the behaviour of people belonging to a particular cultural group. All these aspects make up the content of foreign language curricula, inspiring students to realise the importance of analysis and further study of intercultural characteristics in order to successfully conduct intercultural interaction in business, political or social spheres.

The article briefly outlines some elements of a practical foreign language lesson, focuses on the intercultural content of the topics of the foreign language curriculum. It is stressed how important it is to develop practical skills of communication in foreign language learning through debating and other interactive teaching methods.

The article outlines the prospects for further development of the study through careful analysis and investigation of the international experience of compiling learning materials for teaching a foreign language with an emphasis on their intercultural content.

Key words: culture, intercultural awareness, foreign language teaching, globalisation, higher education, professional training.

У статті розглянуто проблему міжкультурної обізнаності у професійній підготовці фахівця сьогодні, обґрунтовано важливість внесення змін у навчально-методичні

матеріали, а саме наповнення їх культурно-пізнавальним змістом з метою мотивування студентів до вивчення своєї історії, культури та її особливостей, звичаїв, традицій, норм поведінки, а також формування у них поваги до культури країни, мова якої вивчається. Автор наголошує на впливі глобалізації на подальше реформування вищої освіти з метою задоволення вимог ринку праці, зокрема, реакція освітян та науковців на міжкультурний зміст навчальних програм вивчення іноземної мови з акцентом на формування у студентів навичок міжкультурного спілкування для успішної їх реалізації у професійній діяльності. На основі аналізу вітчизняних та міжнародних джерел, автором наголошено на тому, що саме культура характеризує нерозривний взаємозв'язок між мовою, історією, релігією, музикою, мистецтвом, а також національною кухнею та традиціями, поведінкою людей, які належать до певної культурної групи. Всі ці аспекти складають зміст навчальних програм з іноземної мови, надихаючи студентів до усвідомлення важливості аналізу та подальшого вивчення міжкультурних особливостей з метою успішного здійснення міжкультурної взаємодії у діловій, політичній чи соціальній сферах.

У статті коротко окреслено деякі елементи практичного заняття з іноземної мови, зосереджено увагу на міжкультурному змісті тем навчальної програми з іноземної мови. Важливим є формування практичних навичок спілкування іноземною мовою через призму культури шляхом проведення дебатів та застосування інших інтерактивних методів викладання.

У статті окреслено перспективи подальшого розвитку дослідження шляхом ретельного аналізу та вивчення міжнародного досвіду укладання навчальних матеріалів для викладання іноземної мови з наголосом на їх міжкультурний зміст.

Ключові слова: культура, міжкультурна обізнаність, викладання іноземної мови, глобалізація, вища освіта, професійна підготовка.

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Formulation of the problem. Having penetrated into all spheres of human life, globalisation has had a huge impact on the development of education, science and culture. The term “globalisation”, according to Steger [8], pertains to a multidimensional body of human-related processes that intensify “interdependencies and exchanges” [8], making people understand how deep local and global connections are.

Intercultural awareness is considered to be a person's open recognition of those who are not “just like me” as well as acceptance of other people's different reactions to things and situations you might

consider unusual, the realisation of the “potential mistakes that might come up in comprehension, interpretation and translation, and communication” [5, p. 4]. Becoming culturally aware, enables learners to identify culture-specific elements, seek similarities and trace differences, enhance understanding of a dialogue as a culturally mediated phenomenon, with an accent on peculiarities of a culture, the language of which is learned, thus, making a intercultural dialogue feasible.

Analysis of recent publications. The theoretical fundamentals of the problem under research were thoroughly studied by both Ukrainian and foreign

scholars. In particular, intercultural communication as a pedagogical problem was studied by F. Batsevych, A. Nypadymka, N. Ushakova, N. Yaksa; intercultural communication in foreign language teaching was investigated by such foreign authors as M. Byram, N. Brooks, J. Corbett, J. Gilleard, A. Green; the research on intercultural competence was done by J. Stier, E. Taylor and others; cultural intelligence was researched by M. Akil, S. Ghahari, E. Khodadady, N. Rachmawaty. Facing new challenges, modern educators find the problem under research still topical and regard it as such that requires further theoretical investigation as well as practical implementation in professional training.

The purpose of the paper is to emphasise the significance of a cultural component as a medium of understanding a message and highlight cultural awareness as a key to establishing effective communication in a multicultural environment.

The main body of the paper. Mastering foreign language communication skills in the course of learning a foreign language is a core task of a foreign language for professional purposes syllabus. Cultural aspect of foreign language learning presupposes gaining the understanding of important and diverse international social and cultural issues in order to act appropriately in the cultural diversity of professional and academic situations. It is asserted by Hadley that understanding of a culture is to be promoted in class to make students sensitive to other cultures, ready to live in harmony with the target language representatives [4].

The notion of culture encompasses what people eat, drink and say in a particular environment, when and how they get married, how they celebrate holidays and what they know about their emergence, what unique customs they follow and how they are connected with their background, why they speak their native language and preserve its longevity, how well they know their history and realise its importance for their future.

Intercultural awareness as a major step on the road to becoming interculturally competent, presupposes boosting learners' motivation for learning a language through both cultural prism and cognitive interest to becoming an undisputable champion of human values.

The XXI century has laid the foundations for intensified globalisation, travel and, undoubtedly, enrichment of people's outlook due to voluntary temporary migration of large flows of people to another environment for a specific purpose. It should be stated that due to such an increase in cross-border travels, an intensive enrichment of vital, cultural and spiritual needs of a modern student has taken place, thus, deepening the multifaceted interaction of societies, universalisation and expansion of economic, political, cultural and communicative ties,

as well as sharpening the need for communication across cultures. Such mass travels of people to another social and cultural climate have broadened people's intercultural horizons, which means that the participants of these processes faced the challenge of learning more and more about things in various fields of knowledge, economic and cultural ties between ethnic groups and peoples to interact effectively at an intercultural level.

The sector which is considered to be the one most affected by intercultural communication is business. If you want to extend your business to broader territories, it is impossible to avoid intercultural interaction. In the era of globalisation, as viewed by Targowski and Metwalli [9], international companies concentrate on the process of intercultural dialogue valuing its significance for business success. Readiness for effective cross-cultural communication in global economy provides pragmatic tools about how to define a communication strategy, makes higher education responsible for selecting appropriate approaches to training.

Modern higher education, with all the contemporary-world demands has shown great advances in the choice of appropriate methods of teaching, selecting topical themes for students to consolidate to keep abreast of the times, paying attention to the most recent learning resources with up-to-date content.

Designing syllabi requires thorough research into labour market needs. If these needs are investigated properly, educational system responds to them by making all the necessary amendments to educational programmes in order to support graduates' employability as well as enhance their resilience to further demands, which may arise at the labour market [7].

Taking into consideration the choice of specialties that are the most popular among both Ukrainian and foreign students these days, 291 *International Relations, Public Communication and Regional Studies* ranks among the most admired specialties, appealing to the students with the best knowledge [6]. According to Kavtseniuk [6], over 200 candidate and doctoral theses have been defended in this field of study since Ukraine was proclaimed independent.

The purpose of the speciality is to train highly educated specialists in the field of international relations with in-depth knowledge of the history and theory of international relations; international cooperation and security; capable of solving various problems in their future professional activity, becoming adaptable to new professions in politics, diplomacy, international law regarding political reforms of the information and technology society and worldwide globalisation.

The invariant part of the *International Relations, Public Communication and Regional Studies* curriculum includes two foreign languages as

compulsory for students of both bachelor's and master's degrees to study.

It should be emphasised that the content of the foreign languages syllabi is designed following the ESP (English for Specific Purposes) National Curriculum for Universities [2] as well as Common European Recommendations on Language Education: Study, Teaching, Assessment, Resolution of the European Union Council [1].

Considering the labour market demands in terms of globalisation, educators place huge importance on students' profound learning of intercultural-related themes such as factors influencing effective intercultural communication and possible barriers which may arise while communicating with the representatives of other cultures. Thus, intercultural awareness as one of the factors influencing positive outcomes of a culturally-biased dialogue is rigorously investigated and studied in the process of professional training, in particular, foreign language learning.

As claimed by Tomlinson and Masuhara [11, p. 2], an "increased cultural awareness helps learners broaden the mind, increase tolerance and achieve cultural empathy and sensitivity". Cultural awareness, when taught through the prism of a foreign language, embraces three features: "awareness of one's own culturally-induced behaviour, awareness of the culturally-induced behaviour of others, ability to explain one's own cultural standpoint" [10, p. 5].

Among the learning resources recommended for higher education, great attention is paid to those with culturally-cognitive content. Let us have a look at the course-book *Speakout*, 2nd edition, published by Pearson Education limited. The theme studied by the first year IR students is *Behaviour*. The section of the *Speakout*, 2nd edition course-book contains a DVD watching activity. Students have to watch an extract from a BBC programme about human behaviour, then learn and practise how to advise a visitor and write a cross-cultural article. In the pre-watching stage, students get acquainted with both verbal and non-verbal greetings which are common in their own country or the countries they have visited or heard about [3, p. 100]. Moreover, it is advisable to discuss such gestures as follows: shake hands, kiss (on the cheek/ hand, hold/clasp (somebody's arm/ hand), hold your palms/ hands out/up/, hug, bow, rub (noses), slap on the back. Students may get a task to demonstrate these gestures to a partner. In a multilingual class, students could be asked to show the gestures common in their countries as well as explain to the groupmates the situations such gestures are usually resorted to. While discussing the plot of the video, students also discuss the meaning of each hand gesture in a different country and how the same message delivered with a hand gesture differs from country to country. After watching the video, another task students may get is to research a

country they would like to visit and learn about cultural advice for people who want to go there. Learners are asked to do internet research into the culture of the chosen country and put down up to five tips and then share with the groupmates. It is often recommended to act out a role play where one student is a native and the other is a foreigner, to demonstrate what kind of conflicts may arise, if a traveller is unaware of the peculiarities of the visited country and how to deal with them efficiently.

Dealing with the theme *Culture*, IR students, usually in their third or fourth year, in order to develop their communication skills, are often encouraged to actively participate in a debate. To raise students' intercultural awareness and motivate them to accumulate their knowledge of both their own and a foreign culture, the following citations for a debate are provided:

- Culture is the widening of the mind and of the spirit. *Jawaharlal Nehru*.
- The acquiring of culture is the development of an avid hunger for knowledge and beauty. *Jesse Bennett*.
- Culture is only true when implicitly critical, and the mind which forgets this revenges itself in the critics it breeds. Criticism is an indispensable element of culture. *Theodor W. Adorno*.
- My ideal is a society full of responsible men and women who show solidarity to those who cannot keep up. *Jacques Delors*
- If art is to nourish the roots of our culture, society must set the artist free to follow his vision wherever it takes him. *John F. Kennedy*
- We are in the process of creating what deserves to be called the idiot culture. For the first time, the weird and the stupid and the coarse are becoming our cultural norm, even our cultural ideal. *Carl Bernstein*.
- It is impossible to give a clear account of the world, but art can teach us to reproduce it. *Albert Camus* [12].

Debating on the abovementioned topics is more effective in a multilingual class. Preliminarily, students are provided with the list of essential phrases to be used while debating as well as asked to make comparisons on two different cultures to suit their tastes.

Conclusions and prospects for further research. Thus, taking into account the information given, it can be concluded that intercultural awareness is a significant component of understanding a message and is pivotal in establishing a rapport in a multicultural dimension.

Students' motivation to study a foreign language should be inseparably combined with the study of cultural differences, similarities, analysis of behavioural norms to express themselves understandably, as well as politely and respectfully in a culturally different situation, be able to solve

various cultural conflicts if such occur. Intercultural connections are unavoidable in business, economy and social life, as globalisation spread has promoted cooperation worldwide, thus, setting higher education a task to train highly competitive specialists aware of cultural paradigms, raising their respect for other nations and affirming their own cultural values.

Though the findings of the research have proved the importance of intercultural awareness for higher education students in the present epoch of globalisation, they do not claim to cover the full scope of the problem under research. Among the prospective areas of further study can be the investigation of the foreign experience of incorporating cultural context in the higher education learning resources and searching for effective approaches to a foreign language teaching through the prism of culture.

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