

THE IMPORTANCE OF INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION FOR HIGHER EDUCATION STUDENTS

ЗНАЧУЩІСТЬ МІЖКУЛЬТУРНОЇ КОМУНІКАЦІЇ СТУДЕНТІВ В УМОВАХ СУЧАСНОЇ ВИЩОЇ ОСВІТИ

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Problem statement. Since 1991, the year of getting freedom and independence, Ukraine has been trying to stick to the European vector of development and values in all spheres of our lives and to keep a partner relationship with other countries. The entry of Ukraine into the European Community, as well as the expansion of business contacts with foreign partners, predetermines the training of multidisciplinary specialists with knowledge of foreign languages, capable to generate and implement new ideas in our lives and to create a positive attitude towards our country on the international arena. Therefore, the issue of increasing the efficiency of professional training of higher educational institutions' graduates is particularly relevant in modern conditions. That is why, a lot of teachers,

The article is devoted to one of the urgent problems of students' adaptation, while participating in an academic exchange program, to the foreign language environment and to the cultural realities of the host country, as well as to the difference in curricula and teaching methods. Ukraine joined the Bologna Declaration, which caused changes in the state education system, and made it necessary to bring educational components to common European requirements and standards to become a full member of the European educational space. Bachelor graduates from a signatory country of the Bologna Declaration can obtain a master's degree at any specialized university in Europe with subsequent employment in any country in the world. For this aim, our students need to adapt to the realities of life and studying in another country, which is often different from the Ukrainian ones. The article also raises the question of the importance of intercultural communication caused by the penetration of globalization processes into all spheres of human life; and interdisciplinarity, as the main component of intercultural communication, as well as its main aspects: cultural, linguistic, ethical, social-communicative, psychological and professional-applied. Along with the positive moments of academic exchange, there are some difficulties for students. Issues of social and cultural adaptation in a foreign-language environment, communication with peers and other natives of the host country, as well as relationships with representatives of other nationalities or ethnic groups remain relevant. Approaches to solving the problem of overcoming the language barrier are proposed by developing the skills of flexible creative thinking and developing adaptive strategies depending on one or another situation that may happen to the student in the process of communication during his/her studies in a foreign country.

Key words: adaptation, foreign language environment, intercultural communication, higher education, academic exchange.

Стаття присвячена одній з актуальних проблем адаптації студентів, які беруть

участь у програмі академічного обміну, до іншомовного середовища, до культурних реалій приймаючої країни, до різниці у навчальних програмах та методах викладання. Україна приєдналася до Болонської декларації, що спричинило зміни в системі державної освіти, викликало необхідність привести освітні компоненти до загальноєвропейських вимог та стандартів, щоб стати повноправним учасником європейського освітнього простору. Випускники бакалаври з країни-підписантя Болонської декларації мають змогу отримати ступінь магістра у будь-якому профільному університеті Європи з подальшим працевлаштуванням у будь-якій країні світу. Для цього нашим студентам потрібно адаптуватися до реалій життя та навчання в іншій країні, яке часто є відмінним від українських. У статті також піднімається питання важливості міжкультурної комунікації, зумовленої проникненням глобалізаційних процесів у всі сфери людського життя; та міждисциплінарності, як головної складової міжкультурної комунікації а також основних її аспектів: культурного, лінгвістичного, етичного, соціально-комунікативного, психологічного та професійно-прикладного. Поряд з позитивними моментами академічного обміну, для студентів існує цілий ряд труднощів. Актуальними залишаються питання соціальної та культурної адаптації в іншомовному середовищі, спілкування з однолітками та іншими жителями приймаючої країни, а також взаємовідносин з представниками інших національностей або етносів. Пропонуються підходи до вирішення проблеми подолання мовного бар'єру шляхом вироблення навичок гнучкого креативного мислення та розвитку адаптивних стратегій в залежності від тієї чи іншої ситуації, яка може трапитися зі студентом в процесі спілкування під час його навчання в іншій країні.

Ключові слова: адаптація, іншомовне середовище, міжкультурна комунікація, вища освіта, академічний обмін.

scientists and applied linguists have been looking for and creating the most efficient methods and techniques of foreign language teaching to find the most appropriate ones which would suit the requirements of their particular students and the challenges of time [5, p.5]. Nowadays, along with all modern educational methods and approaches, the most effective tool for mastering foreign languages is considered to be live communication with native speakers, especially in a foreign language environment.

That is why many leading Higher Educational Institutions of the world have introduced the practice of enrolling students in academy mobility programs. Participation in such a program allows students not only to improve their professional skills and abilities

but also to dose into the atmosphere of a country, acquiring, in such a way, intercultural experience and intercultural competence. The program of academy mobility is a comparatively new, but students of the National Technical University of Ukraine "Igor Sikorsky Kyiv Polytechnic Institute" are taking part in it quite actively. Our future engineers and programmers have already studied in many countries, such as Norway, France, Poland, Japan and China. Taking part in a program of academy mobility helps our students to expand their life horizons, develop their critical thinking and allows them to widen their scope, as well as gain the real practical skills to adapt quickly to new living conditions. But the process of penetrating other's country culture becomes two ways profitable for our country also, not only from the point of view of specialist's training but from the angle of delegation of our Ukrainian culture via our students, representatives of our state. While communicating with the new generation of Ukrainian people, people in different parts of the world get to know about Ukraine, our life, customs and traditions and our constant struggle for independence. This knowledge is especially essential nowadays, when Ukraine has been suffering from violent Russian military aggression, and millions of Ukrainian women and children are forced to look for help and shelter in different countries of the world.

Analysis of recent research and publications.

The question of intercultural competence in a multicultural environment has been studied by many scientists and researchers, such as A. Pavlenko, O. Dmytruk, S. Krajewski, R. Kiely, G. Clibbon, P. Rea-Dickins, A.M. Lin, J.-C.G. Lin, P. Lee, M. Loosemore, L.R. Lin, H.R. Markus, C.L. Olson, K.R. Kroeger, V.A. Pellegrino, C. Roberts, M. Schweisfurth, Q. Gu, L.Y. Teng, I. Varner, C. Ward, T.J. Young, A. Schartner and some others.

Aim of research is to study the peculiarities of intercultural communication through the importance of acquiring a good command of a foreign language as one of the most important tools for understanding between nations. The task of the article is also to analyze the phenomenon of intercultural communication, its features and peculiarities, to highlight the problems which students can face in the process of taking part in the program; to offer possible solutions and ways out for students while adapting.

Results and discussion. Nowadays, in the era of globalization, there has been the aim to expand Europe to the East and ensure its further development as one of a stable, peaceful and tolerant society, as well as the creation of a single educational and scientific area. For this purpose, in 1998, in France, the set of instructions and rules, concerning education, called the Sorbonne Declaration was adopted [6]. The next year, in Italy, the Bologna Declaration [1] was also adopted to work out the uniform criteria and standards in the sphere of education within the European continent, to ensure the competitiveness

of the European education system compared to the American, British or Australian ones. The educational community of Ukraine decided to join the Bologna Declaration in May 2005, being obliged to undertake particular changes in the national system of education and to cooperate in defining mutual requirements and priorities for the creation of a common European area of education and science. Having joined the Bologna Declaration, Ukrainian students got the opportunities to have quality education, to have the possibility to travel and to take part in different educational programs, where they can get access not only to "horizontal", but to "vertical" mobility (i.e. not only to study abroad at the same time, as they could study at home, but to get the master's degree in a Higher Educational establishment in another country), but also to have real prospects for further employment in that other country.

Intercultural communication is a key to success in international business relations, ensures productive interpersonal contacts and reduces mutual misunderstanding between representatives of different nations [4, p. 7]. Students' participation in the programs of academic mobility, such as Erasmus [3], provides them with practical experience and intercultural competence. Foreign language communicative competence is a tool for obtaining high-quality modern knowledge and a competitive advantage in future professional activity, which is an effective approach in the system of scientific knowledge, a necessity in a multicultural environment, for which cross-cultural communications in all are becoming more and more characteristic without exception, spheres of activity [7, p. 273].

It is obvious, that taking part in the program of academic exchange is already the process of studying itself because the only fact of being in a new environment means a kind of learning. But there is another point of view, due to which, the process of studying in a new environment cannot be always easy, because the previous experience has quite a strong influence on the creation of a new picture of the world in the process of intercultural communication. So, intercultural students' experience affects their competence in intercultural relations quite indirectly. The terms "accommodation" and "adaptation" are used to describe the cognitive, affective and behavioural changes that occur to students, that take part in an academic exchange program.

Intercultural transition is conceptualized within one of two perspectives: stress and adaptation, or cultural learning. Models, considering stress and adaptation, highlight the importance of changes in the life of a foreigner during the cultural transition and the acculturation stress, that is caused by the intercultural transition. To overcome acculturation stress, it is advised to have a real cognitive assessment of the situation and the coping strategies. At the same time, the cultural approach highlights the importance of studying the most essential cultural features of a

new environment, and conceptualizes intercultural transition as an experience, helping the growth and improvement of students' attitudes to the situation. It means that after the problems with the initial adaptation, stable improvement is taking place when a student has mastered the specific skills for a particular culture, which are necessary for effective functioning in new circumstances.

Intercultural communication implies mutual recognition by representatives of different linguistic and cultural communities. At the same time, a mandatory component of intercultural communication is the process of perception of each other. People have to get to know each other based on perception and understanding of their behavioural characteristics, the formation of ideas about their intentions, thoughts, abilities, and emotions, which is the basis for establishing coordinated actions with them and a special kind of relationship. The language endows the bearer of a certain nationality with a picture of the world, which is the most vividly embodied in concepts. The cognitive picture of the world is a mental image of the surrounding world, which is formed by the cognitive consciousness of the ethnic group in the process of mental activity. In other words, the cognitive picture of the world can be considered as the summation of conceptual spheres and given stereotypes of consciousness, which are formed by culture. That is why, a lot of students, studying abroad, face several psychological problems. According to the research, the problems are connected with the language barrier, academic difficulties, financial difficulties, personal problems with local students, racial or ethnic discrimination, the loss of social support, and anguish for their native land.

The researcher O. Dmytruk offers to consider the following barrier, that the students face while studying abroad, regardless of the country of origin or study [2, p. 12]. First of all, considering the aim of the stay in another country, the academic barriers should be mentioned. Students have difficulties communicating with lecturers, because of the cultural differences and because of the difference in the proposed training requirements, which are significantly different from the usual way of studying at the native university. As a rule, foreign students fall into a kind of isolation from their fellow students in their free time from studying. It is a typical situation for academic mobility programs when a foreign student joins a group of regular students. At the same time, language difficulties are the most essential problem for most foreign students, because the lack of foreign language skills affects the academic performance of students, and academic difficulties, consequently, affect their psychological adaptation. This mostly concerns students who cannot freely express their thoughts in an academic environment in another language but have high academic achievements in their countries. Moreover, language

barriers often prevent students from participating in international exchange programs from communicating with other students. Due to numerous potential barriers caused by language problems, international students experience severe acculturation stress.

Intercultural communication is an important factor for students to learn and improve a foreign language. Knowledge of a foreign language is an obligatory prerequisite for the development of intercultural skills. Therefore, learning foreign languages and the basics of intercultural communication are inseparable processes. The process of learning a foreign language partially belongs to the sphere of a language and culture and their interaction. While studying foreign languages, students start getting interested in the intercultural phenomena. The absence of knowledge of a foreign language is an obstacle to successful intercultural communication. The results of the research show that students' lack of confidence in their language skills and unfamiliarity with foreign university teaching methods were factors that contributed to feelings of alienation throughout their studies. In addition to language difficulties, cross-cultural differences in social interaction can also prevent international students from forming close ties with local students and cause accumulation of stress. We are speaking about different communication models when students have to face different communication styles and situational differences in behaviour not only in the process of learning but also in the process of living in a new society outside the educational process, which causes certain difficulties and inconveniences, as well as cultural barriers, in particular: cultural shock when students are faced with differences in the value system, behavioural and communication models, differences in the cultural code and sign system in the process of communication, peculiarities of interpersonal communication.

In general, the process of communication means not only the exchange of information between people, but also embraces such means as channels of transmission and receiving of information with the help of machines, devices, artificial intelligence, computer networks and programs, culture signs, space satellites, etc. Communication in particular is the main way of human interaction, the most active form of people's activities. Besides verbal means of communication, there are also nonverbal ones, that accompany or replace the ordinary way of exchanging information. The processes of globalization and international cooperation among peoples in the world have already changed the mode of communication. Establishing business and friendly relationships with representatives of other countries requires knowledge of foreign languages. But it is not enough, because the main obstacle in communication with foreigners is the ignorance of their ethnic and cultural peculiarities. Nevertheless, only the knowledge of foreign languages

helps to learn and understand better all differences in ethical and cultural features of other nations.

Knowledge of other nations' languages is an essential component of intercultural communication and the very first step to establishing successful communication between representatives of different nations and cultures. Knowledge of language is a fully conscious perception of language as a treasury of certain knowledge about a man and the world, which is recorded in vocabulary, phraseology, grammar and other ways of linguistic expression. But the conscious and deep knowledge of the language or the languages appears most often in the process of knowledge about the national and cultural peculiarities of different peoples, forms intercultural competence, without which mutual respect and understanding between nations couldn't be achieved.

The purpose of intercultural communication is the formation of intercultural competence, and necessary knowledge about different peoples and cultures to avoid interethnic and intercultural conflicts and establish comfortable conditions for communication in various spheres and life situations. Researchers offer to distinguish different aspects of intercultural communication, but the main ones are the following: cultural, linguistic, ethical, socio-communicative, psychological, professional and applied.

We have conducted research among the students of National Technical University of Ukraine "Igor Sikorsky Kyiv Polytechnic Institute" on the aspects which are important for them in intercultural communication. And we obtained the following results, which are depicted in Figure 1.

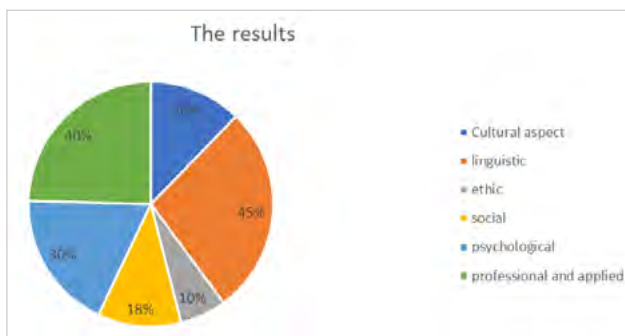


Fig. 1. The aspects important for students in intercultural communication

We may see that according to the research results the linguistic aspect is considered to be the most important among the students. The linguistic aspect implies the study of language differences that can affect communication between speakers of different languages. There are a lot of cross-language homonyms, the meaning of which does not match in different languages. For example, the following words, such as rector, minister, chancellor, president, faculty, department, college, aspirant post, etc. have different meanings in English-speaking countries

and in Ukraine. The linguistic aspect is not limited to identifying the semantic features of words in different languages. It also covers the comparison of different communicative situations, the ways of organizing the world through linguistic means, and the comparison of the linguistic behaviour of representatives of different cultures.

Professional and applied aspect was also considered very important by students because it includes areas of application of knowledge in intercultural communication. Nowadays, intercultural management is being actively developed to teach the basics of intercultural communication to specialists who work in the sphere of international business or multicultural teams, because communication failures in business result in economic losses. For example, a lot of European companies couldn't conquer the Eastern market, because of their unpreparedness for the social and cultural peculiarities of other countries. That is why, all the listed above aspects are very important for the creation and development of intercultural communication, but all of them should be based on sufficient knowledge of foreign languages.

The psychological aspect studies the psychological reaction of people in the conditions of communication with representatives of other states and ethnic groups. Psychologists together with experts in the fields of ethnology, develop special recommendations, the observance of which reduces the discomfort of being in a foreign environment and helps to prevent discomfort for others from their stay or inappropriate behaviour for a certain national environment. The psychological aspect closely interacts with linguistic, especially when it comes to communication styles or professionally determined situations of communication with foreigners.

The cultural aspect is also among the key ones in intercultural communication because culture covers the entire spectrum of human heritage in the historical development of civilization – from folklore and mythological ideas and national customs to works of art and in general the peculiarities of life of different peoples. In the process of intercultural communication, the primary role is played by contact – “communication”, a dialogue or a polylogue of cultures. From the point of view of intercultural communication, the culture – is primarily inherited and established norms of the social practice of people who belong to certain national or ethnic communities. The peculiarities of such socio-cultural activities are kept in collective memory (mental program) and are instilled from an early age, materialized and recognized through a system of cultural codes. One of the interesting manifestations of cultural codes is the peculiarities of communication between people, by which they can be recognized: temperamental Italians, slow Estonians, restrained Britons, loose Americans, emotional Greeks, and so on. Language, which is the main

component of communication, can also be considered a self-sufficient cultural system, which has led to the emergence of a separate science – linguo-culturology, which studies the interaction of culture and language, summarizes all possible ways of preserving and transmitting information about the culture of the people with the help of language.

The socio-communicative aspect includes models, norms and rules of communication accepted by society, establishing and maintaining contacts in general. Each social stratum in each country has rules of social behaviour and communication, already accepted, which are determined by many factors. In monarchical countries, such as Great Britain, for example, certain ceremonial models are established, which are observed in clothing, language addresses, manners and distance between persons, so on. Youth societies in almost all countries differ from adults in the language (youth slang), appearance, clothing or looseness in behaviour. The essence of the communicative aspect consists in the study of various styles of communicative behaviour, and peculiarities of the manner of communication depending on the specific situation and social environment of the interlocutors.

Ethical aspect is aimed at understanding the differences in ethical norms, that are specific to different countries and nations. They include norms of morality, behaviour, interpersonal communication, and speech etiquette. Gesturing also serves as an important expression of information. For instance, the thumb-up has different numerical values: for Italians and French it is “one”, but for Americans and English people it is “five”. Clothes and make-up also belong to the elements of etiquette and therefore are the subject of attention in intercultural contacts. That is why people from America or European countries feel uneasy in Ukraine when they are afraid of looking “overdressed” or vice versa “underdressed” in comparison to locals.

Conclusions and research perspectives. Thus, students, who are planning to study abroad, have to develop flexible thinking skills and be ready to

upgrade constantly their knowledge and outlook, to change quickly their adaptation strategies, depending on the situation. The ability to adapt quickly and effectively to the challenges of academic mobility programs increases the quality and level of education of foreign students and ensures motivation for mastering knowledge, skills and abilities. Moreover, to work effectively in a new academic environment, to meet the curriculum vitae requirements, students should apply the problems coping strategies to get used to new academic requirements and practices, accepted in a new university environment. And to have success in all of these aspects of intercultural communication students have to study well and know well the foreign language as a mean of conducting intercultural communication.

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