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THE INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION WITHIN THE PREPARATORY PROGRAM OF ROMANIAN FOR FOREIGN CITIZENS

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Abstract

In today's society, a lot of emphasis is placed on language learning, but also on attitudes and behaviors that facilitate good understanding with people of other nationalities. European Union policies on multiculturalism promote the intercultural education based on learning attitudes of tolerance and openness to diversity. The field of our research, the development of intercultural communication competence is not a new one, but it is controversial in defining the concept and locating in time the process of acquiring this competence. With the emergence of debates on intercultural communication competence, there was talk of a paradigm shift in the teaching of Romanian as a foreign language, where the communicative approach was enriched by acquiring a new intercultural valence. The intercultural paradigm brought about the change of the interest center on the development of the intercultural speaker's skills, which replaced the linguistic model of the native speaker. We believe that foreign students must benefit from a program of adaptation to the new culture in order to facilitate language and culture, the development of linguistic, socio-cultural and intercultural skills to overcome the cultural shock, to successfully integrate the educational environment and the host society and improve their study performance. The article highlights the factors that negatively affect communication with people of other nationalities, the type and frequency of difficulties encountered in communicating with Romanian interlocutors, but also the perception of the obstacles that influence the cultural adaptation of foreign students or the attitudes of Romanians regarding international students.

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1. Introduction

Our article brings added value in the development of a pedagogical framework for the development of intercultural communication competence in order to make pedagogical communication more efficient in the environment and facilitating the overcoming of students' cultural shock. We try to identify a possible pedagogical framework that is materialized in methodological recommendations for the development of intercultural communication competence and a vision of epistemological references in the teaching of Romanian language, based on the representations of foreign students and teachers of Romanian as a foreign language, analysis of curricular and legislative documents in force.

We believe that the development of intercultural communication competence leads to optimizing communication with the teacher and the members of the intercultural group, to their increased ability to communicate in Romanian language and to adapt to a new culture, by easily surpassing the cultural shock and increasing the study performance.

Nowadays, it may sound redundant if we assert that we live in a multicultural world and that societies have borders open to mobilities so that each of us can move freely in diverse cultural spaces. However, these statements are still valid today because they reflect, to a large extent, the reality of contemporary societies. This openness to the mobility of company members through both direct contact and virtual meetings through today's advanced technology made it possible for cultural differences or similarities to be noticed and lived by those who travel for different purposes.

Lately, much has been said about globalization as one of the effects of the technological advancement, the opening of borders to the free movement of goods or individuals, and which aims to eradicate differences. The term is used to describe a multicultural process that results in events taking place in a part of the globe that have wider repercussions on societies and issues in other parts of the globe. Globalization represents the interdependence and there is a process by which the geographical distance becomes an increasingly important factor in establishing and developing cross-border economic, political and socio-cultural relations.

2. Problem Statement

The concept of "culture" is used as a synonym for "nation" or "country", but it cannot be a total synonym, as a country can host more cultures, as is the case in Great Britain, for example, bringing together British, Irish and Scottish cultures in the same space. The variety of the definitions of culture thought by sociologists, philologists or economists leads us to the conclusion that there is essentially no unitary vision of the elements that define culture. In our opinion, culture is a form in which a human community expresses itself at some point in history.

Culture is seen as a defining element of humanity, being a reference frame people perceive the reality with and interpret it and, therefore, faced with the same stimuli, individuals with different cultures do not organize them in the same system of perceptual categories and do not necessarily perceive the same things. Therefore, culture has a primordial instrumental function within the individuals. The term of cultural reference frame refers to a set of specific beliefs and behaviors in certain social situations and acquired more unconsciously in the process of socializing, etc.

"Interculturality" (Bleszynska, 2008) focuses on cultural dynamics, taking into consideration more particular elements than universal ones, while the dynamic aspects of culture, manifested by behaviors, attitudes, beliefs and mentalities in a society or community, are never a coincidental fact, but vary according to certain norms, or what we call "the cultural reference framework" (Herskovits, 1958).

There are several types of socio-cultural contexts that require the intercultural approach of education to develop the skills associated with effective communication and interaction within the Preparatory program of Romanian language for foreign citizens, the learning efficiency and didactic communication in multicultural educational situations, but all these situations are defined by the same characteristic present in today's society: cultural diversity. Intercultural competence is formed through all dimensions of education, through different curricular areas and extracurricular activities. It is rarely formalized in a concrete subject of learning, much more often being developed indirectly, by creating specific contexts, we, the teachers, are going to offer the international students' practical models of behavior in this sense. Observing, imitating and replicating these behaviors by international students often have more value than discussions about the need to respect diversity. By his/her own behavior, the teacher, consciously or unconsciously, influences positively or negatively the formation of intercultural competence in international students (Dervin, Layne, & Tremion, 2015).

3. Research Questions

The concept of interculturalism has a much wider meaning and content than the multicultural content, which usually refers to a society in which distinct cultures exist than coexist and interact very little. Interculturality refers, first of all, to a dynamic process of influence, dialogue, collaboration and reciprocity between groups. The existence and sometimes overlapping of different cultures is a resource of great value to humanity as long as it is realized that interculturality is an opportunity for mutual enrichment, regardless of the culture you represent.

We mention some key aspects or features of intercultural education that are being developed within the Preparatory program of Romanian language for foreign citizens:

1. Intercultural education is addressed to all international students, regardless of age, ethnicity, confession, etc.;

2. Correct / objective / impartial dialogue and information are indispensable components of education;

3. Intercultural education occurs naturally, in varying contexts, very often - through the so-called "hidden curriculum";

4. Intercultural education is integrated into all courses and seminars, generally contributing to the formation of intercultural competence;

5. Intercultural education is based on real life situations and contexts;

6. Intercultural education requires commitment, time and effort on the part of all actors involved;

7. The higher education system must be a model of positive practices in promoting intercultural dialogue at all levels.

What does the Preparatory program of Romanian language for foreign citizens do to ensure conditions and opportunities to promote intercultural dialogue and intercultural competence formation? First of all, it organizes both curricular activities, courses, seminars and extracurricular activities focused on this dimension; second, it creates contexts for constructive dialogue, contributing to the development of values, abilities, and intercultural attitudes.

4. Purpose of the Study

In this regard, we would like to emphasize the importance of promoting intercultural dialogue at the level of the Preparatory program of Romanian language for foreign citizens, as an institutional entity that launches and maintains the vision and values of an intercultural community, and the social circumstances in which learning takes place and is crucial in ensuring its effectiveness, especially if we are talking about the formation of intercultural competence. The current educational context in the near future inevitably brings an important set of far-reaching changes in the functioning and development of the Preparatory Program of Romanian Language for Foreign Citizens. Today, it is the higher education institution that creates and provides a favourable environment both for achieving academic performance and for the formation of a citizen capable of integrating into a transition society where cultural diversity is one of the basic characteristics.

For the functioning and development of an inclusive education system that assumes the intercultural dialogue, it is necessary to establish an organizational culture appropriate to these challenges that will be taken into consideration in the process of planning and implementing internal policies within the higher education institution (Levinson, 2010).

The principles of intercultural education emphasize the following:

1. Intercultural education respects the ethnic and religious identity of the international student by offering qualitative training to all.

2. Intercultural education provides each international student with the knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary for plenary integration and active participation in the community and society.

3. Intercultural education contributes to respect, understanding and solidarity among people belonging to different ethnic, social, cultural and religious groups.

5. Research Methods

An intercultural educational system necessarily has an organizational culture based on shared values and visions shared by all. Organizational culture implies a specific set of leading beliefs, representations, meanings that determine the ways in which the international students will behave inside and outside of the university; is the internal environment on which the higher education institution's efficiency is largely dependent. So, as the general elements included in the definitions given to organizational culture, one can distinguish: vision, mission, values, mentalities, beliefs, traditions, history, symbols, etc.

Values and dominant mentalities are beliefs about what is good and what is less good for the educational system, about what needs and does not have to happen within it. The stronger the values, which must be recognized at all levels, including at the higher hierarchical level, the more will influence the behavior of those involved. The implicit values, deeply rooted in the culture of the organization and

strengthened by managerial behavior, exert a deeper influence than those declared, idealistic, unmanaged at the level of leadership. The basic values - social beliefs accepted and shared by the majority - related to the goals to be pursued and to the main means necessary to achieve them, influence the activity and the performance of the school and identify the way in which students, teachers, parents and other partners of the institution. Through all its elements, intercultural organizational culture promotes social equity and respect for human rights.

6. Findings

The promotion of the intercultural dialogue at the higher education level, carried out in extracurricular and organizational activities, goes through some logical steps. These steps consist in identifying the multicultural dimension of its own context and understanding the perspectives and its challenges. At this stage, it is important to be aware that we are different, representing different social groups, valuable cultures - a situation that must be recognized, understood and accepted. The second stage, stereotypes, is a stage that involves open comparison of cultures. In this way, the subjects will be helped to understand the differences and turn them into opportunities for mutual enrichment and harmonization. We may continue with self-education "through the other", which will result in the creation of a common, global vision and in the cultivation of a feeling shared by both teacher and international student.

Our research includes several steps: denial, defensive reaction, minimization of differences, acceptance, adaptation and integration. The benefits of intercultural education are important to all students because we stimulate their curiosity and interest in social and cultural differences, contribute to the development of imagination to accept and capitalize cultural differences in different contexts, develop critical thinking by identifying the perspectives and challenges of our own culture and of other cultures.

The intercultural education involves diversity and differences, providing solutions for effectively managing possible obstacles in the context of cultural alterity, which can lead to misunderstandings, racist attitudes, or even acts of violence. In principle, intercultural education overlaps, to a greater or lesser extent, other concepts of post-modern education such as "human rights education", "education for democracy", "civic education", "inclusive education", etc. Researchers converge on the fact that intercultural education cannot circumscribe an object of study and that intercultural pedagogy cannot be associated with a specific methodology.

7. Conclusion

However, we know that its aims are to promote cultural pluralism and valorise cultural differences in order to create a tolerant society in the face of diversity, learn positive attitudes and eliminate the hierarchy of cultures. Cultural diversity can characterize both formal and non-formal education. In terms of higher education policy, addressing cultural differences, we consider that there are chronological stages of approaching diversity, the stage of cultural pluralism, the phase of cultural separatism and the interculturality phase.

The "cultural dimensions" (Fischer, 2009) are in a relationship of interdependence and, as we say, despite the typology of temperaments, there are no persons with one type of temperament, we can say that there is no single dimension specific to a culture. Furthermore, cultures are not immune and independent

entities, but they are constantly built on relationships with the other cultures they come into contact with. Interculturality is a dynamic process that has not occurred very recently in the historical evolution of the culture perspectives.

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