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**ISSUES OF LEARNING THE BASICS OF INTERCULTURAL  
COMMUNICATION IN HIGH SCHOOL**

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***Abstract***

This article shows the problem of overcoming stereotypes about students that come on student exchange programs from countries of the near and far abroad. According to the Bologna Declaration and in accordance with the principles of university autonomy, the responsibility for ensuring academic mobility of higher education lies primarily on the educational institutions themselves. Thus, a basis for the real responsibility of the university for attracting foreign students and teaching staff is created. This document is the beginning of the reform of higher education and indicates the global nature of this problem and the irreversibility of its modernization processes. Intercultural communication is becoming more complex, even controversial. Students' opportunities for intercultural interactions are growing at an incredible rate due to the greater impact of the media, internships in foreign universities. Our research is aimed at reviewing the concept of intercultural openness, study of stereotypes among Russian and foreign students. The authors present results of the study aimed at researching intercultural stereotypes students have, as well as the ways to promote intercultural communication in the context of student exchange programs. One of the objectives of the study was the question whether the course on the basics of intercultural communication leads to success in learning and to an increase in intercultural awareness among students. In addition, a specific issue is a critical analysis of the evaluation results obtained at the seminar, for the further development of teaching the course of "Fundamentals of intercultural communication" and for the increasing its importance.

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**Keywords:** Stereotypes, intercultural communication, cultural phenomenon, student mobility, student exchange program.



## **1. Introduction**

In our globalized, internationalized and interconnected world, international cooperation in the field of education is an essential factor determining the processes of updating the system of national high education. "In Russia, "The concept of the state policy of the Russian Federation in the field of training national personnel for foreign countries in Russian educational institutions" was approved in October 18th, 2002 by President V.V. Putin, and this shows the relevance of the development of educational services exports (Isaeva, 2010). The turning point in the history of higher education in Russia was the signing the Document on the accession of our country to the Bologna process in 2003. One of the main objectives of the Bologna Declaration is the academic mobility of students, teachers and administrative staff of universities. Kalmyk State University was actively involved in the process of attracting foreign students from near and far abroad. The University is currently expanding the work on student exchange programs and the cooperation with universities from many countries. Exchange students have their own stereotypes about Russia, Russian people and their customs and traditions. And it is becoming increasingly obvious how important the issues of intercultural interaction are in the framework of the educational process. Our study is relevant for teachers working with foreign students, and it offers ways to help them to increase their understanding of the intercultural communication issues and have a positive impact on foreign students learning process. The discipline "Basics of intercultural communication" is designed to help students to share the experience of intercultural interaction to overcome their stereotypes.

## **2. Problem Statement**

Insufficient awareness of such cultural paradigms as intercultural communication, as well as the problems of intercultural interaction continue to permeate through the educational discourse. Many states that international academic mobility can lead to personal and cultural changes of its participants, but such assertions are not often supported by empirical evidence. Our research is aimed at considering the concept of intercultural openness, the study of stereotypes of Russian and foreign students, their change at the end of the course study on the basis of intercultural communication, as well as the potential impact of the course on stereotypes content. Based on the results of empirical research that was conducted over a period of three years, the authors discuss the following questions: the extent to which being in a foreign university contributes to reducing the number of stereotypes and promoting intercultural communication. The study involved 96 students in various years of study. The results of our research should contribute to the growth of cultural knowledge of university students, and also increase tolerance to cultural differences and improve the ability to communicate with people of different cultures.

## **3. Research Questions**

This study addresses the issue of intercultural interaction in the process of teaching. We have attempted to answer the following questions:

- How does the course on the basics of intercultural communication influence the student's belief system, which leads to positive results in a multicultural environment?

- How to achieve an effective learning experience through the development of intercultural competence?

In accordance with the requirements of modernization and reforming the higher education, the idea of a higher education institution changes qualitatively - the nature of its ties with the state is changing, attention to academic mobility of students and university teachers is increasing, and diversification of higher education is being also implemented.

According to Bogoslavsky (Bogoslavsky, Pisareva, & Triapitsina, 2007), "In domestic and foreign science, a sufficient amount of knowledge has been accumulated considering the problems of the international academic mobility development" (p. 38). This research is based on the following research principles: a systematic approach to the analysis of pedagogical phenomena; axiological and cultural approaches to the study of social and socio-pedagogical phenomena.

#### **4. Purpose of the Study**

On the basis of the following goals scientific and theoretical substantiation were listed:

1. Describe students' perceptions of stereotypes in intercultural interaction before and at the end of the course on the basics of intercultural communication.
2. Compare students' ideas about stereotypes in intercultural interaction before and at the end of the course on the basics of intercultural communication.
3. Investigate whether students' stereotypes vary depending on the subject taught.
4. To analyze whether there is a correlation between the stereotypes of students.

#### **5. Research Methods**

To check the tasks, a set of research methods was used: analytical and synthetic review of scientific publications and theoretical works; analog method, modeling. Along with the above methods, elements of content analysis, questionnaires, conversation, observation, analysis of the results of educational activities were applied.

#### **6. Findings**

Intercultural competence is one of the most important components of professional competence of a modern person. Nowadays, there are numerous theoretical and practice-oriented works on the basics of intercultural communication. Among the most famous theories Hall's (1995) theory of high- and low-contextual cultures, G. Hofstede's theory of cultural measurements, E. Hirsch's theory of cultural literacy, M. Bennett's foreign culture model (as cited in Sadokhin, 2014) stand.

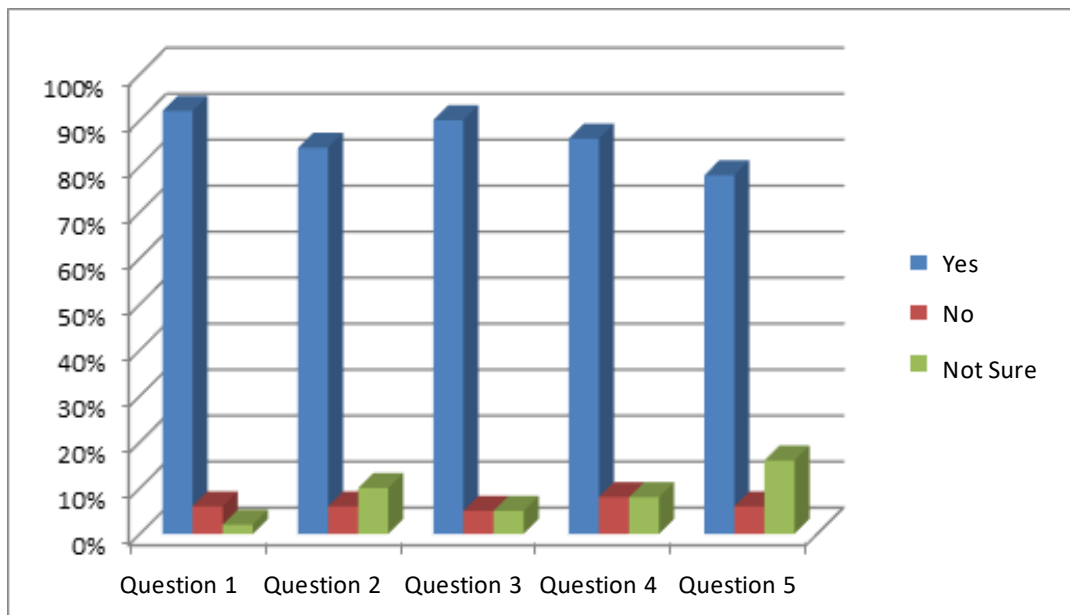
On their basis, we created a special course "Fundamentals of intercultural communication" for students of the Faculty of Humanities. Students were familiarized with theoretical positions and in practice considered special cases of intercultural communication. "It is well known that learning with understanding, as well as learning with interest, is more likely to occur when students are given opportunities and support. (Moloney & Saltmarsh, 2016).

At the first stage, students answered the questions: Do you have stereotypes of people who are different from you when you first see someone? Do you have visual cues that guide your thoughts and behavior? Are these thoughts always correct? Could they be wrong? Do your first thoughts about a person change after you meet him?

Answers of students are reflected in Table 1.

**Table 01.** Presence of stereotypes before the start of the course

	Yes	No	Not sure
1. Do you have any stereotypes of people who are different from you, when you see someone for the first time?	92%	6%	2%
2. Do you have visual cues that guide your thoughts and behavior?	84%	6%	10%
3. Are these thoughts always correct?	90%	5%	5%
4. Could they be incorrect?	86%	8%	8%
5. Do your first thoughts about a person change after you know him/her?	78%	6%	16%



**Figure 01.** Survey data representation

This diagram (Figure 01) clearly reflects the presence of stereotypes in students, so to the Question 1 “Do you have any stereotypes of people who are different from you, when you see someone for the first time?” 92% of respondents gave positive answers, while 84% were guided by stereotypes and 90% noted the correctness of this approach, which contradicts the fact that 78% positively answered the question: “Do your first thoughts about a person change after you know him/her?” and confirmed a positive answer by saying that 86% recognized that personal stereotypes can be wrong. The explanation of this contradiction lies in the complexity and versatility of stereotypes.

The beginning of the study of stereotypes refers to the 20s of the 20th century. Walter Lippman gave the first definition of a stereotype, which he designated as an image that exists in a person’s head, which stands between him and reality (Bogolyubova & Nikolaev, 2018).

“The stereotype (as a generic concept) includes the standard, which is a non-linguistic reality, and the norm that exists at the language level” (Leontiev, & Tarasov, 1997, p. 29). As it is well known, people perceive each other through the prism of stereotypes. “There is nothing surprising and bad in the fact that people use stereotypes in their lives. According to the observations of specialists, about two thirds of human behavior forms are dictated by stereotypes.” (Sadokhin, 2014, p 66). Ter-Minasova (2000) defines a stereotype as “a schematic, standardized image or concept of a social phenomenon or object, usually emotionally colored and stable” (p. 33). Grishaeva (2007) believes that ethnic or national stereotypes are stable judgments about the views of some national groups from others point of view.

Pavlovskaya (1998) believes that stereotypes "allow a person to form an idea of the world as a whole, to go beyond its narrow social, geographical and political world" (p. 99). Shatskaya (2013) believes that “when meeting the representatives of other nations and cultures, people have a natural inclination to perceive their behavior from the standpoint of their culture. Therefore, the need to study these phenomena, their impact on the communication process does not lose its relevance” (p. 52).

Working with textbooks on the basics of intercultural communication, making presentations at seminars, writing an essay and performing exercises on the teaching aid “Intercultural communication. Theory and training” help students to understand the meaning of stereotypes in their lives. The exercise “Do you know this person?” (Rot & Kopteltseva, 2006) allows you to identify the criteria for selective perception in the background of your own culture. Students are divided into groups and receive photos of various people. Their task is to discuss the similarities and differences in the description of the same person. We give the opinions of students after discussing the photo. According to the students, “stereotypes are based on previous life experiences and education, but at present they are also strongly influenced by the media. It is important not to allow our initial thoughts based on stereotypes to influence to how we treat people. We characterize people by their appearance, but if we take the time to get to know them, we often conclude that our initial thoughts were wrong.” Student D. says “Stereotypes allows us to understand what to expect from a stranger. We look at his clothes, hairstyle and try to relate him/her to a certain group of people.”

"Often, in different cultures, traditional norms and rules of behavior are significantly different." (Ratmair, 2002, p. 189). The confirmation of this judgment was the execution of the exercise “Choose a neighbor” on p. 121 (Rot & Kopteltseva, 2006). The assignment has led students to a great interest in cross-cultural issues. Student B.: “I believe that stereotypes are a kind of defense mechanism. This course made me think and not rush to conclusions when it comes to assessing people”. Student C.: "Some stereotypes are not always accurate and often prevent us from building relationships and communicating with different people".

The content structure of the ethnic stereotype is considered in the works of the Polish linguist Bartminsky (2009). According to the researcher, “the central part of the content of the ethnic stereotype is descriptive signs (cognitive), which may not exist, but are subjectively elevated to the rank of typical signs”. (Bartminsky, 2009).

The students were offered a task from the textbook written by Frick (2013), "Fundamentals of the theory of intercultural communication": "Tell us what stereotypes exist about the representatives of your culture". Students were asked to analyze text examples from the Russian National Corpus with verbalized

representations of the image of their nationality (Kalmyk men, Kalmyk women, Vietnamese, Turkmen men, Turkmen women, Chinese man, Chinese women) and identify the content structure of their ethno-stereotype. As it is well known, ethnic stereotypes reflect the features of the national way of perceiving the world. Different ethnic groups "feel, behold, appreciate and experience in different ways" (Kornilov, 2003). As a result of the analysis, four basic substantive characteristics (domain) were identified: temperament, psychosocial characteristics, appearance and style, hobbies.

Kalmyk women: small, bony, dark-haired, wildly, very not bad, some with beautiful voices, pretty, beautiful, Similar descriptions are given in novels (45.26%), memoirs (22.11%), stories (16.84%).

Kalmyk men: highbrowed, high-cheeked, with intelligent and kind eyes. The descriptions are found in novels (28.58%), monographs (19.28%), diaries (7.85%), stories (7%).

Vietnamese: quiet, meek, hardy, fearless,

Chinese men: patient, scrupulous, inquisitive, small, dry, yellowish. Their main qualities are calmness and endurance. Such descriptions were found in novels (16.78%), articles (13.49%), memoirs (8.88%), and stories (8.8%) of Russian authors.

Chinese women are presented as: flexible, elegant, hardworking, disciplined. Examples are taken from novels (21.13%), stories (15.77%), articles (9.86%).

Russian authors consider the Turkmen women as beautiful, small, pretty, dark, they do not give up without a fight. Such image appear in novels (35.48%), diaries (20.97%) and short stories (19.35%).

Russian literature gives the following characteristics of Turkmen men: thin, tall, courageous, hardworking. Among them are many men with a purely European appearance, fair-haired, blue-eyed, they are the most "noble" of the Turks. Such descriptions are found in essays (24.02%), novels (21.84%), short stories (11.54%) and articles (10.76%).

The process of stereotyping can proceed in various ways. A person gets the habit of thinking about other nations in a certain way in the process of mastering his native culture and socialization; in the process of communication with parents, friends, teachers, etc.; through personal contacts that give to one a positive and negative experience of communication with representatives of another culture. Students have more opportunities to communicate with representatives of different nationalities in the student environment and for them are important features of the psyche such as honesty, loyalty to the promise, kindness and cordiality in interpersonal contacts, reverent attitude to the family, love of art, music. Students consider such psychological characteristics important and necessary at present, and they are noticed by representatives of all the above-mentioned nationalities.

The students also answered the questionnaire at the end of the semester. The results are shown in Table 02.

**Table 02.** Results of students questionnaire survey

	Yes	No	Not sure
1. Do you have any stereotypes of people who are different from you, when you see someone for the first time?	55 %	44%	1%
2. Do you have visual cues that guide your thoughts and behavior?	84%	6%	10%
3. Are these thoughts always correct?	46%	52%	2%
4. Could they be incorrect?	49%	48%	3%
5. Do your first thoughts about a person change after you know him/her?	46%	48%	6%

The questionnaire show that the number of negative answers has increased. Significantly more students answered, they do not always believe that their initial thoughts about stereotypical relationships are correct. Thus, the results obtained by us during the repeated questioning show that students have increased the level of not only the formation of a culture of international communication, but also changed attitudes towards stereotypes in intercultural interaction. We believe that purposeful work on the formation of a culture of international communication will instill interest among students in the cultural characteristics of various ethnic groups and will contribute to their successful intercultural interaction.

## 7. Conclusion

The need for knowledge of the basics of intercultural communication is becoming a necessary skill that opens access to successful study and is crucial for professional success. This knowledge will open access to the world of information, perspectives and opportunities for young people who can navigate in life and live in a multilingual and multicultural society. As young people face ever greater cultural diversity, a thorough examination of the competence of intercultural communication becomes more and more important. Only through competent intercultural communication can people from different cultures communicate effectively in a modern global society.

This study aims to find out how the course “Fundamentals of Intercultural Communication” helps students to overcome existing stereotypes.

Students who have studied the course "Fundamentals of Intercultural Communication" can:

- (1) name and apply the theoretical foundations of intercultural competence, especially with regard to different points of view and approaches,
- (2) explain and critically evaluate the culture of their country,
- (3) identify, classify and critically compare stereotypes in intercultural communication,
- (4) identify and convey their personal intercultural experience,
- (5) classify their behavior in new, unfamiliar situations based on their cultural nature,
- (6) determine the situation, empathize, reflect and critically assess the situation of intercultural communication.

Students are invited to take part in surveys and discussions. Their participation contributes to understanding which elements of the course are particularly helpful. The study notes an increase in cultural knowledge, an increase in tolerance for cultural differences and an improvement in the ability to communicate between people of different cultures. The findings suggest intercultural competence increased and will be used in designing future courses for a wider range of students.

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