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Dialogue of Cultures - Culture of Dialogue: from Conflicting to Understanding

INTERCULTURAL EDUCATION OF STUDENTS – FUTURE FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHERS

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Abstract

The polycultural character of modern society requires qualitatively different tools of managing the process of interaction between its participants in various spheres. It becomes more and more evident that the task of educating students in the context of the dialogue of cultures and preparing them for successful intercultural communication can be realized only on condition of the ability and readiness of foreign language teachers to carry out this process. The article states the problem of forming the intercultural communicative competence of students – future foreign language teachers as an essential part of their professional, social and personal development. It presents the results of the research aimed at revealing the conditions of effective intercultural education of future teachers. The basic research methods were the assessment of the methodological aspect within future teachers' intercultural education, the analysis of the successful worldwide experience of international practice within teachers' training and the assessment of the potential of international practice in Russian universities. The use of the named methods made it possible to identify the key directions of preparing future foreign language teachers and put forward recommendations, the implementation of which will contribute to forming the intercultural communicative competence of foreign language teachers and consequently their students.

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1. Introduction

The global currents and processes of modernization lead to reevaluating the priorities of education and the change of paradigms towards forming and developing various competences. It becomes more evident that foreign language teaching has expanded its goals from a mainly linguistic focus (knowing how to communicate in a foreign language fluently and accurately) towards a fuller attainment of communicative competence which is inherently intercultural (understanding that cultural assumptions, beliefs and practices, which may often be implicit, underpin successful communication) (Tolosa et al., 2018, p. 227) This heightens the need for teachers' training in the field of intercultural education.

According to the Russian Federal State Educational Standard (FSES) of professional education in the course of "pedagogical education" (Baccalaureate) a graduate is to possess the following general cultural competencies: ability to understand the meaning of culture as a form of human existence and to follow the principles of tolerance, dialogue and cooperation; readiness for tolerant perception of social and cultural differences, respectful and careful attitude to historical heritage and cultural traditions. In terms of professional cycle (main part) a graduate is to know the peculiarities of carrying out the educational process in the conditions of polycultural and polyethnic society as well as to possess the ways of making contacts and keeping interaction with the subjects of educational process in the conditions of polycultural educational environment (Federal State Educational Standard of Higher Education [FSES], 2015).

Basing on the project of the FSES of higher education "3+" generation, the Bachelor course has to state such a universal competence as "intercultural interaction" which means the ability to perceive the cultural diversity of society in socio-historical, ethnic and philosophical contexts (FSES, 2017).

According to the FSES of higher education in the course of "pedagogical education" (Magistracy) a post-graduate is to possess the readiness to interact with the participants of educational process and social partners, to manage a group by perceiving in a tolerant way social, ethnoconfessional and cultural differences (FSES, 2014).

The Professional Standard (PS) for educators (Section "Education") includes such a task as "forming tolerance and behavior in the changing polycultural environment" (PS, 2013). Being general for all educators, this task is particularly significant for the professional development of foreign language teachers. The intercultural communicative character of professional competence means studying a foreign culture, the culture of speech and communicative behaviour adequate to the situations of foreign interaction.

It becomes evident that to accommodate the standards' expectations foreign language teachers' training needs to contain knowledge, skills and experience in: a) theory and practice of intercultural communication and b) theory and practice of intercultural language education. It is essential to prepare students for participating in the intercultural communication and teaching a foreign language in the context of dialogue of cultures (Tareva, 2017, p. 35).

2. Problem Statement

A body of research on intercultural education reached consistent findings that although most teachers perceive the importance of intercultural communicative competence (ICC) in foreign language teaching, a number of them seem reluctant to integrate the ICC into their classroom activities

(Fungchomchoei & Kardkarnklai, 2016, p. 242). This raises a number of problems of both scientific and practical content. In particular:

1) Little knowledge about adequate implementation of intercultural aspects into the process of teaching a foreign language.

The study of subjects in the Institute of foreign languages of Moscow City University (MCU) on the aspect of intercultural education of students has shown that a great deal of them are related to the Master programme (courses "Foreign languages in modern intercultural communication", "Personality development foreign language education", "Intercultural foreign language education at school and university", "Theory and practice of intercultural communication"). The examples of these subjects are the following: "Practicum on intercultural communication", "Practicum on intercultural professional communication", "Theory and methodology of foreign language intercultural communication", "Intercultural aspect of foreign language education", "Basic theory of intercultural communication", "Methodological system of intercultural education of foreign languages", "Methodology of overcoming national stereotypes in intercultural foreign language education", "Podcast as a means of forming intercultural communicative competence of students", etc. The analysis of the contents proves that only several subjects contain a methodological aspect which means not only forming the intercultural communicative competence of students themselves, but also enabling them to carry out intercultural education of schoolchildren.

Meanwhile, all the subjects of the educational programme for future teachers contain the intercultural component to some extent. This component needs to be heightened as the interaction between teachers and their students in the language classroom can be conceptualized as a form of intercultural communication in part because of their differing backgrounds in age, gender, race, ethnicity, class, religious belief, educational attainment, and so forth. Moreover, the process of acquiring a language rather than one's own is inherently an intercultural endeavor in that the learners are acculturating or being acculturated into, a new linguistic structure and a habit of viewing, ideating about, understanding and representing reality (Kong Lum, 2018, pp. 3-4).

2) Lack of experience in the field of intercultural communication and education.

Moscow City University is aimed at broadening contacts and investing into cooperation with world's leading educational and research institutions. The students of MCU participate in various international programmes (the Erasmus+ Credit Mobility, Capacity Building, Jean Monnet programs, etc). However, this academic mobility is not widely implemented and only a small percentage of students in general gain an opportunity of intercultural communication and education. In order to form the ICC of their students a teacher needs first of all to possess this competence themselves. Only having demonstrated by their own example such professionally significant qualities as tolerance, empathy, impartiality and breadth of views a teacher is able to prepare students for efficient intercultural communication (Budnik, 2017, p. 77). These are some of the reasons why recent research has affirmed the necessity and importance of increasing the global perspectives and intercultural awareness of foreign language teachers (Bektas-Cetinkaya, 2014).

3. Research Questions

The study raised the following questions:

1) How can a methodological component be implemented within the linguistic subjects of the educational programme?

2) What is successful worldwide experience of including intercultural practice into teachers' training?

3) What are the benefits of the existing international programmes for MCU students?

4. Purpose of the Study

General study plan is specified by the following objectives:

- to illustrate the implementation of methodological aspect within future teachers' intercultural education;

- to make a review of intercultural practice within teachers' training worldwide;

- to reveal the potential of international practice in Russian universities.

5. Research Methods

1) Assessment of the methodological aspect within future teachers' intercultural education

Researchers determine the necessity of developing the intercultural aspect of Bachelor and Master course programmes by adding to the curriculum special modules, subjects and language practices directed at this aspect. Only a teacher educated within an intercultural educational concept is able to deal with complex tasks, work out and put into practice innovative technologies (Yazykova, 2018, p. 280).

It is also stated that a teacher exists inside a definite methodological culture with its values, norms and regulations which are nationally specific. This is revealed not only in a teacher's views and attitude to the methodological principles followed, but also in understanding of a teacher's role in organizing communication in the foreign language classroom. Therefore, it seems significant for a teacher to reach a balance between the norms of native and foreign language behaviour in a foreign language (Goncharova et al., 2018, pp. 222-223).

These ideas may be illustrated on the example of the subject "Podcast as a means of forming the intercultural communicative competence of students". On the first stage future teachers study the potential of podcasts in forming the ICC. While dealing with videos on both foreign and native languages they learn to carry out intercultural analysis of these videos: reveal similarities and differences between the two cultures and try to interpret their native culture phenomena from another angle (the representative of the foreign culture). During this work future teachers analyze not only the given podcasts, but also find podcasts on their own, using special criteria. On the second stage the role of a student is changed into the role of a teacher who is ready to carry out intercultural education in the classroom. Future teachers work out lessons directed at forming the ICC of students and conduct these lessons (within the course or/and during their teaching practice). During the whole course there is constant self-reflection of future teachers which focuses on the skills of carrying out the intercultural communication and subsequent intercultural education.

The course described demonstrates the possibility of combining an intercultural and methodological component within teachers' training.

2) Analysis of the successful worldwide experience of international practice within teachers' training

The analysis of theoretical and practical framework shows that the issue of including international practice into the process of preparing future teachers is already under active development. To illustrate this idea there may be of interest some effective experience of different countries, which can be the basis for intercultural teachers' education in Russia.

The research carried out in the Department of Teacher Education in Norway, Oslo, proved the fact that duration of stays abroad strongly correlate with sense of preparedness for teaching oral skills. Findings from the interviews suggest that stays abroad play an important role in building up competences for parts of the subject. All the informants strongly stressed that their feeling of well-preparedness for teaching stemmed not only from university education, but also from their stays abroad. In particular, the informants emphasized the value of these stays for their knowledge about everyday culture in the target language area. These issues were far from adequately dealt with in their university studies which concentrated primarily on academic and written language. The results obtained raise the discussion whether or not stays abroad should be an obligatory component for all future foreign language teachers (Vold, 2017).

Being a culturally diverse nation, Australia prepares teachers to work with diverse students in multicultural classroom teaching. It seems important to enable teachers' education students to undertake diverse professional experiences in varied socio-cultural settings. For example, Federation University Australia conducts cross-cultural teaching experience of pre-service teachers to middle-schools in north-east China. The aim is to provide teachers with an international worldview and to enable graduates to engage students in learning effectively in multi-cultural class settings. During their experience the teachers not only planned and taught English classes, attended regular teacher professional learning sessions, but also had the opportunity to experience Chinese culture and learn to understand Chinese educational system (Jin et al., 2016).

International collaborations create spaces for increased intercultural experiences and engagement with various teaching contexts, facilitating reflection on the uniqueness of individual teaching contexts. Telecollaboration project between Dankoon University (South Korea) and Indiana University of Pennsylvania (USA) was a valuable opportunity for teacher-educators, deepening their understandings of possibilities for both local and international teacher education. This project also enabled the participants to overcome cultural prejudices against each other and develop their intercultural competence (Shannon & Park, 2016).

Research held in Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Programs (Spain, University of Deusto) confirms that the students need to develop and utilize intercultural competence not only for academic and social spheres, but also for professional life in the future. Students shift between these three fields in the different countries throughout their course, which reveals a pronounced need to develop flexible and transferable intercultural competence to assist students in the multiple spheres of application. Moreover, this confirms that any training offered by higher education needs to take into account the complex nature of intercultural competence and all the different spheres of IC application (Yarosh et al. , 2018, p. 61).

In general, the study reveals the value of overseas professional experience and evidence of the use of such programs at numerous teacher education programs internationally.

3) Assessment of the potential of international practice in Russian universities

The study covered MCU students' experience in two international programmes: Erasmus Mundus and personal scholarship (on competitive basis). The first one is aimed at primarily Bachelor students while the second one involves both Bachelor (except first year) and Master (except last year) students. The goal of the research was to get an insight into the international experience of the students who participated in the two programmes. In order to do it there was a questionnaire held which contained questions about the benefits of the practice for students in professional and personal terms, the process of integrating into another culture, challenges they faced and other significant facts the students noticed.

The answers of two participants of each programme were chosen to assess the potential of international practice for future foreign language teachers in Russia. Within the first programme – Student A who had a five-month practice in the Universidad Católica San Antonio de Murcia (Spain) and within the second programme – Student B who had a one-month practice in the University of Gothenburg (Sweden). Both students specialized in teaching English as a foreign language (Bachelor and Master course) and all the classes and activities during their practice were organized in English. Therefore, both of them appreciated the increase of their level of English.

In terms of professional development Student A noted the opportunity to get acquainted with the CLIL methodology, while Student B singled out the course “Swedish school system” which provided the information about the structure of the educational system in Sweden from kindergarten to university as well as a valuable experience of visiting a Swedish school and teacher shadowing. The results of the questionnaire also prove that international practice contributed to the students' development such as improved flexibility, tolerance, self-confidence, independence and ability to adapt in a different culture.

Both students note that the process of integrating into another culture went on in quite a smooth way. Student B noticed the differences in the educational system at a school and university level compared to Russia. Student A had more time to get acquainted with traditions, mentality and lifestyle of the country and note its peculiarities. The main challenges the students faced related to organizational details of their practice. Student A also mentioned the language barrier which was mostly noticeable beyond the educational sphere.

As results of the questionnaire illustrate, the students highly evaluated their experience abroad and strongly believe that such practice needs to be an obligatory component of teachers' training in Russia.

6. Findings

The assessment of the educational programme for future teachers reveals an opportunity for both intercultural and methodological components, especially within Master course. Although not all subjects of the programme imply this integrity, it seems essential to heighten at least the intercultural component within each subject. It will enable future teachers form the ICC of their students.

The analysis of the worldwide experience of intercultural education, particularly within teachers' training, has revealed the significance of international practice for preparing future foreign language teachers.

The assessment of international practice in Russian universities gives evidence that its potential has not been fully realized. Meanwhile, the experience obtained by the participants of the international

programmes proves to be undeniably effective in terms of professional, social and personal development of future foreign language teachers.

7. Conclusion

The research states that effective ways forward the challenge of developing the ICC of future foreign language teachers is heightening the intercultural and methodological component of the programme (both for Bachelor and Master students) and providing more opportunities for international practice within teachers' training. The first way seems more fundamental and achievable at present, however, the significance of the second way cannot be underestimated. International experience is able not only to give students a chance to integrate into another culture, but what is also essential (especially for future foreign language teachers) to gain a renewed sense of their own cultural and linguistic resources and "notice" their cultures and languages from an asset perspective (Li, 2017, p. 11). These issues need to be addressed in order to develop foreign language teachers' educational programs that are fully in line with the needs of society, schools and students.

Overall, this study contributes new theoretical and empirical evidence regarding the essence of forming the ICC of future foreign language teachers. Evidently, intercultural education cannot be mechanically added to existing training programs. It must impregnate the whole educational environment, decision-making and professional development of teachers, the content and methods of teaching, relationships between students (Valeeva & Valeeva, 2017, p. 1569). Future research can continue to probe the ways of effective teachers' training in the intercultural context.

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