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Intercultural Competence Development at Universities

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Abstract: The aim of the paper is to identify and describe some specifics of intercultural competence development at the tertiary level in the framework of language and culture. Different views on intercultural competence development in higher education are presented as well as intercultural competence development in different countries and many scholars' points of views. The results show certain specifics of intercultural competence development including linguistic competence, linguistic and cultural competence, as well as the components of intercultural competence development: the knowledge of foreign languages, cultural background knowledge, and basic soft skills. It is stated that knowing foreign languages, understanding the national culture of the target language, and having universal soft skills are necessary for successful intercultural competence development. Some soft skills are developed too, such as: tolerance, a sense of responsibility for one's actions, the ability to empathy, understanding and acceptance of a foreign culture, the ability and desire to understand the difference and unity of one's culture and the country culture of a target language, a sense of adequate and friendly perception of a foreign language and its realities. It is concluded that it is important to know a theory and have a practice for intercultural competence development and intercultural communication, since a foreign language, culture can only be acquired through activities. As for the specifics of intercultural competence development at the tertiary level in national universities, an indirect character of its development and patterning during intercultural communication are characterized.

Keywords: *Intercultural competence; foreign language; cultural background; student; university.*

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1. Introduction

As it is known, the meaning of the word “postmodern” is everything that is past after modern. The essence of postmodern as a certain type of self-awareness is an exhaustion feeling of the modern world in general, and education, in particular.

Postmodern in education is a model, a project of the education status in the predicted future, based on current trends in education. Postmodern, minding trends of up-to-date education, highlights the nonlinearity thinking, different ways of thinking. The main distinguishing postmodern feature is pluralism; it considers the simultaneous coexistence of diverse points of view, including education issues.

In education in general, and in teaching and learning, in particular, as in any humanities, an issue is always about a person, about communication between people. A person and his/her development have always been and still are the research subjects. Any theoretical concept of education, any concept of education goals and content assumed and presupposes a person's development.

In postmodern higher education, a university teacher with postmodern thinking helps a student to create his/her own knowledge, to develop his/her own skills; to interpret life, to discover new opportunities, strengths and talents, to self-realize his/her own potential; to understand a connection, a correlation between absolutely opposite things; to connect the logical and the emotional; to develop empathy; to contextualize the education content; to understand the interaction between the private and the general; to go beyond the boundaries of simplified acceptance and understanding of cause-and-effect correlations, to consider all the diversity of the surrounding world in the context of learning.

One of the problems of postmodernity is communication, intercultural communication between peoples, states in the framework of language and culture.

Historically, establishing contacts between representatives of different peoples and cultures served as a source of development and contributed to the innovation introduction. The up-to-date process of globalization not only expands, but also requires interaction between states and their cultures, both for joint development and for solving global problems. In addition, diplomatic contacts, trade and tourism, as well as numerous cultural and student exchanges, international education and internship abroad, scientific cooperation, etc. have become a reality of today.

No doubt, an important factor is the growing role of human capital. A person's ambition to self-realization and social adaptation in a multicultural, multi-ethnic world in the context of globalization, the striving for mutual understanding between people of different communities leads to the emergence of a dialogue of cultures. In order this dialogue to be successful, communication participants should have intercultural competence, that is, the ability to achieve mutual understanding in the process of intercultural communication, taking into account the difference in languages, cultures and stereotypes of thinking.

Anyway, intercultural competence begins to be developed as early as childhood, when the perception basis of the surrounding world is grounded, because children get acquainted with the world culture almost in parallel with the assimilation of their own culture through watching foreign animated cartoons, films, documentaries, shows, using Internet, traveling with their parents abroad, etc.

However, the most active intercultural competence development is received during students' years, when there is a conscious creation of a personality competent in intercultural communication. Since today there is no doubt about the fact that a free, independent and creative person can develop only in the context of universal human values, mastering the foundations of world culture. In addition, at the present moment, intercultural communication skills are one of the keys for a harmoniously developed personality, and a tolerant attitude towards manifestations of another culture contributes to the awareness of one's own.

Therefore, it is no coincidence that intercultural competence development during study at universities is emphasized. This is evidenced by the analysis of recent researches in this area, which are devoted to the study of some organizations, contents, forms, methods and technologies for intercultural competence development.

2. Literature review

Contemporary intercultural education is widespread nowadays. It gives students an opportunity to learn, work, and live together in our diverse society. There are different languages, cultures, cultural barriers in the world. Intercultural education influences school development (Dimitrov et al., 2014), university training (García-Pérez & Rojas-Primus, 2017; Pinto, 2018), and learning practice (Huber, 2012).

Definitely, intercultural education change is impossible without necessary abilities, attitudes, skills, competences (Griffith et al., 2016), and

knowledge needed (Ciolăneanu, 2007; Sain et al., 2017) for mutual understanding. So, towards a framework for intercultural education, intercultural competence development is a key point at the tertiary level.

As it is known intercultural competence is the ability to interact and communicate, recognizing diverse identities. It is considered “intercultural competence is the ability to develop targeted knowledge, skills and attitudes that lead to visible behaviour and communication that are both effective and appropriate in intercultural interactions.” (Deardorff, 2006, p. 241).

Intercultural competence development in higher education is studied “in physical and virtual realities” (Gregersen-Hermans, 2017), in the content of “communication skills necessary for multicultural exchange and effective intercultural communication” (Ilie, 2019). Different constructs like “intercultural sensitivity, intercultural expertise, cultural intelligence, and perspective taking” are studied as well as the abilities “to observe cultural differences, to empathize” (Bhawuk, 2017). No doubt, at universities “intercultural competence cannot be acquired in a short space of time, it is not a lifelong process which needs to be addressed explicitly in learning and teaching and staff development” (McKinnon, n.d).

Some problems of intercultural competence have been examined in different countries: in Europe in general (Hoskins & Sallah, 2011), in Spain (Keshabyan-Ivanova, 2016); Croatia (Sain et al., 2017); Romania (Chiper, 2013); Latvia (Luka, 2007); Poland (Sobkowiak, 2015); Georgia (Malazonia et al., 2017); Ukraine (Aleksandrova, 2016); as well as in Australia (Zou & Shek-Noble, 2014), Canada (Dimitrov et al., 2014; García-Pérez & Rojas-Primus, 2017).

The underpinnings of intercultural competence have been studied by C. Kramsch (1993), M. Byram (1997), M. Byram, B. Gribkova, H. Starkey (2002), S. Leiba-O’Sullivan (1999). Some methodological, cross-cultural issues of intercultural competence development are studied in the works of M. Warschauer (1996), W. Gudykunst (2003). The problems of abilities within intercultural and cross-cultural communication are investigated by D. Buttjes (1990), D. Buttjes, M. Byram (1991), G. Hofstede (2001), R. Clouet (2006), J. Shirley (2016). Different skills, competences (Ciolăneanu, 2007), motivation and communication aspects (Gudykunst, 2003), cultural boundaries, values and behavior patterns (Sain et al., 2017) are studied while teaching foreign languages.

In our previous work the strategy for intercultural competence development at the tertiary level at English lessons is proposed (Holubnycha et al., 2019). However, this skill improvement under the indicated conditions has its own characteristics, which until now remain insufficiently studied.

While understanding these features could make the intercultural competence development more effective.

The **aim** of the study is to identify and describe some specifics of intercultural competence development at the tertiary level in the framework of language and culture in order to achieve its efficiency.

As the paper does not describe any experiment and it is theoretical and argumentative one, no experimental methods were used, but quantitative, general theoretical ones; they were traditional analysis and synthesis, students' observation at the tertiary level at universities as usual for researches in pedagogy and psychology.

3. Intercultural competence development

In order to understand what features of intercultural competence development a university teacher has to face, it is important to comprehend what this phenomenon is and what are its components. An analysis of numerous definitions of the concept "intercultural competence" showed that its essence is the ability or skill to successful, effective and appropriate intercultural communication. It is the ability for communication in various cultural contexts, including some cognitive, affective, and behavioral skills for different people of different cultures. Sometimes it correlates with diverse cultural norms. In addition, it is possible to establish that intercultural competence has numerous components; they are motivation, self- and other knowledge, tolerance for uncertainty, cultural worldview, differences, practices and worldviews, cross-cultural skills. Two basic competences are important for intercultural competence development and intercultural communication, they are linguistic competence, linguistic and cultural competence.

3.1. Linguistic competence, linguistic and cultural competence

Linguistic competence is the possession of a sufficient supply of linguistic means necessary for communication with a native speaker. Linguistic and cultural competence is more complex concept. It includes the possession of a sufficient stock of background knowledge, that is necessary for effective communication with the native within a specific foreign culture.

Thus, a connection is seen between intercultural competence and foreign language communicative competence. Therefore, it is natural that for the most part of intercultural competence development is carried out while teaching foreign languages.

However, our experience shows that even a fairly high level of proficiency in a foreign language communicative competence and the ability to decipher correctly the behavior of another person and build one's own does not guarantee necessarily mutual understanding, and, consequently, the successful interaction of participants in intercultural communication.

The reason for this is the insufficiently developed skills of comparing behavior models and the ability to convey to an interlocutor, acting on an unconscious basis, the meaning of the peculiarities of the intercultural communicative act. All of the above is due to the difference in socio-cultural baggage and cultural traditions.

That is why it is important to realize that intercultural competence is much broader than foreign language communicative competence. Undoubtedly, the language, which acts as a bridge of mutual understanding and interaction between representatives of different lingual-ethnic communities, plays a huge role in the implementation of successful intercultural communication.

However, preparing students for coexistence in one common world, it is necessary to teach them to build an effective mutually beneficial dialogue with representatives of all cultures and nations of the world. For successful intercultural interaction, a foreign language teacher cannot be limited only to work on increasing the stock of necessary language means.

Indeed, even in ancient schools, teachers understood that, while learning a new language, a person penetrated simultaneously into a new national culture, received spiritual wealth preserved by the language. Teaching classical languages is also not conceived without cultural commentary. In teaching living languages, since the end of the 19th century, along with oral speech, acquaintance with country realities of the language being studied has come to the fore.

From the above, students need to be given knowledge on the main topics from country, regional studies: history, geography, political and social relations, education, culture, sports, etc. in the country of the target language, and, in addition, about the socio-cultural characteristics of people who are native speakers.

At the same time, the elements of the students' native culture should be involved for comparison, since only in this way they can realize the perception peculiarities of the world by representatives of another culture. The effectiveness of training depends on largely the selected country studies, and linguistic and cultural background. Information about everyday life in the countries of the studied language should be important and interesting for

students. And photographs, diagrams, statistics should be accompanied by detailed comments of a teacher.

In addition, it is necessary to develop students' tolerance, as well as a sense of responsibility for their actions, the ability to empathy, understanding and adequate acceptance of another culture, without losing their own cultural identity. After all, without a developed tolerant intercultural vision of the world knowledge of the language is practically useless. Therefore, the goal of intercultural competence development is to achieve such a quality of a linguistic personality that allows a person to go beyond his/her own culture and acquire the mediator qualities of cultures without losing his/her own cultural identity.

3.2. The components of intercultural competence

Our own experience and students' observation allow us to reveal three components of intercultural competence, they can be considered as the following: 1) knowledge of a foreign language, 2) cultural background knowledge, 3) certain soft skills. All these components, to our mind, the basis for intercultural competence development.

However, due to globalization, several languages have become the most common, officially, the languages of globalization are English, first of all, and in addition Spanish and Chinese, and they are used not only by native speakers. Accordingly, communication partners in reality may belong to completely different lingual-ethnic communities and cultural traditions.

Therefore, the question of background knowledge development about the culture and life of the interlocutor's country becomes more complicated, since, in addition to the culture of those countries that are native speakers, it is necessary to provide basic knowledge about the culture types in the world, the behavioral features of Western and Eastern nations, about the most important moments of life and religion.

In psychology it has been established that in the consciousness of each communication participant there is, on the one hand, his/her own personal baggage, in other words, his/her own culture (an individual picture of the world), and, on the other hand, a foreign world, an alien image of consciousness, which to one point or another is opposed to the first. This creates a dialogic personality. It is the dialogic nature of a personality that makes a person, as a result, capable of a culture dialogue.

In the process of communication, a person comes into contact with cultural phenomena and through it learns the world in all the richness of interactions between objects, people, and principles. Studying the culture of the target language country goes from a private case, that is, from linguistic

structures to general one, particularly, the knowledge and understanding of a foreign culture. Through the study of a foreign language, a student recreates the culture of the people who speak this language. But, at the same time, as indicated above, a foreign culture can be understood only by comparing it with the native culture, with the knowledge that a student has already mastered.

3.3. Different approaches in foreign language teaching

Two different approaches in the process of foreign language teaching are underlined: country, regional studies and philological one. The first approach is based on teaching country, regional studies, a discipline that is traditionally associated with the study of any foreign language, namely, history, literature, geography, economics, art, etc. of the target language country.

The second approach is philological one; the main object is not a country, but the background knowledge of native speakers. These approaches differ in classes, as country, regional studies are not always associated with language learning or with it at all. It means that they can be presented in the native language to the audience, and may be available for people who do not learn a foreign language.

As for the philological approach, it is possible only within the framework of studying a foreign language, which serves as a source of information about the history and culture of a language country.

In our opinion, for the most effective intercultural competence development, a combination of the named approaches is possible: country, regional studies and philological one may be the most reasonable. Moreover, the country, regional specific work of a foreign language teacher corresponds directly to the essence of communicative language teaching.

However, our experience has shown that even a university teacher's consideration of the listed components and adherence to the indicated approaches for intercultural competence development does not guarantee students from mistakes in intercultural communication. The reason most often is that, having country, regional knowledge in theory and possessing tolerance, students transfer their own knowledge and experience inherent in their national culture to the reality and lifestyle of the country of the language being studied.

This leads to a natural inadequate understanding, and sometimes to a complete misunderstanding. The cultural barrier is becoming a real factor that hinders mutual understanding between communication participants, and

in order to overcome it, students should prepare for real communication in a foreign language with native speakers.

3.4. Intercultural competence development specificity in national universities

Here, the specificity of intercultural competence development in our national universities is revealed: we are not native speakers, we are just national teachers of English who train students for intercultural communication, and we are students' communicators belonging to the same culture. In other words, teaching foreign language is carried out outside the real language environment, far from the real native culture.

Since it is not essential even talk seriously about the elements of acculturation in foreign language teaching. Acculturation involves the culture assimilation by a person who grew up in it, because anyone can cognize and assimilate background knowledge, but adopting the worldview characteristic of a particular culture, on the basis of which verbal communication occurs, is much more difficult task.

Moreover, patterning, understood as a behavior stereotype reproduction of a native speaker, as an imitation of the national cultural model can be attributed among the features of intercultural communication in the situation of national universities. A university teacher task is to teach communication adequately with representatives of other cultures, and not to become just the closest possible reproduction of a native speaker.

Therefore, it is important in the process of international communication to pay considerable attention to the comparison of the national culture with the culture of the target language. So, communication becomes precisely intercultural.

There is an opinion that intercultural communication is possible even in cases where its participants do not have sufficient background knowledge. However, to our mind, such communication is unlikely to be successful and effective, and then there is no talk of sufficient intercultural competence development at all.

No doubt, without background knowledge that is common for communication participants, sufficient communication is impossible. In our opinion, such communication can lead to a serious cultural conflict, and its participants may find themselves in an unpleasant situation with an incorrectly and sometimes hostilely understood phenomenon of foreign culture, especially if the conflict with culture occurs indirectly and not personally (for example, using Internet).

The third component of intercultural competence development, which has been identified, is the upbringing a sense of tact, tolerance, a positive attitude towards another language, culture, and people speaking this language. In our opinion, in order a foreign language to be perceived not as alien for us, but as inherent in another people and culture, the process an adequate perception development should include the study of 1) the peculiarities of speech behavior with representatives of other cultures in interpersonal communication, for example, on a tourist trip, in a youth center abroad etc.; 2) learning equivalent and non-equivalent vocabulary; 3) cultural information; 4) ways to convey the realities from the native language into a foreign language.

3.5. Drills, tasks, exercises for communication

In addition, it is known that any knowledge without practice is useless. So, drills, exercises, tasks should be both communicative. Such exercises can be:

1. Training dialogues widely applied in situations as close as possible to real ones and typical for the culture of a given country, for example, communication at an airport, hotel, restaurant, shop, party, etc. Motivate students to reflect on their individual identities and cultures. Offer students to communicate throughout the interview.

2. Using technical means while real communication with representatives of foreign culture: correspondence by e-mail, chat, forum; the ideal option is live communication via zoom, etc.

3. Using case studies of both linguistic and linguistic-regional nature, for example, what a native speaker would answer this question, how a native speaker would behave in this situation, etc. Propose think-pair-share in pairs and small groups.

4. Making research and creative projects related to the topics under study, but, in addition to searching and presenting information, including the linguistic and country, regional analysis of this information. Incorporate team-building exercises. Propose students learning or working overseas.

5. Making linguistic, linguistic and regional analysis of authentic resources, from printed publications to films or news of the national channels from the country of the target language.

4. Limits and Discussions

In terms of the discussion the obtained results are similar to other researchers' results. Intercultural competence development all over the

world is international. It is interdisciplinary and has cross-cultural experience in many countries.

Definitely, S. Pinto is right that intercultural competence development “is considered crucial for changing prejudiced attitudes, preparing students to live in a global world and empowering them professionally” (Pinto, 2018).

No doubt, N. Dimitrov is right saying: “as a result of training, participants became more aware of cultural and disciplinary differences in communication, were able to adapt their communication style to audiences with different levels of background knowledge, and felt more prepared for interpersonal interactions across cultures with undergraduates...participants were able to transfer the skills learned to other areas of graduate study and used effective intercultural communication strategies when interacting with globally diverse peers and faculty supervisors” (Dimitrov et al., 2014).

It is necessary to understand the nature of intercultural competence development as in theory as in practice. It is important to investigate it at the tertiary level. It stimulates and extends interuniversity collaboration and country teamwork. University students learn in interculturality facing different languages, cultures, international programs, intercontinental networks.

On the contrary, our results suggest just our own proposed thoughts, opinions, observations, and experience through our own understanding. V. Figueredo-Canosa and coauthors are right that “it is necessary to enhance the experiential character of the formative processes and link them to reality, so as to favor meaningful learning... It is essential to acquire basic knowledge about different cultures and languages” (Figueredo-Canosa et al., 2020). Definitely, the research has some limits, mainly as for the quantitative methodology.

5. Conclusions

Thus, while researching the specifics of intercultural competence development at the tertiary level in order to achieve its effectiveness, the components of intercultural competence can be considered as the following: 1) language and culture knowledge, competences, and skills; 2) sufficient background knowledge development about the country culture of a target language; 3) the development of universal soft skills such as: tolerance, a sense of responsibility for one’s actions, the ability to empathy, understanding and acceptance of a foreign culture, the ability and desire to understand the difference and unity of one’s culture and the country culture

of a target language, a sense of adequate and friendly perception of a foreign language and its realities.

So, it is important to know a theory and have a practice for intercultural competence development and intercultural communication, since a foreign language, culture can only be acquired through activities. As for the specifics of intercultural competence development at the tertiary level in national universities, an indirect character of its development and patterning during intercultural communication are characterized.

Further researches can be about qualitative and experimental studies of intercultural competence development or intercultural communication to understand students and teachers' understanding, perceptions, practice and experiences more in depth.

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