

# Foreign Language Teaching As a Factor Contributing To Intercultural Polylogue

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## Abstract

XXI century is characterized by the diversity of world cultures and multilingualism of the world, so a modern specialist should act as a linguistic personality, able to conduct a successful dialogue with foreign partners, taking into account their culture and traditions. Realization of such qualities is a guarantee of the expansion of business contacts and international cooperation in general. Therefore, the purpose of foreign language teaching should be in developing the capacity for intercultural communication. The article discusses the possibility of achieving intercultural polylogue through learning educational technologies of foreign language teaching, using the activity-based and student-centered approaches to teaching, taking into account the international experiences of foreign language teaching. Cooperative learning and project-based methods are described as efficient in contributing to the intercultural polylogue development.

**Key words:** English language, Education, Sociology, Student, University, Cooperative learning, Intercultural polylogue, Project-based method, Foreign language teaching

## INTRODUCTION

Russia is a multi-ethnic and multicultural state in which it is important to educate citizens who are able to live in a multinational environment. A foreign language teacher has an important role in the formation of socially-adapted personality, with acquired national and international, all-Russian and global, and in a word – universal human values. A University lecturer or a school teacher, teaching foreign language and literature (Russian, Tatar, English, German, and etc.) in variously by their ethnic composition audiences or classes, will always have to deal with multiple languages and cultures. A bilingual teacher takes on an integrating function or that of the organizer of the dialogue of cultures, which implies a system of knowledge and skills to establish links between cultures in the framework of the discipline. The educational goal of foreign language education today is all about an inter-socially-educated person with a high level of culture of international relations [1], characterized

by such personality traits as cultural decentration, interethnic tolerance, positivism and empathic attitude to representatives belonging to a different nation [2]. Tasks in foreign language teaching should be aimed at developing tolerance of future professionals to cultural diversity, and not only at mastering the methods of foreign language speaking and writing.

In the dialogue of world cultures, the Republic of Tatarstan (RT) demonstrates the function of a “bridge” between the West and the East. The population of RT is heterogeneous in ethnic composition, religious and cultural traditions, though Tatarstan has managed to maintain stability in the political, economic, and cultural spheres of life. RT provides each individual with the possibilities for national identity, and engages representatives of the region in an equal dialogue with ethnic groups living on the territory of the Republic, by not only Russian, but also Tatar as a foreign language, introduced as a necessary subject in the school curriculum along with one of the European languages.

Language as a mirror of culture reflects the reality and creates a worldview specific to every nation or ethnic group using the language as a communication tool [3]. At the turn of 19-20 centuries, ethnolinguistics arose – a branch of linguistics that studies a language in its relation to culture, the interaction of linguistic, ethnocultural

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and ethnopsychological factors in the functioning of the language. Language, thinking and culture are so closely interrelated that form a single whole, where neither of the components can function without the other two.

The mechanism of mutual interaction of personalities and cultures is a dialogue (as a basis of polylogue), which is interpreted as a form of communication of individuals and as a way of their interaction with the objects of culture and art in a historical perspective. In situations of interethnic communication and in the socio-cultural behavior of communicants there are similarities and differences in cultures, in their national identity, which foster respect and sympathy for the socio-cultural values of each other. Any communication, interpersonal or intercultural, is the interaction of two or more particular worlds. In a polylogue of various cultural meanings of existence there is the essence of the modern concept, of the modern logic of thinking.

Teaching a foreign language is characterized by a focus on the formation of cross-cultural competency, which provides a future professional's ability to participate in the polylogue of cultures, business negotiations, international internships, international professional seminars and conferences.

Today, there is a challenge before the education system: to prepare professionals for cultural, professional and personal communication with representatives of countries with different social traditions, social systems, mentality and language culture. To accept the culture of others, to be tolerant to all around, can only those who are available for "polylogue-based" thinking, the ability to communicate with representatives of other socio-cultural communities. Polylogue, being realized as the fundamental principle of cultural lives and activities, points to the essential need of one culture in another. A language – is the prerequisite for integration and universal tolerance and acts as a factor in the development of international polylogue.

The success of Russia and other CIS countries largely depends on whether they are able to establish constructive cooperation in the field of professional education. In this regard, it is extremely valuable and fruitful to study foreign experience, where a special place is taken by the coordination of the educational policy as a key element of stability and efficiency of integration processes. International experience in language teaching combined with the domestic practices in education will contribute to the formation of students' intercultural competence and international polylogue-based thinking which should become a required component of the foreign language training of future professionals.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

Project-based learning is popular among foreign language teachers as a learner-centered pedagogic approach that implements cooperative learning [4]. Polat E.S. notes that in practice the project-based method is often substituted by other kinds of work taken in for project-based learning educational technology [5]. The main purpose of project-based work is the development of independence and creativity of a student, his/her abilities in business activity in the sphere of language and education in the process of mastering a foreign language and its use as a means of professional intercultural communication. The leading criterion of the project-based learning is the student's ability to interact and cooperate in the process of solving project-research and project-creative tasks.

Project-based learning as a pedagogical technology involves a set of research, problem-based, and creative by their nature methods [6].

The principles of the project-based approach are: the principles of team work, independence, creativity, authenticity of teaching materials. Work on their own projects while learning a foreign language reflects the current trend in education – a focus on a research model of learning that teaches students to independently plan their actions, to predict possible solutions to problems, to choose the ways and means of their implementation [5]. The main provisions of the project-based methodology can be summarized in the following requirements: 1. To mould personal qualities of each student and develop creative abilities in the foreign language oral speech learning process. 2. To develop the abilities to cooperate in joint activities. 3. To teach foreign language communication, to build up skills in polylogical communication.

The activity concept of education applies to the polylogue approach, the authors of which, Tarasov E.F. and Sorokin Yu.A. believe that a foreign culture is absorbed only in the process of some activity [3,7].

## RESULTS

Foreign language training was activity-oriented and open to new knowledge and new experiences, designed to help learners of the language and culture to navigate in a society in which all lives are defined by ethnic, linguistic, religious, and social differences, the dependence that would be even more clearly expressed in the students' future.

Having studied and analyzed literature on the use of foreign language, educational technologies at higher

schools of Russia and abroad, we can state that domestic universities have traditionally paid attention to knowledge of vocabulary and grammatical phenomena. Cooperative learning and project-based educational technologies are aimed at the development of oral dialogical and polylogical speech. The widespread adoption of these interactive learning educational technologies in the teaching practices of foreign language training as international experience ensures the success of international polylogue already involving Russian culture-bearers.

As the analysis of the European experience of foreign language training of students shows, only the widespread introduction of new educational technologies would change the paradigm of education. Among the various schools of the new educational technologies that are widely used in Europe, for example, the most adequate to the set goals, from our point of view, are the cooperative learning and the project-based method in professional education.

Cooperative learning and project-based educational technologies require much attention to oral language, especially to the ability of communicating in pairs or in a group, taking on different social roles. The cooperation in education is an expression of the personal-activity approach. Project-based and cooperative learning integrate such interactive teaching methods as the method of cases (situations) and the method of brainstorming, as they involve team participation. Both of these methods were created in U.S. and soon became popular in Western Europe. These educational approaches in Russian higher schools are used less than in foreign schools. The communicative learning educational technologies are the most popular now in all developed countries, used directly in teaching foreign languages. Method of projects is often considered as one of the forms of cooperative learning realization.

The essence of the project-based method is that students develop details relevant to their specific problem, presenting different solutions with a coordinating role of the teacher. In the course of the project, practical, didactic, educational, and developmental goals were achieved. It is possible to highlight the following general steps in the project-based learning: 1) Goal setting. At this stage, the topics of the project activities were selected, groups were formed (each group was composed of students with different levels of training). 2) Planning. Hypotheses were put forward, objectives were formulated, and possible sources of information were identified to solve the problem. 3) Implementation. Students developed the ability to work with information, to synthesize and analyze ideas, prepare their project for submission. 4) The project defense. The students together with the teacher discussed and evaluated the results of the work on the projects.

Using the project-based method in the classroom, we adhered to not only linguistic and cultural orientation of the training content, based on the linguistic and country-study approach, but also to communicative and professional. Under the topic “What do you do?” from the “foreign language in professional communication” course, the students had to imagine themselves as employees of an international company which was going to launch a new product. Here, the project-based learning was implemented, with the idea of the final result in a form of a “documented work” presentation. This project was carried out jointly: the tasks were distributed among all the team members based on their individual characteristics.

Interactive learning educational technologies, in our view, could successfully combine traditional and alternative methods to achieve the goals of the training program and the education standard. So, the brainstorming method proved to be the most effective in the early stage of the implementation of the project-based learning – when selecting a theme, defining the hypotheses and objectives of the project. The “case-study” (situation) method showed its effectiveness in the implementation of cooperative learning while monitoring the material studied. A democratic and creative atmosphere was created in the classroom, when discussing the material, the students and teacher became equal partners. According to the results of our study, this method can be part of project-based learning, with a condition of its usage at the final stage, with the aim of monitoring students’ knowledge. Discussion of small cases was performed in small fragments in the educational process, when students got introduced with the proposed situation directly in class. When using the interactive learning educational technologies of foreign language training, interdisciplinary integration was carried out, that allowed showing the relationship of the academic disciplines and the integrity of the general professional training of the future professionals in a prospective unified multicultural area.

In the course of the implementation of the project-based activities, the students carried out the information retrieval, the way of its layout and processing, and the accumulation of factual knowledge; acquiring the experience in the research work, development of a certain attitude to the phenomenon was carried out, as well as awareness of the cultural value orientations, and creation of the students’ “own product”. The creative process in the context of the project-based activity of the future professionals built up the necessary environment of pair, intra-group, and inter-group interaction between the students, interaction between the teacher and the students and a sense of community, collegiality, mutual respect, and healthy competition.

In the process of our study and implementation of the cooperative learning and the project-based methods in the educational process with students, it was identified that as interactive types of group training, they provided intellectual and moral development of students, their independence, kindness, and tolerant attitude to each other.

Any linguistic worldview determines the perception of the world by its native speakers. It is impossible to overestimate the role and the importance of culture in the formation and language personality development. The system of multicultural linguistic personality formation is of a multi-level character, as the formed personality of a future professional is implementing a phased transition from ethnocentrism to dialogue, and then to the polylogue of cultures. Thus, in educational institutions, foreign language teaching can help to overcome national prejudices and to promote intercultural understanding between different peoples.

## DISCUSSIONS

The proponents of hermeneutics consider polylogue of cultures primarily as communication of consciousnesses. By “consciousness” in this case a set of images and their structures emerging in the activity are meant. To enhance the purposeful formation of a “European consciousness” of the young generation, at the annual meeting of Education Ministers of the European Community (1991) it was proposed to introduce a “European” perspective in general education courses, and to include in the University curricula the materials on economic, political and cultural relations between the countries and peoples of the “big” Europe. This basic, priority complex of humanities is intended to express the individuality of national cultures and their relationship with universal human values, to form an idea about “European identity”, to develop the skills of intercultural communication on this basis. Striving for integration, Europe is actively breaking down inter-state barriers in all the spheres – political, economic, and cultural. Since the second half of 90-ies it has involved professional education as “the least integrated sector of the United Europe”. The formation of a single European area is associated with the solution of problems of the regional educational policy. Recognizing the multicultural Europe, the Council of Europe developed and implemented various projects related to teaching and learning modern languages [8,9].

The Council of Europe has been implementing a language policy for the past several years, aimed at the development of plurilingualism in European countries. In particular, it organizes and finances various projects in the field of foreign languages, helping the participating countries in designing and reforming their national educational programs

in the field of foreign language teaching, in exchanging the experiences and teaching techniques, developing modern methods of teaching foreign languages [9].

Though in Europe they acknowledged the failure of the policy of multiculturalism, believing that migrants should integrate into the Western culture of the state in which they reside; in Western Europe the process of integration in professional education is taking on the features of internationalization. Internationalization in education is a complex, controversial, and lengthy process.

Culture exists as communication, as a polylogue of people of various cultures, as a form of individuals’ free choice of their lives’ meanings and of taking responsibility for their choices and their fate. One of the major goals of foreign language training is the formation of mutual understanding. At any point in the development of the culture its serving language reflects it fully and adequately. Therefore, the driving force of progress and any changes in a language is, ultimately, the society, the members of the national-cultural and linguistic community.

Foreign language training is considered by the European teachers as a contribution to education for peace by resolving cross-cultural conflicts. In educational institutions of EU countries learning a foreign language contributes to the development of international polylogue, as by means of a foreign language a certain person tends to communicate with people from other cultures to understand their specific perceptual system, cognition, thinking, their system of values and actions, to integrate the new experience into their own cultural system and modify it in accordance with the foreign culture. Gupfert H. formulates some postulates, which must comply with the educational programs: “Other peoples and cultures should not be seen as objects, but as historical subjects. You need to show the representatives of other cultures in their life situations, along with their life style, traditions, characteristics and life circumstances” [11].

Multilingualism and polyculturalism, according to the Bologna process, should be seen as the fundamental efficiency criteria of communicative educational technologies in the formation of international polylogue skills. Cooperative learning and project-based learning meet the requirements of multilingualism, that is, “a person’s ability to use two or more languages as a means of communication in most situations and the ability to switch from one language to another in case of need”. These educational learning technologies also meet the requirements of polyculturalism, that is, “a person’s ability to act in accordance with the norms and rules adopted in this cultural community and the ability to switch to other behavior patterns, if necessary” [12].

The emergence in the theory and methodology of foreign language teaching of such area as the “linguistic multicultural education” is due to the increasing interest in the enormous socializing and educational potential of a foreign language. The requirement of globalization is about the formation of a multicultural identity, where an important role is played by multicultural education of students by means of a foreign language. A multicultural linguistic personality is a bearer of a specific linguistic culture, uniting its own characteristics and features of various language communities. It should be noted that the development of foreign language skills in conjunction with the formation of tolerance to the cultural diversity ensures the integrity of the system of training of a future professional for successful communication in a multicultural environment.

Attempts of various linguistic schools to separate their language from culture failed [13]. The language implements, verbalizes the national cultural picture of the world, stores it, and passes it from generation to generation. So when a person learns a foreign word, he/she as if removes a “puzzle piece” out of another cultural worldview, and, trying to combine it with the existing cultural view of the world in his mind, given by the native language, faces such a phenomenon as the interaction of the primary and secondary worldview.

Thus, foreign language training of a future professional should be based on the concept of “the polylogue of cultures” [13], implying a focus on socio-cultural principles of education, when the cultural environment of foreign language training is formed in an intercultural learning situation.

## CONCLUSION

Teaching intercultural communication should be based on a joint study of language and culture using modern educational learning technologies and taking into account positive experience of foreign language training schools in other developed countries. Polylogue, perceived as a fundamental principle of functioning of cultures, points to a significant need of one culture in another. The essence of the “polylogue” approach is to consider intercultural communication as a way of familiarizing future professionals with various cultures with the purpose of formation of planetary consciousness, allowing to work closely with representatives of various countries

and peoples, and to integrate into the global and pan-European cultural and educational area in the course of their professional activities. Intercultural polylogue is one of the areas of future professionals’ competence, a form of inter-human or intercultural communication, which determines the general cultural, professional, and psychological development of the individual.

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