

DEVELOPMENT OF STUDENTS' INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE AS A TOOL OF CURRICULUM INTERNATIONALIZATION

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Abstract

The problems of development of intercultural communicative competence of all participants of the educational process in the conditions of implementation in the universities a wide range of activities for the internationalization of higher education are considered in the article. The authors reveal the essence of the concepts of "internationalization of higher education" and "intercultural competence". An important tool of internationalization, contributing to the solution of its problems, is the study of foreign languages. Particular attention is paid to the description of the experience of Russian universities aimed at finding new solutions to improve the efficiency of students' learning foreign languages. The authors emphasize the necessity of implementation of interactive technologies in the process of teaching foreign languages with the aim of training students to effective intercultural interaction. The formed complex of intercultural competences will allow students to be equal partners of intercultural communication in a foreign language, to use a foreign language for professional development, will contribute to the activation of all processes of internationalization.

Keywords: intercultural competence, internationalization of higher education, foreign language

1. INTRODUCTION

Today we are witnessing a process of active reform of higher education systems in Europe and, in particular, Russia. The main driving force of the changes is the Bologna process, aimed at building a unified space of higher education. The UNESCO report "Higher Education in the 21st Century: Approaches and Practical Measures" (1995) noted that the most important task of improving the quality of educational services is including the "international dimension" of its curriculum: knowledge exchange, the creation of interactive

networks, the mobility of teachers and students, international research projects.

In this context, the internationalization of higher education becomes one of the priorities of universities. We consider the internationalization of higher education as a process of voluntary adoption by an educational institution certain rules and procedures for conducting all kinds of its activities, recognized and used by the world community, with a focus on providing academic staff and students with the opportunity as a result of training to gain knowledge, skills and competencies that would be in demand in any country (Biryukova N.A., Krasilnikova N.V., 2014). Effective implementation of the concept of internationalization has certain advantages both for the development of an individual university, and for the economic, social and cultural development of the country as a whole. In the process of internationalization, a new international educational environment is being formed, where the national interests of its participants are implemented in the most effective forms, and a joint search for solutions to problems is being carried out. Internationalization is considered by universities as a means to improve the quality of higher education, improve the reputation of the university at the national and international levels, attract additional finance and human resources. According to many scientists and politicians, in the 21st century without internationalization any university of any country will not be able to prepare competitive specialists that meet the requirements of the post-industrial information society (Erasmus Impact Study, 2014).

2. MATERIALS & METHODS

Practice shows that the implementation of the strategy of internationalization in Russian universities is associated with several difficulties. They are faced by both providers of educational services and students, teachers, University management. Internationalization has not yet become a priority for the modernization of universities. There are shortcomings in institutional policies, financial resources and legislative gaps. The problem of equivalence of Russian and foreign diplomas is far from being solved, which significantly hinders the exchange of students. The academic staff in universities, their age, the need for training and retraining complicates the process of internationalization. Among the most common barriers to the development of internationalization are financial resources, administrative barriers, lack of awareness of all participants of the educational process about the real possibilities of participation in this process. The most acute problem of internationalization of Russian higher education is the lack of language training of participants of academic mobility. The level of language training in Russian secondary schools does not allow students who have started their studies at the University to take part in numerous student mobility programs offered by international organizations and foundations.

Analysis of the experience of the Mari State University (MarSU) as the basic university of the Volga region of Russia in the successful implementation of internationalization allowed us to identify the following areas of activity:

- Development of language centers as units contributing to the creation and development of multilingual educational environment;
- Teaching language for specific purposes;
- Computer-assisted language learning;
- Content and language integrated learning;
- Development of students' extra-curricular activities that contain an international component.

Many Russian universities have started to design the educational process in such a way that it contributes to the formation and development of foreign language professionally-oriented communicative competence of students. For this purpose, special language centers were opened. Their main goal is to create and develop a multilingual educational environment. Thus, programs aimed at the formation of intercultural competence are conducted for students and University staff. According to a study conducted at MarSU in 2017, 95% of students who have completed these programs have expressed willingness to participate in academic mobility programs, 82% – in international research projects, 76% expressed a desire to continue their education at the next stage abroad and 71% – to go abroad to get a job. The proportion of students who did not attend these courses, but also responded positively to these questions, was significantly lower: 45%, 43%, 33% and 31% respectively. Significant support for the internationalization of the educational process is provided by language centers through the implementation of programs for teachers: teaching academic writing, preparing for a presentation in an international context, writing an application for project funding, intercultural communication programs and others.

Language centers regularly review the content of foreign language courses, making them more profile-oriented, introducing teaching language for specific purposes (LSP). Professionally-oriented foreign language teaching is pragmatic; it is aimed at meeting the needs of the student. Professional requests of students naturally determine the choice of forms and methods of teaching LSP. Our experience in the direct implementation of English language programs for special purposes has shown that, focusing on the content of future professional activities of students, teachers use teaching methods that reflect the specifics of this activity. For example, the training of engineers focuses on the formation of reading skills of scientific literature, while the training of teachers focuses on the formation of skills of monologue and dialogue speech.

The rapid development of the modern information society involves the active use of information and communication technologies in higher education, in particular, in the teaching of foreign languages. In MarSU ICT in teaching foreign languages is considered in the context of computer-assisted language learning (CALL). Learning a language using a computer involves the use of interactive whiteboards, electronic portfolios, intelligent learning systems, virtual games, social networks, blogs, forums, wikis and other learning tools (Kolesova T.V., Biryukova N.A., Kuragina A.A. et al., 2017). The main advantages of using CALL are the following: increasing the motivation and interest of students to learn a foreign language, their independence and autonomy; the development of transversal skills; give students opportunities for effective communication (written and oral) with representatives of different cultures and nationalities, native speakers of different languages; promotion of educational and research cooperation of faculty and students with universities in other countries.

In recent decades, content and language integrated learning (CLIL) technology has become particularly popular. This is one of the effective ways to improve the level of foreign language proficiency and the ability to use it as a means of learning. Our experience clearly shows that the use of a foreign language as a means of teaching a non-linguistic discipline has a positive impact on both professional and linguistic competencies of students. CLIL assumes the use of a foreign language as a means of teaching other disciplines. An important feature of the CLIL methodology is that when studying the content of a non-linguistic discipline in a foreign language, there is a parallel study of the foreign language itself, which has a positive impact on the success of the internationalization of the educational process. According to D. Marsh, the term "subject-language integrated learning "(CLIL) refers to" learning relating to any two-subject-focused educational context in which an additional language, usually a non-native language of learners, is used as a medium in teaching a non-language subject " (Marsh, D., 2002).

The introduction of interactive technologies is one of the most important directions of improving the language training of students, the formation of their foreign language communicative competence. Interactive learning is aimed at improving the efficiency of the educational process: not from theory to practice, but from the formation of new experience to its theoretical understanding through application in practice. In comparison with traditional forms of conducting classes, the interaction of teachers and students in interactive learning is changing. There is a mutually directed activity of subjects, constructive cooperation of the teacher and students in joint activity, increase of own activity of students and development of their self-training. Interactive technologies currently exist in the form of interactive tests and simulators, computer training programs, interactive electronic textbooks and manuals, virtual workshops, interactive business games, mobile applications. They are increasingly used in the educational process and are used in teaching various disciplines, including foreign language. The use of numerous interactive methods creates conditions for the development of foreign language communicative competence of students in various types of speech activity, as well as leads to mutual understanding, interaction, joint solution of common issues (Kondratenko E.V., Biryukova N.A., Kondratenko I.B. et al., 2018).

A new direction of internationalization is the development of extracurricular activities of students containing international components. The examples of such programs are: Summer school of Mari language and culture and Summer school of Russian language and culture for Chinese students; clubs of international friendship of students; international Finno-Ugric student forum "Wealth of Finno-Ugric peoples"; Total English – Total dictation and quizzes in English. These events, in our opinion, contribute to the effective involvement of Russian and foreign students in an active dialogue and, as a result, the expansion of their knowledge about other countries, the formation of respect for representatives of other nations and cultures, prepare students for effective international cooperation.

3. RESULTS

In the course of the research to assess its results, a survey of students, teachers, heads of departments of international cooperation and heads of educational programs was conducted. The survey of students was

aimed at determining the degree of their involvement in the University activities on internationalization. According to the results of the analysis of the data obtained, the basic elements of internationalization, which affect the formation of students' intercultural competence are the following:

- Participation in additional courses of foreign language and / or intercultural communication;
- Application for participation in international student exchange programs;
- Participation in international research projects initiated by teachers;
- Membership in international student associations and clubs.

The Russian students attributed the main factors contributing to the effective acquisition of competencies necessary for life and successful work in a multicultural environment:

- Study / internship abroad while studying at home University (68 %);
- Obtaining a degree in a foreign University (55 %);
- The use of teachers in the classroom of their own international teaching and research experience (72 %);
- The use of interactive teaching methods with an international component (comparative studies, the method of cases with the consideration of foreign experience, business games) by teachers) (85 %);
- Training in groups where there are foreign students (67 %).

The foreign students noted the effectiveness of university linguistic centers, providing an opportunity to take a course of Russian language; international student associations, operating with the support of universities.

The respondents also noted the effectiveness of the staff of the departments of international cooperation of universities, as well as teachers, introducing them to the possibilities of studying abroad and giving examples of foreign modern state of science in the field of the discipline. As the main reasons for participation in academic mobility programs, foreign students indicated personal development, improving the level of foreign language skills, familiarity with another culture, expanding the existing resume to the international level. At the same time, the main difficulties faced by foreign students were the lack of proficiency in the language of teaching, cultural shock, misunderstanding on the part of some teachers. Upon graduation, students with experience of studying abroad and / or participating in international projects gave more positive answers to their plans to continue their studies abroad, enroll in a double degree program and get a job abroad.

Some specific features of teaching foreign languages in the context of internationalization were defined: the need to implement communicative technologies of formation of skills in all types of speech activity (reading, writing, listening, speaking); taking into account the individual interests and characteristics of students, different cognitive styles to improve the efficiency of learning; the use of communicative tasks that contribute to the formation of various competencies; authenticity of educational materials, which is designed to provide samples of natural speech of native speakers of different spheres of communication (Krasilnikova N.V., Biryukova N.A., Kolesova T.V. et al., 2017). The formed complex of intercultural competences will allow students to be equal partners of intercultural communication in a foreign language, to use a foreign language for professional development, will contribute to the activation of all processes of internationalization.

The study showed that the high level of foreign language proficiency is insufficient for effective professional, business and socio-cultural communication of a specialist. He must learn to understand the characteristics of participation in intercultural communication, which presupposes the observance of universal norms of behavior, rules and categories for the cultures of the world, combined with specific norms of etiquette peculiar to specific cultures. Today we are talking about the need to prepare a modern specialist to participate in intercultural communication as the main goal of teaching foreign languages in universities and the unique role of a foreign language as a leading means of penetration into another culture.

4. CONCLUSION

The expansion and qualitative change in international cooperation, Russia's accession to the Bologna process, its entry into the global market have made a foreign language not just a means of communication in a foreign language professional environment, but also popular means of improving the intellectual and practical activities of a specialist. The state and society began to feel an urgent need for people, practically, and often at a high professional level, speaking foreign languages. There is no doubt that modern society has become more aware that knowledge of a foreign language and culture of the country of this language

gives undeniable advantages: more chances to integrate into a rapidly changing society with a market economy, better employment, fully understand the culture of other peoples, a deeper understanding of world problems.

For young people, foreign language communicative competence becomes important as a means of mutual understanding and interaction between people, as a way to include in the processes of information exchange and internationalization of cultural achievements, science, Economics and technology, familiarizing with other national culture, which significantly affects the cultural and educational level, value orientations of the individual. In the context of the ongoing processes of internationalization of the world labor market, foreign language communicative competence of Russian University graduates increases the prestige of their professional education, and language resources enhance the competitiveness of domestic specialists, expand their professional and socio-cultural horizons. The inclusion of Russia in the international educational and economic community, the expanding multifaceted ties with the countries of the United Europe and the United States, the changed status of a foreign language in the modern world suggest updating the content of foreign language teaching taking into account the internationalization of education, which will provide an opportunity for Russian students to get an education that meets international standards, without leaving their University, will increase the attractiveness of the University for foreign students, it will make it possible to compare and correlate the results of education at different levels.

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