

CULTURAL ASPECT OF E-LEARNING

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Abstract

In modern conditions of global integration processes, skills that are associated with foreign language communication in the professional and business sphere are of particular relevance and significance. The problems existing in the system of higher education, such as reduction in the number of higher educational institutions and in the teaching staff, optimization of university and departmental structures, reveal a contradiction in the field of teaching foreign languages to students of non-linguistic specialties: a high requirement for the level of knowledge of a foreign language with a rather limited number of teaching hours that are allocated for its study.

One of the ways out of this situation can be the introduction of open educational online resources into the educational process which will dominate the development of education in the next decades. The aim of the paper is to explore the problem of cultural adaptation of open online educational resources, which involves taking into account the trainees' belonging to one or another type of culture (collectivist or individualist, male or female type, visual or textual perception of information) and cultural sensitivity (linguistic, economic, historical, political, religious, gender, technological, graphic and other factors that are also endowed with cultural identity).

The authors study in details the abovementioned factors and the requirements for them in e-learning. The key role in this process remains for the teacher who is a carrier of the native culture for students, who, for the successful mastering of the material, can perform the language and cultural translation of the electronic course. Language as an integral part of culture plays an exceptional role in global online learning. It is important to take into account that in the course of using open educational resources, various kinds of cultural difficulties may arise related to the relationship between countries, intergender relations, religion, historical and economic factors. The technological, graphic and design components of open educational resources, which are also closely related to a particular culture, also need to be adapted to increase the pedagogical effect of using online learning.

Keywords: E-education, Open Online Educational Resources, Intercultural Differences, Cultural Adaptation

1. INTRODUCTION

In modern conditions of global integration processes, the skills that are associated with foreign language communication in professional and business sphere are very important. In this regard, the future specialists of non-linguistic areas are faced with the task of mastering oral and written speech in a foreign language at a level that would allow successfully solve various communication tasks in the most typical for a certain

professional sphere situations, as well as organize the process of self-education and professional development.

The concept of language training of a specialist should be based on learning all types of speech activity to ensure the formation of the necessary language competencies: the readiness of the student to read professionally oriented literature and periodicals in order to extract professionally relevant information, participation in oral communication in the professional and business sphere, conducting business correspondence and documentation using modern information and communication tools, translation professionally-oriented texts from a foreign language into Russian and vice versa, writing works based on content-stylistic analysis and creative processing authentic professional texts.

As the main principle in the training of specialists in various areas in the field of foreign languages, we are considering the organization of a comprehensive professionally oriented learning a foreign language, which is based on a modular system and is aimed at learning communication in various situations of communication in order to solve professionally significant tasks.

In modern linguodidactics, various theories and concepts of learning are used, for example, associative-reflex concept; theory of gradual formation of mental actions; design, communicative, intensive, activity concepts; the concept of continuous education, etc. More often all active teaching methods are introduced into the practice of teaching a foreign language.

On the other hand, it should be noted the contradiction that has arisen in the system of modern higher education in the field of teaching foreign languages to students of non-linguistic specialties: high requirement for the level of foreign language proficiency with a rather limited number of teaching hours, allocated for his teaching. In addition, processes related to the reduction number of higher educational institutions, optimization of university and departmental structures, reduction teaching staff, etc. All this leads to the need to optimize the educational process, including the use of electronic technologies and the development of effective methods for their applications.

We believe that one of the ways out of this situation can be the introduction of process of open educational online resources. It is well known that online education is acute. It easily overcomes borders and involves various cultures and languages in its orbit. Consequently, education is increasingly becoming intercultural. Intercultural electronic education is a broad topic that should be studied from different points of view. Our attention focuses on necessity of flexible changing of the content of open educational courses, which crosses borders.

There are a number of factors that can be taken into account to ensure the successful development of free accessible educational materials: language barrier, technical accessibility, cultural differences, traditions in areas of education, teaching techniques and methods, computer literacy, software provision, the attitude of the educational institution to open educational resources, etc.

2. RESULTS

Many researchers have recently paid more attention to the transformation of the content of the courses in order to adapt them in different ways. So, D. Laurillard and Yibin Zhang explore the problem of planning and collaborative learning through open educational resources within the framework of the intercultural use of tools for providing educational design (Zhang, Laurillard, 2015); S. Downes considers the problem of different approaches to the process of knowledge adaptation (Downes, 2007); in the center of scientific interest of G. Conole is the development of more pedagogically sound mass Open Online Courses (MOOCs) that would provide better assurance of the quality of open online learning (Conole, 2010), etc. Among domestic researchers who pay attention to the problem of learning with using open educational resources in the system of vocational education and ways to adaptations - L.M. Nikonorova, Zh.I. Aituganova, N.A. Dmitrievskaya, M.S. Kogan, A.S. Voronkin, N.N. Datsun, L.Yu. Urazaeva and others.

Intercultural exchange of knowledge, access to various educational resources, including courses from leading universities in the world, are considered as the main advantages of open Internet education. However, it should be borne in mind that students from different countries and cultures learn differently. Therefore, effective teaching and learning on the Internet is possible only if the cultural aspect is taken into account.

3. DISCUSSION

Culture, as you know, reflects the peculiarities of a person's perception of the world around him, his values, thinking, and behavior. It comprehensively affects communication, cognitive processes of the individual, and

the features of mastering educational material. In this regard, the design of open electronic courses should be created taking into account intercultural adaptation.

So, Richard E. Nisbett, an American social psychologist, in his book "The Geography of Thoughts: How Asians and Westerners Think Differently... and Why" reveals different ways of thinking among representatives of the West and the East, emphasizing that the cultural characteristics of people influence the way of thinking much more than previously thought. In particular, the scientist clearly demonstrates the differences in the ways of perception of visual and textual information by carriers of different cultures [5]. Therefore, in relation to the field of e-learning, open online training courses should provide for "alternative actions", i.e. different ways of participating in culturally sensitive learning.

In his theory of cultural dimensions, the Dutch sociologist, specialist in management theory Gert N. Hofstede proposed a system of indicators that determine the cultural characteristics of people of different cultures. As a result of the study, five basic indicators (criteria) were formulated by which he distinguished cultures:

- 1) Isolation (collectivism - individualism);
- 2) Power distance (from low to high);
- 3) Uncertainty avoidance (strong - weak);
- 4) Assertiveness (masculinity - femininity);
- 5) Strategic thinking (short-term - long-term orientation to the future) (Hofstede, 1980).

The indicator "individualism-collectivism" determines belonging to a certain culture: the culture of individualism or the culture of collectivism. In relation to the educational process, in the first case, students regard the teacher as their assistant, mentor. Students prefer independent work, waiting for an assessment of their individual, rather than collective work, which, for example, is more typical for students from the United States. In the second case, students are focused on teamwork, cooperation in learning (Latin American countries, China).

The indicator "power distance" indicates an unequal distribution of power among members of society. With regard to learning, in one case, the educational process is hierarchical, and teachers stand above the students, their knowledge and qualifications are not questioned on their part (the countries of Southeast Asia, Russia, Arab countries), while in the second case, teachers and students act as equal participants in the educational process (Germany, Denmark).

The indicator "uncertainty aversion/avoidance" indicates the attitude of cultural representatives to the factor of certainty/uncertainty, the degree of perception and response to unfamiliar situations. In the first case, the classroom will require a clear formulation of goals and objectives, a given work schedule; in such a learning situation, accuracy in completing tasks is valued. In the case of training representatives of a culture with a low uncertainty avoidance index, multiple answers, approximate goals and objectives, and the expectation of rewards for originality in completing tasks are preferred.

A culture that is characterized by the indicator "masculinity" is aimed at achieving a result at any cost; countries with a high value of this indicator are classified as "male type" (Japan, Italy, Austria, Mexico, Philippines). Representatives of this culture are characterized by such qualities as rivalry, self-confidence, purposefulness, commitment to material values. Countries with a low value of this indicator (Denmark, Norway, and Sweden) belong to the "female cultural type", which is characterized by respect for relationships, cultural values, concern for the quality of life. Trainees belonging to the male type of culture openly compete with each other, the result is important for them and they are very upset when they fail; in the second case, the student audience is calmer, the intensity of rivalry is weaker.

The indicator "Strategic thinking (short-term or long-term orientation to the future)" determines the orientation towards solving long-term goals, the desire or lack of it to look into the future. For cultures with high values of this parameter (Southeast Asia), prudence, perseverance in achieving goals, and fortitude are characteristic; for cultures with a low value (Europe) - adherence to traditions, fulfillment of social obligations.

Model with cultural indicators has been repeatedly criticized by G.N. Hofstede. So, A. Emundson, improving and creatively developing the Hofstede model, in 2007 developed a new model on its basis called the "Cultural Adaptation Process", adapted to the educational process. Emundson's cultural model includes the following parameters:

- Translation from one language into another;

- Localization in different cultures;
- Access to technologies for the full use of electronic educational resources;
- Taking into account cultural differences among trainees.

Edmundson rightly states the need to use a pilot test option culturally adapted program/course before its launch for a wide audience [Edmundson, 2007, pp. 267-290].

Adaptation of educational material and teaching methods, taking into account multiculturalism, requires the creation a new educational paradigm based on a deep penetration into the psychology of a separate, awareness of the unique features that this culture brings to the global world.

One of the solutions of the problem of taking into account cultural differences in the implementation of open online education is blended learning, which is a combination of:

- 1) the type of education traditional for a particular culture;
- 2) open e-learning.

In blended learning, teachers are representatives of their native culture, who, for

successful mastering of the material can perform language and cultural translation of the electronic course.

Language, as an integral part of culture, plays an exceptional role in global online learning. Without language proficiency, an open educational course of study will be useless both for teachers as well as for students. One of the main linguistic difficulties is fifteen conversion of educational materials created in English or another foreign language, culture-oriented, culturally adapted, intellectually developing materials that form the necessary competencies in a new language. Translation is not a simple replacement some words by others, this is a different semantics and new connotations.

Note that most of the learning materials used in e-learning are focused on English and Western culture, including educational texts, keyboards, software. One way out is seen in the emphasis for cultural adaptation on programmatic visualization, incorporating familiar and understandable for the host culture icons/images.

It is important to consider that in the course of using open educational resources, there may be various cultural difficulties associated with the relationship between countries, gender relations, religion, historical and economic factors.

We emphasize that technologies also have cultural parameters. In various countries in education, different computer systems are used. The software must also be compatible in different countries for successful online learning. Internet access is required. Accounting for cultural differences in technology allows course developers and teachers to produce the necessary cultural adaptation of educational materials.

4. SUMMARY

Curriculum design is one of the most important aspects in the development of educational software security. Course designers should take into account cultural characteristics such as learners (for example, individual or collective orientation), styles in communication and interaction (for example, respect for seniority, honoring people of higher rank, striving for harmony in communications characteristic of the Asian style of behavior, which lead to more formality in speech, avoidance of directness and open criticism), etc.

Learners need to understand the content and meaning of visual information in the learning process. Graphic images are the visual language of a particular culture. The cultural-adapted interface is focused on a certain culture and serves the maximum achievement educational goals. Effective online course, web page or educational multimedia materials must combine all the necessary components, including cultural objects, used for educational purposes. Cultural recognition (films, newspapers, paintings, companies, sights, geographical names) increases the motivation for learning, and students are proud of their country and its culture.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The localization of open educational online courses and its cultural aspect are extremely important. Teachers should turn the educational resource into a clear and accessible for student audience, taking into account its belonging to a particular culture, including language, social, political, gender, religious and other factors. Technological, graphic and design components of open educational resources, which are also closely related to certain culture needs to be adapted to enhance the pedagogical effect of use of online learning.

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