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МЕЖКУЛЬТУРНАЯ КОМПЕТЕНТНОСТЬ КАК КЛЮЧЕВОЙ КОМПОНЕНТ СОВРЕМЕННОГО ВЫСШЕГО ОБРАЗОВАНИЯ В БЕЛАРУСИ

В статье рассматривается ключевая роль межкультурной компетентности в высшем образовании Республики Беларусь, подчеркивается ее значение в формировании всесторонне развитых специалистов, способных успешно ориентироваться в глобализованном многокультурном мире.

Ключевые слова: межкультурная компетентность; высшее образование; глобализация; Беларусь; компетентностный подход.

INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE AS A CORE COMPONENT OF MODERN HIGHER EDUCATION IN BELARUS

The article explores the pivotal role of intercultural competence in higher education, particularly in Belarus, highlighting its significance in shaping well-rounded professionals capable of successfully navigating a globalized, multicultural world.

Key words: intercultural competence; higher education; globalization; Belarus; Competency-Based Approach.

In 1990, Nelson Mandela famously said: “education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world” [1]. Indeed, education is the most significant tool of our society, and with the help of education the next generation’s mindset is shaped, which leads to a renewed society and, hopefully, the continuous progress of the humanity, globally.

In today’s globalized world, universities are not only centres of academic knowledge but also spaces where diverse cultural perspectives meet and interact. Intercultural connections play a crucial role in shaping the quality and relevance of modern higher education. Through intercultural connections, students and educators gain opportunities to develop empathy, tolerance, and the ability to communicate effectively across cultural boundaries – skills that are essential for virtually any human being. Such connections foster mutual understanding and collaboration, preparing graduates to engage responsibly in an interconnected world. Therefore, integrating intercultural engagement into higher education is fundamental for cultivating global citizens who can contribute to sustainable social, cultural, and economic development.

In the Republic of Belarus, the evolution and implementation of higher education are indeed shaped by the processes of massification and globalization [2]. These trends align with the nation’s commitment to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) – a universal set of objectives adopted by the United Nations in 2015 to eradicate poverty, safeguard the planet, and ensure peace and prosperity for all by 2030 [3].

Considering global educational trends, *The Concept for the Development of the Education System of the Republic of Belarus until 2030* emphasizes the learner as a central subject, aiming to develop each individual’s abilities and meet personal educational needs. This humanistic approach shifts attention from traditional teacher-centered methods toward productive, cognitive, and creative student activities [2].

The Code of Education of the Republic of Belarus articulates the aim of higher education as follows:

“*Article 198.* Higher education is a level of basic education aimed at developing the individuality of students, cadets, and trainees, their intellectual and creative abilities, and developing the competencies necessary for professional activities culminating in the award of a specialist qualification with a general higher, advanced higher, or specialized higher education and/or degree” [4].

Thus, the focus is placed on nurturing students’ individuality, intellectual and creative potential, and the acquisition of essential competencies.

The competency-based approach in our country is recognized as the dominant educational framework [2]. Within the specialty “Modern Foreign Languages”, for instance, the universal, basic professional, and specialized competencies are singled out.

The same regulatory document outlines expected learning outcomes for bachelor's programs. Some of these outcomes explicitly contribute to the development of intercultural competence. For instance, graduates are expected to:

- communicate in a foreign language to solve interpersonal and intercultural problems;
- work effectively in teams and demonstrate tolerance toward social, ethnic, religious, cultural, and other differences;
- apply linguistic and stylistic tools appropriately in communication, observing the sociocultural norms of the target language community;
- design and manage the educational process, including within intercultural contexts [5].

Returning to the notion of developing individuality as a key educational objective, it becomes evident that members of modern society should be capable of global thinking, self-awareness, and understanding not only of their native culture but also of those belonging to other nations and humanity as a whole. Achieving this goal necessitates the formation of intercultural competence, which comprises tolerance and a positive, respectful attitude toward one's own culture and others, all of which comes from the recognition and appreciation of diverse cultural values and traditions [6, p. 157].

Various scholars interpret the concept of intercultural competence in different ways. Some view it primarily as a specific form of communication, while others consider it the ultimate goal of foreign language education. Many researchers, however, merge these approaches, emphasizing that one cannot exist without the other.

According to A. P. Sadokhin, intercultural competence constitutes a set of an individual's knowledge and skills employed for effective intercultural interaction, accompanied by constant verification of communication outcomes through feedback [7, p. 278]. O. D. Mitrofanova describes it as a correlation between a person's ability to realize themselves within a dialogue of cultures and the process of mastering another linguistic culture while simultaneously expanding their cultural experience [8, p. 14].

I. L. Pluzhnik draws attention to another aspect – the difficulty of fully comprehending the psychology of representatives of other national cultures within the traditional university framework. She argues that forming an individual capable of navigating multiple linguistic and cultural contexts requires more dynamic and experience-based methods [9]. Scholars such as P. Adler, R. Norton, D. Lutsker, and R. Birdwhistle refer to such individuals as “interculturally oriented personalities”, “multicultural personalities”, “universal personalities”, or even “people mediators” (as noted by V. Gudikunst). The preparation of such an individual can thus be viewed as one of the core missions of higher education [10, p. 53].

A. V. Khutorskoy defines intercultural competence as the ability to interact with others based on the knowledge, skills, and abilities acquired through intercultural and communicative experiences [11]. Meanwhile, N. N. Vasilyeva understands it as awareness of the characteristics of a particular society that shape individual behavior and the appropriate use of nonverbal components rooted in national values, customs, and traditions [12, p. 56].

In general, these definitions highlight the dual nature of intercultural competence – it functions simultaneously as both a means and an end of the educational process. Within the traditional paradigm of language teaching, one becomes interculturally competent *through* the act of intercultural communication itself.

The problem pointed at by I. L. Pluzhnik brings us to the issue of compatibility of the traditional teaching methods used in the majority of higher educational establishments with the possibility of intercultural competence acquisition by students. It seems that universities should embed deliberately designed, experience-based pedagogies across curricula so that intercultural competence is learned as a practice rather than only as knowledge. Structured experiential learning (such as study-abroad, short-term immersion, and international service-learning) can be one of the many options for providing the opportunities for the authentic cultural competence acquisition. Extended, guided immersion produces measurable gains in intercultural effectiveness and deeper cultural understanding when combined with preparatory and follow-up reflection [13, p. 6–8].

The sociocultural educational space serves as an arena that reflects cultural diversity and encourages students to cultivate reflective capacities necessary for understanding cultural values. Education, as a social and cultural institution, facilitates a person's entry into culture by familiarizing them with its values. However, the mission of education and culture must transcend the boundaries of national heritage. They should aim to enrich both individual and collective consciousness with universal human values, thus fostering cultural and moral development [14, p. 3].

When discussing the understanding of another people's culture, it's important to remember that its foundation lies in the degree to which the younger generation has developed a culture of differences. Understanding culture will help a person gain a deeper understanding of their own culture, understand themselves, integrate into the culture of their people, and become proficient in the language, rituals, and values so that the process of enculturation and socialization for each of us is active. Mastering the values of one's native culture makes one's perception of other cultures more accurate, profound, and comprehensive [6, p. 158].

The concept of cultural intelligence (CQ), introduced by Earley and Ang, can also contribute to a deeper understanding of intercultural competence. Cultural intelligence represents a set of abilities that enable individuals to comprehend and

interact effectively with people from diverse cultural backgrounds. It involves developing humility and respect toward unfamiliar cultures, recognizing one's own cultural assumptions and biases, learning about the communication styles and behaviours of different groups, and cultivating the ability to navigate intercultural exchanges with sensitivity and adaptability [15, p. 336].

Cultural intelligence plays a crucial role in cross-cultural communication, fostering empathy, awareness, effective interaction, conflict resolution, and success in global contexts. It encourages inclusivity, promotes mutual understanding, and enhances personal and professional relationships. Possessing a high level of CQ allows individuals not only to adjust to multicultural environments but also to thrive in them by demonstrating respect, open-mindedness, and the ability to build genuine connections across cultural boundaries [16, p. 160].

Thus, the formation of intercultural competence emerges as a pivotal goal within the framework of contemporary higher education. It aligns with both international tendencies and national priorities, emphasizing the development of tolerance, openness, and effective engagement with cultural diversity. By embedding intercultural competence into educational standards, universities ensure that their graduates are prepared for the demands of a globalized labour market while contributing to their personal growth and humanistic development.

Moreover, the continuous focus on reflective learning, cultural intelligence, and value-based education guarantees that future professionals are not only equipped to function in an interconnected world but are also capable of thriving within it. Through these efforts, higher education fulfils its essential mission – shaping individuals who embody intellectual flexibility, moral awareness, and a deep appreciation of cultural diversity.

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