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STUDENTS' CROSS-CULTURAL COMPETENCE BUILDING IN ESP TEACHING

Due to the growth of international relations and globalization, society is becoming multicultural. Changes in society necessitate changes in the system of higher education and English language teaching. According to the domestic and foreign research, a contemporary system of education must be culture oriented. No wonder that cross-cultural approach is one of the fastest-growing areas in English language teaching. Teaching English cross-culturally will allow graduates to use a foreign language as a means of professional and interpersonal communication and as a tool of cross-cultural communication in modern society. It becomes obvious that communication, language and culture can't be separated. Successful cross-cultural communication demands not only linguistic fluency, but cultural awareness and skills. That is why modern professionals need to possess cross-cultural communication skills and cross-cultural awareness. This involves uncovering and understanding of the ways of interpretation and acceptance of other cultural patterns in business interaction.

The Department of Cross-Cultural Communication of the Academy of Public Administration under the aegis of the President of the Republic of Belarus takes into account the current trends in ESP teaching and takes practical steps to raise the level of students' cross-cultural communication. Priority is given to building up students' cross-cultural competence, which involves solid cultural background knowledge and skills of communicative behaviour (both verbal and nonverbal), as well as an ability to communicate in foreign language with people from other cultures and countries. Culturally different patterns of communication are a common cause of misunderstanding and may be a source of confusion in business deals, which can produce embarrassing results. To avoid such misunderstanding a professional communicator should understand the differences in communication styles between his / her own and other cultures and be familiar with culturally-determined patterns of verbal and nonverbal communication in business. Taking

this fact into consideration the Department of Cross-Cultural Communication directs its effort to assist students in understanding a multicultural world and other people's history, culture, traditions, values. In this context, much attention is paid to shaping cross-cultural awareness and communicative skills. Such approach helps to link the acquired knowledge and skills with practical activity of prospective public administrators and eliminate difficulties in cross-cultural communication. This, in turn, will allow public administrators to establish and develop successful business contacts, build proper business relationships with their foreign partners, understand and accept different models of behaviour and avoid misunderstanding in cross-cultural interaction.

However, the question arises of how to carry out this task in the framework of the current syllabus and the amount of academic hours provided for ESP teaching.

The answer, in our opinion, lies in the following. First of all, in advancing the level of students' motivation. We try to influence positively on the motivation of the students, primarily by making the process of learning interesting. This is done through a lot of activities, such as the group projects "Belarus on the Map of the World, in the Heart of Everyone", the business game "International Conference: "Actual Problems of Public Administration", presentations, project works, round-table discussions, essays which are included into the programme of "The Week of Foreign Languages", cross-cultural role-plays, debates, scientific reports, quizzes conducted in the framework of the club "SCOFI", etc. These are kinds of work which help the students to integrate the English language into the network of their own communication competence and improve their cross-cultural communication skills. Such activities have become an essential part of teaching English cross-culturally for public administration students.

Secondly, in working out the strict requirements for the selection of educational material for cross-cultural communication, such as educational and cognitive value, authenticity, novelty, diversity. We regularly use authentic material from the target culture to bring the world of the target culture into the classroom and strictly follow the rule: educational material must be selected according to the interests of students and their language proficiency.

Thirdly, in providing a thematic content of educational materials and textbooks for ESP teaching. For example, the volume of educational materials can be the same, however, the cross-cultural content can vary greatly.

Fourthly, in greater involvement of audio and visual aids, TV and radio broadcasts, Internet resources into the process of education. Authentic sources such as video clips, newspaper reports and others are used as a means of expanding students' ability to identify observable cultural features of the target culture. The students are given the opportunity to gather information, deduce facts about everyday life in the countries with different cultures, evaluate their perceptions of various cultural patterns and modify any misconception they may have. Supporting materials, such as diagrams, tables, drawings which generalize and illustrate data on cross-cultural communication are also very important. These types of materials can be used in the classroom and in extracurricular educational activity of students.

Fifthly, in applying modern formats (discourses, debates, case studies, cross-cultural role plays, presentations, etc.). Contemporary methods and technologies used in ESP teaching allow to simulate various situations of cross-cultural communication, which, in turn, broaden students' outlook and help them to become equal members of the international community. That is why they are very useful for classroom communication.

Finally, in working out textbooks integrating cross-cultural component into the ESP teaching practice. This will allow the students to link the acquired knowledge and skills in cross-cultural communication with practical activity directly related to their future profession. A careful examination of the resources available on the market showed a dearth of this kind of textbooks. That is why it was decided to issue a manual 'Professional Communication in Cross-Cultural Environment'. This decision satisfies contemporary demands of ESP teaching, which integrates linguistic, social, professional and cultural aspects. This manual aims at helping students to increase their consciousness of cultural differences in values and attitudes, to learn the models of behaviour of people from other cultures, to get necessary skills of cross-cultural communication, to consider the characteristics of their own culture in the context of other cultures and the world culture in general. The manual is designed for the first, second and third year students of specialities 'Public Administration and Economics', 'Public Administration and Law', 'Information Resources Management.' Nine units of the manual encompass the following topics: "What is Culture? Cross-Cultural Differences, Values and Norms", "Good Nonverbal Communication, Good Business", "Do's and Taboos around the World", "Cross-Cultural Differences in Management", "Leadership across Cultures", "Cross-Cultural Business Etiquette", "Strategies for Effective Cross-Cultural Communication: Negotiations", "National Cultures and Corporate Core Values", "Religion and Business Culture: Where do they Meet?", "Cross-Cultural Competence and How One Can Improve it", "Managing Cross-Cultural Communication."

Each unit consists of the following sections: **Anticipating the Issue.** Its aim is to define student's background knowledge and skills in the sphere of cross-cultural communication. A set of tasks and video clips are suggested for this purpose. **Read, Watch and Discuss.** This section includes 4-6 informative authentic texts and 4-6 video clips. They are supplemented by a number of tasks and activities, which are used for discussion and practicing different situations of cross-cultural communication, which, in turn, encourage students to recognize and explore their own cultural assumptions about both the target and the native cultures. **Cross-Cultural Case Studies** and **Role play.** The main activities of these sections (cross-cultural role-plays, case studies, simulations, discourses, etc.) are oriented towards practical usage. They highlight the problems and misunderstandings experienced by people in different cross-cultural situations which demand effective solution. Such activities ask students to examine culturally sensitive situations and choose the most appropriate behaviour for the situation. **Miscellaneous.** The tasks of this section suggest unexpected situations and

circumstances, which stimulate students' intellectual curiosity about the target culture, encourage their imagination, creativity, initiative and develop skills of cross-cultural communication. Periodical achievement tests and finals are used for diagnostic purposes and for evaluations.

Thus, the main aim of the Department of Cross-Cultural Communication to integrate cross-cultural component into the process of ESP teaching has become a reality. To achieve this purpose we followed certain practical teaching principles:

- make the studies of cultural behaviour an integral part of the lesson;
- aim for all levels to achieve cross-cultural understanding – awareness of their own culture, as well as that of the target language;
- recognize that not all teaching about culture implies behaviour change, but merely an awareness and tolerance of the culture influences affecting one's own and others' behaviour [1, p. 8].

In order to promote cross-cultural interaction in the classroom and increase students' cultural awareness we use a task-oriented approach, which is characterized by joint work of the students and cooperative learning tasks.

In conclusion it is necessary to say that practical steps of the Department of Cross-Cultural Communication, aimed at building up students' cross-cultural competence in ESP teaching will provide prospective public administrators with wide opportunities to acquire cross-cultural communication skills, knowledge of the main aspects of "business cultures", professional ethical codes and standards of the modern business world. This is very important because according to numerous surveys, three-quarters of all failures in establishing business contacts happens due to the lack of cross-cultural communication skills.

LITERATURE

1. Tomlan, B. Cultural Awareness / B. Tomlan, S. Stepleski, A. Maley. – N.Y. : Oxford Univ. Press, 1993. – 160 p.