

SOCIO-CULTURAL COMPETENCE IN TEACHING FOREIGN LANGUAGES

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Abstract. This article is devoted to the problem of integrating socio-cultural components into teaching and upbringing through foreign languages. The aim of teaching a foreign language means not only acquiring communication skill but also forming cultural and linguistic personality. This fact causes the emergence of new concepts in foreign language teaching e.g. concepts of intercultural communication and socio-cultural learning. The main aim of any communication is to be understood by interlocutor. The effectiveness of this process is directly dependent on the reached level of mutual understanding between communicants. To achieve this aim partners should have the willingness and capacity to form dialogue of cultures which presupposes the existence of a socio-cultural competence. Sociocultural competence includes knowledge about values, beliefs, behavior patterns, customs, traditions, language and cultural achievements peculiar to society. This competence occurs in the framework of socio-cultural education and training, i.e. in the process of personalizing the culture and national traditions of the studied language country..

Keywords: interculturalism, socio-cultural competence, foreign culture, communication, cognitive, tolerance, cross-cultural.

1. Introduction

Sociocultural concept of education and upbringing comes from the fact that foreign languages and cultures became part of everyday life in all countries of the world. Ongoing changes and reforms of the educational system in Russia, including new Federal Educational Standards Administration, teachers are more involved in adopting educational programs, writing reports, giving analytical data to the officials and so on (16). Nevertheless, language lesson should encourage students to be free from prejudice of foreign cultures and make them capable of intercultural communication. The interaction of cultures engenders communication, a dialogue clearly characterized by M. Bakhtin. "Unity of culture is an open unity: a foreign culture only reveals itself more fully and deeper in the eyes of another culture" [4]. Intercultural communication requires a high level of knowledge about domestic culture and culture of studied language country. Language cannot be taught and learned without native speakers' society. Acquired information about natural conditions and lives of other culture representatives and political, economic and cultural development is of great importance in teaching process. Discussions about cultural peculiarities of studied language country, as well as acquaintance with routine problems, can arise interest in unknown culture and language and create a deeper understanding of them. In the modern system of education intercultural communication is widely integrated in the learning process as one of the leading humanitarian disciplines. [7].

2. Materials and methods

Scholars distinguish following methods for formation of socio-cultural competence:

1) Comparative method includes various kinds of discussions. At classes students discuss those traditions, customs which differ significantly from their native culture. 2) Method of "critical incidents" is aimed at identifying differences in verbal and non-verbal communication. According to this method, trainees are offered a description of the incident in communication that causes difficulties in interaction of different cultures representatives due to cultural differences and misunderstanding of the situation by one of the partners. 3) Method of "cultural capsules". It accentuates one of the differences in cultures, for example, the difference between buyers in Germany and Russia [5]. 4) Role play. Teacher instructs the group to hold a party with representatives of another culture. Students should greet guests according to etiquette. The teacher and the other trainees not only observe, but also critically assess the verbal and non-verbal communication of the students.

3. Results and Discussion

True interculturalism encompasses not only one's own action in a foreign language and a cultural society, but also the action of a representative of a different culture in a foreign language and a cultural society [6].

But, despite the willingness of both sides, there can always be intercultural misunderstandings, since communication partners lack certain knowledge about traditions, religious features, taboos, norms and values or extralinguistic rules of behavior of another culture.

It should be noted that the further cultures are distant from each other, the greater is the probability of intercultural misunderstandings.

Thus, the socio-cultural competence covers the following aspects:

- formation and achievement of this competence in foreign culture;
- reflection of one's own culture and ability to talk about it in a foreign language;
- achievement of intercultural understanding leading to tolerance and mutual respect [1].

Sociocultural knowledge includes knowledge of social and cultural life, knowledge and experience of one's own and foreign culture, owning and owning a foreign language, the ability to recognize and analyze the situation, give it an adequate assessment, find ways to solve problems and achieve the set goals.

We agree with V. V. Safonova, who assigns the following to the main provisions of socio-cultural competence:

- need for a preliminary study of socio-cultural situation in the country and the national environment of studied language;[3].
- accounting for bicultural language education by changing its content, namely, socialization, humanization, education and education in the spirit of peace, respect for human rights;
- socio-cultural competence is multidimensional. obligatory components are linguistic-regional, regional, sociolinguistic and general cultural. This opens ample opportunities for professional and humanity training of young participants in the dialogue of cultures;
- socio-cultural competence makes it possible to pattern student's behavior in an authentic language environment, allowing to predict and thereby avoid possible difficulties that arise in another sociocultural environment;
- the basis for socio-cultural competence is cultural studies, which gives a true picture of the country's socio-cultural portrait, including historical and cultural knowledge, values and way of life of the peoples of the country;
- for successful solution of problems aimed at forming social competence various social and cultural tasks must be included in the educational process: cognitive-search, cognitive research, communication role-playing games, a variety of projects and discussions that have a potential to form personality, contribute to the development of a culture of communication and cognition;
- a major role in the formation of socio-cultural outlook plays a social and cultural background of students' native environment, which includes social and political life in their home country, historical, cultural, aesthetic, ethnic standards own social and cultural environment, as well as the attitude towards foreign language and country of the studied language [2].

Thus, the formation of socio-cultural competence is aimed at developing of world's perception and understanding the history of their country and their people, as a carrier of national values.

The goal of sociocultural learning is, therefore, not only the knowledge and knowledge of another culture, but also the ability to portray critically its own culture. The linguistic picture of the world is formed on the basis of language means, such as word, the phraseological unit, the proverb, the text which contain background knowledge and ways of reflection of these values in the national picture of the world [9].

In the classroom of a foreign language, it is not just a matter of communicating language knowledge. Many Western curricula on foreign language contain the requirement that trainees should master socio-cultural competence [8]. In this case we are talking about: 1) functional knowledge 2) information from everyday life; 3) the expansion of the spiritual horizon; 4) comparison of one's own and foreign culture with the goal of knowing one's own (and foreign) culture as one of many others.

Let us consider the criteria of socio-cultural competence:

- Functionality of the content. This means that only knowledge that is important for the students is provided. Foci are on the texts about countries of studied language. Such information about region is called actual, cognitive;
- Important information about your own country. Foreign culture can be studied and understood only through the prism of domestic culture. Socio-cultural prerequisites are not always recognized by the students, they are perceived as a reality, therefore, there is no corresponding knowledge in their own culture;[7].
- To establish efficient communication with a native speaker, the trainees need knowledge in the areas of geography, politics, social sphere, culture and science. This criterion is based on the assertion that sociocultural competence can be applied only in the context. Context is a combination of political, socio-economic and cultural facts that are crucial for the production and reproduction of speech patterns. This criterion is very important for the students as it simulates an authentic situation and thus could react to another, foreign culture [6].

Russian teachers distinguish the following criteria for assessing regional geography:

- Validity. Requires correctness of information, authenticity of texts and situational accuracy;
- Presentation. Important typical moments are essential, without which it is impossible to understand the country of the language being studied, at the same time it is necessary to inculcate awareness of internal diversity and differentiation;
- Realistic depicting. A realistic picture of culture should be presented, including conflicts and problems arising in the given society;
- Audience correspondence. The content should correspond to the age, should be interesting and understandable. It should also provide an opportunity for comparison, evaluation, development of a common cultural features;
- Interculturalism. This criterion concerns sociocultural competence that is defined as the ability to recognize common and different features between one's own and foreign culture consciously and successfully operate it in the language of study;
- An important tool of sociocultural competence is comparison and understanding: the comparison of cultures always takes place against the background of one's own culture (3).

Socio-cultural education enables trainees to engage in their own and other cultures, develop understanding and, finally, participate in intercultural communication.

Thus, sociocultural competence is: 1) system of knowledge of universal cultural values; 2) knowledge of values system of the native culture, forms and ways of their manifestation in the institutions of society, models of people's behavior, linguistic picture of the world, acceptable speech practices; 3) knowledge of the value system of the culture of the language being studied, the forms and methods of its implementation in the state structure, models of carrier behavior, and their speech; 4) knowledge of the principles of interaction between cultural ideas and norms when meeting representatives of different cultures; 5) ability to isolate cultural values by observing the carriers of other cultures and interacting with them without addressing them with direct questions.

4. Summary

Thus, it is possible to give the following definition of socio-cultural competence: knowledge of national and cultural peculiarities of the countries of the studied language, norms of speech and non-verbal behavior, and the ability to build their behavior in accordance with this knowledge in real communication situations.

By analyzing various approaches to the definition of socio-cultural competence, we confirm thesis of simultaneous acquiring foreign languages and its' culture history and modern life by the students. Therefore, we may state that sociocultural aspect should become permanent, an integral part of the process of education and upbringing. This allows to identify the main objectives of the formation of socio-cultural competence:

- The goal of education is humanizing education, training students in the spirit of a dialogue of cultures, fostering mutual understanding and tolerance towards a foreign culture, the ability to treat it with respect, but critically; the manifestation of interest in contact with a different culture, the perception of one's own values and cultural values of the countries of the studied language;

- The general educational goal promotes awareness of socio-cultural information in the process of interaction with elements of a different culture, understanding and interpretation of cultural interrelationships;

- The developing goal makes it possible to use sociocultural background for understanding and interpreting socio-cultural elements, for a reference point in the value categories of one's own and other societies, to develop the willingness to make choices, make independent decisions, and formulate one's own point of view. Development and education of trainees is carried out in the process of their inclusion in the design, research, search, creative work, meaningful both for the trainees themselves and for other people speaking a foreign language;

- The practical goal helps to communicate tolerantly in various life situations in relation to the partner in communication, to use, with direct contact, adequate speech resources, to use knowledge of the sociocultural background in professional activity (2).

Socio-cultural competence includes three blocks of knowledge:

- Linguistic and cultural knowledge - knowledge of lexical units with national and cultural semantics and the ability to apply them in situations of intercultural communication;

- Socio-psychological knowledge - possession of socioculturally-conditioned scenarios, national-specific models of behavior using communicative techniques adopted in a given culture;

- Cultural knowledge - knowledge of socio-cultural, historical-cultural, ethnocultural background and the ability to use them to achieve mutual understanding with the bearers of this culture (3).

According to the theory of sociocultural learning, the mastery of a foreign language means perception of individual and collective mentality, culture of another people and assumes acquaintance with the views, assessments and experiences of another cultural community. As a form of education innovation, the introduction of the new course needed to be managed effectively at the micro-educational level in order to achieve such aims [10,11].

Every national language contains a national and cultural specificity of the world view consisting of elements and phenomena, essential and essential for this people. That is why an optimally organized process of foreign language teaching can prepare a student's personality for a tolerant perception of another culture, for empathy and evasion of inadequate stereotypes.[12]

5. Conclusion

However, in determining the significance of socio-cultural competence, it is advisable to consider this concept in conjunction with communicative, linguistic, strategic and other competences.

The formation of a sociocultural competence can be achieved by studying the rules for constructing sentences and the system of word compatibility alongside with the principles of multi-valued words functioning and grammatical structures in real communicative situations. At the same time, communicants should be able to cope with possible difficulties through verbal and non-verbal means, assessing the emotional level and style of interaction, goals and conditions of communication. Thus, in language teaching there is a shift of interest from predominantly structural aspects of the language to its pragmatic aspects.

In our opinion, the study of cultural diversity that exists within one nation should become an integral part of the program for teaching intercultural communication. For students, the idea of "political correctness" and tolerance should become familiar, so that they can prevent mini-conflicts and ensure the successful achievement of communication goals without infringing the feelings and dignity of the interlocutors.

Summarizing the aforesaid, it can be said that the problems of culture and intercultural communication should be presented in the educational process as a global task of the education system. However, the new concept of sociocultural education requires serious didactic thinking, choosing an approach to teaching a foreign language that can ensure the socialization of educational foreign language communication and the combination of communicative activity of trainees with cognitive research on the study of the sociocultural portrait of native speakers.

A new concept of sociocultural learning requires the development of textbooks of a new generation that consider the cultural specifics of everyday and professional communication between their country and the countries of the studied language. The most important condition for the development of socio-cultural competence is the provision of students with appropriate didactic material on a cross-cultural basis.

The condition of the new concept of sociocultural learning is the introduction of additions to the content of language education. Filling the content of the language course with a sociocultural component can serve as a means of motivating students' speech activity and learning the development of the sociocultural educational needs of the trainees.

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