

## Formation of cross-cultural communicative competence among foreign students during pre-university training

### Formación de competencias comunicativas interculturales en estudiantes extranjeros en la etapa de formación preuniversitaria

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## Summary

The stage of pre-university training is the most important stage in the professional development of foreigners studying at the preparatory faculties of Russian universities. During this period, cross-cultural communicative competence is being formed.

The article proves that the formation of cross-cultural communicative competence is a complex process, which can be facilitated by the concept of its component composition. The article describes the pedagogical conditions that are necessary for the formation of intercultural communicative competence.

**Keywords:** Intercultural communicative competence, pre-university training, foreign students.

## Resumen

La etapa de preparación preuniversitaria es la etapa más importante en el proceso de formación profesional de los estudiantes extranjeros en las facultades preparatorias de las universidades rusas. Durante este período de tiempo, la formación de la competencia comunicativa intercultural se produce.

El artículo demuestra que la formación de la competencia comunicativa intercultural es un proceso complejo que puede facilitar la idea de su composición componente. Se describen las condiciones pedagógicas que contribuyen a la formación de la competencia comunicativa intercultural.

**Palabras clave:** Competencia comunicativa intercultural, etapa de preparación preuniversitaria, estudiantes extranjeros.

## Introduction

The expansion of international cooperation requires the establishment of economic, political, educational and cultural contacts. In frameworks of poly-ethnicity and multiculturalism, the role and importance of communication increases, requiring a revision of professional training system in higher education.

The key education category is the quality of education, including not only the complex of certain knowledge, skills and abilities, but also culture, moral qualities and adaptability.

Trying to meet the public order, many educational institutions create programs that prepare students for working and learning in the context of intercultural interaction. At the same time, the education policy in Russia should not only be aimed at integration with other countries, but also at preserving its high-quality educational product. Thus, the educational system is focused on the competencies that are necessary for the graduate specialist.

According to the Federal State Educational Standards of Higher Education, a graduate must carry out their professional activities in the conditions of intercultural communication in various professional fields, must enter into intercultural communication and have the skills and tactics of resolving conflict situations related to intercultural communication. Accordingly, the most important task of higher professional education is the formation of intercultural communication.

## Literature review

D.A. Ivanov considers “competence” as a training result. He believes that the learning purpose and result is the acquisition of competence (Ivanov, 2008, p. 17). In the concept by A.V. Barannikov, competence approach is considered as a condition for improving the quality of education, so the competence is based on the notions “education” and “culture” (Barannikov, 2008, p. 9). A significant contribution to the development of the competence notion was made by A. M. Novikov, who identified the following groups of competencies: educational (related to the

learning process organization, choosing one's own educational trajectory, solving educational and self-educational problems), research (related to finding and processing the information, using various sources, working with the documents), communication (related to understanding other people's views, discussing and defending one's point of view, languages, and the ability of public speech) (Novikov, 2006).

I.A. Zimnaya considers key competencies as a result of education. At the same time, the emphasis is on the practical application of knowledge, the development of its components. The scientist proved that competencies perform an integrative role that combines the cognitive-emotional, value-motivational, and regulatory aspects of the educational process. While mastering the competencies, the student's personality is formed. Moreover, Zimnaya considers the relationship between the concepts of competence and competency: "whether they are its components, whether they replace it, or whether they co-exist with it, being in relation to the rank, position or subordination, etc." (Zimnaya, 2006: p.1).

Further development of the competence-based learning theory is associated with the researchers' attention to intercultural interaction. The first definition of "intercultural communication" in the Russian science was made by E. M. Vereshchagin and V. G. Kostomarov. According to the scientists, "intercultural communication is an adequate mutual understanding of a communicative act by two participants from different national cultures" (Vereshchagin, Kostomarov, 1990, p. 26). It has an applied nature, as it includes the study of cross-cultural communicative competencies and is closely related to the teaching of foreign languages.

Interest in the structure and content of the "intercultural communicative competence" concept in foreign science is associated with E. Hall. The significance of his research is related to the fact that he proved the connection between the culture, the knowledge of foreign languages and the communication (Perwill, 2005, p. 21). Intercultural communication includes three main elements of intercultural competence: cognitive, intrapersonal and interpersonal elements. Cognitive element is associated with the inclusion of knowledge about other cultures and higher-level cognitive abilities. The intrapersonal element is related to the individual's self-determination. The interpersonal element is related with the individual's ability to communicate effectively with people from different cultural groups (Chernyaeva, 2016). V.G. Zinchenko, V.G. Zusman, and Z.I. Kirnosa (2007) modeled a synergetic model of intercultural communication.

E.V. Volkova, Yu.N. Ziyatdinova, E.V. Volkova (2010), N.N. Klementsova (2016), and E.A. Loginova (2015) described the structure of intercultural communicative competence.

The study of criteria for assessing intercultural communicative competence is covered in the works by T.G. Grushevitskaya (2003), N.S. Rudenko, K. Brighton (2013), and others.

Analysis of the research literature has shown that, despite the variety of studies, the theoretical and practical aspects of intercultural communication have been studied insufficiently. In the scientific literature, there is no generally accepted position on the key components of intercultural communicative competence. The existing variety of cross-cultural communicative competence models does not clarify its content. However, numerous studies and attempts to structure and model cross-cultural communicative competence suggest that this category must be understood. A retrospective analysis of the ideas about cross-cultural communicative competence shows that its concept is gradually changing towards the recognition of its dynamic multi-level nature.

### **Problem statement**

Methodologists and teachers must pay special attention at the pedagogical conditions for the formation of intercultural communicative competence among foreign students during educational activities within the framework of pre-university training. The ability to use intercultural communication skills is the most important requirement for foreigners who study Russian as a foreign language at the stage of pre-university education.

Entering a foreign language environment, a foreigner is forced to establish cross-cultural contacts. Thus, foreign students act as intermediaries in the cultural dialogue. While studying at

the preparatory faculty, foreigners master the foundations of intercultural communicative competence, which will be filled with new content in the following years, while studying in the Russian universities. According to the observations, the scientific literature doesn't consider these aspects.

The stage of pre-university training involves teaching speech activity, when the intercultural communicative competence is formed. The preparatory faculty contains a huge potential for cross-cultural learning and teaching the culture of the language being studied. The disadvantage of the modern system is that the students perform a passive role. Work with reproductive educational tasks decreases the educational effect of the study communication.

## **Discussion**

### **The hypothesis of Edward Sapir and Benjamin Lee Whorf in the context of intercultural communication theory**

According to the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, the language helps us to organize the objects and phenomena of the environment. If an object has several concepts, it is important for this culture, and diversity of the concepts' system indicates the phenomenon's value in the given culture. As an example, the scientists mention the number of values for snow in the Eskimo language.

The Sapir-Whorf hypothesis is based on two principles: the principle of linguistic relativity, according to which each language has features that distinguish it from other languages, and the principle of linguistic determinism, according to which the language determines a person's thinking.

Many scientists do not agree with the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, since the differences in the world perception between representatives of different ethnic groups and cultures are not so different, otherwise people would not be able to understand each other and communicate. The idea of the language's influence on the culture is also criticized (Sysoev, 2001, p. 52).

According to most critics of the theory, it is impossible to compare ethnic groups that are at the different stages of their development, and the discrepancy in words can be overcome by paraphrasing or explaining via other semantic categories.

Due to Sapir and Whorf, the scientific world paid attention at the relationship of such categories as language, culture and thinking. Their theory served as the impetus for numerous studies of the language relationships.

T.G. Grushevitskaya, V.D. Popokov, A.P. Sadokhin (2003), G.V. Elizarova (2005), L.V. Kulikova (2006) believe that scientists have made a contribution to the development of intercultural communication, having proved the necessity of interdisciplinary approach development, since the science object is a person as a native speaker.

### **About the concept of “intercultural communication”**

The concept of “intercultural communication” in lingvodidactics is not new. Many researchers who were at the origins of cross-cultural communication noted that cross-cultural issues are associated with many aspects of human life: language, culture, everyday life, etc.

The research-based study of cross-cultural issues begins in the middle of the 20-th century. The impetus for intercultural communication development were the increased number of tourist contacts in the 1960s, labor migration, the creation and distribution of international television channels. It is believed that cross-cultural communication originally was based on the American scientific school of anthropologists and appeared after the Second World War. The economic development of the United States contributed to the expansion of international contacts. Against this background, there were misunderstandings and even conflicts between the representatives of different nationalities. In order to minimize cultural and ethnic conflicts, the Friendship Institute was founded, headed by the linguist Edward Hall. Representatives of different nationalities and cultures were invited to work there. E. Hall observed practical differences in cultures, norms of behavior, and value orientations.

The term “cross-cultural communication” first appeared in the 1954, in the book “Culture as communication” by E. Hall and D. Trager.

The communication theory was further developed in the book “The Silent Language” in 1959. The scientist put forward and scientifically proved that all cultures have some common foundations, which makes it possible to study culture. Gradually, an idea is being formed that the principle of cultural dialogue should be put at the forefront. In the 1970s in the United States, an idea appears that culture can be understood in two aspects: first, as an art work, and secondly, as values, behavior, and norm. From the point of view of intercultural communication, the norms, rules and value orientations of an ethnic group and a person are crucially important.

In Europe, the study of intercultural communication started in 1970s and 1980s.

Integration processes that took place on the territory of Western Europe. The creation of the European Union is a global political, demographic, and economic process in which the idea of multiculturalism is formed, i.e., the idea of harmonious conflict-free coexistence of different cultures within one state. The idea of tolerance for representatives of other cultures is central to the public policy of many European countries.

A significant contribution to the development of intercultural communication was made by the British researcher Michael Byram in the book "Cultural Studies in Language Education" (1989). The significance of his research lies in the fact that he scientifically justified the need to teach language and culture together. For this, he develops an appropriate learning model.

Thus, the 20-th century was marked by the rapid development of intercultural communication theory. This is partly due to the rapid spread of the English language as a means of international communication. At the beginning of the 21-st century, research in the field of intercultural communication reaches a huge scale.

In Russian science, the study of intercultural communication started in 1990s. A distinctive feature of Russian cross-cultural communication research is the consideration of cross-cultural competence on a par with cross-cultural learning, that is, cross-cultural research falls into the field of lingvodidactics. The appeal to cross-cultural competence is associated with the search for optimal ways of developing students in order to activate their personal potential via the development of cross-cultural empathy and tolerance. Language should be not only a means of mutual understanding, but also a tool for creative development. Cross-cultural competence should form the basis of teaching foreign languages together with other competencies (Galskova & Gez, 2008). That is, cross-cultural competence is considered in the context of intellectual competence.

S.G. Ter-Minasova notes that in modern conditions, when Russia enters the world educational space, it is necessary to change the practice of teaching languages (Ter-Minasova, 2008: p. 122).

N.D. Galskova & N.I. Gez (2008, p. 336) believe that the intercultural paradigm is an ontology of modern language education.

### **The concepts of “cross-cultural competence” and “cross-cultural communicative competence”**

A controversial issue in science is the distinction between the concepts of “intercultural competence” and “intercultural communicative competence”. Let us consider the existing definitions.

First, we shall study the notion of intercultural competence.

According to G.V. Elizarova, cross-cultural communicative competence is “a compensation of a special nature, based on knowledge and skills, the ability to carry out cross-cultural communication by creating a common meaning of what is happening for communicants and ultimately achieve a positive communication result for both sides” (Elizarova, 2005, p. 236).

I.V. Chernyaeva defines intercultural communicative competence as “the ability to carry out any activity, both familiar and new, on the basis of a limited unity of knowledge, skills, experience, relationships, together with the ability to apply them in familiar and unfamiliar situations inside an intercultural environment” (Chernyaeva, 2016, p. 124-125).

I.L. Pluzhnik believes that intercultural communicative competence is “the ability to effectively communicate in the process of understanding and interpreting the meaning of foreign cultural situational actions based on awareness of common and different features of cultures, ways of their linguistic and non-linguistic expression in the context of professional discourse” (Pluzhnik, 2003, p.15).

E.V. Volkova and Yu.N. Ziyatdinova consider cross-cultural communicative competence as “a set of abilities necessary for an effective process of interaction with other people of different culture and language” (Volkova, Ziyatdinova, 2010, p.85).

Thus, the concept of cross-cultural communicative competence is closely related to the concept of effectiveness, that is, assessing the ability of participants in cross-cultural interaction to achieve their goals during interaction with other nations.

Cross-cultural communication covers a variety of human life areas. Thus, there is a huge number of cross-cultural communicative competence models.

Researchers, speaking about communicative competencies, in the field of foreign language learning, speak about the lack of reliable and valid data, as well as the inability to choose the most appropriate criteria for the formation of the students’ cross-cultural communicative competence in a particular situation.

### **The components of cross-cultural communicative competence**

D.K. Deardorff (2011) is one of the first scientists who made an attempt to scientifically substantiate the components of intercultural competence. A group of 23 experts in the field of international intercultural communication was created, who listed the main components of intercultural communication competence. 22 main components of cross-cultural communication were identified. It should be noted that only one of the selected elements, “understanding other person’s worldview”, received one hundred percent approval from the experts. However, the experts’ opinions did not agree on the other components.

D.K. Deardorff did not create a reference model for cross-cultural communication, but European scientists constantly rely on it in their scientific publications.

Thus, cross-cultural communicative competence is a complex multi-level category, in which it is possible to distinguish empathy, the ability to look at the situation from the outside and adaptability.

A.P. Sadokhin believes that the content of intercultural competence includes empathy and tolerance (affective knowledge), ethnocentrism and ethno-cultural relativism (cognitive knowledge), strategies of intercultural contacts (procedural knowledge). In other words, the key components of cross-cultural competence are relativism, empathy and tolerance. Ethnocentrism is characteristic of all peoples because it allows them to be involved in the culture. At the same time, ethnocentrism creates obstacles to establishing effective communication, so it is very important to overcome it during the interaction (Sadokhin, 2008, p. 160).

Thus, cross-cultural communicative competence expands the boundaries of communicative competence, since it includes cross-cultural competence.

### **The role of intercultural communicative competence in the study of Russian as a foreign language**

The Russian language becomes a part of the culture of the language being studied for foreign students. It forms both foreign students’ own cultural image and the image of another culture, allowing to interact with the representatives of other ethnic groups in the Russian educational and scientific world. In this context, the study of Russian as a foreign language should

be considered within the framework of an intercultural paradigm, and multiculturalism should become the leading teaching principle.

According to A.V. Makarov, the competence approach is associated with the acquisition of experience in independent work related to the solution of professional tasks and personal development (Makarov, 2004). The competence approach is aimed at forming a person capable of social adaptation in a foreign language environment, a person ready to continue professional education in Russian and capable of self-education during pre-university training. Thus, the students are mastering the culture of the studied language via the prism of their native culture, a system of their individual and personal coordinates. N.N. Nokhrina notes that “the defining function of education is the culture reproduction, and the education quality in this case is an indicator and a derivative of the given society’s culture” (Meshcheryakova, 1998, p.110).

The analysis of competencies in teaching a foreign language allows to distinguish the following competencies:

- subject competence (includes interactive learning, problem-based learning by creating communicative situations, immersion in the “microenvironment” at the real life context;
- activity competence (the ability to plan educational activities, the ability to see the problem and the goal as an idea of the desired result, the ability to solve emerging problems and overcome these obstacles;
- developing competence (includes an intrapersonal component, an interpersonal component and a cultural component (Mulrud, 2004).

The purpose of foreign students’ language study at the stage of pre-university training is the formation of intercultural competence. The level of proficiency in cross-cultural communication becomes an indicator of development. “If a person has mastered the knowledge and characteristics of another culture and adequately uses them in communication with its representatives, it becomes cross-culturally competent” (Sadokhin, 2008, p. 229). Modernization in the system of pre-university training is associated with the need for ethno-oriented teaching of Russian as a foreign language, in which “a positive image of one’s own culture co-exists with a positive value attitude to other cultures” (Sadokhin, 2008, p. 248).

The teacher of Russian as a foreign language should organize the educational process according to a competence-based approach, as a result of which foreign students master key competencies. Pre-university training must define the competence approach principles. Initially, it is necessary to define a set of key competencies, to develop criteria on the basis of which the level of their formation will be determined. “The cognitive basis of such competence consists of basic knowledge about the world, about the peculiarities of the partner’s culture, the subject’s own communicative abilities and his tolerant attitude to foreign cultural phenomena” (Sadokhin, 2008, p. 93).

An effective mechanism that corresponds to the vectors of the modern education development is intercultural competence. Thus, the process of pre-university training should be aimed at:

- improving the education quality via the formation of the necessary key competencies;
- formation of a tolerant attitude to the multicultural world;
- implementation of the dialogism principle, which contributes to the formation of the foreign personality who is ready for a dialogue with other cultures, primarily Russian;
- increasing the motivation of foreign students to obtain necessary skills and knowledge;
- formation of a competitive personality while implementing the competence approach.

In frameworks of language education, at the stage of pre-university training, the task of teaching Russian as a means of the students’ cultural and mental development is set. While teaching foreigners, the following educational goals are realized: intellectual tolerance, humanity and understanding, adaptability (Bowen, 1978).

The main tasks of modeling the intercultural competence of foreign students include:

- understanding of the modern multicultural world by foreign students while studying foreign language culture at the stage of pre-university training;
- the establishment of methods, tools, and principles of content organization that ensure the most effective interaction of foreign students and teachers in the educational process;

– definition of a didactic tools' set while forming intercultural competence: communication norms and forms, strategies of intercultural communication, the choice of interaction forms in the conditions of modern intercultural society.

Thus, in the course of training, students are introduced to their native and world cultures. Increasing the level of intercultural education contributes to expanding the students' horizons. The practical component of forming foreign students' cross-cultural communicative competence is associated with mastering the communication skills necessary for communication in a foreign language environment, for an adequate perception of cultural realities, for the development of skills to build harmonious relationships with partners in cross-cultural communication.

Formation of intercultural communicative competence takes place during practical classes of the Russian language.

The starting point is to create conditions that would facilitate the introduction of foreign students to the culture of the country the language of which is being studied. The inclusion of a cultural component will help to increase motivation and interest in the country of the language being studied.

In the process of work, it is possible to use individual, pair and group types of training.

An unconventional form of the educational process helps to remove the psychological barrier, the fear of making a mistake in speech structures. For this, excursion lessons can be conducted, during which the foreigners should tell about their country, their hometown, about the city in which they came to live and study. This is a clear example of the implementation of the cultural dialogue principle.

As a possible type of the educational process organization at the end of the first semester in Russian universities, a lesson-concert can be organized. The fragments of art works, songs, and poems used in the lessons improve the pronunciation skills of foreign students, increase communicative, cognitive, and aesthetic motivation.

## Conclusions

Thus, the formation of cross-cultural communicative competence among foreign students at the stage of pre-university training is a complex multi-level process, based on the following principles:

- the students' activity, their readiness to interact in the educational process and in speech communication;
- openness of the system, manifested in the exchange of ideas and information;
- the dialogue, mutual enrichment and communication;
- multivariance and alternativeness of interaction between the participants in educational process.

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