TRANSFORMATIONS OF TRADITIONAL LITHUANIAN CULTURE INFLUENCED BY INTERCULTURALITY: A CASE OF LITHUANIAN 10TH-12TH FORMS PUPILS’ OPINION

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Abstract

The problem of this research is determined by the fact, that comparing with investigations, conducted by foreign scientists, the problem of influence interculturality on traditional culture is not widely developed. Thus, Lithuanian scientific practice lacks wider attitude towards this problem, but the importance of interculturality and intercultural education in the global world becomes a more relevant object for researchers in Lithuania. This affected the aim of this paper – to reveal transformations of traditional Lithuanian culture influenced by interculturality from pupils’ perspective.

Keywords: Intercultural education, educational practice, pupils’ opinion, essay, content analysis, Lithuania.

1 INTRODUCTION

Relevance of the topic. Today’s and future society exists in the process intersection of technological advance, increasing integration of social network progress, states without borders, eliminating socio-cultural obstacles, what promotes diversity and entirety feeling, emphasizing the importance of convergence. As the scientists ([17], [12]) claim, diversity is the basis of today's civilization, creating preconditions for fundamental solution to the problem of existence. Taking into account the changing public expectations it is necessary to implement the educational changes towards the changes caused by globalization, economics, politics and technology, considering the socio-cultural factors. This encourages the orientation to education based on interdisciplinary, integrity, and values ([19], [23]). Political, economic, social and cultural changes in the country influence on the curriculum changes, when it aims to improve the educational outcomes and quality of scientific institution activities in modernizing education and training policies in the regional, as well as national and EU levels. In order to develop a dynamic modern Lithuanian identity and modern personal nationalism, the educational content should relate to the “learners’ experience and socio-cultural needs to help students succeed in the learning process and avoid social exclusion” [11]. In this context “personal growth process, involving an individual into society, promoting to reflect why we want to learn and what we want to achieve <...>, and the way we live in our society” become relevant [21: 36]. Students’ intercultural education is one of the approaches trying to understand the contemporary world’s cultural diversity, identity and change of values, to accept the changes in traditional culture, promoting the principles of equality, respect and accept the otherness and tolerance expression. Along the learners’ ability to interact and communicate with “their group members and surroundings is being developed” [2]. Therefore, it is important to reveal the learners' perception through their experiences analyzed in the context of the object, highlighting the awareness of the intercultural dimension and it’s caused changes.

Substantiation of the scientific problem. In response to education challenges the educational content orientation to interculturality meaning knowledge is promoted, which can be achieved by updating the creativity, exploration and development of open education programs, initiating the teachers’ training, developing the information resources, educational tools, and applying the new technologies in education. However, such assumptions require a broader assessment of the situation, which forms the problem question: what traditional cultural transformations are experienced and recognized in the context of interculturality by the Lithuanian secondary school pupils?

The aim of this research is to reveal how pupils from senior forms evaluate the influence of interculturality on traditional culture and what socio-cultural problems it causes.
2 METHODOLOGY

Methodological provisions of the survey. “Philosophy of social constructivism ([18], [20], [22]). It’s base - social theories and knowledge about social phenomenon. Therefore, within the context of the social constructivism, perception of interculturality and expression within educational practice has become a relevant problem, which requires some special attentions, because different practices of intercultural education are analyzed. Critical theory ([4], [5], [6], [7], [9], [15], [24], [26]) is explained as the formation of meaning, the rising wish to form explanations, the conceptual reality order. The critical theory indicates ideology as the widely accepted for the population of values, myths, explanations, personal attitudes and moral wishes. Therefore application of this theory in explanation of intercultural competences will reveal the critical attitude, perception of the school community members will change the social reality, because the critical theory strives to generate the specific world vision as it could be” [3].

The organization of the survey. The research was carried out in comprehensive education schools in Lithuania and was organized in 2015. On the grounds of their personal experience, participants of the research (pupils from 11th–12th forms) had written an essay on the topic “What does interculturality mean to me as a Lithuanian?”. In this essay, they revealed their point of view and rendered value attitudes in the context of the object under investigation. To carry out data analysis, the method of content analysis was employed (analytical segments are coded, e.g. [R1]). Essays revealed the experiences of research participants, their evaluation of the influence of interculturality on traditional culture.

3 THEORETIC GROUNDING OF REALITIES AND PERSPECTIVES OF INTERCULTURAL EDUCATION IN LITHUANIAN EDUCATION SYSTEM

Lithuania, meeting the global public education development challenges, follows the European Union strategic documents and UNESCO provisions to implement the new strategy “Lithuania 2030”. This allows to purify and relate the education objectives, whilst focusing on the economic, social development and cultural contexts. In harmony with the European Union and other international strategies Lithuanian education policy is guided by the fundamental prerequisite for the overall welfare of the society, in order to ensure the quality and universal access to education. International documents emphasize the human rights in order to reduce the manifestations of discrimination and ensure equal opportunities. Such provisions are reflected in the importance of education system, when it aims for the new quality of education, emphasizing new skills, information and civic literacy, skills and attitude to lifelong learning and constantly updating acquired competencies.

According to the researchers, the educational policy and educational strategies must respond to the changes in education caused by the cultural diversity, focusing on the existing different social identities in the learning environment ([16], [25], [8]). This can be implemented through the realization of the principles of intercultural education where all students are educated with the emphasis on their differences, uniqueness, promoting tolerance and respect for otherness resolution. Realizing these principles the school environment becomes a medium, where the cultural manifestations of negativism must be reduced and openness to cultural diversity must be implemented.

In order to develop and implement intercultural educational programs, based on the acceptance for respect, tolerance, otherness and difference, it is appropriate to focus on friendly relations between different individuals / their groups forming the basis of the above mentioned ideas. The scientific literature provides the different intercultural education methodology ([13], [1]), namely focusing on the cultural difference awareness and conveying the learners knowledge of different cultures / groups / individuals; teaching learners, developing the intercultural experience through the didactic or experiential instruments (film analysis, simulation, reflection).

However, the major weakness of the curriculum is identified from the perspective of Lithuanian educational situation in the State documents, that is “curriculum is too much focused on the knowledge and the students’ academic skill development, and too little attention is paid to the curriculum links with the real life, new, modern competence development, necessary in nowadays society, comprehensive student’s personality growth, his national and civil consciousness education” [10]. This is resulted by the poor teacher supply with innovative teaching aids, which were “adapted for

students’ active learning, training to individualize, differentiate and evaluate” [10]. It is appropriate not only to develop and implement new programs to promote educational innovation, but also it is necessary to ensure consistency in their implementation, and after the end of the project or strategy change to ensure further support for schools, purposefully and successfully realizing program targets.

The role of school conveying equality and multimedia public insights is extremely important. As Leeman, Ledoux [14: 576] note, “teachers develop the intercultural practices in classroom, but without any theoretical education in order to be able to vary cultural differences between the dominant discourses”. Therefore, developing the intercultural education programs it is necessary to assess the teachers’ contextual knowledge and experience, to initiate their involvement into the methodological intercultural development tools.

4 ANALYSIS OF THE SURVEY RESULTS

The participants of the research distinguish the transformations of the Lithuanian traditional culture caused by interculturality, such as Lithuanian culture change, other (sub)culture becoming dominant, the effects of emigration (Fig. 1). The opinion appears that other countries holidays become our nation’s holidays, when “many new festivals and customs came to our country from all over the world, and today they are given a lot of attention” [R3]. This is illustrated by the examples, when “we celebrate the day of love not on May 13th anymore, but as in the whole world – on February 14th. Americans call this day “Valentine’s Day” [R 18], and the United State’s festive Halloween, during which people wear costumes, have fun, tell horrible stories, watch horror movies, “overshadows the All Souls’ Day” [R3] – the national Lithuanian day honoring the dead souls. It damages the country’s traditions, and it is <...> very upsetting [R3].

The Lithuanian attributes are replaced by other countries’ ones, when “a rare kid today knows what Easter Grandma is, but every child knows very well what Easter hare is” [R3]. The recent popularity of the character is caused by the Lithuanian traders (“... it came from America and soon became a very popular character because of the traders and overshadowed a good and beautiful Lithuanian character” [R3]).

It is emphasized that the Lithuanian holidays and customs are changing, and this leads to an aggregation of nations and cultures, where “it is difficult to maintain national identity and not to forget the country’s culture and customs” [R18], while “the beautiful Lithuanian holidays and traditions are forgotten” [R3]. Thus, “interculturality partially damages the country’s traditions” [R3], and in this way the authentic Lithuanian culture is blurring, which, as it is stated, on the contrary – has to be “proud and not forgotten” [11].

The name of subcategories Threat of Lithuania State / cultural extinction implies about the fact that Lithuania is still a “young and immature nation to be able to assess the cosmopolitan world, not forgetting the most precious and the only homeland” [R7], and resulting to be in danger of its extinction. The research participants emphasize one of the possible scenarios of the future state – “after many years Lithuania can be only in written sources existing country” [R14]. This would lead to an attempt to be concurrent with other countries, taking over “their culture and traditions, but losing our own customs, unique culture, and most of all - our own unique language” [R7]. The issue remained associated with people who are “concerned about Lithuania and its survival” [R14], and this can be achieved through the activation of people and their participation in “the ethno cultural events with their children, <...> all Lithuanian celebrations, <...> motivating them to be genuine patriots of their country and altruists” [R14]. The emphasized communication skills (own language) change, when the own language is not enriching, is defined as “one of the biggest nowadays problems” [R18]. Frequent consumption of Anglicism and ignorance of Lithuanian grammar for communication in social networks are pointed out, claiming that “in reality it is often forgotten how to correctly write, or even speak in Lithuanian language” [R18]. The negative impact of IT and media on the culture is specified, noting that such measures promote other countries’ goods and services.
The participants of the research emphasize that interculturality results in other (sub)cultures predominates when “from other countries a lot of all kinds of non-traditional crops come, which work very attractive to teenagers” [R3]. All this encourages to take over other (sub)cultures, such as Goths, Emo, Punks, which “appeared abroad, but increasingly become more popular in our country, even in school teenagers want to distinguish out from the crowd, join the groups, forgetting the beautiful Lithuanian customs and rites” [R3]. Such processes determine the popularity of other countries holidays in Lithuania and thus “endangering Lithuanian traditional ceremonies” [R3]. At the same time it is emphasized that other culture becomes more interesting when “the youth, after visiting foreign countries, decide their further life to create abroad” [R7] and one of the reasons is the desire to “copy the Western way of life” [R7] and the attitude that “abroad things are different – better” [R7]. This is also caused by the generation gaps when young people lack patriotism “that existed in our parents and grandparents” [R7].

The participants of the research emphasize the consequences of migration, when the threat for nation existence appears, different culture is taken over, communication skills (mother tongue) are blurring, and xenophobia appears. As stated, emigration is one of causes of the Lithuanian culture and national identity loss, and possibly - preconditions for the nation extinction, noting that “many Lithuanians, impressed by a better life, leave the country” [11] and the number of emigrants is constantly growing (“more and more people leave the country” [R17]). One of the consequences of emigration and re-emigration - is taking over the other culture, when “people, who left Lithuania, usually forget their culture and customs, adapt to a new country and become a part of it, <...> and when they return home, they often try to stick here the new traditions which, in fact, are soon naturalized” [R18]. Immigration process in Lithuania causes controversial reactions, and xenophobia arises when “<...> immigrants come back to Lithuania, frequent employer does not trust them, give the unskilled jobs, pay minimum wages” [R14].

The participants of the research emphasize the degradation process of communication skills (mother tongue), when people in emigration “forget their native language” [R17], what is “a very urgent
problem in modern society” [R5]. There are some samples, when Lithuanians, who have relatives living abroad, face with the problems to speak with them in Lithuanian language (“a big part of my family is in England. <...> it is already difficult to speak in Lithuanian with a cousin <...> we can understand each other, but a cousin, who lives in England from birth, I am afraid, does not already understand Lithuanian” [R5]. The highlighted gap between the emigrants’ children and the mother tongue justifies that there is a large “Lithuanian and English” blend and “it is often asked how to say something in Lithuanian” [R5].

5 CONCLUSIONS

The analysis of research results revealed, that, according to pupils’ opinion, interculturality influences the vanishing of customs of a country, when celebrations of other countries become accepted in a native country (e.g. Halloween upstages All Soul’s Day, a celebration that is meant for quiet and respect of the dead). In such a way, when nations and cultures mix, people migrate to other countries it becomes difficult to keep one’s own nationality and not to forget culture and traditions of your own country. These factors, according to pupils, might lead our country near extinction. National symbols are also vanishing (e.g. a symbol of Easter lady is replaced by Easter bunny, who came from the USA culture), which is fostered by mass marketing and mass media. Interculturality conditions the dominance of other (sub) cultures, when representatives of younger generation join Goths, Emo, Punk subcultures, western lifestyle is copied which suppress the spirit of patriotism, the cultural identity is forgotten, unique Lithuanian language is lost. Pupils highlighted problems and threats of emigration – extinction of Lithuanian population, alternation of personal identity, segregation from the national language, negative attitude towards re-immigrants and migrants. All these factors have influence on the transformation of traditional Lithuanian culture.

REFERENCES


