CROSS-CULTURAL BUSINESS COMMUNICATION COURSE AS INTERDISCIPLINARY TEAM-TEACHING

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Abstract

Nowadays one cannot efficiently communicate with representatives of different countries without cross-cultural competency that means ability to participate successfully in cross-cultural communication. The article is devoted to researches on ways to develop cross-cultural competency of students of the Economics Faculty with the interdisciplinary approach to organization of a training course “Guidelines to Cross-cultural Business Communication”.

Business communication implies ability to establish and develop business networks. It is crucial for cross-cultural partnership that involves professionals from different occupational areas. To communicate successfully in multicultural environment means adequate communicative behaviour when establishing professional partnership. Here we need to emphasize, that high reference level of foreign language is not enough to achieve this. In addition, one needs to be able to adequately interpret and accept socio-cultural variety among partners while dealing with practical tasks. Therefore, any specialist-training program requires special attention to a linguistic persona (identity) formation among students, a persona that possesses skills of cross-cultural communication.

Cross-cultural business competency development can be carried out in different ways, but anyway it should be comprehensive, multi-faceted and person-centred. One of modern trends in teaching, interdisciplinarity can be helpful in achieving this objective as it is aimed at widening scientific view of the world and considering any concept as not limited by one single scientific subject.

Interdisciplinarity of a training course can be defined by interrelations between several sciences and subjects, maximum flexibility of the content and high rate of teacher’s autonomy in terms of choice among teaching forms and methods. The content of such training course should be determined by cognitive and age peculiarities of target students, logic of course delivery, scientific preferences of a teacher, and requirements to learning outcomes.

Applying both above-mentioned concepts (cross-cultural business communication and interdisciplinarity) we’ve developed an interdisciplinary training course on “Guidelines to Cross-cultural Business Communication”. The article gives a description of the course content and special aspects of its delivery to students of different economic specialization.

Keywords: cross-cultural business communication, interdisciplinarity, cross-cultural competency, linguistic persona, teaching methods.

1 INTRODUCTION

Communication efficiency depends on various factors: business language knowledge, etiquette rules, and non-verbal forms of communication (mimic, gestures etc.), conditions and culture of communication.

These days, teaching and developing cross-cultural communication skills and competence is an important part of education at University level, and not only for language students but also for students who study other specialities. Lecturers should aim at considering, analysing and teaching the main problems and issues of cross-cultural communication based on relevant theories and research data. It is important that students should be able to put into practice the main principles of cross-cultural interaction in today’s global context. [1]

E. T. Hall’s and G. Hofstede’s theories helped to understand the origins of differences between cultures, overcome controversies and problems of cross-cultural communication, and laid foundation for further researches. [2, 3]

Applying the above-mentioned theories of E. D. Hall, G. Hofstede, alongside with other Western scholars and using data of their own studies, Russian linguists, psycholinguists and sociologists have
developed concepts of national communication styles and subjected to meticulous analysis numerous cases from real life settings in the context of cross-cultural interaction. [4, 5]

Cross-cultural communication includes not only traditional linguistic components of cross-cultural competence, but also factors that are integral to culture, such as historical, educational, behavioral, demographic, religious and ethical. Even if a specialist has a proficiency level of foreign language and use it in every-day professional performance his idea is generated and structured based on native culture and respective worldview. Therefore, combination of linguistic, professional, computer and cultural aspects of bachelor education both in class and during self-instruction is crucial for cross-cultural competency development within interdisciplinary approach.

The current education system requires more interrelated learning and coherence in the curriculum, some new methods and approach in studying disciplines, that help students adapt the way to organize and seek knowledge and spread disciplinary boards. Interdisciplinary team-teaching is one of the ways to being competitive in the labor market and satisfying the multidisciplinary needs of the world work.[6]

The Interdisciplinary approach engages students and helps them develop a deep knowledge, develop problem solving skills, self-confidence, and maybe for somebody a passion for learning. According to Allen F. Repko, interdisciplinary approach to teaching has advances in cognitive ability and identifies some of the educational benefits of interdisciplinary learning including gains in the ability to recognize bias, think critically, tolerate ambiguity and acknowledge and appreciate ethical concerns. [7]

2 METHODOLOGY

2.1 Participants

Interdisciplinary course on cross-cultural business communication was integrated in the curriculum for bachelor students of Economic Faculty of our University taking a supplementary course “Foreign language for professional communication”.

2.2 Content of interdisciplinary course “Cross-cultural business communication”

The course combines “Cross-cultural business communication” which is a compulsory subject in economic school curriculum with a course “Business communication in foreign language” which is a compulsory subject of a supplementary course “Foreign language for professional communication”.

It consists of 15 interactive lectures on the following topics:

1. Theory of cross-cultural communication
2. National character
3. Stereotypes
4. How to behave with American, Italians, Spanish, Chinese etc.
5. Basic rules of behavioural philosophy
6. Philosophy of behaviour and communication
7. Professional ethics
8. Types of business communication: verbal and non-verbal
9. Non-verbal communication
10. Components of business person image
11. Verbal face-to-face communication
12. Business negotiations
13. Phone business communication
14. Secrets of effective phone communication
15. Written forms of business communication.
Indeed, structured interactive form of teaching is a better lecture format as compared to didactic lectures as they provide teachers with opportunity to actively engage students in a teaching process. Making lectures interactive by including special tasks such as think-pair-share, demonstrations, and role-playing, can boost student's active engagement, and enhance the value of the lecture segments for further studies. Moreover, it helps to conveniently incorporate information, data or tasks from other disciplines and makes teaching process interdisciplinary.

2.3 How lectures of an interdisciplinary course are delivered

The Interdisciplinary approach result also in significant learning. During the lecture when teachers share some skills and insights about the educational process with the students, and these ideas seem to be meaningful and important to them, students are getting involved in the learning process. According to Fink, six elements of the teaching process promote significant learning and are common features of the interdisciplinary approach. They are foundational knowledge, application, integration, and human dimension, caring and learning How-To-Learn [8]. We followed those elements preparing lectures to deliver our interdisciplinary course:

• at the first stage students got a comprehensive foundational knowledge with integration of various corresponding disciplines (for example basic information about theory of cross-cultural communication);
• then they were given helpful tips on how to apply knowledge on practice in their professional performance (here video and audio materials on situations of cross-cultural communication were given together with analysis and helpful tips);
• being equipped with necessary knowledge and helpful tips students completed interactive tasks of the lecture such as role-playing of real life situation of a business communication or case study, project development and presentation of a project to the whole group;
• finally, students were provided with extra resources to get necessary information on cultural peculiarities of business communication in the countries with regard to a foreign language they study within their special course.

2.4 Intermediate and end of course assessment

To monitor mastering of the course material during the course students are offered to do some test on the educational portal based on theoretical information given on the course lectures. Students get a pool of 25 questions and 4 possible answers to choose from for each question. It helps them to see before the completion of a course their own gaps in knowledge and fill it by the end of the course.

End of course assessment combines testing knowledge of theory and practical skills to apply that knowledge [9, 10]. To achieve it, in addition to theoretical questions, students are given practical tasks such as: write a business letter regarding the following situation; translate a part of a business contract into a foreign language; analyse given information and write a report; write a memo to your colleagues concerning the following situation and the like.

3 RESULTS

With interdisciplinary learning students have developed their cognitive abilities such as: a) developing and applying perspective-taking techniques; b) developing structural knowledge of issues appropriate to interdisciplinary study; c) integrating controversial insights into professional issues from two or more disciplines; d) and finally, producing a cognitive or interdisciplinary understanding of the issues they may face in their future professional performance. All of above-mentioned can become very helpful contribution to a further graduation paper.

If we look at the examples of interdisciplinary activities within a course, we would find the course theme, issue, problem, or question from the perspective of two disciplines: foreign language and cross-cultural business communication. Connection between those disciplines and integrating disciplinary insights and viewpoints have produced a more comprehensive and complete understanding by the students of the course problem and test it by proposing a holistic solution [11].

While there are many statistical reports made by scholars from different countries, which conclude that students of interdisciplinary techniques have higher test scores in both core knowledge and critical thinking over real professional issues, there is also a need for interdisciplinary techniques to better
remember basic discipline lessons later in life. In an article titled “Interdisciplinary Instruction”, Laura Duerr explains the importance of an interdisciplinary approach to the life of a student by stating, “With interdisciplinary instruction, students can become more involved in their learning and teachers can work toward eliminating discipline lines. Students can become independent, confident individuals who ‘learn how to learn’ and develop lifelong learning skills” [12].

4 CONCLUSIONS

As the interdisciplinary approach continues to combine the characteristics and methods belonging to multiple disciplines and at the same time develops among students lifelong learning skills, they will have met the goals that modern community and employers set before Higher Educational Institutions. Interdisciplinary curricula are obviously time consuming and take much collaborative teamwork of teachers that specialise in various disciplines and thus work in different departments. It takes much time to develop and introduce them into a teaching process. At a first glance, it can seem like a hard and exhausting disadvantage, but in the end, the students, who took interdisciplinary course, acquire many favoured skills that are sought by future colleges and employers. Students and their teachers will also advance in such aspects as critical thinking, communication, creativity, pedagogy, and essential academia with the use interdisciplinary techniques. Our experience with this approach is another evidence to all above-mentioned.

REFERENCES

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