MODEL OF INTERETHNIC INTERACTION: THE STRUCTURE AND CONTENT IN CASE OF AN INTERNATIONALLY ORIENTED UNIVERSITY

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Abstract

An internationally oriented University has a great potential for successful adaptation and integration of foreign students into the educational environment. There is a lack of interdisciplinary research in this field, so the given paper is an attempt to plug the gap. The research determines the factors that influence interethnic interaction in the educational environment of an internationally oriented university.

The article gives the theoretical description of the integrated model of interethnic interrelation and the structure of this model. It focuses on the interethnic interaction of the representatives of different ethnic groups in the process of learning Russian as a foreign language.

The experimental base for the given research is RUDN University that is an internationally oriented university with students from 150 countries. The target audience of the research are 500 foreign students (both pre-university and university ones from Africa, Asia, Latin America and Europe).

The purpose of the study was to identify the factors influencing the effectiveness of interethnic interrelation. Learning Russian as a foreign language is the main component of interethnic interrelation in the suggested model as the language is the basis of linguocultural adaptation. The authors included in the field of their research the Internet communication as an effective linguo-cultural instrument of integration of foreigners into the Russian-speaking environment. Special attention was also paid to non-verbal communication of the representatives of different ethnic groups in the process of learning Russian as a foreign language.

The description of the suggested model is based on the analysis of the adaptation processes among the foreign pre-university and university students of RUDN University. The analysis helped to determine the communicative barriers in the Russian educational environment, as well as the factors affecting the effectiveness of the interethnic interaction of different ethnic cultures representatives.

The research is important for developing the educational strategies necessary for international universities, and the content of the educational programs of teaching Russian as a foreign language to make the interethnic interrelation more efficient.

Keywords: Educational environment, interethnic interaction, internationally oriented University, adaptation and integration, Russian as a foreign language.

1 INTRODUCTION

Interethnic interrelation is the contact between the representatives of different ethnic groups that leads to the changes in individual and social characteristics of each of the ethnic groups and their representatives; it also leads to the integration of their characteristics and properties. Interethnic interrelation is reflected primarily through the joint action both in communication and indirectly in the process or work, family communication or communication with friends. This process is the complex system of the interchange of ideas, concepts and beliefs; it helps to understand the uniqueness of every nation and at the same time to realize the specificity of the own culture of each nation.

Interethnic interrelation means that the interethnic dialog takes place in the situation of the polyculture contacts between the nations when the countries and the cultures interrelate. If the culture is aimed only at getting from outside and do not share anything with the other cultures, the other cultures reject it.

Interethnic interrelation is explained by the willingness of the ethnic groups to contact. At the same time it is important to mention the influence of ethnic stereotypes on interethnic interrelation. They are an inseparable part of the cultural identity of a person and a social group. It is impossible to completely...
avoid the influence of cultural stereotypes in the process of intercultural interrelation as they perform a number of important functions in the culture: they structure the beliefs system, help to keep the positive group identity, provide the long-standing of the culture. [1]

On the other hand, ethnic stereotypes are dangerous for the effective interethnic interrelation. Taking into consideration that the differences between the individuals are more expressed than the similarities even in one culture, the researchers suggest using the psychological mechanism that is opposite to stereotyping in interethnic interrelation: studying of the identity of a partner through communication [1]. It is necessary to keep in mind that the language is the integral part of any culture and ethnos helping to form the mentality and the system of beliefs [2].

The interethnic interrelation in an internationally oriented University is realized through the contacts of the students from different ethnic groups in the educational environment. Ethnic diversity of multicultural educational establishments contribute to the positive interethnic interrelations. It reduces the prejudices against different ethnic groups. The foreign students in such Universities get accustomed to new life in a foreign country, learn to be independent and to manage coexistence with the other cultures and nationalities. The conditions are often differ from those in the native country, thus the teaching and the administrative staff of an internationally oriented university should arrange the educational process to where international students from different countries interrelate.

The purpose of the study is to identify the factors influencing the effectiveness of interethnic interrelation in an internationally oriented University. Learning Russian as a foreign language is the main component of interethnic interaction in the suggested model. The description of the suggested model is based on the analysis of the adaptation processes among the foreign pre-university and university students of RUDN University. The analysis helped to determine the communicative barriers in the Russian educational environment, as well as the factors affecting the effectiveness of the interethnic interaction of different ethnic cultures representatives.

2 METHODOLOGY

To run a diagnostic of the real picture of the interethnic integration of the students the authors used a questionnaire. The respondents were 40 students with B2 Russian language competence: the students from Africa (60%), China (30%) and Arab countries (10%). All of them live in the dorm in the University campus and regularly interrelate with different ethnic groups from various countries of Europe, Asia and Latin America, as well as the students from Russia.

The diagnostic is realized in the following stages:

- B2 language test to assess the readiness for interethnic interrelation;
- the questionnaire specially developed by the authors to assess the ability for interethnic interrelation in the internationally oriented University.

The object of control are the interethnic skills of foreign students. The questionnaire was translated from Russian into the native languages of the respondents by a native speaker. The survey questions were divided into three groups:

1 Ethnocentrism: the questions focused on the negative attitude towards the representatives of another ethnic groups (e.i. I do not cooperate with people from different ethnic groups, I don't trust people from different ethnic groups)
2 Interethnic interrelation: the questions about the positive personal experience of interethnic communication
3 Interethnic bridge of a social capital: the questions about the readiness for cooperative work in multiethnic groups

3 RESULTS

The target of the pedagogical process determines the choice of the educational model. The model is based on the theoretical concept and the educational approaches. The insufficient knowledge of the Russian language by the foreign applicants, the lack of the intercultural communication skills makes it necessary to teach them the principles of interethnic interrelation already at the pre-university stage.
Table 1. Interethnic interrelation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>&quot;Ethnos - Ethnos&quot; Interrelation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ethnic mix</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>different ethnic groups mix with each other and a new ethnos appears as the result</td>
</tr>
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</table>

In Russia, the main approach to the polyculture education is based on the three-component model. That model is the basis for the educational content in internationally oriented universities. It includes ethno cultural, intercultural and polyculture components that provide the identity of a foreign student:

- the ethnic component is oriented on the acquisition of the ethnical culture of the person;
- interethnic component helps to develop the students identity in the Russian educational environment;
- polytechnic component helps the education globalization.

Table 2. Methodological approaches and the educational principles [3]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>approaches</th>
<th>principles</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>sociocultural approach</td>
<td>the principle of psychological and pedagogical characteristics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>communicative activity approach</td>
<td>the principle of joint action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>person-oriented approach</td>
<td>consistent integration of pedagogical cultures</td>
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</table>

The principle of joint action in the process of learning means the cooperation of a language teacher and the foreign students. The leading role according to this principle belongs to the organizational forms of the educational process that include joint actions and the cooperation in the directions “student – student” and “student – teacher”.

The principle of national educational tradition integration involves the choice of the most appropriate forms and methods of work depending on the educational traditions of the foreign students.

The principle of psychological and pedagogical characteristics involves the focus on the national mentality of foreign students to minimize its influence on intercultural communication.

The efficiency of intercultural communication does not only depend on the knowledge of the foreign language that helps to avoid typical mistakes in everyday life situations. The knowledge of a foreign language does not guarantee the successful communication in more complicated situations.

3.1 Diagnostic component of the interethnic interaction model in teaching Russian as a foreign language

The students of any international university in Russia master the Russian language in stages, the target is B1 level, that is achieved by foreign students at pre-university faculty through the integration of the interethnic integration in the classroom and extracurricular activities.

The questionnaire results analysis shows that ethnocentrism is substantially connected and influences interethnic interrelation. It is the connecting social capital for the students in an internationally oriented University in Russia.

The main purpose of the research was to verify the hypothetic structural model with ethnocentrism as an independent variable that prognoses the interethnic bridge social capital. At the same time, the research deals with the role of interethnic interrelation as the mediator of the relation between ethnocentrism and interethnic bridge social capital. The results determine that ethnocentrism has
negative influence upon the interethnic convergence of the social capital of the students and its blurring among different ethnic groups.

The first conclusion is the inability to develop bridge forms of social capital supports the idea of ethnocentrism as the barrier for the successful development of trust and reciprocity. Ethnocentric attitudes among the students undermine the possibility of cooperation, trust and cooperation that are necessary for social cohesion. Ethnocentric students usually think that their culture is the best and are not interested in the culture of the others. That can bring to the mistakes in decision-making, to biased unfriendly relations. Ethnic segregation is still a problem for the Universities of Russia.

The suggested diagnostic model of interethnic interrelations is aimed at gradual B2 Russian as a foreign language acquisition, that is based on the integration of the educational cultures in the classroom and during extracurricular activities in the combination of active methods and game technologies. The most effective were the following methods and approaches: adaptation training together with the undergraduates, lessons – celebrations, conferences, the technologies of the critical thinking development through reading and writing, discussions and roleplay.

The success of sociocultural and academic adaptation of the students largely depend on the educational model of pre-university education and the environment of the internationally oriented University. The role of a teacher in the process of intercultural communication is indisputable. Theorists have recently emphasized students’ active role in education in which the teacher is no longer a transmitter on knowledge, but the teacher is still the "manager of intercultural communication" when we speak about the students with different ethnic backgrounds. The role of teachers seems to be shifting from preprogrammed knowledge dispensers to managers of student learning and the learning environment. [4]

3.2 Some ways of forming the culture of interethnic interrelation of the students in polyculture environment

The course of Russian as a foreign language is a combination of classroom and extra-curricular activities, being a complex process and helping to organize the interethnic interrelation. That lets the language to be learned not only in the academic way but also through informal and non-academic communication. Extracurricular activities include going to the museums, theatres, exhibitions where the informal communication of the representatives of different nations take place.

Russian as a foreign language classes is a good platform for developing the culture of interethnic relations. The situation can be complicated because of the language barrier the students step by step learn to overcome it and to participate in interethnic activities in the classroom. The students get the information about international holidays (for example, the international day of greetings where the students learn to greet each other in different languages and get acquainted with the greeting gestures of different nations; the day of the native language where they translate the verses of A.Pushkin into their mother languages; the New Year celebration and so on). These events reflect the atmosphere of friendship between the nations at the same time focusing on the importance of every nation’s culture.

The given research results let the authors come to some practical conclusions. The educational establishments should foster intercultural activities that helps interethnic interrelation and confidence building between different ethnic groups. One of the ways is to arrange at the University a community with a great number of students from different countries; this community could support the students’ integration. The internet communication of the students should be studied with its unlimited potential for constant interethnic communication in its specific way.

To make the cooperation between the students possible it is necessary to arrange regular structured and constant interethnic interrelation in friendly atmosphere. The authors suppose that the effective methods of forming the culture of interethnic interaction can be:

- joint project activities;
- problem-solving;
- situation analysis;
- role models research;
- positive thinking and positive attitude to mistakes.

Polyculture competence can hardly be formed in the traditional education with its subject-oriented curriculum. It is developed through the system integration into the educational process being its
inseparable part. It is not a natural process developing spontaneously. It is not the development of a certain social characteristic in the situation of a social norm. This competence is formed by the targeted educational activity and special methods.

4 CONCLUSIONS

Intercultural communication is not simply a “problem” to be solved, but something to be explored and encouraged. Higher education is concerned with cultural diversity issues, both to enhance students’ experiences on campus and to prepare them to function in their careers and in larger societies. [5:321]

Interethnic interrelation, when a foreign applicant comes to an internationally oriented university in Russia, means first of all adaptation. The successful adaptation of foreign students is the process of entering, developing and the forming of personality in the Russian educational environment. It is the combination of informational, social and cultural environment bringing to the adaptation of foreigners to the Russian culture and co-existence in the multinational environment.

The survey results demonstrate that the students do not have ethnic integration in the university and the university does not stimulate the communication. The students neglect the interethnic interrelation. The students themselves are not inclined to get involved into interethnic communication so it makes a problem that must be solved by creating special conditions or involving them in specific activities: if people from different cultures work together in a specially organized context it brings to the development of the “negotiation culture”. Frequent interaction help the students to cooperate.

The diagnostic model of interethnic interrelation is aimed at stage by stage acquisition of the Russian language at B2 level. This process is based on the integration of the contacting cultures in the classroom activities and during extracurricular activities.

The authors see the culture of interethnic relations of the foreign students as the integrative personal education that regulates the relations between different nations during the years of study at the University. The culture of interethnic interrelations includes the knowledge of the customs and of the other cultures and nationalities, non-conflict behavior and the ability to communicate on the international level. It presupposes the acknowledgement of the nations’ equality and the ability to bear personal responsibility for the actions and behavior. All these elements taken as complex help to provide effective communication and interaction of the representatives of another nations keeping in mind their needs and interests.

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