

# UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' SOCIO-CULTURAL COMPETENCE DEVELOPMENT THROUGH FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING

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## Abstract

The article substantiates the necessity of building up and reveals the opportunities of developing the socio-cultural competence of students of non-language departments with the use of information technology on the basis of enhanced culture-through-language studies component within the content of foreign language teaching for university students. In recent years, interest in studying foreign languages in connection with socio-economic changes has significantly increased in Russia. All subjects of the educational system strive to meet the needs of self-realization of a person in a new socio-cultural environment; a dialogue of cultures of Western and Eastern countries is clearly traced. This fact leads to significant changes in the educational system as a whole, since training of a responsible and competent future professional begins to take a priority place in the field of educational services.

At the present time there is a discrepancy between modern requirements to a professional and the content of the training. The need to increase the professional qualifications of specialists is determined by the expansion of the scope of their intercultural interaction, the growth of global problems, and development of the economy as a whole. Training of university students who are able and willing to participate in intercultural communication is most effectively carried out in the process of forming and developing their socio-cultural competence, with strengthening the language-through-culture component in the educational content.

The term "culture-through-language study" is included in the definition of teaching foreign language content. When studying foreign languages, it is necessary to include information about social experience of people whose language is being studied. In the work the Internet technology "Web Quest" was used, created in 1995 by American professor B. Dodge, which is a web scenario of the project assignment and includes less complicated components such as "Hot list" and "Multimedia scrapbook" (lists of certain information, multimedia and Internet sources on the topic). If we want to prepare students for real intercultural communication, it is necessary to use information of authentic content in teaching. A culture-through-language study is a part of the area investigating the relationship between language and culture and is directly referred to intercultural communication.

Keywords: learning, education, teaching, university, student, socio-cultural competence, foreign language training, culture-through-language studies, information technology.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

In recent years, interest in studying foreign languages in connection with socio-economic changes has significantly increased in our country. All subjects of the educational system strive to meet the needs of self-realization of a person in a new socio-cultural environment; a clear dialogue of the interpenetration of cultures of Western and Eastern countries is clearly traced. This fact leads to significant changes in the educational system as a whole, as training of a responsible and competent professional begins to take a priority place in the field of educational services. The qualitative training of a future specialist will determine its competitiveness in the Russian labor market and favor its painless entry into the international labor market. Knowledge of a foreign language characterizes a specialist as ready for social and professional mobility and entry into intercultural communication.

At the present time there is a discrepancy between modern requirements to a professional in these conditions and the content of the training. The need to increase the professional qualifications of specialists is determined by the expansion of the scope of their intercultural interaction, the growth of global problems, and development of the economy as a whole.

Introduction of advanced technologies in the labor market requires professionals of a high level of preparedness, characterized by competitiveness. Foreign language training is one of the most

important factors in the process of training a future specialist for the dialogue of cultures in the context of globalization and internationalization [1].

Under the "professional-communicative" skills we understand the ability of a person with use of information technology and foreign vocabulary to acquire information [2]. In close connection with the professional-communicative competence is the general communicative competence, which is determined by the following psychological and pedagogical factors: expansion of communication boundaries, emergence of a global communicative space, creation of a global information space that ensures people's information interaction, their access to global information resources, information products and services, the transition from direct interpersonal communication to the heuristic type of communication, while both types of communication at a certain stage are indirect. Intermediated interpersonal communication is understood as a form of communication between people, realized through the use of new information technologies (Internet, e-mail, etc.). Impersonal communication is a form of obtaining information embedded in the information bank of new information technologies (computer sites, etc.).

Training of future professionals who are able and willing to participate in intercultural communication is most effectively carried out in the process of forming and developing their socio-cultural competence, with the strengthening of the language-through-culture component in the content of training. A culture-through-language study is a part of the area studying the relationship of language and culture, and is called intercultural communication. A culture-through-language study is an aspect that reflects the culture and helps students learning a foreign language to understand the national historical features which are characteristic of a different social culture.

## 2 METHODOLOGY

The term "culture-through-language study" is included in the definition of the content of teaching a foreign language. It should be noted that the topic of culture-through-language studies was actualized abroad much earlier. Loch Ness may be considered the founder of the culture-through-language study methodology.

It is known that language, being one of the main features of the nation, expresses the culture of the people who speak it, that is, national culture. Therefore, foreign-language training should be provided as a source of information about the national culture of the native speakers of the target language. Given the enormous educational function of the language, language-through-culture study is a means of educating students about respect and love for the country of the target language. Language-through-culture study aspect in the organization of educational material strengthens the educational focus of the teaching content, which allows foreign language training in close connection with the history and culture of the country of the target language.

Knowledge of nature, thinking, society, ways and methods of activity, skills and abilities to carry out activities, the basis for finding activities to solve emerging problems, the system of emotional, moral, volitional, and aesthetic educatedness are included in the concept of social experience. When studying foreign languages, it is necessary to include information about the social experience of the people whose language is being studied.

In the work the Internet technology "Web Quest" was used, created in 1995 by American professor B. Dodge, which is a web scenario of the project assignment and includes less complicated components such as "Hot list" and "Multimedia scrapbook" (lists of certain information, multimedia and Internet sources on the topic), "Treasure Hunt" (questions about the topic are added to the sources), "Subject Sampler" (where among other things, questions of a problem nature are presumed, where one's opinion needs to be expressed) [3].

It should be noted that all students while preparing the assignments can always use information resources in the Internet, while those students who do not fit in time to prepare a task for a sufficient number of points have the possibility to get the necessary points by the end of the semester by preparing a report of the completed task in the format of the Internet technology "subject sample": they compile a list of Internet resources on the topic, several questions that reveal the content of the topic, and the answers, in which it is expected to express their opinion on the topic. Students should be able to "defend" such work.

### 3 RESULTS

The peculiarity of socialization in the context of the study of foreign languages is seen in the fact that the object of perception for the learner is not the facts of the material and non-material world, but the method of submitting these facts, carried out by the addresser. If the addressee and the addresser represent different cultures, there is a possibility of unintentional manipulative influence on the addressee [4, p.4]. It follows that if we want to prepare students for real intercultural communication, it is necessary to use information of authentic content in teaching.

#### 3.1 Foreign Language Training via Language-Through-Culture Component

Due to the lack of specific and scientifically grounded practical recommendations for the development of the students' socio-cultural competence, teachers are free to choose the most appropriate ways of delivering material. Thus, while carrying out foreign language training using the language-through-culture component, although acting out of the best motives, teachers can leave some elements of the content of language-through-culture studies and the rationale for their inclusion in the contents open to criticism.

##### 3.1.1 *Cultural component in language study*

It is important to distinguish a cultural component in language-through-culture study, which includes knowledge of national realia, important historical events, major figures of literature and art, science and technology, a national vision of the world, as well as skills related to standard situations characteristic of the country.

When implementing foreign language training of students of non-language University departments, the search for technologies that are able to link language learning with teaching the culture served by this language is still relevant. Therefore, language-through culture study as an aspect of the methodology of teaching a foreign language requires the ordering of information about the country of the target language in the classroom and puts on the agenda, in the circle of linguo-didactic issues, the problem of finding modern methods of familiarizing learners with the new culture.

The effectiveness of professional intercultural communication is determined by the degree of students' knowledge of the common general professional language picture of the world, providing an idea of the methods and rules of communication that are observed in each specific foreign language social environment. In the process of mastering the professional language picture of the world, students in parallel acquire the foreign language information area [1]. The study and borrowing of international experience is carried out through professional-communicative competence, which often occurs in the language of interethnic communication, which is English.

##### 3.1.2 *Language-Through-Culture Training and Information Technology*

In the formation and development of general and professional communicative competences with the use of information technologies, interrelation of not only professional, communicative and informational aspects occurs, but also of interactive, carried out on the basis of language-through-culture training in the university and contributing to the formation and development of the socio-cultural competence of future specialists. Continuous updating of information technologies requires a continuous revision of the methods for selecting the content of the taught courses and teaching methods.

The use of information and multimedia technologies, Internet resources, for example, in Kazan Federal University, helps to realize the personality-oriented component of the personality-activity approach in teaching future specialists in the humanities and ensures the individualization and differentiation of training. The classes are held in specially-equipped computer rooms, where electronic media with training programs are used that allow displaying information in the form of text, sound, and video. Increasing the speed of mastering the material is one of the strengths of information technology. Undoubtedly, a computer in teaching can be considered only as a means, except for its use in dynamics, during some time period, when it takes over the function of a teacher. The latter is typical for the implementation of the concept of learning through life, at the departments of distance education. The equipment and training correspond to the principles of creating single information and educational space, and those of educational continuity.

Currently, the selection of the content of foreign language training can be carried out in a different way, depending on new information technologies, when integrating forms and methods of work. For

example, the technology "tandem study of a foreign language and culture" is gaining popularity in the world. "Tandem Europe" is a project funded by the European Commission [5, c.388]. According to the tandem method, people who speak different languages work in pairs to learn the language from each other, learn more about the culture of their partner in order to exchange knowledge from different areas and spheres of life. Thus, in the process of the project tandem methodology, intercultural interaction takes place, which is carried out, inter alia, from interdisciplinary positions. In the tandem method the language of communication is the language of one of the communicants. The success of intercultural communication can be declared when mutual satisfaction on the part of all its participants is achieved [6].

## **3.2 Development of the Socio-Cultural Competence**

The content of the preparation for intercultural dialogue includes acquaintance and study of international experience reflected in the elements of reflection, analyzing one's own attitude towards one's potential profession, increasing respect for one's profession, and toward oneself as a professional. The educational material should reveal the essence of many relevant phenomena.

### *3.2.1 Prospects for the Development of Socio-Cultural Competence*

The culture-through-language component has always been present in the content of teaching foreign languages, but has not been defined until recently as an independent category. Studying of the content of the language-through-culture aspect by university students helps to increase their interest in the countries of the target language, their introduction to the cultures of these countries in all their richness, the development of socio-cultural competence.

Socio-cultural competence can be linked with understanding of a holistic system of ideas about the basic national traditions, customs and realities of the country of the target language. Prospects for the development of socio-cultural competence are quite large for today, since there are objective reasons, which consist in the formation of international cooperation. Involvement of social partners from the countries of the near and far abroad will accelerate the processes of internationalization and socialization in the Russian education system.

As D. Johnson notes, some scholars criticize the pedagogy of teaching a foreign language, which accentuates Western values [7]. Despite criticism, foreign language teachers acknowledge that teaching a socio-cultural component is an integral part of the program in the foreign language training of students. The problem is to find a balance between ethical and pedagogical aspects in the language-through-culture studies.

### *3.2.2 Teaching the Cultural Aspect*

Encoding and decoding of communicative actions requires understanding and proper perception of the cultural context in which they take place. Scientists such as Auerbach, Phillipson, Scutnabb-Cangas are mentioned in the article of D. Johnson on teaching the cultural aspect. They warn that materials for training should not be more prioritized in relation to other materials [8], [9]. Scientists say that many pedagogical practices are dominant. For example, in the general flow of teaching materials, the American and British cultures, in their opinion, are portrayed as dominant and more advanced in relation to the culture of the learner.

In our opinion, one of the most effective methods for developing the socio-cultural competence of university students in foreign language acquisition is the creation of such situations of communication, when students seem to "forget" that they are in the process of targeted foreign language training, and then quite naturally they have various questions, concerning the culture and the country of the target language. Such an approach in the transfer of knowledge leads to a process of interaction between the teacher and students on the basis of mutual interest and seeking answers to the questions posed. This process of interaction includes an effective learning process, where students perceive the language-through-culture aspect as not an imposed, and thus a dominant component, but rather as a sequence of recommendations implicitly introduced. The results of the training will help students to apply a foreign language in real conditions of culturally-saturated situations, and also to form their own attitude to the studied culture of another country.

## 4 CONCLUSIONS

The effectiveness of using the latest information and communication technologies in the process of foreign language training of future professionals depends on the quality of didactic processing of teaching materials, i.e. methodology aimed at developing the ability to perceive foreign language and socio-cultural material [10].

The expansion of cooperation between countries and peoples increases the demand in the international labour market for specialists with a high level of socio-cultural competence and the ability to use the world's information resources, as a foreign language has become a tool of communication in a single information space.

Particular attention should be paid to the authenticity of foreign language materials in order to form correct views about the countries of the languages studied: about universal and national values, cultural heritage of foreign countries. Authentic texts are especially needed as an alternative to real communication with native speakers. Students themselves can seek to learn language-through-culture information that helps to master the foreign language. The success or failure of a particular course depends on which approaches the teacher chooses to integrate the language-through-culture elements into the curriculum.

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