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Training students for intercultural communication in a dynamic world: a challenge in continuing education

Подготовка студентов к межкультурной коммуникации в динамичном мире: задача непрерывного образования

Written by:
Irina I. Klimova[1]
https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5142-1890
Tatiana A. Zhukova[2]
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2184-4814
Derrick I. Cameron[3]
https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5520-4797
Nina A. Kozlovtseva[4]
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2323-0752
Natalia V. Chernyishkova[5]
https://orcid.org/0009-0003-2744-4269

Abstract

The article discusses the problems related to preparing students for intercultural communication within the context of continuing education. The authors develop a set of definitions concerning the process of training students for intercultural communication. Additionally, the current need to review conventional approaches to the preparation of students for intercultural communication vis-à-vis the implementation of novel strategies is highlighted. The primary goal of the research is to establish a repeatable preparation process, which is practice-focused. The range of tasks suggested by the authors reflects the practical application of these strategies. Thus the following aspects have been identified as the most critical drivers: (1) a continuous and practice-focused process which facilitates the preparation for intercultural communication; (2) the use of case-based reasoning for researching and updating the tools and methods within the process of preparation of students for intercultural communication; (3) and a systematic approach to task development within the learning process (e.g., case studies, role plays, mixed interaction, networking, etc.). This method enables the adoption and concurrent adjustment of the teaching practices in order to fulfil the educational

Аннотация

В статье определена проблема, связанная с подготовкой студентов к межкультурной коммуникации в условиях непрерывного образования. Авторы обозначен ряд дефиниций, отражающих процесс подготовки студентов к межкультурной коммуникации. Кроме того, подчеркивается необходимость пересмотра сложившихся подходов к подготовке студентов к межкультурной коммуникации в связи с внедрением новых стратегий. Основная цель исследования – определить специфику организации практикоориентированного подхода к подготовке педагогов к межкультурной коммуникации. Следующие аспекты должны быть учтены для реализации обозначенной цели:: (1) непрерывный и ориентированный на практику процесс, который облегчает подготовку к межкультурной коммуникации; (2) использование метода прецедентов, основанного на изучении конкретных примеров для обновления существующей практики с целью оптимизации процесса подготовки педагогов к межкультурной

[1] PhD of Philological Sciences, Professor Financial University under the Government of the Russian Federation, Russian.
[2] Dr. in Pedagogy, Associate Professor Financial University of the Government of the Russian Federation and ADD: MISIS University of Science and Technology, Moscow — University of Science and Technology, Moscow.
[3] MA of Applied Linguistics, Instructor Financial University under the Government of the Russian Federation, Russian.
[4] PhD of Culturology Financial University under the Government of the Russian Federation, Russian.
[5] PhD of Philological Sciences, Associate Professor Financial University under the Government of the Russian Federation, Russian.

goals of diverse intercultural communication programs. Optimized practices and strategies can subsequently be collected, disseminated, and ultimately replicated within other post-secondary settings and contexts.

Keywords: teacher training, continuing education, intercultural communication, strategies for preparing students, case study, role play, networking.

коммуникации; (3) и системный подход к разработке задач в рамках процесса обучения (например, тематические исследования, ролевые игры, смешанное взаимодействие, создание сетей и т.д.). Этот метод позволяет внедрять и одновременно корректировать методы преподавания для достижения образовательных целей, реализуемых в рамках различных программ по межкультурной коммуникации. Усовершенствованные методы и определенные стратегии впоследствии могут быть интегрированы, распространены и, в конечном счете, использованы в других учреждениях и контекстах послевузовского образования.

Ключевые слова: подготовка учителей, непрерывное образование, межкультурная коммуникация, стратегии подготовки учащихся, метод прецедентов, ролевые игры, создание сетей.

Introduction

Currently, «society has made students' ability and readiness for constant information searching and acquisition its top priority» (Akmambetova & Savelieva-Rat, 2021). Refining and updating professional knowledge and skills on a regular basis «has become one of the most critical factors which drive the importance of individualizing learning processes» (Akmambetova & Savelieva-Rat, 2021). Moreover, the willingness to develop a person-oriented educational path and the ability «to translate research interests into a specific and targeted course of study by being open and ready to embrace the innovations brought forward by the professional environment and intercultural communication is critical». (Kurylo, 2019).

The theoretical analysis dealing with the status of the scientific development of the problem under consideration shows that many research studies have been carried out by Russian and foreign researchers working in the field of pedagogical sciences. For the purpose of this research article, the studies can be divided into three groups. The focus of the first set of studies has been primarily on the aspects of training students for intercultural communication and the identification of its key principles and role in the current educational system on a global scale (Akmambetova & Savelieva-Rat, 2021; Stenischeva, 2020; Sirenko, 2021).

The second set of studies is targeted at analysing and understanding the genuine meaning of such a phenomenon as "intercultural communication"

including aspects of its implementation within the context of training students for intercultural communication (Zhukova & Shrenk, 2016; Novikova, 2007).

The third set of studies examines strategies for the preparation of students for intercultural communication in the context of dynamically changing *learning* needs. (Zhukova et al., 2022; Kurylo, 2019)

Thus, this paper presents the first authors' conclusion on the problem and seeks to understand the importance of continuing education and the strategies to its development.

The research has five sections following this introduction, wherein we have discussed the issues in the current situation to investigate how the continuing education could be applied to teaching process. In the next section, we present the analysis of the current methods deployed in this research. Following this, we present a brief history of the studied sector, focusing on the recent views on the current problem and the possible ways of solution (case study, personal education path, etc.). This is important to investigate how the continuing education is perceived.

Literature Review

Within the present context of training students for intercultural communication, there is an emerging trend of rethinking the role of students

in the educational process, making them active partners rather than silent participants. The authors assume that the training of students for intercultural communication can be narrowly defined as a type of learning which includes pre-teaching. This means that the instructor provides background information on the subject ahead or before students start delving into the topic. Additionally, the fundamentals of the subject can be highlighted while discussing related topics. They can also be presented in a non-intrusive manner by way of referring, exampling, or creating associations. This type of dynamic educational process appears to be effective for studying a subject, which is difficult to understand. «The change of roles turns a student into a partner in the learning process who brings in his or her own experience» (Zhukova, 2022). In this educational process, a student becomes more agile and flexible. Being agile and flexible implies the ability to think faster, and to analyse and adapt to the current circumstances and search for the appropriate types of activities.

The key attribute of training students for intercultural communication is featured by its focus on the content and the process, which includes the readiness of learners for developing and setting their own learning goals along with forecasting the developmental trends of the phenomena under study. In other words, the whole learning system is designed to develop personal qualities, which are required for successful performance and driven by rapid social and intercultural changes (Kurylo, 2019).

This poses another challenge for pedagogical science, in particular, the optimisation of methods for training students for intercultural communication. Intercultural communication implies interaction among representatives of different cultures, which connects people, establishes good rapport and produces effective business correspondence and mass communication. Many researchers define intercultural communication as a combination of various forms of relationships and interactions among individuals and groups, which may belong to different ethnic and cultural backgrounds (Alismail, 2016; Duzhakova, 2008). However, there are those who see intercultural communication as interaction among people representing different cultures alone (Duzhakova, 2008) Researchers suggest that intercultural communication spawns a new social medium featuring a freedom of communication in a multicultural environment. This makes the problem of overcoming and eliminating communication barriers more relevant and current.

Zhukova T.A. et., al put forward a perspective which reviews intercultural communication as a culturally driven process. The components of this communication process are closely interconnected with the cultural identity of its participants. At the same time, it is important to highlight three basic competences of intercultural communication: (1) the ability to notice and interpret information which is transmitted through non-verbal cues and which representatives of different cultures find the most difficult to interpret; (2) the ability to actively listen - a skill which participants of the intercultural communication process are expected to master; (3) the ability to predict and eliminate potentially embarrassing mistakes which may disrupt the intercultural communication process because of the wrong impressions they might produce.

Lately, researchers have taken a keen interest in the dynamic perception of culture, which stresses the importance of understanding the lifestyle, behavioural norms and values of a social group (e.g. urban culture). These developments emphasise the importance of research in the field of intercultural communication. In addition, the pace of the educational process is changing, making it more dynamic and forward-looking. It is obvious that there is an increasing need for new strategies and approaches to the education process (Dyuzhakova, 2022).

The organisational strategy implies a system, which contains findings of analysis of current social and educational conditions, learning goals, principles of selection and design of course content. It accounts for students' needs and expectations and a number of components associated with the process. The strategy includes a master schedule, which sets out priorities, and sequences the steps required for achieving the strategic goals. It is necessary to emphasise that Russian pedagogical universities currently «have come to realise the importance of strategic management and setting of short-term goals in the context of the new reality» (Alismail, 2016).

The points below show how dynamic the model of teaching student is and how it is important to consider the personal and organizational strategies. We believe that the strategies of continuing education we can use while teaching students and the ways how to improve continuing education.

Methods

The objective of this research study is to provide insights for preparing students for intercultural communication within the context of continuing education.

One of the key aspects of the research methodology is targeted at improving the understanding of the methods, which contribute to the organization of the educational process. The selected method of case-based reasoning enables the working out of solutions to new tasks through the adjustment of existing outcomes obtained from similar tasks. The analysis, in its turn, provides a description of a particular case at a given educational institution, which allows for the application of accumulated experience to the problem in question. In this study, the research has been conducted by the Financial University under the Government of the Russian Federation (Moscow) and the Herzen State Pedagogical University (St. Petersburg). The implementation of scientific ideas and theoretical models proposed by the teachers in Herzen State Pedagogical University (the Institute of Pedagogy included 110 staff) is suggested as necessary.

In an attempt to understand the principles and structure of the case-based reasoning method, the authors rely on a systematic approach, which provides detailed insight into each case. This process allows for detailed analysis and comparison, and leads to the development of an integrated system of cases. Having this system in place makes it possible to single out structural components from individual cases and to identify functional relationships between them.

Moreover, the authors use the review literature and analyze the literature on the mentioned problem, the role of continuing education I n teachers' training. As well, they find it is important to use interviews (among 20 colleagues of Financial State University under the Government of the Russian Federation and Herzen State Pedagogical University). Moreover, they refer to the literature regarding the activities, which should improve the process of training.

Results

As discussed previously, the identification of new strategies should be instrumental in preparing instructors for intercultural communication within the context of continuing education. The authors of the article have provided the most significant examples from their perspective.

To begin with, it can be asserted that the efforts to replace traditional linear approaches to the preparation of students have led to significant changes. The linear approach is manifested in a learning environment, which relies on the long-established patterns of development of intercultural communication skills without considering the relevant cross-cultural dynamics, which have been the subject of multiple research studies for many centuries (Alismail, 2016; Enders, 2002). The purpose of these research studies is to identify a range of linear, yet unique, design trends including opportunities for the improvement of existing practices. However, a number of researchers who have opposed the logic of linear theories have demonstrated that the linear type of development is one of many available and should be placed either in a fully closed information-driven environment without external exposure or the degree of impact should be properly gauged (Enders, 2002).

It appears that another strategy could be that of the personalisation practice-oriented approach (Kokarevich & Sizova, 2015). This strategy is mainly associated with life-long education. A solid life-long education strategy in the field of professional education sets clear objectives, tasks and content. These components are designed to encourage the rapid development of the personality of a student making them ready and willing to design and predict personal development paths and to work out ground-breaking solutions by way of intercultural communication. In this regard, a student takes on the role of the designer of his/ her personal educational path.

The term «personal educational path» was introduced in pedagogy at the end of the 1990s and can be reviewed as a definite educational programme and standard (Nieto et al., 2008). The following components make up the structure of the educational path: (1) a plan, which assumes target setting based on the appropriate standards; (2) content which includes systematization and grouping of subjects; (3) technology which drives the use of specific pedagogical technologies, methods and techniques; (4) a diagnosis which defines the set of required tools for analysis; (5) tools; (6) outcomes.

What is more, proper attention should be given to strategies, which facilitate social interactions. Such strategies are targeted at regulating the interactions among the various participants

involved in intercultural communication especially at the level of the educational institution, and regional government etc. The purposes and levels of self-regulation (self-organisation, self-management and self-control) define the selection of the correct strategy or strategies. They may include monologues (imperative or manipulative) and dialogues.]

If an imperative monologue strategy is selected (Hosseini Fatemi et al., 2016), then the instructor determines the goal and communicates it to the students. Thus, the educational process is built around it. This strategy is commonly applied when studying norms, which require performing specific operations, or when the sequence of steps cannot be disrupted. Work with official documents can be an excellent example of such a strategy. Additionally, the strategy for the management of the audience during lecturing is considered imperative if the instructor does not check up on the response and understanding of the students.

A manipulative monologue strategy (Zhukova et al., 2022) is different as it is the instructor who defines the path to the achievement of the goals. In this case, the instructor refers to the goals of a specific educational stage for consistency and compares them to the actual goals of the students. The instructor evaluates whether the students' level complies with the requirements set by the educational process for this specific stage. In addition, the instructor takes into account the nature of the relationship among the students in the group. The instructor creates the environment required for the achievement of the goal, which may be either not clear or partially obvious to the students at the start. The 'manipulative strategy' of interaction implies that the instructor presents the sequence of stages and level of difficulty of a specific task. For instance, in the case of a research project, if the goal of each step is not linked to the goals of the educational process, the instructor may change the sequence or content of the steps at any time if the situation calls for such changes.

The dialogue strategy (Vaira, 2007; Vargas, 2000) may be effective if both the instructor and the students have established an atmosphere of mutual trust. In the case of the pseudo-dialogue strategy, the instructor defines the goal of interaction, but in the course of studying the instructor facilitates work in groups (question and answer sessions or similar), discussions, case studies, etc. The instructor acts as the advisor, generally, at the request of the group. Given that the goal complies with the educational

programme, the instructor can present a list of potential goals to the group or specify the subject of the next stage of the educational programme, thus, passing on a new level of understanding the current pedagogical task.

The next strategy describes and defines the continuous nature of preparation for intercultural communication driven by the significance of bringing together various social cultures. This, in its turn, drives society towards tolerance, an integration of different educational systems, and a search for new ways of interaction and optimisation of preparation. The following highlighted levels articulate the findings of this research article:

➢ *The first (low) level* reflects the acquisition and adoption of conventional fundamentals of intercultural communication. This level reveals various inconsistencies and defines the necessary psychological and pedagogical set of tools required to optimise the preparation process through developing solutions to professional tasks.
➢ *The second (medium) level* includes innovative prospects of arrangement of intercultural communication defined by the regulatory process. It allows for the critical analysis of the prevailing norm in terms of the new prospects and identification of opportunities for further development and implementation through role-play.
➢ *The third (high) level* describes the ability to implement changes into the system of preparation for intercultural communication (educational programmes, chain of educational institutions, organisational structure of regulatory bodies within the educational system). The dialectical rejection of the second level paves the way for the transition to the third level. It is featured by the development of a clearer understanding of the substantial number of internal contradictions within the system necessary for the initiation of the transition process. In other words, differentiation has become a crucial component in the process. This includes the ability of the education to break the continuous flow of information and go beyond the established routine. It means that education should be capable of predicting and evaluating various problems and working out appropriate solutions based on its values and fundamental principles. Any problem should be viewed as an opportunity for further development through network-based mixed interaction.

Discussion

Examples of tasks for the levels, which have been described above, are discussed below. The tasks have been developed accounting for the main principles of the strategies reflecting the various aspects of the preparation process.

1) The research study relies on the perceptions suggested by Zair-Bek, Ye. S. who state, *«the learning task is the essential component of the competency or outcome-based approach. What is more, the combination of professional tasks forms the core of the content of professional preparation whereas the stages of competency development define the content».* «The content includes the shaping of the problem which can be presented as an idea to the students. Afterwards, the students start to develop tasks, which require specific solutions independently. The tasks are based on the description of cases, facts or situations. The initial analysis, critical evaluation and interpretation of the findings lead to the transformation of the text through exchanging opinions and personal evaluations of the problem, which include the experience, values and perceptions of the participating individuals. The next stage involves a problem-solution session resulting in the development of new data sets which can be then studied following the same procedure». (Zair-Bek, 2017)

The task is an instruction or call for an action (a number or sequence of specific steps or activities) which includes requirements (known and needed for reaching the goal or solving the problem), context (generally known) and the outcome/solution (the unknown). These components are formulated in the form of a question or a task. The development of the solution includes the identification of the unknown components. Finding the solution means obtaining a specific and measurable result. A sample task might have the following structure and content presented in the form): (1) a generalised definition which describes an existing contradiction, challenge or question; (2) a key task which specifies an outcome or solution (which is to be developed); (3) a context which may include the following information: input data, specification of resources in place (informational, scientific, methodological, timing, psychological, managerial, and etc.); (4) a reference to the theoretical knowledge used for the solution to the problem; and (5) instructions which drive the development of

the final solution. The final solution may rely on data, action plans, instructions, perceptions, judgements, evaluations.

The final solution can be presented in the form of a text (programme, presentation, brochure, leaflet, book, notes, different types of advertisements, guidelines, project, instructions, etc.). It can be a descriptive piece of writing such as a behavioural strategy, a course of action, a mode of operation, or a technology etc.

The list of tasks can be combined to produce an outcome, which contains a solution, and at the same time, this outcome should be flexible. Additionally, the instructor should be able to adapt it based on the needs of students and the type of task. The process requires compliance with a comprehensive pedagogical process which includes axiological (methodological) self-identification; diagnosis-evaluation-prediction; target-setting; planning; design (concept development); practical steps needed to arrange pedagogical processes (technologies and interaction); outcome evaluations (students and teacher), and corrective actions.
Sample tasks are described below.

Sample Task 1: Intercultural communication.

General overview of the task. Modern society expects individuals to develop intercultural communication skills. Current observations show that the number of problems arising from interaction with representatives of different cultures is gradually increasing. The issue of eliminating such inevitable obstacles such as language barriers, social beliefs remains relevant and of great importance.

The key task. Provide a brief overview of intercultural communication.

The context for solving the task. You have a number of representatives from different cultures in your group. Both you and the representatives face language, social and cultural misunderstandings.

The tasks, which might lead you to the right solution, include the following:

➢ Identify the theoretical basis which can be employed to solve the problem in question;
➢ Collect data which describes solutions applied by professionals from different fields of study;

➢ Consider which steps or activities can contribute to the improvement of intercultural communication;
➢ Attempt to predict how representatives of different cultures might respond to the suggested activities. Work out and mutually agree a possible solution;
  ➢ Prepare the final version of the solution as a project and prepare for presentation and defence.

Sample Task 2: Culture exchange game

The purpose of the «Culture exchange game» is to shape and improve the understanding of the role of a game in the learning process among students. Innovative games can be used to solve rather challenging social and economic tasks. They include swapping social roles for getting a better grasp on the real world. Three types of outcomes have been identified at the initial stages of innovative games: (1) informative – ideas and solutions to difficult or weakly structured problems, projects and programmes; (2) social – consolidating groups, senior management and specialist teams; (3) educational – mastering new techniques, brainstorming and effective decision-making.

The range of tasks under consideration and methodological sets of tools have been extended. Innovative games provide an opportunity to obtain a number of meaningful results, which include social and psychological aspects meant to improve the learners' understanding of their own personal needs and those of others.

Methodical results include the advent of new methods, techniques and mental strength practices, which assist participants of the game in self-adjustment. What is more, innovative games tend to encourage a higher degree of social engagement, and in turn create a unique environment for interaction. The aesthetic results often involve activities such as writing poetry, short plays performance or artwork. Methodological results can be characterised by an emergence of novel methodological approaches, ideas, and focus areas. A prime example is the "Network-based educational holding game" which involves the development of a company's organisational structure and corporate development strategy.

Sample Task 3: Intercultural Projects

«The age of self-management project» has been prioritised over other learning process initiatives within the roadmap, «The future of global education 2015-2035» as proposed by the ASI strategic agency. The project suggests creating and developing mixed (network-based) structures, which deal with the communication of news content and cultural differences in Internet communication. Internet culture emerged with the advent of the World Wide Web and has evolved as an independent social phenomenon functioning on its own terms within global human civilisation. The projects are computer-based which contain common problems, goals, methods and techniques which are targeted at delivering specific results through collaboration. Examples might include:

– «The secret of the melting-pot» project which introduces students to family values passed on from generation to generation. As a part of the project implementation, students visit city museums, familiarise themselves with the items treasured by their families and conduct polls among other members of the group including teachers. Then they process and analyse the data which they have collected in order to find answers to the following questions: How can we preserve the memory of our ancestors?" The outcome of the project will be a virtual exhibition of family values.
– The «Cloak and dagger in a multicultural world» project which teaches students different methods of information exchange. This project includes questionnaires and practical tasks. The project aims at providing a better understanding of the ways to encrypt information and explaining why it is essential in a multicultural context.
– The «Student holding groups» project which focuses on teamwork and the development of this skill. In this case, «holding» means a group of students, which are perceived as a parent company. The parent company sets the pace and line of work along with establishment of a number of smaller-sized subsidiaries which are expected to follow the instructions and report to the parent company.

Conclusion

To conclude, the following notable aspects feature continuous and practice-oriented processes of preparation for intercultural communication: a continuous and practice-focused nature; a use of case-based reasoning methods for finding and updating the components of the preparation process; and real - world learning tasks including role-plays and mixed network-based interactions.

The authors offer a number of suggestions for further research, which involves the elaboration, and refinement of the components underpinning the process of preparing students for intercultural communication. Further research and reading in this topic should consider the dynamics of the intercultural processes, which influence students' training for intercultural communication. The improvement of these processes should result in increasing the overall effectiveness of the training process of students for intercultural communication in a dynamic world.

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