

INTERCULTURAL EDUCATION AS AN INTEGRAL PART OF MODERN LEARNING PROCESS

Margarita Kulagina

Language Studio “4U”

Article History:

Submitted: 15.06.2015

Accepted: 08.08.2015

Abstract: The process of the world globalization leads to the enlargement of intercultural and interlingual connections among the representatives of different countries, nations, religions and cultures. Herewith, there is a special interest towards the study of intercultural communication and its reflection in the educational sphere. That is why the problem of including cultural information into modern educational programmes and compilation of cutting edge teaching materials has acquired great importance.

Modern methodical complexes acquaint students with the changing realities of the English-speaking countries and fixed expressions that describe various aspects of life. The main task is to avoid misunderstanding, caused not only by purely linguistic reasons but also by lack of cultural knowledge, misunderstanding or simply unfamiliarity with the key concept of the culture being studied.

Taking into consideration the changing status of foreign languages as a source of intercommunication and mutual understanding, methodology underlines the necessity of intensification of pragmatic aspects of the language acquisition. Nowadays, the main purpose of the educational process is to get acquainted with the foreign language as a whole unit, including grammar and lexical data, as well as cross-cultural information. It helps to understand natural, historical and social realia, spiritual values and assists in the formation of the linguistic consciousness.

At the present stage educational courses solve the problem of a textbook, as well as a reference resource, highlighting all the lexical, grammatical and cultural information, and meeting the students' needs. These directories support effective lesson and make it possible to get deeper into the culture of the foreign language.

Keywords: globalization, intercultural education, modern educational courses.

Nowadays we live in the world of fast and easy communication, dealing with people of various cultures and backgrounds. Economic, political and historical changes have created new forms of intercultural interaction in the process of globalization. Stanley Fischer (2001) in his speech *The Challenge of Globalization in Africa* pointed out that globalization is a multi-faceted concept, containing many important social, political, environmental, cultural and religious dimensions, which affect every human being in this or that way. As Henry Teune (2002) explains *globalization has changed the world enough to demand serious re-thinking about comparative social research in our era of globalization*.

As a result of globalization world society is becoming more multicultural. It makes us recognize, respect and value diversity. The terms **cultural diversity** and **multiculturalism** have already become a part of our life. In this regard, the interest of researchers from all over the world towards successful interaction between the representatives of various groups is constantly growing. Communication that lacks appropriate cultural content can become the source of misunderstanding and communication failure that can lead to negative effect. Therefore, one of the most important skills of nowadays is the ability to develop communicative competence in order to take part in the life of multicultural communities and changing society. The interaction of representatives of different nationalities has been made more commonplace by the fluidity of the political and economic conditions in many countries (Kasatkina, 2010). This process continues to occur as individuals keep on feeling compelled to take extraordinary attempts to uproot themselves from their familiar cultural and linguistic groups and immigrate to different cultural and linguistic communities. This can be achieved thanks to intercultural education.

First of all, it is necessary to define the term of intercultural education itself. As Harry H. Giles, Victor E. Pitkin and Thelma Ingram (1946) notice this expression didn't appear in the Education Index until after 1941 and it only came out in Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature in 1943. They give the following definition: *Intercultural education is education to improve understandings and practices of good human relations between individuals of the many culture groups*.

It is also interesting to look at the work of historian Nicholas Montalto, who made a research *A History of the Intercultural Educational Movement, 1924-1941*, where he shows the routes of intercultural education in the USA. It appeared as a response to the changes that took place in the society which were caused by the new coming immigrants from southern and northern Europe. During the first two decades of the 20th century there was a foreign language movement in American libraries, providing the new members of society with the literature in their native languages. It was an attempt to fulfill successful communication between the representatives of different nations and to create positive intercultural dialogue.

Active discussion about the necessity of intercultural education was connected with the growth of immigrants coming to Western Europe, especially to France, Benelux, Germany, Switzerland and the United Kingdom. Different approaches were introduced and the most widely-spread were *immigrant education*, *intercultural education*, *multicultural education* and *anti-racist education*. The main accent was made on successful assimilation with the main focus on language learning mainly. The followers of immigrant education organized special classes for newcomers where they studied together with other migrants outside of the majority group. It was absolutely evident that this approach didn't work well

and educators had to look for new methods. Later in 1980-1990 researchers in many European countries started active developing of multicultural education with the main concentration on integration rather than assimilation. The focus was on tolerance and different cultures. In many schools there were organized special cultural events on different theme days. However, this approach led to even bigger separation underlining the division into “ours-others” concept. Educators came to a conclusion that intercultural education should become an integral part of learning process without subdivision of students into minority and majority groups.

Nowadays, the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) (2005) define intercultural education as an *...education which respects, celebrates and recognises the normality of diversity in all areas of human life. It sensitises the learner to the idea that humans have naturally developed a range of different ways of life, customs and worldviews, and that this breadth of human life enriches us all. It is education, which promotes equality and human rights, challenges unfair discrimination, and promotes the values upon which equality is built.* According to the INTO (2002) it is also about “*...respecting cultural difference and promoting anti-racism, it is not simply the knowledge of a variety of cultures. It aims to counter misconceptions and negative stereotyping of different cultures, religions and nationalities and seeks to develop an appreciation of other cultures in the context of a critical appreciation of local/Irish cultures. Intercultural education celebrates the positive aspects to cultural diversity as well as drawing attention to the power differences between groups and societies*”.

The UNESCO Guidelines on intercultural education published in 2007 identifies the key issues and challenges related to education and multiculturalism such as *culture, culture and education, culture and language, culture and religion*, but also *cultural diversity and majority or minority cultures, multiculturalism and interculturalism*. It also defines the role and objectives of intercultural education as *learning to know, learning to do, learning to live together and learning to be*.

The guideline presents the legal framework to which intercultural education can make reference: The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, international treaties and conventions, covenants, declarations and recommendations. Also the outcomes of the main international conferences are given and allow the educators to use them in forming the programme and developing new educational concepts.

Finally three main principles that frame these guidelines are presented and followed by indications on how to achieve them. The general issues are the following:

- | |
|---|
| <p><u>Principle I:</u> Intercultural Education respects the cultural identity of the learner through the provision of culturally appropriate and responsive quality education for all.</p> <p><u>Principle II:</u> Intercultural Education provides every learner with the cultural knowledge, attitudes and skills necessary to achieve active and full participation in society.</p> <p><u>Principle III:</u> Intercultural Education provides all learners with cultural knowledge, attitudes and skills that enable them to contribute to respect, understanding and solidarity among individuals, ethnic, social, cultural and religious groups and nations.</p> |
|---|

Intercultural education has been actively discussed by world leading politicians, researchers, educators and scientists for about four decades. The European Commission has

created a strong legal basis on which action for intercultural dialogue and against discrimination can also be developed in the education sector.

These are the related documents that can be used while working over the curriculum:

- Racial equality directive (2000/43/EC);
- Employment framework directive (2000/78/EC);
- Directive COM(2008) 426;
- [Renewed social agenda](#);
- Intercultural dialogue support through EU programmes.

Educators have come to a conclusion that modern learning process should be oriented at getting new skills, especially communicative ones, rather than gathering information and remembering facts. Teachers' aim is to prepare students for real life in diverse society, saving learners' own identity and respecting the others. The number of immigrants is constantly growing and newcomers are actively taking part in the life of communities they are coming to. Learners' backgrounds differ in terms of religion, socio-economic status, parents' education, values, attitudes, lifestyles and abilities. All these factors accentuate social and cultural pluralism. In Guidelines on Traveller Education in Primary Schools (2002), the Department of Education and Science explains the main points of intercultural education for children that can successfully be referred to any modern learning process, aiming to foster conditions conducive to pluralism in society. Intercultural education raises awareness of learners' own culture and attunes them to the fact that there are other ways of behaving and value systems. It helps to develop respect for lifestyles different from their own so that learners can understand and appreciate each other.

In view of the intense spread of English in the world, its teaching becomes global. Modern methodical complexes acquaint students with the changing realities of the English-speaking countries and fixed expressions that describe various aspects of life. One of the tasks today is often to avoid misunderstanding, caused not only by purely linguistic reasons but also by lack of cultural knowledge, wrong understanding or simply unfamiliarity with the key concept of the culture being studied. According to professor Claire Kramsch (1993), *culture is always in the background, right from day one, ready to unsettle the good language learners when they expect it least, making evident the limitations of their hard-won communicative competence, challenging their ability to make sense of the world around them*. Wilga Rivers (1981) points out that *we must focus on both appropriate content and activities that enable students to assimilate that content. Activities should encourage them to go beyond fact, so that they begin to perceive and experience vicariously the deeper levels of the culture of the speakers of the language*.

Language Policy Division of the Council of Europe has presented the detailed guide for the development and implementation of curricula for plurilingual and intercultural education useful for both educators and those who are responsible for curriculum planning. The European Centre for Modern Languages (ECML) of the Council of Europe designed a programme of learning through languages aiming at developing plurilingual and intercultural pedagogic approaches.

Educators understand the importance of intercultural education and developing cognitive skills and abilities in their students in order to make them successful in changing

multinational and multicultural world. At the same time intercultural education is aimed at recognizing socio-cultural and linguistic diversity, as well as respecting and understanding different groups in the same society. Undoubtedly, modern technologies for the creation of educational next-generation products will improve the efficiency of formation of linguistic and intercultural competence of the learner and help to lead a successful dialogue between the representatives of various cultures.

References

- Fisher, S. *The Challenge of Globalization in Africa*. Yaoundé, Cameroon, 2001.
- Giles, H. *Review of Educational Research* Vol.16, No.1, Social Foundations of Education (Feb.1946), pp.39-45.
- Guidelines on Traveller Education in Primary Schools*. Dublin, 2002.
- Kasatkina, N. *Analyzing Language Choice among Russian-Speaking Immigrants to the United States*. The University of Arizona, 2010.
- Kramsch, C. *Context and culture in language teaching*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993.
- Montalto, N. *A History of the Intercultural Educational Movement, 1924-1941*. New York: Garland, 1982.
- Rivers, W. *Teaching foreign language skills*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981.
- Teune, H. Is Globalization An American Ideology? XV World Congress, International Sociology Association, Brisbane, Australia, 2002.

INTERNET RESOURCES

- https://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/Source/Source2010_ForumGeneva/GuideEPI2010_EN.pdf
- <http://www.ecml.at/Portals/1/mtp4/broschure-mtp4-EN-web.pdf>
- https://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Information/Intercultural-Education-Strategy/mig_intercultural_education_strategy.pdf
- <http://www.ncca.ie/uploadedfiles/publications/intercultural.pdf>
- <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0014/001478/147878e.pdf>