LINGUISTICS, LITERATURE, PHILOLOGY

UDC 378.147

DEVELOPING MULTICULTURAL COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE
IN ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE CLASSROOM

IRINA KORENETSKAYA
Pskov State University, Russia

Due to the recent increase of academic mobiltity at higher institution level in Russian Federation there appear more and more multicultural academic groups. English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teacher faces new challenges, connected not only with different language levels but with behavioral patterns, rooted in different cultural background. This paper will present design and implementation of an educational programme that aims at developing both students' language skills in English as a foreign language and social skills of interaction in multicultural environment. These ideas help to create classrooms that are more equitable and provide effective engaging of students from diverse backgrounds in the academic process by taking into account their cultures, values and language skills.

Introduction. During the years of its existence the term multiculturalism has experienced different interpretations among politicians, researchers and educators: from being wildly accepted practically worldwide, then the complete rejection in some countries, and finally, we face nowadays rather modest interpretation of this term as a certain balance between an integrated identity as a representative of a particular country and maintenance of linguistic and cultural diversity.

English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners in multicultural framework tend to interact in the environment of mutual understanding and acceptance of different points of view and other cultures and values. Students need certain communicative life skills that are promoted with multicultural education.

Actually, multicultural education should be based on educational equality, mutual acceptance, respect and social justice, prejudice rejection, which will enable the learners to resolve the personal conflicts effectively in today's world. The question: "What knowledge and skills students acquire in their EFL classroom framework when it is about interactions with those who come from different multicultural environment?" turns into "How successful they will be in the global marketplace?".

The tendency to multicultural education changes the main objective of EFL education, which is to prepare citizens to interact in diverse cultural and linguistic contexts. Gogolin (2002) states that the goal of language learning is to develop intercultural competence and promote language diversity.

According to the National Association for Multicultural Education, multicultural education promotes development of positive self-image for students; provides students with equitable educational opportunities; offers multiple perspectives and ways of thinking; combats stereotypes and prejudicial behavior; teaches students to analyze the community in the interest of social equality and justice.

The development of these skills enables students to respond to their role as active citizens in a modern multicultural context. In order to do it, acquisition of linguistic communicative competence alone is not enough. As far as we remember, the term "communicative competence" has been in use for more than forty years. Starting with Hymes (1967, 1973), who added to linguistic competence a sociolinguistic one; later, the term in Canale and Swain's research (1980) acquired strategic competence as well, and finally Celce-Murcia (1995) added actional and discourse competence.

Moreover, nowadays we face the shift in understanding the image of a Native Speaker as an ideal model of language mastery. It will be more correct to replace the pattern of a Native Speaker with an Intercultural speaker. The learner will never manage to attain the level of a Native Speaker, when the latter encompasses both the high level of linguistic and cultural competence. The learner of EFL will always stay as an imperfect Native Speaker, because even if he can acquire perfect linguistic and cultural skills, he will never be able to get rid of his own cultural background in order to become a true Native Speaker. That's why an Intercultural Speaker

can be less skilled than a Native Speaker, regarding his mastery of language, but he can interpret correctly other people's behavior, be tolerant, show respect and interest towards other people in multicultural context, while a Native Speaker is driven by ethnocentrism, taking as "normal" what he knows, and feeling at a loss when he faces a new situation. Students need to function in a situation where at least two languages and two cultures interplay (Kramsch 1993: 233–259), and they must become intercultural speakers, equipped with certain complex and interrelated skills (Yassine, 2006), such as: a) comparing and contrasting cultures, b) dealing with or tolerating ambiguity, c) accepting difference, d) defending one's own point of view while acknowledging the legitimacy of others and e) willingness to engage with the foreign culture.

These skills can be organized into three groups: cognitive (awareness of cultural diversity and different cultural background), emotional (positive acceptance of a different point of view), behavioral (effective relationships with the representatives of other cultures).

To evaluate the effectiveness of implementation of a multicultural educational programme we can resort to the criteria of a result, where we outline the level of development of multicultural communicational skills. Here we differentiate among the highest level, when the students accept the issue of positive multicultural interaction, when they are ready and well-prepared to such an interaction, being able to understand, interpret, respect, be patient to the representative of a different culture. Then there go the intermediate and the lowest levels of multicultural skills, where less personal qualities are necessary for interaction in multicultural context.

Below we would like to present theoretical and practical provision for multicultural educational programme within EFL classroom.

Framework of EFL classroom within multicultural context. The question is: what should really happen in the EFL classroom, when learners of diverse cultural background interact on a daily basis? Undoubtedly, there is a common goal for all learners – that is to develop communicative competence in EFL. But one more question is: who are these students? How well are we, as educators, aware of their linguistic and cultural background?

Addressing diversity is a complex concept, and there is not one single set of right answers. Only by understanding each other we can agree on how to resolve our different points of view. The outcome depends on a dialogue — a discussion with the goal of understanding each other's perspectives.

So, let's get down to the crux of the issue: How does one go about teaching in a classroom where there are, let's say, 6 Russian students, 5 Turkmenian students, one Estonian student, one Uzbek student, one Ukrainian student? Besides this linguistic diversity, what should be done with the cultural diversity that we encounter in such a multicultural framework? How is it possible to take into account all this diversity of learners' backgrounds?

Can English language become the assistant in bridging the language or cultural gap that exists within each student?

In EFL classrooms there should always be time for mother tongue, that provides the opportunity to study and work out the similarities and differences. In this case, the Russian language would be the language selected for comparative analysis for Russian students, whereas the Turkmen language would be chosen by Turkmenian students.

Multicultural encounters within EFL classroom may be provided through a specific activity. These tasks could be thematically related to a certain topic, e.g. relationships, free time and so on.

The simplest example is when the teacher designs the work with idioms, when students try to find equivalents in their mother tongues. For example, students find similar sayings for English "A friend in need is a friend indeed", where in Russian it is «Друг познается в беде», in the Turkmen language it will sound as "Dostuň üçin zäher yut" (Be ready to drink poison for your friend). In the Turkmen language there are some more proverbs with a different implication as well: "Hasaply dost aýrylmaz" (Friendship is one thing, but business is another one); "Täze dost tapdym diýip, könesini unutma" (Old friends and new clothes are best); "Syryňy dostuňa berme, onuñam dosty bardyr" (I said the word to a friend and the enemy got to know my secret).

If we take into account all types of learning styles, i.e. visual, kinesthetic, auditory, analytic learners and so on, (Weaver & Cohen, 1997), then within the language framework the students can compare: vocabulary loans in their languages (e.g. jeans, jam, brand, fitness etc.), jokes, idioms /sayings/proverbs/similes. Analyzing a piece of music, students can present songs from their countries or find common points of reference among languages (New Year's or Christmas songs), present traditional musical instruments from their country. Reading an abstract from drama narration, students can write and perform plays based on cultural elements derived from their country, read poems, written by the authors from their country, watch the films based on a particular book narration but made in their country. When studying the history of English speaking countries, students prepare

the presentations about the greatest sights of their country, traditional myths or legends, national symbols and traditional symbols, customs, celebrations, habits and traditional cuisine of their country. Dealing with the topic "Art", students present some information about outstanding artists of their country, about masterpieces in painting and sculpture.

Designing the lesson plans in such a way, the teacher creates as many opportunities as possible for the students to understand and experience other cultures by means of the textbooks, videos, films, press articles. So we see a shift from teaching of the language itself to the teaching of cultural aspects of the native countries of our students, but not only that of English-speaking countries. Dealing with issues like traditions and customs, history, geography or politics within the EFL classroom we develop intercultural communicative competence, promoting attitudes of openness and tolerance towards the representatives of other cultures, the ability to handle intercultural contact situations with reflection on cultural similarities and differences.

To understand the points mentioned above one needs to have cultural sensitivity. The last one can be added into the structure of intercultural communicative competence. Intercultural sensitivity can be defined as an integrative character trait, combining curiosity, openness, and empathy. It is based on understanding the diversity among the representatives of different cultures and readiness to consider these differences in multicultural encounters, showing flexibility in the choice of communicative strategies and ways of verbal and non-verbal communication.

In every of the point of multicultural encounters the crucial issue is about culture. Louise Damen defined culture as the "learned and shared human patterns or models for living; day-to-day living patterns that pervade all aspects of human social interaction. Undoubtedly, culture is mankind's primary adaptive mechanism." Representatives from different nationalities, ethnicities, and races bring cultural patterns to their interactions, and it's up to teachers to recognize, celebrate and share different cultural patterns. Culture affects learning, both inside and outside the classroom.

Inside the classroom culture influences *academic performance*, when students are taught to process and understand the ideas and information in different ways based on their cultural upbringings, and teachers may need to adapt the lesson plans for multicultural classrooms.

Classroom engagement itself can be highly influenced with students' cultural roots. Students from impoverished backgrounds may struggle to focus and participate, and English-language learners may be less likely to speak up in class.

Different cultural background is important in *student-teacher relationship*. How students treat authority figures, and what they expect from them, differs across cultures. While American children tend to be more informal, other cultures may have very formal structures for student-teacher relationships.

Students' cultural background influence the way students *solve the problems* inside the EFL classroom. Given the same set of information about a problem, students from different cultural origin are likely to suggest a wide array of solutions. A teacher should validate a range of approaches and help students understand there are multiple ways to solve a problem.

Personal culture within EFL classroom may influence the way students *handle the conflicts*. Cultural responses to conflict vary significantly, and it's vital for teachers to be aware of these differences so they can manage them effectively. Some students are taught to avoid conflict at all costs, while other cultures see conflict as a positive and constructive exercise.

Outside the classroom *socioeconomic status* can affect academic performance in some ways. For example, some students may not be able to afford proper academic supplies, causing them to struggle with homework assignments because they don't have the right tools.

There is a challenge in EFL learning *outside* the classroom, when a student is the only English speaker in their family and help from their parents or siblings on academic assignments may not be possible.

Family structure determines how students see themselves and interact with their peers.

Religion can make it difficult for a student to balance different priorities, when, for example, students may stay away from classes due to particular religious rituals.

Ethnicity can affect patterns of classroom behavior.

Even *proper nutrition* may affect the interaction within multicultural environment. Malnourished students may fall behind when they struggle to remain focused and retain information.

To draw a conclusion, it may be said that multicultural encounters within EFL classroom should be designed to help students to not only value multicultural diversity but also to overcome prejudice and discrimination and become true Intercultural Speakers, well-equipped with multicultural communicative skills.

Conclusion. As it can be seen from the points mentioned above multicultural education is most successful when implemented as a systematic approach with the reconstruction of not only the curriculum, but also organizational patterns.

Firstly, multicultural education requires a staff that is not only diverse, but also culturally competent. Educators must be aware, responsive and embracing of the diverse beliefs, perspectives and experiences.

Secondly, textbooks and other resources about multiculturalism can come in handy when designing lesson plans and educational materials for multicultural framework. One of the most important reasons for truly learning about the cognitive backgrounds of cultural groups is so that the interpersonal attitudes and behaviors of diverse students can be effectively interpreted in terms of the culture that they're entrenched in. It means that students shouldn't be forced to modify their way of thought and behavior, but the teacher should adapt cultural difficulties to the level of students' understanding.

Finally, the teacher while designing the lesson plans for multicultural groups should take into account different inside and outside classroom factors affected by a certain culture, such as family structure, religion, ethnicity and so on which may help or create obstacles on the way to multiculturalism.

REFERNCES

1. Byram, M. Language Learning in Intercultural Perspective: Approaches Through Drama and Ethnography / M. Byram, M. Fleming. – Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1998. – 310 p.
2. Canale M. Theoretical bases of communicative approaches to Second language teaching and testing / M. Canale, M. Swain //Applied Linguistics 1. – 1980. – №1. – P. 1–48.
3. The elaboration of sociolinguistic competence: Implications for teacher education / J.E. Alatis [et al.] // Linguistics and the Education of Language Teachers: Ethnolinguistic, Psycholinguistic, and Sociolinguistic Aspects. Proceedings of the Georgetown University, Round Table on Languages and Linguistics. – Georgetown University Press, Washington DC, 2005. – P. 699–710.
4. Gogolin, I. Linguistic and cultural diversity in Europe / I. Gogolin // European Educatinal Research Journal 1. – 2002. – № 1. – P. 123–138.
5. Hymes, D. Models of the interaction of language and social setting / D. Hymes // Journal of Social Issues 23. – 1968. – № 2. – P. 8–38.
6. Kramsch, C. Context and Culture in Language Teaching / C. Kramsch. – Oxford Applied Linguistics. – 1993. – 295 p.
7. Weaver S.J., & Cohen, A.D. (1997) / S.J. Weaver, A.D. Cohen // Strategies-based instruction: A teacher-training manual. – Minneapolis, MN : Center for Advanced Research on Language Acquisition, University of Minnesota. – 1997.
8. Yassine, S. Culture issues in FL teaching: Towards fostering of intercultural awareness / S. Yassine // Annales du Patrimoine [Annals of Legacy Mostaganem], Algeria. – P. 31–38.