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## **STUDENTS' TOLERANT BEHAVIOR IN A MULTICULTURAL ENVIRONMENT**

*Tomsk Polytechnic University trains not only the students from the Russian Federation, but also the students from Asia, Africa, East and West. The main teacher's aim is to teach students the subject as well as to build up their tolerance towards other cultures and each other. The study of works by E. Gellner, B. Anderson, and E. Hobsbawm allowed forming the theoretical basis of the article and the use of the Smart methodology promoted the practical implementation of the tasks set by the teachers. As a result, it was found that the lessons and activities undertaken in the framework of the curriculum, especially, in the framework of extracurricular activities, allowed students to demonstrate their cultural identity and contributed to the development of tolerance among students. In addition, by means of cultural information exchange students developed the mutual understanding and friendship. The students' adaptation in a new multicultural environment occurs much quicker.*

*Keywords: tolerance; multicultural environment; extra curriculum activity; international students.*

### **1. Introduction**

According to the English philosopher E. Gellner, the modern economy needs substitutable and mobile people on a large scale, it needs all people to be specialized but to move between specializations [1].

Any social mobility involves a social interaction in which the language is required to assimilate the knowledge and rules of behaviour of another community. Language means allow learning the necessary information and implementing the interaction both between individuals and groups. Thus, foreign language teachers are in charge of forming a tolerant relationship among students. A modern student lives and studies in a multicultural world. The successful adaptation to an alien socio-cultural environment plays an important role in the psychological comfort and, as a consequence, the effective learning. This article proposes ways of adapting international students to a multicultural environment. The teachers of Tomsk Polytechnic University understand this process as the formation of a tolerant relationship among students and possibility to realize their identity with the native culture.

Nowadays modern universities face global challenges of internationalization. To accept these challenges, the fact that a man perceives the culture of another one through the prism of his own culture should be taken into account. Therefore, it is necessary to learn the efficient cross-cultural communication. The knowledge of cultural values and their differences will promote a tolerant interaction.

### **2. Materials and methods**

#### ***2.1. Theoretical framework***

The problem of nationalism was studied by E. Gellner, B. Anderson, and E. Hobsbawm. E. Gellner considered the economic development as a condition for the social mobility, which, in its turn, could lead to the cultural standardization.

According to E. Gellner, the peak of nationalism is the right of nations to the self-determination [1]. B. Anderson stated that nations inspire love, and often profoundly self-sacrificing love. The cultural products of nationalism – poetry, prose fiction, music, plastic arts – show this love very clearly in thousands of different forms and styles [2]. In this regard cultural traits are understood by E. Gellner and B. Anderson as signs of group solidarity. It allows defining the ethnicity as a social group that has formed as a result of its rallying links: linguistic, cultural, historical, religious.

It should be noted that in the context of globalization, the cultural traditions as national phenomena are getting more important, as a person feels the need to identify himself with a community. The historian and author of the concept of “invention of traditions” E. Hobsbawm wrote about the duality of national phenomena. At studying these phenomena the beliefs and needs of people should be taken into account [3].

Thus, for the adequate perception of a representative of another culture the knowledge about this culture is required. Tolerance provides the basis for the efficient socio-cultural communication. R. Frost, a modern German philosopher, believes that tolerance is an enforced virtue of the modern world [4].

## **2.2. Methodology**

The task of teachers, working with a multicultural group of students, is to create these necessary conditions for the formation of tolerance. For this purpose, the philosophy of constructivism expressed in the fact that everyone builds his understanding of the world can be used. According to J. Piaget, the student's point of view is the starting position from which the construction of the new knowledge by means of overcoming the conflict between the established experience and unknown external reality begins [5]. As motivation to construct new knowledge, students are encouraged to share the values of their culture, to present themselves as representatives of a certain society. For this purpose, the project methods and extracurricular activities are used. Taking part in all these projects and activities students obtain the information about other cultures by means of Smart technologies. In addition, the use of fundamental principles of smart education, such as the use of relevant information for solving educational problems, independent and project activities, creates conditions for the formation of intercultural competence.

## **3. Results and discussion**

### **3.1. Teaching students in the multicultural environment**

In today's world the student environment in many universities consists of representatives of different religions, traditions, and languages. Frequently a future specialist faces not only with language barriers, but also the challenge of cultural understanding as well.

The first year of study is always connected with the adaptation to a new environment. This includes the learning process itself, living conditions, and social environment in the university. The success in learning depends on the successful students' integration in the community. It is important to note that in the adaptation process the individual not only adapts to the requirements of the environment, but he also effects this environment, thereby causing a change in the medium itself. These processes are more complex and multifaceted in a multicultural and multina-

tional environment. This is the focal point where the formation of a tolerant relationship among students is important. Teachers of Tomsk Polytechnic University understand the tolerance as an active moral position and readiness to be tolerant in order to achieve a mutual understanding among people of different nations. The tolerant attitude allows interacting positively with people of different cultural, religious and national environment.

The teacher of students' multinational group should be aware that for any person the ethnic group to which he belongs is of the greatest importance than he is himself. The sacral perception of the ethnicity is conditioned by the fact that the ethnicity is given to us at birth. But there is also the national identity suggesting the presence of a certain mental attitude. Considering these factors, we are able to form a tolerant attitude in the students' group.

For this purpose, at foreign language lessons the students are given the task in the form of a project. The result of this project is the conference held in two groups of students (20–25 people). The use of the projects method in teaching a foreign language is due to the fact that it allows students to focus not on the structure of the language, but on the issue as well, move the focus from linguistic aspects to content, investigate the problems and reflect on their decision using the language as a tool [6. P. 140]. The participation in the project allows students to compare their results with the work of others and use effectively the English language as a tool expressing thoughts. The project method is a sophisticated combination of forms and methods of teaching English. Therefore, it is necessary beforehand to prepare students to work on the project.

The necessary conditions for this task are the following:

1. The teacher forms subgroups to perform the task, in which students of different nationalities usually work. The subgroups consist of 2 or 3 students.
2. The topic of a task is directly related to the culture, history and lifestyle of the ethnic group or nation to which one of the students from this group belongs to.
3. If all members of the group belong to the same ethnic group or are citizens of the same state, they are proposed to study another socio-cultural environment.
4. The language competence is taken into account.

This form of studying has a number of positive features. Firstly, students are given the opportunity to show themselves as representatives of their culture. Secondly, they learn the traditions and cultural features of people from different countries. Thus, this form of activity allows finding a common view, creating a situation of communication in a foreign language, and then solving the problem [6. P. 139]. The initial phase of the task involves searching for information. The analysis and synthesis of information is more efficient with the use of Smart technology and promotes the development of general language skills with reference material [7. P. 178].

The aim of teaching the basic English language (the 1st – 2d years of studying) at Tomsk Polytechnic University is to improve all components of the foreign language communicative competence, which is the main condition for the implementation of cross-cultural communication in general. It is carried out according to the curriculum, which is based on modules and sub-modules. The modules present the main themes to be studied in the frame of the basic course and sub-topics that emphasize some important aspects in the framework of the main modules.

The module program of the 1st course includes the following modules: personal identification, student's life, dwelling, travel and transport, healthy lifestyle. The module program of the 2nd course includes the following modules: natural world, mass media, technologically advanced world, education, work and job.

Problems for the conference are selected in accordance with the themes studied in the curriculum. For example, within the theme "Personal identification" the students are given the task to prepare the conference presentation, in which the distinguishing features of a nation or ethnic group are described. They tell about the appearance, character, traditional clothing, and the preference in a modern fashion. The material and title of the presentation are chosen by the students themselves. Thus, each student in the group has an opportunity not only to develop conversational skills and express himself in a creative activity, but also to share the features of his culture and history with the Other.

Studying the theme "Education", students present not only the educational system in their country, but to a large extent they tell what they can do in their spare time. Also, students are proposed to compare the lifestyle and dreams of students from different countries. As a result, they find both common and distinctive features. Students usually come to the conclusion that they have more in common rather than differences.

For teaching and solving some educational problems, the teachers and students apply Smart technologies and some basic principles of smart education in the educational program such as the use of relevant information to solve the educational problems (in our case to promote tolerance), organization of independent learning [8], research and project activity of students. A large number of sources and a variety of multimedia allow students to find the information and visual material. Colourful and informative presentations give students the opportunity to interest other students and engage them in a discussion. During the discussion the contradictions of socio-cultural basis are identified, the arguments and counter-arguments are put forward to; the logic of a speaker's position is built up. It is very important that during this activity an international student realizes that he or she is of the interest for the Other, primarily, as a representative of his ethnos or nation. The student feels proud for his identity and in response to the manifestation of the attention and respect he feels similar feelings to the groupmates. As a result of intercultural communication the students' understanding of the Other develops, which, in its turn, leads to the formation of a tolerant attitude towards other nations, ethnic groups, and religions.

### ***3.2. Extracurricular activities***

Extracurricular activities contribute significantly to the development of tolerance. These classes are a compulsory and integral part in learning a foreign language. Within the framework of extracurricular activities the following events are conducted: Halloween, Christmas, Saint Valentine's Day and others. A large number of students meet together at these events. They can show their creativity there, get acquainted with one another, and talk about how such festivals are held in their country. And the biggest event is the Student International Festival, which is held annually in spring.

The festival is a way of organizing students' extracurricular activity developing better the language competence of participants. The main purpose of organi-

zing and conducting the Student International Festival in a foreign language is the formation of tolerant behavior of students in the multicultural environment, respect for the culture of the Other, as well as the stimulation in developing the intellectual and creative potential of students, the increase of a motivation level to learn a foreign language and provide additional opportunities for the language development, social and linguistic-cultural competences in the creative activity using a foreign language. For the presentation of national cultures the English language is chosen, which is the official international language, the sub language of the festival is the Russian one, which is used to provide the involvement of students studying the Russian language as a foreign one. The festival is attended by the students from the 1st to the 5th courses of Tomsk Polytechnic University, as well as all interested students from other universities.

The objectives of this festival are as follows:

- the formation of the tolerant attitude of students to other cultures,
- the possibility to demonstrate the ethnic features of folk culture of different nationalities,
- the motivation to study the cultures of other nations,
- the encouragement and support of students from a technical university in improving language skills and the development of intellectual and creative potential,
- the stimulation of students' creative activity of and needs in creative self-realization,
- the development of language, social and linguistic-cultural competences in the creative activity in a foreign language,
- the monitoring of the foreign language quality,
- the increase of the motivation to learn foreign languages,
- the students' involvement to the moral and aesthetic self-education.

Participants of the festival demonstrate features of various national traditions and cultures by means of the studied foreign languages and different stage techniques. In order to convey to the audience the ethnic flavour and multiculturalism, students demonstrate a national dance, song, art, poetry and theatrical performances of national myths, traditions, and rituals. The festival has a concert program that provides participants' creative performances. Creative performances of participants can be presented in one of the following genres:

- national song,
- national dance (followed by an oral narration about the dance or history of people whom it belongs to),
- art reading,
- stage performance of national myths, traditions, customs, rituals, fairy tales, most important events in people's history.

The use of topic illustration with Smart technology is obligatory at the festival. Performances should conform to generally accepted standards of performing arts. It is a festival of the national art and foreign language, allowing students to realize constantly their creative potential and develop the level of language skills. This extracurricular event has already been held since 2013 in Tomsk Polytechnic University and is gaining popularity among the students. About a thousand of students have attended this event since that time. Among these students are the Russians, the Kazakhs, the Ingushes, the Uyghurs, the Vietnamese, the Chinese, the Gyp-

sies, the Yakuts, the Buryats, the Chechens, the Lezgins, the Ukrainians, the Koreans, the Mongolians, the Azerbaijanians, the Armenians, the Turks, and others. The cultures of the Caucasus, China, Ireland, England, France, Spain, Germany, Belarus, Ukraine, Yakutia, Buryatia, Mongolia, Azeyrbadzhn, Armenia, Russia and others have been presented.

It is important to note that international groups are involved to take part in the festival. In addition, students do not necessarily represent the culture of their ethnic group and nation. For example, a group of students, consisting of the Azerbaijanians, the Mongolians, and the Vietnamese, may perform the Belarusian national dance or stage the Irish myth. For this purpose, students should work together to study the culture of another people, which is unfamiliar or unknown to them. The seriousness, with which the students prepare for the performance, is worth of respecting for the young generation of future specialists. Young people are believed to begin studying deeper their culture and appreciate it thanks to such projects. All participants of the festival are united by the creative activity that takes place under the context of researching and performing the best cultural traditions. Students start supporting each other. The mutual understanding and friendship among them appear. It becomes clear that the Other is the same as you are regardless of nationality or religion.

### ***3.3. Studying the dynamics of adaptation processes***

During the academic year 2018 the teachers conduct a survey of students in order to study the dynamics of adaptation processes and the effects of the ongoing activities on the formation of a tolerant relationship among students. The study is carried out among students of the 1st and 2nd courses of Tomsk Polytechnic University. The first survey is carried out in late September to study basic indicators, then in mid-December in order to study changes in the opinions and psychological comfort of students after the project methods of teaching a foreign language, in March after extracurricular activities, on the eve of the Student International Festival, and in May after the festival.

The survey consists of the following sample questions and tasks:

1. Do you feel comfortable in a new group?
2. Do you find quickly mutual understanding with people of other nationalities?
3. Are you interested in studying the culture traditions and history of other nations?
4. Assess your knowledge about the cultural features of other nations by 5-point scale.
5. Assess your level of tolerance by 5-point scale.
6. How difficult is it to adapt for international students?

The results of the students' survey within the year are presented in Table 1.

Within a year the percentage of positive responses to question № 1 has increased by 20%. This indicates that the students could adapt to a new environment.

The number of positive responses to question № 2 has increased to 100%. Students explain their positive responses to this question by the fact that learning more about the culture of other nations, they begin to understand them better.

Students explain the negative responses to question № 3 by their workload and shortage of time. Gradually positive responses have increased by 60%. Students explain positive responses by the fact that they are interested in acquaintance with

other cultures, because it not only enriches them spiritually, but also helps to understand other nationalities. Many students find that this knowledge would help them in their future, in communication with colleagues and business trips.

*Table 1. The results of the students' survey within the year (% of respondents)*

Question number	Points	September	December	March	May
1	—	76%	83%	89%	97%
2	—	68%	79%	91%	100%
3	—	35%	67%	91%	98%
4	1	0	0	0	0
	2	80%	14%	6%	1%
	3	5%	15%	23%	7%
	4	10%	60%	80%	96%
	5	5%	40%	45%	97%
5	1	0	0	0	0
	2	0	0	0	0
	3	69%	50%	41%	10%;
	4	31%	62%	69%	70%
	5	20%	47%	86%	91%
6	—	23%	40%	71%	100%

Points by means of which students have to assess themselves in questions № 4 and 5, have increased significantly as compared with the beginning of the academic year. It should be noted that with the increase of knowledge about the cultural features of other nations, the tolerance level of students has also increased.

The responses dynamics to question 6 is rather striking. As it turned out, the students did not expect that it was difficult for international students to adapt to new environment. As many students came from different cities of Russia, they believed that all newcomers were in the same conditions, because they lived far away from home. And just after learning more about the cultural differences, they have realized that it was more difficult for foreigners to adapt.

#### 4. Conclusion

The rapid development of the modern global world sets before our system of education the task to prepare a new generation of future specialists not only to the professional, but also intercultural communication. According to S.V. Dementeva individuals can talk to people of other cultures every day. This requires an awareness, mutual understanding, respect and tolerance for cultural differences in perception, thinking, feeling and acting [9. P. 519]. The assimilation of social norms of another society should take place with the respect of the society for the individual, not only as a personality, but also as a representative of another ethnic group or nation. Cultural awareness leads to understanding why the Other expresses himself this particular way, and not otherwise. It reduces the stress in cross-cultural communication. It helps to perceive the values of other cultures with respect, which, in its turn, contributes to the tolerant attitude.

Thus, the formation of a certain socio-cultural tolerant environment allows creating an atmosphere of mutual understanding, cooperation and responsibility. This will allow the graduates to become competitive in the labour market.

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Tomsk Polytechnic University trains not only the students from the Russian Federation, but also the students from Asia, Africa, East and West. The main teacher's aim is to teach students the subject as well as to build up their tolerance towards other cultures and each other. The purpose of this article is to offer the solution of the problems concerning the adaptation of foreign students and tolerance development in a multicultural student environment. This process, which can be called an adaptation, is complicated by the fact that TPU is a Higher Education Institution where only two foreign languages – Russian and English – are taught. However, not all the students are proficient enough in these languages. It complicates greatly the adaptation in a new socio-cultural environment, as during the extra-curricular time foreign students speak only their mother tongue. As a result, it was found that the lessons and activities undertaken in the framework of the curriculum, especially, in the framework of extracurricular activities, allowed students to demonstrate their cultural identity and contributed to the development of tolerance among students. In addition, by means of cultural information exchange students developed the mutual understanding and friendship.

The students' adaptation in a new multicultural environment occurs much quicker. The formation of a certain socio-cultural tolerant environment allows creating an atmosphere of mutual understand-



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