CDSES 2020

IV International Scientific Conference "Competitiveness and the development of socio-economic systems" dedicated to the memory of Alexander Tatarkin

PODCASTING MEDIA TECHNOLOGY IN THE SOFT POWER FORMATION: ECONOMIC EFFICIENCY

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Abstract

The purpose of the article is to present media technology for the development of intercultural communicative tolerance as the basis for the formation of soft power, contributing to the formation of soft skills necessary for the productive behavior in intercultural dialogue in the business environment and enhancing the economic efficiency when concluding transactions, assessing investment opportunities and creating international alliances. The research's relevance is based on the need to introduce new teaching methods in the preparation of professional personnel capable of establishing strong contacts with business partners. The validity of the research results is substantiated by identifying statistically significant differences in indicators between the experimental and control groups according to the Student's t-test, as well as modeling using the Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) and the Difference-in-Differences methods with the introduction of a variable to identify the cause of the dynamics. The data obtained confirm that the reason for the positive dynamics in the experimental group is the use of the proposed technology. The efficiency of the developed technology correlates with the central problem of efficiency in Economy of Education. Currently, the education system is one of the first non-material spheres of the national economy, which is required to external economic efficiency proved by Economy of Education.

1.   Introduction

One of the sources of human potential development and subsequently human capital can be considered the flows of educational migration (soft power), that is migration of a higher level adapted to the new socio-cultural context by acquiring not only professional skills (hard skills) but also intercultural skills (soft skills). In addition, it is one of the options for managing migration flows, ensuring sustainable development and security of the country.

For universities, the main incentive for enrolling international students is income generation. For example, the amount of funds that the US economy received in 2016 from foreign students is estimated at $39.4 billion. In several Asian countries where fertility is falling and the population is aging, for example, in Japan, foreign students are helping to preserve higher education system (Kuprina et al., 2019).

On the other hand, it is necessary to train new professional personnel capable of carrying out work in a difficult cultural diversity situation, which also requires mastering soft skills proved by several researchers.

Boussebaa (2020) points out that trust is integral to companies' success as it promotes the expansion of interactions among clients, employees, stakeholders in economic transactions, brings a higher level of trade turnover. Jha et al. (2019) emphasize that international alliances are created mainly between firms from countries with more trust and shorter cultural and geographic distance. Ma et al. (2020) underline that culture is a key factor in supporting sustainable foreign direct investment, especially in international companies, in both developed and emerging markets. Thus, in the modern world, a sustainable economic efficiency cannot be provided only by material and technological aspects but requires the establishment of productive relationships that take into account the cultural parameters of a particular society, one of which is intercultural communicative tolerance contributing to adaptation in the context of cultural diversity.

The given direction was clearly justified in the reports of Academician Tatarkin "Human 'economic' as a phenomenon of the market system" and Academician Polterovich "Evolution of Competition Institutions, Power and Cooperation: Impact of Culture" at the VII All-Russian Symposium on Economic Theory in Yekaterinburg in 2016. Consequently, the research's relevance is due to the need to modernize higher professional education through the use of modern technologies that meet the requirements of society and socio-economic conditions of life.

The purpose of the research is to confirm the efficiency of students' intercultural communicative tolerance development through podcasting media technology in teaching a foreign language. The main feature of the methodology is the combination of active teaching methods within the framework of classroom studies and distance learning technologies. The proposed technology aims to develop the skills of dialogue and the implementation of interpersonal and intercultural interaction (soft skills), contributing to the establishment of stronger contacts with business partners.

The results of the research are mathematically substantiated based on identifying statistically significant differences in indicators between the experimental and control groups according to the formula for calculating the Student's t-test, as well as modeling using the OLS (Ordinary Least Squares) method and the Difference-in-Differences technique with the introduction of variable to identify the cause of the

dynamics. The data obtained confirm the presence of statistically significant differences between the experimental and control groups as well as the fact that the reason for the positive dynamics in the experimental group is the use of the proposed technology (Beketova, 2018).

On the basis of the research, a teaching tutorial "Five lessons for developing tolerance" (Beketova & Kuprina, 2016) is proposed, recommended by the methodological council of Ural Federal University for students of all areas of training who have the discipline "Foreign (English) Language".

Thus, the technology can be used to develop intercultural communicative tolerance in the process of studying at a university with a double vector, for both foreign and Russian students. So, there formed a positive vision of the environment which can attract both new human capital creating a positive economic efficiency and ensure the sustainable development of society. This assumption is proved by research in Economy of Education.

2.   Problem Statement

The Economy of Education is a relatively young science. However, the prerequisites for the emergence appeared long before its modern interpretation. Thus, Smith, Marx, Mill, Marshall, Petty and others spoke about the role of professional training. In the 1920s in Russia, the Strumilin's calculations of the impact of education on the economic development were significant. Russian academician Ursul put forward the idea of advanced education which is considered as the most important in the field of strategies for increasing the country's intellectual potential. The works of Akperov, Balashov, Baskakova, Dyatlov, Fedorov and others are devoted to the modernization of higher education.

The modern education system is viewed as a large diversified field of activity where the most important element of national wealth (the fund of knowledge, skills and personal qualities of the labour force education fund) is created, which turns out to be the most long-term of all modern active production factors. In this capacity, education is an investment branch of spiritual production (Martsinkevich, 1993).

The problem of efficiency is central to the theory of Economy of Education. The education system has become the first non-material sphere of the national economy which is required to external economic efficiency, showing its contribution to the growth of all components of the country's national income.

The main attention in the theory of Economy of Education is drawn to material factors: resource provision of educational institutions, effectiveness of financial investments in the education system, relationship between the level of education and economic growth. Thus, the Economy of Education is a branch of economic theory that studies the functioning and development of the educational system, as well as the material prerequisites for these processes and the training of personnel (Martsinkevich, 1993).

In this regard, an important issue is the training of specialists for various industries, taking into account their demand in the labour market where, first of all, attention is paid to the development of professional skills (hard skills). If we talk about the training of managers and administrators, then it is dominated by the practice of operational and economic activities, the structure of accounting and reporting, standards and regulation of legal settings, financing processes, etc.

However, one of the tasks of the Economy of Education is to establish economic patterns and cause-and-effect relationships between economic and non-economic phenomena (humanitarian knowledge) and processes in the educational sphere. At present, communication skills and the ability to

work with people are becoming more and more in demand, especially in the context of the expansion of the international sphere of production (soft skills). This thesis is consistent with the subject of Economy of Education, which includes relations that arise in the production, distribution, exchange and consumption of services and goods created in the educational sphere. Thus, research carried out in the field of soft skills is highly relevant, allowing us to propose ways to solve the problems of their formation and development, which contributes to the establishment of productive contacts in the intercultural environment and, consequently, to an increase in external economic efficiency.

The foreign language discipline is a good platform not only for teaching a foreign language but also for developing soft skills. The convenience of using this discipline is due to an increase in the level of educational migration (an increase in the number of foreign English-speaking students) which contributes to the acceleration of adaptation in a different cultural environment. At the theoretical level, a number of foreign and Russian authors confirm these aspects.

Abdrafikova et al. (2017) argue that today tolerance is a fundamental universal principle the world, in general, and the individual community, in particular. By the beginning of the XXI century, the ethnic component of tolerance has come to be of particular importance. A great role in breeding tolerance is played by education. The present day system of Russian education has to meet this challenge and offer diverse ways of solving the problem of forming students' tolerance.

Porto and Zembylas (2020) consider that foreign language teaching can and should sensitise students about issues of human suffering and cultivate empathy, solidarity, hospitality and inclusion. In this way language education can create spaces for fostering political, ethical, and social justice responsibilities for changing socially unjust societies.

Koutsoni et al. (2019) confirm that the formation of tolerant attitudes towards intercultural, interethnic differences is one of the ways out of decreasing negative attitude to «others».

Levitan and Yugova (2018) emphasize that the high level of proficiency in its every functional aspect (communicative, cognitive, culturological) is a necessary condition of the specialist's innovative activity, international cooperation in education, science, economy and other spheres of life. It allows participating effectively in the innovative processes and intercultural dialogue. The language competences and personality traits of students as bearers of innovative culture (creativity, critical thinking, reflexivity, assertiveness, responsibility, tolerance, self-actualization) are evolved by means of appropriate pedagogical technologies and methods.

Shaposhnikova et al. (2018) point out the interconnection of digital economy and the need to establish tolerant relations in a new multicultural society. Thus, a cultural approach in combination with active teaching means that information and communication technologies allow achieving the effect of participation in a multinational society in which a foreign student becomes a member of a small homeland. It is a humanistic approach to education that makes it possible to create axiologically significant educational literature for citizens studying abroad and experiencing difficulties entering a different language environment and ethno-culture.

Zaripov et al. (2017) underline "the process of the tolerance formation of a student's personality by means of a foreign language under conditions of the multicultural environment of the university" (p. 812).

The realization of the process makes it possible to discover a number of regularities: multilingualism, perspectives, interrelation of the subjective and objective.

Levina et al. (2016) continue that tolerance training in foreign language classes is part of a broader paradigm of teaching culture and intercultural communication skills. They consider tolerance as, firstly, one of the leading values in modern education and, secondly, as the basis of productive cross-cultural interaction. The foreign language classes embody the paradigm of culture-based language teaching and target tolerance as a primary educational goal.

Asif et al. (2020) underline that "sustainable development is promoted when the system of education provides the learners with an opportunity to equip themselves with moral values, skills, and competences that assist them in effecting personal and community positive changes" (p. 2).

Zaghar (2016) concludes that in the present time's globalized atmosphere, the need for intercultural communicative competence in the workplace runs high. Students approaching the end of their course of study must get ready to enter the world of job-market and to become global citizens able to deal effectively with multiculturalism in the work environment.

Thus, we can state the following problems: between the need of preparing modern specialists obtaining both hard and soft skills and lack of the qualitative educational materials for their development, in general, and intercultural communication competence, in particular; between the need and lack of instruments of assessment the tolerance level, sufficient for the adaptation in the multicultural environment.

3. Research Questions

The main questions to be studied are the following: to show the importance of developing intercultural communicative tolerance as a kind of soft skills; to show the results of natural pedagogical experiment which registers the tolerance skills in the process of active learning; to show the sequence of stages for tolerance development; to show the technology of tolerance development taking into account the university multicultural environment to achieve economic efficiency.

There included many research instruments: questionnaires, classroom observation, assessment of students' tasks, confirmation of the results by the econometric calculations.

4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is verifying the efficiency of the methodology devised, that is the formation of students' intercultural communicative tolerance through the use of the podcasting media technology within foreign language classes.

5. Research Methods

The main feature of the methodology is a mixed-method approach (Asoodar et al., 2016) that includes in-class active learning tools, such as group discussions, opinion exchange, role-plays, problem solution, round tables, case-study, brainstorming, and the distance podcasting media technology.

The word 'podcasting' derives from iPod и broadcasting. Podcasting is a way of audio-file distribution through the Internet. A podcast is an audio file that can be downloaded onto a personal computer, often in MP3 format, or transferred to a portable device such as an iPod, another portable media player, or a mobile phone for being listened to later. The podcasts' content is similar to radio programs that allow being frequently updated and automatically downloaded as new episodes become available.

Podcasts last an average of three to fifteen minutes. This duration is related to the peculiarities of young people's clip thinking perception of information through short vivid images, messages of TV news, video or audio clips, that is, as a sequence of related or unrelated subjects rather than a whole image.

Podcasts vary widely in topics and are freely available on the Internet, on specialized sites or services. Their number is growing steadily. Recent data have shown that there are between 115,000 to 130,000 English language podcasts available to download on the Internet (Selwood, 2017). Podcasting also allows listening to programs on a PC, PDA or portable MP3 player (Zhuravleva & Shishkova, 2019). In European countries, podcasting is perceived as a full-fledged channel of information transmission. Many media sources broadcast in the podcast format.

Educational programs are also created based on podcasts for people who want to learn foreign languages and develop listening skills by listening to audio files on the Internet (Abdulrahman et al., 2018; Artyushina et al., 2017; Naidionova & Ponomarenko, 2018; Zhuravleva & Shishkova, 2019). Selwood's research indicates that 82% of students have had a favorable disposition towards the use of podcasts as part of their language-learning process. It can be certainly stated that the modern young generation, called 'digital natives' by Artyushina, is ready to perceive information coming from various sources and definitely needs the implementation of media technologies into education (Nurkhamitov & Gerkina, 2017). Educators should embrace all the opportunities that the digital era presents. That is why one of the main tasks of Russian universities should be to encourage the creation of such educational materials by the teachers (Artyushina et al., 2017) and the students themselves (Zhuravleva & Shishkova, 2019).

Implementing educational programs using podcasts as a type of e-learning via the Internet can provide flexibility for students to master programs in full regardless of their location (Artyushina et al., 2017; Brabazon, 2016; Selwood, 2017) and, as a result, increase the effectiveness of learning. Besides, the use of podcasts within the framework of a higher educational institution will make it possible to achieve a new quality of education by ensuring variability (Brabazon, 2016; Nurkhamitov & Gerkina, 2017), increasing motivation to study (Asoodar et al., 2016; Nurkhamitov & Gerkina, 2017) and obtaining competitive specialists. Furthermore, podcasts stimulate cognitive skills (Nurkhamitov & Gerkina, 2017), creativity, activity and independence to the maximum extent. Podcasting, according to Brabazon (2016), serves a key function in rejuvenating the role of auditory cultures and sonic media which have been under-utilized in teaching and learning.

The use of the proposed podcasting media technology in teaching a foreign language is aimed at providing students with the necessary knowledge about tolerance and equal dialogue conduction, formation of tolerant interpersonal and intercultural interaction skills, as well as the development of cognitive, evaluative, motivational-value, reflective and activity components specifically.

The technology of forming students' intercultural communicative tolerance using podcasts in foreign language classes is based on the podcasts that are created both by the teacher and the students within the following topics: tolerance and respect, characters and tastes, thoughts and behavior, communication and interaction, professional behavior, working in international business, learning. The proposed technology consists of three stages: introduction and discussion (group work aimed at mastering essential knowledge on tolerance issues); application (pre-demonstration, demonstration and post-demonstration stages of working with the teacher's podcasts); automation and skills formation (in-class group work with the podcasts created by the students).

Each of the stages implies group discussions, opinion exchange, role-plays, problem solution, round tables, case-study, brainstorming, which means that students develop their interpersonal skills through expressing and discussing different opinions on certain problems.

The podcasting media technology that is used in teaching a foreign language allows solving a number of methodological problems including listening and speaking skills formation (Brabazon, 2016; Naidionova & Ponomarenko, 2018), vocabulary enrichment (Elekaei et al., 2019), foreign speech comprehension ability (Abdulrahman et al., 2018). In addition, combination of specially prepared content and a variety of the suggested communicative methods contributes to the formation of a tolerant personality, eagerness and readiness of the students to positive interpersonal and intercultural interaction for the main purpose of achieving mutual understanding and cooperation. An undeniable advantage is also the ability to master educational material whenever and wherever it is convenient for the student (Selwood, 2017).

Two groups of students were involved into the experimental work: at the diagnostic stage – experimental (76 students) and control (56 students), at the final stage – experimental (69 students) and control (50 students). Based on the results of group discussions, exchange of opinions and observation data, as well as Boyko's diagnostics, the levels of students' intercultural communicative tolerance were determined at the diagnostic and final stages.

The differences reliability analysis was carried out using the MS Excel spreadsheet editor in accordance to the calculating method of the Student's t-test.

For the dynamics evaluation of the intercultural communicative tolerance development, the absolute growth and the rate of growth (decline) were calculated.

To identify the cause of the dynamics, the OLS (Ordinary Least Squares) and Difference-in-Differences modeling methods were used. Modeling was carried out in the Stata statistical program.

6. Findings

In order to identify the presence or absence of statistically significant differences in the indicators between the experimental (EG) and control (CG) groups at each stage of the experimental work, the differences reliability was analyzed using the MS Excel spreadsheet editor in accordance to the calculating method of the Student's t-test.

First, the standard deviation (Sd) was calculated using the formula:

$$Sd = \sqrt{\frac{RMSD\ (EG) + RMSD(CG)}{n1 + n2 - 2} * \frac{n1 + n2}{n1 * n2}}$$

where RMSD (EG) – root-mean-square deviation in EG, RMSD (CG) – root-mean-square deviation in CG, n1 – number of students in EG, n2 – number of students in CG.

After that, t - empirical was calculated by the division of the difference between the average scores and the standard deviation. The value of t - empirical was 3.88. It turned out to be more in value than t - critical, which is equal to 3.381 at a significance level of p≤0.001. These proves statistically significant differences between the experimental and control groups.

When analyzing the dynamics of students' intercultural communicative tolerance development in the experimental and control groups based on the results of group discussions, exchange of opinions and observation data, we compared the levels at the diagnostic and final stages of the experimental work.

For dynamics evaluation of phenomena development, such analytical indicators as absolute growth and the rate of growth (decline) are used.

The absolute growth characterizes the increase or decrease in the level over a certain period of time, expressed by positive or negative values, which show how much the level of the current period is higher or lower than the basic one. The absolute growth is calculated by the formula:

$$\Delta y = y_i - y_{i-1}$$

where y_i – level of the compared period; y_{i-1} – level of the previous period.

The rate of growth (decline) characterizes the difference between the levels, expressed as a percentage of positive, negative or zero values. The rate of growth (decline) is calculated by the formula:

$$T_{gr\ (dec)} = \frac{y_i}{y_{i-1}} \times 100 - 100,$$

where y_i – level of the compared period; y_{i-1} – level of the previous period.

The absolute growth in the formation level of individual components of intercultural communicative tolerance is expressed as percentage, since it shows an increase or decrease in the proportion of students in the EG and CG with high, medium and low levels (table 1).

Table 1. The absolute growth in the formation level of intercultural communicative tolerance components in the EG and CG

Components	EG			CG		
	High level	**Medium level**	**Low level**	**High level**	**Medium level**	**Low level**
Cognitive	81,9%	-52,1%	-29,8%	-0,3%	0,2%	0,1%
Evaluative	88,6%	-57,5%	-31,1%	0,7%	-0,8%	0,1%
Motivational-value	2,6%	-2,6%	0%	-5,1%	5,1%	0%

Reflective	2,2%	-16,5%	14,3%	-1,9%	5,7%	-3,8%
Activity	79,7%	-28,7%	-51%	0,6%	-0,2%	-0,4%

Thus, in the control group insignificant positive dynamics (less than 3.8%) is observed in the development of evaluative, reflective and activity components of intercultural communicative tolerance, while in the experimental group there is a significant positive dynamics of the development of cognitive, evaluative, motivational-value, reflective and activity components (up to 88.6%).

When analyzing the dynamics of students' intercultural communicative tolerance development in the EG and CG according to the results of Boyko's diagnostics, we compared the average scores in each scale of the questionnaire at the diagnostic and final stages of the experimental work and calculated the absolute growth and the rate of growth (decline).

Table 2 shows the decrease of absolute values in the EG, which indicates positive dynamics in the development of intercultural communicative tolerance, while the increase or decrease in absolute values in the CG proves instability in the development.

Despite the negative value of the average rate showing positive dynamics of intercultural communicative tolerance development in the CG, positive and negative values (from -6.20% to 1.46%) indicate instability in the development. Therefore, we consider this indicator to be insufficient. However, it is necessary to note the sufficient stability in the EG with all negative values showing positive dynamics in the development of intercultural communicative tolerance.

Table 2. The absolute growth and the rate of growth (decline) of the average scores in each scale of the V.V. Boyko's questionnaire in EG and CG

	Absolute growth		Rate of growth (decline)	
Scales	**EG**	**CG**	**EG**	**CG**
Scale 1. Rejection or misunderstanding of another person's individuality	-0,31	0,05	-5,99	0,83
Scale 2. Using yourself as a model in evaluation of other people	-1,15	-0,13	-20,80	-2,22
Scale 3. Conservative attitude in evaluation of other people	-0,19	-0,25	-2,71	-3,01

Scale 4. Inability to hide or flatten unpleasant feelings when being faced with uncommunicative qualities of other people	-0,90	-0,40	-15,86	-6,20
Scale 5. Willingness to change other people	-0,78	-0,03	-15,72	-0,54
Scale 6. Willingness to fit other people in or make them 'comfortable'	-1,49	0,02	-24,36	0,37
Scale 7. Inability to forgive mistakes that are made unintentionally	-1,05	0,01	-17,88	0,14
Scale 8. Intolerance to physical or mental discomfort caused by other people	-1,14	0,07	-22,30	1,46
Scale 9. Inability to adapt to the character, habits and desires of other people	-1,17	-0,02	-20,05	-0,33
Average absolute growth	**-0,91**	**-0,12**	**-**	**-**
Average rate of growth (decline)	**-**	**-**	**-16,19**	**-1,06**

Finally, the comparative analysis of intercultural communicative tolerance formation levels in the EG and CG at the diagnostic (DS) and final (FS) stages of the experimental work was performed (figure 1).
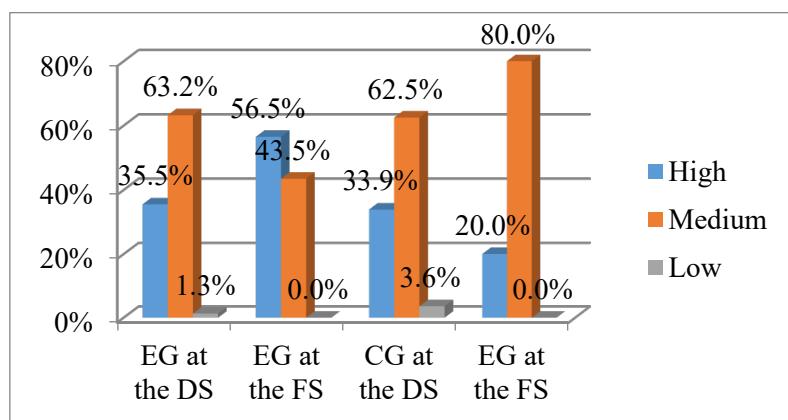
Figure 1. Formation levels of intercultural communicative tolerance in EG and CG at the DS and FS

In order to prove that the cause of the dynamics was the introduction of the proposed technology, the OLS and Difference-in-Differences modeling was carried out via calculating the Index influence variable according to the formula:

Index = $\beta_0 + \beta_1$*Dummy_Course+β_2*Dummy_After+β_3*Dummy_Course*Dummy_After

where β_0 – coefficient characterizing the error of the model due to the influence of external unaccounted factors; β_1 – coefficient of significance of the Dummy_Course variable characterizing the presence (absence) of the media technology; β_2 – coefficient of significance of the Dummy_After variable characterizing the students' participation (non-participation) in intercultural communicative tolerance formation; β_3 – coefficient of significance of the variable Dummy_Course*Dummy_After characterizing the impact (lack of impact) of the technology on the formation level of intercultural communicative tolerance.

According to the results of modelling, the Index influence variable proves to be significant with the value -1.96 at a significance level of $p \leq 0.05$, where the negative sign means positive effect of the media technology on students' intercultural communicative tolerance formation as the lower the score appears, the higher the students' tolerance level is.

7. Conclusion

The dynamics evaluation results using the absolute growth and growth rate (decline) indicate positive dynamics in the students' intercultural communicative tolerance development both of its separate components and its general level in the experimental group.

The results of the OLS and Difference-in-Differences modeling methods application proved the effectiveness of the students' intercultural communicative tolerance development through the use of the podcasting media technology in teaching a foreign language.

The data obtained underline the validity of the presented technology, which can be used both in university studies and in training on the development of intercultural communication and soft skills as the basis of soft power in order to achieve the maximum economic efficiency when concluding transactions, assessing investment opportunities and creating international alliances.

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