

PNP 2021
Personality in Norm and in Pathology 2021**ADDRESSING DIFFICULTIES IN INTERCULTURAL
COMMUNICATION WITH COMMUNICATION
TRAININGSESSIONS**

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Abstract

Today, the phenomenon of multiculturalism is widely acknowledged and accepted by educational establishments, businesses and state institutions. However, the current education system often fails to meet such educational needs of students as the building of psychological readiness for intercultural communication, hence necessitating the development of related programmes. The theoretical and methodological basis of the study was comprised of works by scholars on psychological problems associated with the process of intercultural communication. The study included empirical methods in the form of an ascertaining experiment and testing with psychodiagnostic techniques, in particular a Difficulties During Foreign Language Classes questionnaire and a Mental State of Students During Foreign Language Classes questionnaire by S.A. Nurmukhambetova. The research showed that the majority of students face various difficulties in intercultural communication; only 11.1% of the subjects denied having any difficulties. Thus, the building of psychological readiness for intercultural communication in students should be of a comprehensive nature and consist of such elements as preparing a learning environment that encourages intercultural communication, implementing intercultural training sessions in educational processes, and improving psychological mechanisms of empathy and self-reflection in students.

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Keywords: Communication training session, difficulties, intercultural communication, mental state, psychological readiness



1. Introduction

It is deemed necessary to optimize the process of building psychological readiness for intercultural communication in students learning German as their second foreign language, therefore a programme of psychological and pedagogical support must be developed and introduced into higher education to help manage the process.

This point of view requires development of a programme of building psychological readiness for intercultural communication and its implementation in higher education. Muller et al. (2020), Vasilenko, et al. (2017) describe a completely formed psychological readiness for intercultural communication as a set of social, emotional and intercultural competences integrated into the academic context.

Today, the intercultural communication competence is required from every person who lives in a multicultural environment and often interacts with different people (Muhamad et al., 2020). Other scholars share this belief as well; in their works, they concluded that the phenomenon of multiculturalism is already widely acknowledged and accepted by educational establishments, businesses and state institutions (Dolgova et al., 2019; Maykel & Kumar, 2020; Shipunova et al., 2018; Tabolina & Gulk, 2018). The most efficient way to improve intercultural competences is to study abroad. Thus, the building of intercultural communication competences in students studying in their home countries requires extensive work with students comprised of intercultural communication and cooperation training sessions aimed at addressing the psychological aspect of communication (Terzuolo, 2018).

To sum up, it should be noted that the issue of building psychological readiness for intercultural communication is currently being widely studied by scholars, especially such aspects of it as preparing a learning environment that encourages intercultural communication, implementing intercultural training sessions in educational processes.

In the process of teaching a foreign language, a teacher should provide students with knowledge, help them improve their skills and eventually turn them into professionals who are able to manage new culturally loaded communication situations (Nechay & Kondyurina, 2017; Reznitskaya, 2015).

At the same time, the significant role of a cooperation-based education model in the process of building psychological readiness for intercultural communication is highlighted as it encourages competition and creativity during foreign language classes, hence erasing psychological barriers in communication and leading to improvement of intercultural competences (Murtazina, 2019).

The learning environment, means and methods of improving foreign language and intercultural competences remain poorly developed today as they fail to comply with contemporary requirements for extra curriculum activities in teaching foreign languages (Sergeeva & Pokhodzei, 2015).

This necessitates further studies of building psychological readiness for intercultural communication, especially during psychological and pedagogical training sessions.

2. Problem Statement

The issue of psychological readiness for intercultural communication should be addressed from the perspective of an activity approach. The psychological analysis of a linguistic persona is said to encourage a more complex understanding of communication patterns, especially in the intercultural

sphere, and to initiate practical psychological and pedagogical experiments aimed at a better intercultural communication training of students.

3. Research Questions

- Higher education sometimes does not satisfy the educational needs of students in the formation of psychological readiness for intercultural communication, so there is a need to develop appropriate programs of psychological and pedagogical support aimed at helping students studying German as a second foreign language in the formation of psychological readiness for intercultural communication.

4. Purpose of the Study

The search for new forms and methods of the formation of psychological readiness for intercultural communication among students that meet their educational needs.

5. Research Methods

- The theoretical and methodological basis of the study was comprised of works by scholars on psychological problems associated with the process of intercultural communication.

The study on psychological readiness for intercultural communication in students learning German as their second foreign language was conducted in three stages: desktop analysis, experimental research, and data analysis. The study on the level of psychological readiness for intercultural communication comprised traditional methods and techniques; theoretical ones included analysis, synthesis, review of literature on psychology and education, and definition of objectives.

The study implemented empirical research methods (Gretsov & Azbel, 2016; Nurmukhambetova, 2017; Shelekhova, 2015; Zagvyazinskiy, 2008) in the form of an ascertaining experiment and testing with psychodiagnostic techniques: a Difficulties During Foreign Language Classes questionnaire and a Mental State of Students During Foreign Language Classes questionnaire by Nurmukhambetova (2017).

The study was conducted at the South Ural State Humanitarian Pedagogical University in Chelyabinsk. 27 fourth-year full-time students of the German and Teaching of German Department of the Foreign Language Faculty participated in the study.

The students can be described as disciplined, understanding and friendly. They actively participate in scientific and art events in the university and demonstrate an academic performance above average.

6. Findings

Findings obtained with a Difficulties During Foreign Language Classes questionnaire (Nurmukhambetova, 2017) show that 51.8% of the students feel insecure when answering a teacher's questions. Only 59.3% are able to speak before their peers during classes with confidence, and 51.8% can participate in group discussions without hesitation. 48.2% admit that it is difficult for them to find right words and build sentences in a foreign language, while 33.3% say that although they have a rather rich

vocabulary and sufficient grammar knowledge, they are not able to apply them in discussions. 29.7% note that they feel embarrassment when making mistakes before their teacher. 40.8% feel too shy to have conversations with anyone who is more fluent in a foreign language than them.

The test results demonstrate that the following communication skills pose the hardest difficulties for the students. 88.9% find it difficult to establish a contact with another person, feel insecure and uncomfortable during conversations and are ashamed to make a mistake. 70.4% admit that it is hard for them to talk to a stranger, ask them a question or find a topic for a conversation. For 85.2%, it is difficult to keep the conversation going if it requires reacting to another person's words or changing a topic. 66.7% say it is hard for them to share their opinion or experience in a foreign language. At the same time, 59.3% believe they can become close with other people in a short time, and 59.3% can easily share their feelings. It should be noted that working with official papers is seen as difficult by 63% of the students, while preparing a text for a presentation before a group is difficult for only 14.8% of the students.

63% prefer to express their thoughts in writing, even though 96.3% have some experience of making a presentation before an audience. 59.3% think they would agree to speak before an audience. 63% believe they are able to express their feelings in a foreign language, while 48.2% note that when speaking a foreign language, they are clear and concise.

To sum up, students have a positive self-assessment of their communication skills as 70.4% of them believe they are interesting to talk to. However, this fact remains unclear as only 26% of the students note they are satisfied with their ability to reasonably prove their point of view.

Thus, the findings above obtained with a Difficulties During Foreign Language Classes questionnaire (by Nurmukhambetova, 2017) showed that higher education sometimes fails to meet the educational need of students regarding the building of psychological readiness for intercultural communication, hence necessitating the development of related programmes of psychological and pedagogical support aimed at helping students learning German as their second foreign language build psychological readiness for intercultural communication.

Findings obtained with a Difficulties During Foreign Language Classes questionnaire (by Nurmukhambetova, 2017) demonstrate that 33.3% of students have lost interest in learning a foreign language during their studying in a university. Only 66.7% still enjoy learning a foreign language. Students list such reasons for the popularity of foreign languages as globalization, intercultural contacts (44.4%), studying other cultures (11.1%), travelling (25.9%), self-growth and self-development (7.4%), employment requirements (11.1%), computerization (3.7%), the global political situation (3.7%), future prospects (7.4%), a popular demand for a foreign language (7.4%), working or studying abroad (7.4%), and emigration (3.7%).

Among their personal reasons are employment and promotion prospects (25.9%), travelling (22.2%), a personal interest in foreign languages (18.5%), prospects for further studying or working abroad (7.4%), computerization (3.7%), the whole process of learning and speaking a foreign language (3.7%), self-development (11.1%), a personal interest in the culture of a target language (18.5%), communication with native speakers (33.3%), and a university degree (3.7%). Only 7.4% deny having any reasons for studying a foreign language.

Students have various learning objectives; some of them are the skill of speaking a foreign language fluently (11.1%), personal satisfaction (3.7%), education (11.1%), studying abroad (3.7%), understanding foreign cultures (3.7%), work (37%), knowledge (14.8%), experience (7.4%), communication (3.7%), not being attached to a place (3.7%), and lateral thinking (3.7%).

Students are planning to apply their foreign language knowledge in various fields. Among them are work (51.8%), teaching (22.2%), travelling (40.7%), and everyday life (14.8%). However, only 7.4% intend to use a foreign language to communicate with native speakers.

59.3% believe it is always possible to meet the need for mastering a foreign language, while 40.7% disagree with this statement. These results illustrate the necessity for new forms and techniques of building psychological readiness for intercultural communication in students which would meet their educational needs.

Students list the following external obstacles that hinder the studying of a foreign language: no desire to study (3.7%), the teacher's failure to motivate (11.1%), the lack of practice (11.1%), difficult phonetics, vocabulary and grammar (25.9%), no communication environment in a foreign language, no communication with native speakers (7.4%), attention problems (3.7%), the mismatch between the education programme and expectations (14.8%), no ability to speak fluently (3.7%), no motivation (3.7%), dissatisfaction with education materials (7.4%), and the lack of free time for language studies (7.4%). Only 29.6% deny having any obstacles in studying a foreign language.

In the language learning process, students face different challenges; some of them are complexity of a foreign language (22.2%), specificities of phonetics, vocabulary and grammar (37%), the lack of free time for language studies (7.4%), high energy consumption of the process (3.7%), the language barrier (7.4%), unsatisfactory curricula (7.4%), no motivation (3.7%), language interference (3.7%), difficulties with public presentations in a foreign language (3.7%), insecurity to speak a foreign language (3.7%), and rote learning (3.7%). Only 11.1% deny facing any challenges.

Students note the following personal issues that impede their language learning: no interest (3.7%), laziness (18.5%), a slow progress due to the necessity to consider every small detail (3.7%), introversion and shyness that hinder public speaking (11.1%), pronunciation issues (7.4%), bad concentration (7.4%), poor attention span (3.7%), self-criticism (3.7%), mood swings (3.7%), a fear of making mistakes (7.4%), no self-management (7.4%), impatience (3.7%), and bad memory (3.7%).

Students list the following individual features that promote language learning: good memory (14.8%), patience (11.1%), good self-discipline (11.1%), hard work (33.3%), good concentration (3.7%), a good language sense (3.7%), confidence (7.4%), talent for languages (3.7%), friendliness, extraversion and good social skills (11.1%), determination (11.1%), attentiveness (11.1%), proactive attitude (3.7%), motivation (3.7%), a desire to learn new things (3.7%), perseverance (7.4%), mindfulness (3.7%), creativity (3.7%), patience (3.7%), consistency (3.7%), a personal interest (3.7%), and readiness for a slow progress (3.7%).

Questionnaire results show that students face the greatest difficulties with speaking and listening (44.4% each respectively), while writing is difficult for 18.5% of the students and reading poses no challenges at all (0%). According to the students, there are the following explanations for it. 51.8% argue that speaking is the most difficult part of language learning, 37% have problems with expressing thoughts

in a foreign language, 44.4% face challenges with understanding the fast speech rate of native speakers, and 33.3% blame their lack of practice.

It is apparent that the findings above obtained with a Difficulties During Foreign Language Classes questionnaire (by Nurmukhambetova, 2017) demonstrate the lack of communication-oriented activities in language classes and necessitate their introduction into the programme of psychological and pedagogical support in the building of psychological readiness for intercultural communication in students learning German as their second foreign language.

In her works dedicated to fostering empathy through training sessions, Engbers (2020) states that although additional conceptual work remains to create a coherent, complete, and parsimonious definition of empathy, the results indicate that the students are gaining many of the facets assumed to be part of the concept of empathy through educational interventions, for instance, through communication training sessions. This view is shared by Do and Kimberly (2020), who believe that their proposed innovative educational method based on training sessions and games is cost-effective and efficient.

Psychological and pedagogical training sessions are seen as a requirement for the building of psychological readiness for intercultural communication (Novikova, 2015).

A high efficiency of intercultural training in ensuring psychological readiness for intercultural communication is provided by the set objective of intercultural training, which is acquisition of productive and tolerant mindset and adequate behaviour in intercultural communication, and development of a set of communication, analysis, cooperation and intercultural skills (Belozerova, 2017).

A complex and comprehensive approach to solving hypothetical communication issues through intercultural communication-oriented training session is believed to help students avoid misunderstanding, misinterpretation of other people's behaviour and conflicts during intercultural communication with native speakers.

In order to build psychological readiness for intercultural communication in students in language and intercultural communication lessons included in the compulsory curriculum for bachelor's degree in education, it is advised to create situations of social communication in the form of training sessions. This solution has also been proposed by other scholars who argue that the dominating axiological and humanistic paradigms emphasise intercultural foundations of education (Valeeva & Valeeva, 2017).

It should be noted that training sessions imply a great number of social interactions through working in groups and in pairs. When working in groups or in pairs, students showcase their speech independence by correcting each other's phrases and gain more confidence by being active speakers rather than passive listeners. A teacher plays a role of a communication host and a moderator in discussions of problematic issues. Students must be involved in active interactions with each other by imitating real situations of intercultural communication and ask each other and their teacher questions in addition to answering questions asked by the teacher controlling the process of understanding and learning new materials. We believe that working in groups or in pairs can help students better understand and acquire new intercultural knowledge coming from language, psychology and intercultural communication. Moreover, it can make students feel more relax, hence encouraging their active participation in training sessions. It should also be noted that working in groups promotes self-reflection; in other words, it develops the skill of reflecting on oneself and one's activities, understanding the

purpose and meaning of one's actions and words, and assessing personal actions. Based on our experience of organizing working in groups, it can be concluded that students do tasks better, more efficient and with greater interest than when working alone. This determination shown by students also improves the psychological environment of training sessions and enhances motivation of a teacher.

We believe that the building of psychological readiness for intercultural communication based on the programme of psychological and pedagogical support in the form of intercultural training sessions can have a positive impact on the development of students' professional competences and skills as it encourages easy and conflict-free integration into the multicultural communication environment.

It can be concluded that application of intercultural training sessions in the process of building psychological readiness for intercultural communication in students learning German as their second foreign language is the most efficient due to the fact that such training sessions promote the skills of listening and learning, encourage the usage of social perception mechanisms in communication, help understand people with another cultural background, erase the feeling of discomfort when experiencing other cultures, build the process of intercultural communication without allowing any conflicts, and ensure that differences in customs and national specificities do not hinder the balance between partners during communication.

The purpose of intercultural communication training sessions is the development of productive and tolerant mindset and behavioural patterns in situations of intercultural communication. Instead of avoiding potential conflicts, students must learn to be confident and efficient and find appropriate solutions in accordance with widely accepted cultural and ethical norms. To achieve this goal, students are required to have a highly developed competence and readiness for intercultural communication. However, it cannot be acquired automatically as a result of intercultural contacts; it can only be achieved through a specific educational process, for example, through intercultural training sessions. Students must be always ready to meet other cultures in order to ensure successful integration and assimilation.

7. Conclusion

In conclusion, the process of building intercultural competences in students learning German as their second foreign language is compounded by the lack of an adequately positive self-assessment of personal readiness for intercultural communication on the one side and by the lack of developed skills for intercultural communication on the other. An efficient solution requires a programme of psychological and pedagogical support in the process of the building of intercultural competences in students learning German as their second foreign language in the form of interconnected and complementary intercultural training sessions with the end goal of preparing students for intercultural communication by providing them with necessary psychological techniques aimed at relieving anxiety, stress and tension and of teaching them appropriate ideas regarding specificities of intercultural communication with native speakers, which is believed to ensure their overall readiness for intercultural communication.

The issue studied requires a comprehensive psychological and pedagogical approach including such aspects as preparing a learning environment that encourages intercultural communication, implementing intercultural training sessions in educational processes, and improving psychological mechanisms of empathy and self-reflection in students.

Acknowledgments

The research is conducted in the framework of the Scientific and Methodological Foundations of Psychology and Management Technology of Innovative Educational Processes in the Changing World project supervised by the South Ural research center of Russian Academy of Education in the South Ural State Humanitarian Pedagogical University. Grant from the Mordovia State Pedagogical Institute named after M.E. Evseyev (head Dolgova V.I.).

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