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**LEADERSHIP SKILLS AS A KEY CONSTITUENT OF EFL
TEACHERS' INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATIVE
COMPETENCE**

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Abstract

Intercultural communicative competence is regarded as the major characteristic of a foreign language teacher in any educational context. Being of a very complex structure, it presupposes quite a deal of various knowledge and skills and emphasizes not only a good language proficiency, but also the ability to understand and interpret one's own and the other view of the world in their interaction forming the basis for effective intercultural communication. The study of literature devoted to intercultural communicative competence shows that there is practically no direct reference to leadership skills among its numerous components, whereas they prove to be one of the most necessary abilities for the teacher in the constantly increasing diverse students groups. The article is aimed at indicating interrelation between EFL teachers' intercultural communicative competence and leadership skills. As a practical implementation of the results found, an attempt to design a special technique for developing EFL teachers' leadership skills as part of intercultural communicative competence has been made. The technique can be used as part of an advanced professional teachers training program in Additional Education Center at Irkutsk State Agrarian University. The main task of the program is to improve teachers' organization and time-management skills, assertiveness, flexibility, critical and quick thinking, cultural consciousness and tolerance while working in an intercultural group of students.

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1. Introduction

The role of an EFT teacher has changed greatly for the past twenty years. S/he has stopped being just an educator and become the link that connects the representatives of different cultures in a multicultural society. This role is even more enhanced with the fact that since 2012 all educational establishments of higher education in Russia have to go through the procedure of effectiveness monitoring. There are five monitoring criteria, including international activity, one of the indicators of which is the number of foreign students among the total amount of the students in the university. Irkutsk State Agrarian University after A.A. Ezhevsky occupies 39th position among 54 agricultural universities of Russia with the rate 27 according to this criterion (in 2020). This means that teachers have to work in international groups of students. At the present moment the university hosts students from Mongolia, Germany, China, Ukraine, Vietnam, Congo, the USA and CIS (Uzbekistan, Tadjikistan, Kazakhstan). As a result, a class is a “melting pot” or a “salad bowl” of different unique cultural, racial and religious identities. To respond to the challenge of working with such an enrolment, an EFL teacher must develop a very high level of intercultural communicative competence (ICC), under which we understand “the ability to realize, understand and interpret the two world views – one’s own and that of a target language – in their interconnection and on this foundation to execute the process of intercultural communication” (Tareva, 2014, p. 69). This ability presupposes linguistic and sociolinguistic or socio-cultural knowledge and the ability to manage the relationship between their own and other systems (Byram, 1997), the skill to act as a mediator between several cultures (Sercu, 2004). Thus, a teacher has to somehow MANAGE the process of communication, leading, directing and correcting it the way to reach mutual understanding in the educational situation (primarily), and then, in real intercultural communication. Obviously, an educator needs some kind of leadership skills/competencies to implement communication and reach education goals under such circumstances.

The article aims at finding the link between intercultural communicative competence (ICC) and leadership skills and describes one of the techniques of developing ELT teachers’ ICC with the aim of effective educational process in international groups of students.

2. Problem Statement

There is little study of the connection of ICC and leadership skills. Having observed literature sources in the field of intercultural communication and management (Arasaratnam & Doerfel, 2005; Flauto, 1999; Jokinen, 2005), we have made an attempt to correlate ICC and leadership models and find intersection points at their constituents/competencies.

There has been a considerable rise in interest to ICC phenomenon in recent years. First scientists searched for correlation between ICC, intercultural and communicative competences and proved that only the former fully responds to the challenges of communication process with the representatives of other cultures (Alptekin, 2002; Byram, 1997; Chen & Starosta, 1996; Kim, 1991, 1995; Riggio & Riggio, 2001; Sercu, 2004; Spitzberg, 2000). Later, specialists in linguistics, psychology, communication and cognitive sciences focused on identifying elements/components of ICC, organizing them into a hierarchy and

modelling its structure. Below are some most significant and profound findings of the scientists and their emphasizing certain aspects of the phenomenon of ICC.

For instance, Gudykunst (2002) accentuates psychological constituents of ICC allotting **self-motivation** to interact with strangers and **ability to manage uncertainty and anxiety**. Kim also bases her theory of successful intercultural communication on person's inner capabilities, namely **adaptability** and **flexibility** which she defines as "capacity of an individual's internal psychic system to alter its existing attributes and structures to accommodate the demands of the environment" (Kim 1991, p. 268). The same idea is found in Chen and Starosta (1996), who define ICC as "the ability to effectively and appropriately execute communication behaviours that negotiate each other's cultural identity or identities in a culturally diverse environment" (p. 355). It is obvious, that the authors consider the **adaptability** a key constituent of ICC, at the same time accentuating on **communication skills**, which are left behind in the above-mentioned theories.

Even more emphasis on person's **language proficiency** is done by Byram (1997) who views a person who has developed ICC as "able to build relationships while speaking in the foreign language; to communicate effectively, taking into consideration his own and the other person's viewpoint and needs; to mediate interactions between people of different backgrounds, and who strives to continue developing communicative skills" (Byram, 1997, p. 34). Besides, from the author's definition it is clear that **attitudes** are a core component of ICC.

The most well- founded and complex structure of ICC, to our opinion, is offered by Wiseman (2006), who represents it through six "C"s:

- 1) Communicative competence;
- 2) Cooperative competence;
- 3) Confidence;
- 4) Commitment to universal human rights;
- 5) Critical thinking;
- 6) Comparability.

The above model shows that communication skills (that is, the knowledge of not less than two languages) make a substantial part of ICC, alone with critical thinking skills, team-working, individual's confidence as a professional, individual's civic duties and responsibilities, patriotism and tolerance, analytical and matching skills. It is proposed that in the process of gaining high **language proficiency** and getting acquainted with the target culture, the student at the same time analyses and interprets other's view of the world through his/her own perspective, developing **tolerance, openness, friendliness**, strategic of interaction and feedback. Such an approach is likely to contribute into person's cognitive **flexibility**, which ensures constant supplementing and revising accumulated knowledge and experience to build new categories instead of forcing new information into old frames.

Further, it is appropriate to consider leadership models with the aim to find corresponding elements and maintain connection and interrelation between ICC and leadership.

It was Barge (1994), who stated that "communication and leadership work together". Naturally, it is impossible to imagine a good effective manager lacking elementary communicative skills.

Communication competence becomes a prerequisite for competent leadership. Leadership is enacted through communication (Flauto, 1999). The link between leadership and communication appears more pronounced in recently developed leadership models (Hede, 2001; PanjiHendrarso, 2019; Rouhiainen, 2005; Yukl et al., 2002). In this way, Bennis and Thomas accentuate on ability to engage others in shared meaning, distinctive and compelling voice, sense of integrity (including a strong set of values), and “adaptive capacity” (which is hardiness and ability to grasp context) (Bennis & Thomas, 2002).

As a result, communicative competence/ skills can naturally integrate into leadership model structure. However, it is obvious that the offered theories do not emphasise intercultural specifics (peculiarities) of communication, whereas competent communication in today’s global and diverse societies needs to be intercultural (Chen, 2005; Samovar et al., 2009).

One of the first indicating to cross-cultural interaction is found in Harris and Morgan (1987) who distinguish such qualities of a leader as empathy, openness, persistence, sensitivity to intercultural factors, respect for others, role flexibility, tolerance of ambiguity, and **two-way communication skill**. Jordan and Cartwright (1998) maintain that the key to success as an international leader lies in a mixture of personality characteristics and managerial competencies. Herewith, psychological profile comprises four attributes: intellectual capacity, self-confidence, openness to experience and emotional stability; and managerial competences include relational abilities, cultural sensitivity, linguistic ability and ability to handle stress. In more recent researches conditioned by globalization processes the intercultural dimension of leadership competences is observed more and more distinctly. Caliguiri and Di Santo (2001) emphasize on openness and flexibility. The top of the list of seven qualities offered by McCall et al. (2002) is headed by open-mindedness and flexibility in thoughts and tactics; cultural interest and sensitivity; ability to deal with complexity.

Summarising the ideas of the discussed authors, we can specify leadership competencies identified as *fundamental* (Hassanzadeh et al., 2015; Hooper & Potter, 2019; Iordache-Platis, 2017; Kessler, 2020; Kazakevych, 2020; Ruben, 2019). First of all, it is **communicative skills**/ language proficiency viewed in intercultural dimension. Second, it is **cognitive skills** (ability to see things in many different ways, critical thinking, **flexibility**, open-mindedness, self-knowledge as ability to understand and manage oneself - one’s emotions, strengths, weaknesses, needs, and drives) (Bartz, 2018; Goleman, 1998; Meldrum & Atkinson, 1998). Third, **emotional resilience** (ability to maintain confidence and objectivity under difficult circumstances) Meldrum and Atkinson (1998) or **self-regulation** (Goleman, 1998) - “ability to control or redirect disruptive impulses and moods and the propensity to suspend judgement – to think before acting” (p. 88). Forth, **empathy** or **openness** - “ability to understand emotional makeup of other people” (Goleman, 1998, p. 88). Finally, **motivation** or personal drive - determination to succeed, to be proactive and take personal risks.

It is apparent, that most of the denoted core constituents of leadership competence perfectly correlate and interact with the elements of ICC offered by Wiseman (2006). Thus, we can make a conclusion that ICC structure can and must integrate leadership skills as one of its key component.

3. Research Questions

The role of a teacher in modern society is a link connecting representatives of different cultures in a multicultural society. Obviously, a teacher must have a very high level of intercultural communicative competence (ICC). At the same time, a modern teacher should be a good manager, a leader, as s/he plans, organizes, motivates and supervises all the educational process. This comprises assessing possibilities, putting forward goals and choosing the ways of reaching them; structuring and designing team work, selecting tasks, distributing roles; correlating personal aims of students with the general goals of education; controlling the effectiveness of chosen techniques and methods (Bartz, 2017; Croft & Seemiller, 2017; Sadulaeva et al., 2019; Skarbaliene, 2018; Supermane et al., 2018; Thrash, 2012; Wenner & Campbell, 2017).

As we stated above, leadership skills appear a significant element of ICC structure. Having obtained the necessary level of ICC, a foreign language teacher cannot but face with such problems as:

- How to communicate, motivate and manage students and students groups that are culturally different from each other and oneself?
- How to be flexible, adaptable and manage complexity and change?
- How to communicate in order to meet one's objectives?

Generally speaking, how to become a leader in a multicultural class and make the educational process as effective and enjoyable as possible?

4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to work out a technique aimed at developing teachers' leadership skills as part of their intercultural communicative competence. The technique is focused on developing teachers' basic actions/ skills that will enable him/her to occupy the leader position in a students' group. These actions are:

- setting/ formulating goals;
- organising class activities;
- creating group norms;
- using supportive tricks;
- occupying "the right" location in class.

It should be noted that the above actions/ skills are considered in multicultural dimension as we are concentrating on international students' groups.

5. Research Methods

Observations and discussions with the teachers working in international groups of students let us make some very important conclusions about the strategy of organising educational process in such groups. The first thing each teacher should do is to identify which nationalities his/ her students represent. It is a well-known fact that all cultures can be classified into high-context and low-context ones (according to Hall, 1959). The style and manner of communication and interaction differ drastically in each group type. For example, low-context cultures prefer explicit verbal communication being very goal-oriented, whereas high-context cultures use a lot of non-verbal cues and great deal of background information. In low-context cultures privacy is very important and their representatives are focused on individual accomplishments. On the contrary, high-context cultures base on trust and close physical contact; their productivity depends on relationships and group processes; an individual identity is rooted in groups; they value social structure and authority.

The survey showed that overwhelming majority of students in Irkutsk State Agrarian University belong to high-context cultures, namely Chinese, Mongolian, Central Europe, Central and Eastern Asia, Africa. It means that in such groups some kind of mentoring/ coaching leadership style will be most appropriate, which can be characterised by the following features:

- reliance on students' background knowledge;
- friendliness and positive psychological climate in the group;
- dialogue;
- challenging tasks for students' self-realization and development;
- permanent supervision and control after fulfilling tasks;
- empathy, assistance and self-control.

With account on the denoted features a teaching technique was designed. The suggested technique presents a training system for teachers working in intercultural groups of students aimed at developing necessary leadership skills as part of their intercultural communicative competence.

6. Findings

The technique of training teachers' leadership skills as part of their intercultural communicative competence consists of four steps: **questioning, educating, practicing and correcting**. Below, each step is carefully described from the standpoint of must-be-achieved goals, ways of teacher-student / student-student interactions, methods used and tasks and exercises fulfilled.

6.1. Step 1 (questioning)

At this stage the participants of the program (teachers) are offered to fill in a questionnaire with the purpose to analyse and determine their leadership potential. The following tasks should be set and solved:

- thinking and analyzing one's tactics and methods working with students' groups;
- self-knowledge and introspection;
- finding out the necessity and topicality of leadership skills for the professional activity;
- developing interest to work with intercultural students' groups.

The questionnaire includes the following questions:

1. *How do you usually formulate the goals of a lesson/ a series of lessons? Give 2-3 examples.*
2. *Do you believe that a teacher as a leader should set lesson goals in a special way? How?*
3. *How do you usually organize work of your students at the lesson? What forms of work are prevalent in your class?*
4. *Do you create group norms? Which ones? Give examples.*
5. *How often do you use humor at the lessons? In what situations?*
6. *Analyze your position during the lesson. Where do you usually sit/ stand when you explain new material? What attributes do you use at the lessons (pointer, red pen, etc.)?*

The answers of the participants are interpreted and analyzed. The results are discussed in the group. During the discussion the trainees make conclusions about what actions are right and wrong from the standpoint of leading an international class.

After the trainees' background knowledge and experience were activated and curiosity awoken, they can proceed to the next step.

6.2. Step 2 (educating)

The goals achieved at this stage should be:

- explaining and instructing participants about specifics of the activity;
- training;
- fulfilling exercises together with the instructor.

At this stage participants of the program study and analyze numerous examples and situations of teachers' behavior at the lessons, take part in various trainings and role plays. Some examples of such activities are given below.

Role plays

a) "Ideas Fair"

The participants are given a particular topic of the lesson. The task is to formulate the goal of the lesson in such a way that it reflected not only its significance for the whole educational process, but also for each student and corresponded with their personal goals and interests.

b) "Interview"

Two participants sit in the centre. Their goal is to find out as much as possible information about the partner on a certain topic during the dialogue. This role play helps to practice skill of taking initiative in conversation and to lead the partner into the necessary course of communication. The task is to do it

very carefully and not let the partner suspect you of the intention to discuss a particular theme. As an example, participant #1 tries to find out family status, hobby and food preferences of the partner. Participant #2 is interested in the partner's income, boss and time-schedule.

During this role-play the level of empathy can be analysed, the necessity of equal mutual information exchange and identifying real life spheres that the partner is ready to discuss.

c) “Geometric shapes”

The participant is given a group of 5-7 people standing in a circle and holding a rope. The task is to line them up in a particular geometric figure as fast as possible.

This task is aimed at identifying and training organizational skills of the participants.

d) “Kaleidoscope”

The participant is given a group of 8 people and offered to fulfil a number of tasks for a limited period of time. This role-play is also aimed at identifying and training organizational skills of the participants.

- to imagine and pronounce a word in chorus;
- to make half of the team stand up on a signal;
- to imagine that they are a ship crew and to appoint the captain, the navigator, the passengers and the stowaway very quickly;
- to distribute the crew members within a triple, two double and a single-bed rooms.

e) “Little Advice”

Participants are offered some non-standard lesson situations. Their task is to give advice in each situation.

f) “Eureka!”

The participants are suggested to work out a very unusual but useful law or output a new formula for the situations: how to identify the age of a neighbors' dog, or how to measure the weight of a thunder cloud, or how to count the number of bees in the hive, etc.

Situations for analysis

Situation #1

One of the students of your group wears black clothes, short haircut, various badges and patches of a definite content. He demonstrates scornful attitude to his Asian group mates in every possible manner. He is from the full family with a good income, has an elder brother. He studies well and physically developed.

Situation #2

The teacher notices that some of the students are copying lectures on another subject during her explanation of the lesson material. S/he doesn't pay attention to it and continues the lesson.

Situation #3

The teacher announces: “And now to systematize the material let’s make a chart in your notebooks”. The class demonstrates displeasure and reluctance. The teacher says: “Ok, let’s then just create a memo”. The class again expresses unwillingness. The teacher makes a decision to draw a chart as the student don’t wish to do anything anyway.

Situation #4

One of the students in class behaves provocatively. The teacher gives him notes sometimes with no results. After finishing presenting new materials, the teacher asks the nasty student to do the task. The student cannot cope with it and gets unsatisfactory grade. After some arguing, scolding and more unsuccessful attempts to fulfill the task the student leaves the class slamming the door. The teacher continues the lesson.

Situation #5

One of the students is eager to start reading the text. He stumbles at the second word, nor knowing how to pronounce it correctly. After his several unsuccessful attempts the rest of the class begins to giggle. The teacher loses her patience and starts to accuse the student of not learning the material and failing to do his homework raising her voice. The student continues reading leaving out the unknown word.

Situation #6

During the lesson the students start passing a note each time looking on the ceiling after reading it. The teacher notices it, grabs the note and unfolds it. The message reads: *Look at the ceiling!* The teacher refractory does this and the class laughs out loudly. The teacher loses her temper, screams and threatens to complain to the dean.

After the participants practiced tasks and were armed with the necessary knowledge and skills, they plan and act out a lesson fragment during which they demonstrate their ICC and leadership skills. It should be reminded that they must pay special attention to how they look and enter the class, how they start the lesson (catch students’ interest, intrigue); mind their speech manner, know group priorities; show respect.

6.3. Step 3 (practicing)

The chief goal of this step for the participants is to present the plan of their lesson with detailed description of goals, methods and tasks, forms of work, etc. and role play it in class. This is an independent creative work demanding time, effort and concentration. It is better to give it as a home assignment done out of class, setting a definite deadline. Then the acted out lessons are carefully analyzed, discussed and assessed.

6.4. Step 4 (correcting)

At this stage the instructor checks the correctness of the tasks done by the participants. He/she assesses the works by certain criteria. Then it is efficient to discuss and comment on particular elements which deserve paying attention to as good or bad with the whole class.

7. Conclusion

In this paper, the leadership skills as part of intercultural communicative competence have been studied. The paper addressed the question of why the acquisition of leadership skills is important for intercultural communicative competence, especially for teachers working with international students' groups. It defined leadership skills and intercultural communicative competence, matched their models and identified common/ shared elements. The implications of this information for assessment purposes are also discussed. Finally, a technique of training teachers' leadership skills as part of their intercultural communicative competence has been developed. The described technique can be applied as part of an advanced professional teachers training program in Additional Education Center at Irkutsk State Agrarian University. The main task of the program is to improve teachers' organization and time-management skills, assertiveness, flexibility, critical and quick thinking, cultural consciousness and tolerance while working in an intercultural group of students.

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