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**MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION IN PREVENTING EXTREMISM  
AMONG ENGLISH STUDENTS IN A MULTICULTURAL  
UNIVERSITY**

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***Abstract***

The relevance of the problems stated in the article is determined by the fact that today's modern society is increasingly threatened by the spread of extreme ideology amongst the young of the world. The expansion of extremist ideas in schools and universities, leads to the implementation of extremists' plans in the future. In this respect, the authors of the article are focused on finding effective ways of reducing the aggression among university students, particularly towards the representatives of other cultures, nations, and nationalities. It is pointed out in the article that the idea of designing university English classes devoted to the problems of extremism and terrorism is considered to be of great value. This article presents the experience of English teachers in Elabuga Institute of Kazan (Volga Region) Federal University (Russia, Republic of Tatarstan), who aim to assist young people live and communicate in the multicultural world by encouraging non-association with extreme groups. The article includes the literature review on extremism and multicultural education; the aims, methods, and the results of the research conducted among the multicultural student society. The materials of the article are intended for college and university foreign language teachers, methodologists of teaching foreign languages, and foreign language student book's writers.

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**Keywords:** Multicultural education, extreme ideology, extremism, multicultural student society, university, English classes



## 1. Introduction

In spite of all the attempts made by the governments of leading countries to regulate the situation in the Middle East and prevent terrorist acts in Europe, the acts of violence organized by aggressively-oriented groups constantly make the civilian population afraid. Unjustified cruelty and violence are condemned unanimously by the international community, measures are being taken in airports, railway stations, major shopping centers, and sports arenas, but nevertheless, the situation does not seem to be changing. The civilian population of the world will continue to suffer subsequently, until the real source of the problem is determined and acted upon.

Undoubtedly, the world has become more multicultural in recent years. Many European countries including Russia have seen a rapid growth in the population of foreigners. One of the reasons for this is wider opportunities people have to travel and change jobs. The other reason is the increased number of refugees from war zones, resulting in a steady flow of disaffected people who have been forced to leave their own countries. This shows little sign of slowing down. In connection with the existing situation in the world, the problems of cross-cultural interaction are considered important. Being part of the multicultural society, it is essential to respect the values of other cultural identity and build relations on the basis of mutual understanding. Clearly, these aims have not been reached yet by the modern society, as it appears that a large percentage of young people demonstrate lack of tolerance, violence, and aggressiveness towards the representatives of other nations and religions. This is due to their specific world outlook, caused by circumstances around them, and the influence of radical extremist organizations that aim to make young people share their fundamental and radical views. This then leads to an obvious increase in the spread of extreme ideology among the younger generation all over the world.

Apparently, university students are seen as easy targets for radical extremists trying to recruit new followers. Absorbing new ideas, they start to believe that people of other nations or religions are infidels, inferior, and inhuman. Being encouraged by leaders of extremist groups, some take part in violent acts against the civilian population, including suicide missions, in the belief that people of other nationalities or somehow inferior groups do not set well with local culture and traditions. In effect, they are not welcome. A good example would be an often-repeated statement 'Russia is for Russians', the inference being that no one else should enjoy the advantages and benefits of Russia.

Tatarstan is a multicultural Russian republic. The representatives of many nationalities have lived together for centuries being taught from birth to be tolerant towards cultural diversity. Nevertheless, in the 1990s the republic faced some nationalistic problems. Each ethnic group's main concerns were to safeguard their culture, language, and rights. The clash of interests caused some problems, and riots were common, but the government managed to solve the conflicts peacefully. Nowadays, the situation in the region is stable, but the problem has not been completely eliminated and some tension still exists between the Tatarstan population and the newcomers from the CIS countries. It is still important for the spirit of tolerance to be instilled to achieve understanding between Tatarstan people and foreign residents. It should be pointed out that these problems are not aroused by the existence of two different religions – Islam and Orthodox Church, since they have existed in the region for centuries. This is a problem of national extremism. Being believers of the same religion, members of different ethnic groups still do not

get on well. The reason is belonging to different ethnic backgrounds which somehow allows one ethnic group to experience less respect towards the other one.

In this respect, it is multicultural education which is largely responsible for teaching students to respect diversity in order to help prevent them from joining these extremist organizations. Due to serious problems currently faced by modern society, the idea of multicultural education, aimed at forming a tolerant person who is able to live in the world of many cultures, has become appealing for the Russian system of higher education.

Elabuga Institute of Kazan (Volga Region) Federal University is a multicultural student society. Students from different countries such as Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, etc., are studying in this educational institution. The teaching staff, encouraged by the institution's government, try to implement multicultural education into the learning process. If possible, lectures, seminars, and personal projects are organized in ways to get students involved in the process of cross-cultural interaction. This helps both Russian and foreign students become more aware of the other cultures, mentality and hence, feel part of a friendly multicultural student society, respect people from different cultural backgrounds, and live side-by-side without any conflicts.

### **1.1. Literature Review – Extremism**

The term “extremism” was first introduced in 1838 by German philosopher Wilhelm T. Krug who defined extremists as people who did not admit the middle course and took pleasure in extremes (Sosnov, 2015). A century and a half later, extremism took a new look and now includes not only extreme political ideas but also rabid religious movements and other radical views (Adorno (1993), Hoffer (2010), Anderson (2016).

Nowadays, there is no generally accepted definition of extremism. It is considered a complicated phenomenon because there is no consistency in the use of the term. Extremism is determined as a denial of other people's opinion, when one's point of view is considered as the right one (Ghosh, 2016). It is regarded as a political ideology that opposes a society's main values or a set of rules and principles (Neuman, (2010). The definition of extremism includes aspiration to impose one's own point of view on other people and resorting to violence if necessary (Ryumina, 2016).

Extremist movements are studied by many foreign and Russian scientists. According to their research, there are different reasons for the rise of extremism. In several works, it is stressed that most extremists are young men. Ideals of masculinity and a desirable title of the so-called *national hero* can be very attractive to the young generation, especially for those who demonstrate an aspiration for self-esteem and power (Bakker, 2006; Nekrasova, 2011; Ryumina, 2016; Styukhina et al., 2015). The second reason for national conflicts can be national, racial, and religious differences. Being part of one's own cultural background, one might find it difficult to tolerate someone who demonstrates another set of cultural values or looks different, due to his nationality or race (Kaldor, 2007; Stern, 2009; Mamytov, 2016). Poor governance is assumed to be the next reason that increases the risk of extremism. State weakness provides opportunities for extremist groups and is considered a key factor in the reason people become involved in extremist movements and violent actions against the government and the civilians (Chenoweth, 2010; Dalacoura, 2006; Freeman, 2008; Li, 2005; Newman, 2007; Galkina, 2014; Salnikov, 2013). It is apparent

that a civil or political society can use violence when ‘faced with political failure or repression’ (Allan et al., 2016).

## **1.2. Literature Review – Multicultural Education**

For the first time, the ideas of multicultural education were developed by foreign researchers. According to the American writers, the aim of multicultural education is to eradicate any sign of racism in fields of human activities including the system of education (Banks, 1979). They stress that multicultural education is based on the belief that all people regardless of their age, sex, religion or ethnic backgrounds must be shown respect (Ford et al., 1996). The phenomenon of multicultural education is defined as a reform movement in the educational system, which allows students of diverse racial, language, ethnic, and cultural groups to have an equal chance to achieve academically in school (Banks & Banks, 2012). In America, the idea of creating multicultural education was connected with providing school teachers and educators with teaching tools for working with diverse school populations and being able to achieve justice within studying groups marked by different kinds of inequalities such as gender, socioeconomic status, language or religion (Banks, 2004). In this regard, western researchers emphasize the role of the school or university curricular being changed according to the ideas of multicultural education (Kymlicka, 1995) and teachers being aware of the cultural backgrounds of their students to implement multicultural education successfully (Alismail, 2016).

European scientists regard multicultural education as a pedagogical process which helps students obtain an aspiration for communicating with people of other cultures, understanding their specific system of world outlook, the way of thinking; it motivates people to analyze other cultures, to compare their values with their own value systems (Thomas, 1983), and to try to learn more about their own culture by studying other people’s cultures (Boos-Nünning, 1983). Multicultural education is targeted at helping people learn more about other cultures, get interested in studying them and respect them (Labaree, 1997); become more tolerant, opener, and more amicable with representatives of other cultural backgrounds (Sandfuchs, 1981) which can be regarded as teaching techniques aimed at helping solve ethnical conflicts (Pomerin, 1984). Multicultural education teaches young people to accept other people as they are without any desire to change their cultural peculiarities, and at the same time, to be proud of their own cultural backgrounds (Alotaibi, 2015). Focus was also shed on conceptualizing a form of giftedness developed by means of multicultural education

Russian educators became interested in multicultural education in the 1990s when minor ethnic groups started talking about the importance of their culture and language and multiculturalism intruded into school and universities. Teachers and educators paid attention to the role of ethnic culture in the educational process. Russian scientists claim that one of the main aims of multicultural education is school and university students’ intellectual enrichment, and an ability to live and communicate in the multinational society on the principle of respect and understanding (Bogdanova, 2009; Vasilyeva, 2011).

Multicultural education has been analyzed by different Russian researchers. In their works, this phenomenon is associated with different things. It is regarded as a means of teaching students about various cultures aimed at enlarging their knowledge of cultural diversity which will help them communicate with people of different nationalities and nations (Vasilyeva, 2011). Multicultural education

is viewed as a complex system. It is aimed at different aspects such as equal opportunities in obtaining knowledge and achieving academic results for students from different cultural backgrounds (Tishulina, 2006); forming students' awareness about the nature of positive cultural interaction (Safonova, 1991); developing students' communication skills based on 'dialogue between the cultures' (Bogdanova, 2009). The aims of multicultural education are to teach the younger generation to respect and to be tolerant towards cultural values of other people even if they are not recognized by their ethnical group (Dzhurinskiy, 2016); to try and preserve all cultural diversity (Gukalenko, 2003).

## **2. Problem Statement**

The increase in intolerance against people of other nations and religions caused growths in terrorist attacks all over the world, and in recent years, has become an important world-wide issue. Investigating students' attitude to this problem and finding the ways of forming negative reaction towards extremism are the problems to be tackled in this article. Regarding the fact that the role of multicultural higher education is considered essential, it is important to teach younger generation to communicate with the representatives of other cultures on the basis of non-extreme ideas. Teaching English in the multi-ethnic group of university students is one of the ways to prevent young people from sharing extreme beliefs.

## **3. Research Questions**

- a) What is the Elabuga Institute students' attitude towards extremism?
- b) How can teaching English in the concept of multicultural education at university help reduce extremism among younger generation?

## **4. Purpose of the Study**

The aims of the present research are to investigate the students' attitudes towards extremism and to find a means of preventing extreme beliefs among university students. It is the view of the authors that by teaching English to university groups of multicultural students, the relationships between different cultures can significantly improve, and a negative reaction towards extremism can be formed.

## **5. Research Methods**

Research data were obtained by means of an anonymous questionnaire conducted among the students of Elabuga Institute of Kazan (Volga Region) Federal University, in the period of September 2016 – December 2016. The experiment involved 186 students (47 (25%) foreign students and 139 (75%) Russian students) who attended the English classes of the authors. Among the foreign students there were 21 (11%) students from Turkmenistan, 13 (7%) young people from Uzbekistan, 11 (6%) students from Tajikistan, and 2 (1%) students from Kyrgyzstan. The Russian students were mostly represented by the Tatars (63 students – 34%), the Russians (56 students – 30%), the Udmurts (6 students – 3%), the Bashkirs (4 students – 2%), the Chuvashes (4 students – 2%), the Maris (2 students – 1%), the Ukrainians (2

students – 1%) and the Armenians (2 students – 1%) who were born and grew up in the Russian Federation, hence, have a Russian mindset.

### 5.1. The Diagnostic Stage

The diagnostic stage of the study was a theoretical and research one (June 2016 – August 2016). At this stage, the researchers concentrated on the study of literature on extremism and multicultural education; the aims and methodology of the study were developed; a questionnaire was designed; the students were interviewed; a set of classes devoted to the problem of extremism was designed. The participants of the study were asked to complete the questionnaire before and after the experiment. The results of the answers are represented in the *Findings* section.

### 5.2. The Experimental Stage

Educational researchers are convinced that teachers are expected to increase their students' awareness of ethnic diversity and cultural differences so that the younger generation can appreciate being part of a multicultural environment (Davidman & Davidman, 1997). Obviously, being amicable and tolerant towards the representatives of other cultural backgrounds might help prevent the rise of extremism among young people. This aim can be achieved by incorporating more multicultural education into the English classes' curriculum. The results of the questionnaire, scientific research on the problem, and our personal experience as foreign language teachers gave us an idea of creating a set of English classes devoted to the problems caused by national extremism all over the world.

At the lessons, the students were offered different materials on the terrorist attacks in New York (the USA), 2001; Moscow (Russia), 2002; the Beslan tragedy (Russia, North Ossetia), 2004; the extremism attacks in Paris and Nice (France), 2015; 2016 respectively; Berlin (Germany), 2016. The teaching material included films, newspaper and magazine articles on the topics.

## 6. Findings

After the experiment, the students answered the same questionnaire but the number of the questions was less than in the previous one. The table below contains the data obtained before and after the experiment.

**Table 01.** Experiment results

Options	The Russian Students (139)		The Foreign Students (47)	
	Before the Experiment	After the Experiment	Before the Experiment	After the Experiment
<b>1 Do you know what is meant by extremism?</b>				
1 Yes	120 / 86%	139 / 100%	35 / 74.5%	47/ 100%
2 No	-	-	-	
3 I don't fully understand	19 / 14%	-	12 / 26.5%	-
<b>2 What are the main reasons of extremism from your point of view?</b>				

1 Multicultural population of the country	5 / 3.5%	3 / 2%	9 / 19%	9 / 19%
2 People demonstrate low level of tolerance towards representatives of other cultures	45 / 32%	84 / 60%	23 / 49%	30 / 64%
3 Members of extreme-oriented groups unleash national conflicts deliberately	85 / 61%	50 / 36%	23 / 48.5%	24 / 51%
4 The number of leisure centers for children, teenagers and adults is not sufficient	10 / 7%	5 / 3.5%	-	-
5 Crisis in the educational system	44 / 31%	80 / 57%	10 / 21%	26 / 55%
6 The change in the value system	39 / 28%	14 / 10%	10 / 21%	10 / 21%
<b>3 Have you ever experienced acts of extremism? /</b>				
<b>Have you experienced acts of extremism during the period September – December 2016?</b>				
1 Very often	-	-	-	-
2 On several occasions	6 / 4%	-	9 / 19%	-
3 Once	14 / 10%	-	19 / 40%	-
4 Never	103 / 74%	-	13 / 28%	-
5 I don't fully understand	15 / 11%	-	6 / 13%	-
<b>4 Have you ever experienced an act of nationalist discrimination? /</b>				
<b>Have you experienced an act of nationalist discrimination during the period September – December 2016?</b>				
1 Very often	46 / 33%	12 / 9%	26 / 55%	15 / 32%
2 On several occasions	44 / 32%	6 / 4%	7 / 15%	5 / 10.5%
3 Once	26 / 19%	3 / 2%	2 / 4%	5 / 10.5%
4 Never	23 / 16%	118 / 85%	12 / 26%	22 / 47%
5 I don't fully understand	-	-	-	-
<b>5 Have you ever taken part in a national conflict? /</b>				
<b>Have you taken part in a national conflict during the period September – December 2016?</b>				
1 Yes	25 / 18%	3 / 2%	26 / 55%	2 / 4%
2 No	114 / 82%	136 / 98%	21 / 45%	45 / 96%
<b>6 There are people who dislike representatives of other nationalities. Do you have negative feelings towards people of other nationalities?</b>				
1 Yes	83 / 60%	24 / 17%	34 / 72%	12 / 25.5%
2 No	56 / 40%	115 / 83%	13 / 28%	35 / 74.5%
3 I don't fully understand	-	-	-	-
<b>7 What do you think about the policy of extreme-oriented organizations and groups?</b>				
1 I condemn it	126 / 91%	139 / 100%	41 / 87%	46 / 98%
2 I appreciate it	3 / 2 %	-	6 / 13%	1 / 2%
3 I don't fully understand	10 / 7%	-	-	-

## 6.1. Russian Students Results

According to the results of the questionnaire before the experiment started, the Russian students showed a high level of awareness what extremism is – 86%. After the experiment, all the respondents confirmed they understood what is meant by extremism.

Before the experiment, the main reasons of extremism for the respondents were *'the members of extreme-oriented groups unleash national conflicts deliberately'* (61%), *'people demonstrate low level of tolerance towards representatives of other cultures'* (32%), *'crisis in the educational system'* (31%), and *'the change in the value system'* (28%). These preferences changed at the end of the experiment. The options of the answers *'people demonstrate low level of tolerance towards representatives of other cultures'* (60%), *'crisis in the educational system'* (57%) were more preferable.

An overwhelming majority of the respondents (74%) stressed that they had never experienced acts of extremism. Some students (14%) admitted having have been in dangerous situations before on a few occasions. During the experiment period, none of the students experienced acts of extremism.

Quite a lot of Russian students have experienced acts of nationalist discrimination: 33% – very often and 32% – on several occasions. Only 19% of the respondents provided a negative answer. During the experiment period, majority of the respondents (85%) did not face any national discrimination. Before the experiment 18% of the students confirmed their participation in national conflicts. By the end of the experiment this number reduced till 2%.

Noteworthy, more than a half of the students (60%) admitted they dislike representatives of other nationalities and 18% have taken part in national conflicts. The answers to the question about the policy of extreme-oriented organizations and groups were of a positive character to a great extend. Only 2% of the students (3 people) appreciate the activity of extremist organization, whereas, 91% of the students condemn their policy.

## 6.2. Foreign Students Results

The foreign students demonstrated a high level of knowledge of what extremism is – 74.5% and 100% positive answers before and after the experiment.

The foreign residents had chosen the same reasons of extremism as the Russian ones, but they put them into different positions according to the level of importance. Before the experiment the most chosen reason was *'people demonstrate low level of tolerance towards representatives of other cultures'* (49%). The second most important for the respondents was *'the members of extreme-oriented groups unleash national conflicts deliberately'* (48.5%). The third place was shared by *'crisis in the educational system'* (21%) and *'the change in the value system'* (21%). According to the results, the students' preferences did not change much after the experiment, but it should be stressed that in their final answers they chose *'crisis in the educational system'* (55%) as the second important reason of extremism.

Answers of foreign students showed that more than a half of the respondents (59%) have experienced acts of extremism once (19%) or on several occasions (49%); a larger number of foreign students (70%) had experienced acts of national discrimination. The majority of them experienced this unpleasant situation often in their lives (55%). Apparently, this unpleasant experience made (55%) of the respondents participate in national conflicts.

During the experimental period, none of the students experienced acts of extremism; 42% experienced national discrimination: 32% – often, 10.5% - on several occasions, and 10.5% once; 4% of the students were involved in national conflicts.

A majority of the foreign students (72%) demonstrated a negative attitude towards other nationalities. The number of such students reduced till 25.5% after the experiment. Six students (13%) had confessed they appreciated the extremism policy. After the experiment, there was only one person left who still did not change his/her point of view.

## 7. Conclusion

The results of the research show that being part of the multicultural world, young people still exhibit a negative attitude towards people of other nationalities. Undoubtedly, steps should be taken to prevent the expansion of the influence wielded by extremist organizations which spread hatred.

According to the results of the experiment, it is clear that it is possible to teach the young generation to be more tolerant and sympathetic, and show less aggression as a result of the teaching methodology adopted in the English language classes, but it is not enough. The reforms should be taken in the Russian system of higher education. We believe elective courses aimed at teaching living in the multicultural society should be designed; the multicultural component should be included into many other subjects in the curriculum, extra-curricular activities should be organized in the way to help students from different national backgrounds desist or at least significantly reduce having negative attitudes towards each other. This could help prevent young people from following dangerous extremist ideologies.

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