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**CASE METHOD AS MEANS OF FORMING INTERCULTURAL
COMPETENCE IN TEACHING FOREIGN LANGUAGES**

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to study the conditions of successful implementing the "case study" method in the process of teaching a foreign language. The analysis of theoretical base of this research, particularly, works on theory and methodology of Russian and foreign scientists, is given. Complex description of distinctive features of the "case study" method, the history of its development and the scope of its application are suggested in the article. Experimental part of the study demonstrates the stages of implementing and the factors of effective case for forming intercultural competence of the student.

The results of the research showed that it is necessary to carry out thorough preparation in order to compile an effective case. Preparation includes highlighting the problem, collecting the appropriate material, adapting the material to the language level of students. The content of the case should be authentic; it should reflect modern realities and encourage students to analyse and to compare different cultures, to communicate with each other and to develop the ability to make joint decisions. It is necessary to have preliminary language training with students for more effective application of this method. This process demands introducing basic terminology, clichés and linguistic structures for work in a certain thematic area.

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1. Introduction

Intercultural communication is actively become integrated as one of the leading disciplines of humanitarian directions in modern educational system. In connection with this scientists and methodologists are actively searching for ways of forming and monitoring intercultural competence. Foreign and Russian scientists identify a number of universal approaches and methods for the formation of various aspects of intercultural competence. Such universal means include questionnaires, the method of intercultural assimilator, as well as various types of interactive exercises (Safina, & Amurskaja, 2017).

The most effective interactive method for the formation of intercultural communication is “the case method”. The advantage of this procedure is that it provides students’ independent foreign language activity under artificially created professional conditions. The application of this particular method assumes active interaction of students during the process of studying foreign language and solving professional problems.

It is to be emphasized that this method should be used to comprehend, critically to analyze certain situations and to solve specific problems. It is a kind of tool that provides a basis for imitating real life in the classroom. This procedure is readily adaptable to real situations. Cases are usually prepared in written form and are based on real facts (Lozovskaya, 2015).

Turning to the history of the development of this technology, it is necessary to mention that the case method was used for the first time in the USA at the Harvard Business School in 1921. The method was most successful when applied to administrative disciplines, particularly, to the precedents of legal and business practice. Along with the classical Harvard school, there is the Manchester West European Case Study School, which, unlike the former, seeks to find not only the correct solution, but suggests the multitudinous solution of the problem.

The method considered is concerned with modern education in foreign countries. We illustrate the case method by considering its active use in business education, in teaching medicine, law, economics and management, as one of the most effective ways of teaching skills for solving standard professional problems.

Attention should be given to introducing this method in teaching foreign languages. A fundamental advantage of this procedure is that the content aspect and professional orientation of teaching cause greater interest and motivation for studying foreign language and culture. We discuss the case-study technology which can be applied to the domestic and socio-cultural sphere in standard situations of business communication and educational and professional activities.

Case-method contributes to the solution of a number of important tasks, creating the necessary language environment and motivating students to use a foreign language for real communication. This methodology promotes the effective development of the skills of all types of speech activity, helps to form the skills of business communication, as well as a number of analytical, creative and social skills (Drutsko, 2014).

Ryndina highlights a potential advantage of this procedure. It lies in the fact that “the emphasis is not on communicating ready-made knowledge, but on encouraging students to think, to independently search for information, to make independent conclusions and messages, as well as “to transfer to oneself” that is an appeal to life and speech experience of students” (Ryndina, 2013).

Pakhtusova notes that this approach is oriented towards the formation of the ability to learn, the paradigm shift of thinking, the ability to process huge amounts of information, and the ability to systematically and effectively perform when some crises occur (Pakhtusova, 2014).

The method is found to be successful on a wide range of the formation of intercultural competence of students, since this competence presupposes the ability to orient oneself in a foreign culture, the ability to adapt to other people's norms and rules of conduct. Among the most important conditions and factors for successful formation of intercultural competence, Maksimova singles out the use of materials that contain the cultural and socio-cultural aspects of the language being studied. It is also important to develop students' ability to compare the cultural realities of their native country and the country of the language they study; to motivate independent students' work with the material relating to those cultures and languages (Maksimova, 2015, p.133).

The principles of compilation and stages of implementation of case technology in foreign language classes are described in the works of a number of scientists. The method to be described here involves important and significant information for students; clear and understandable instructions from a teacher; the necessary sources of information; clearly planned time-table for solving different problems (Zolotova, & Demina, 2015).

The procedure is most simply and successfully followed for the case of careful reading the terms of the method; highlighting its key points; searching for the necessary information missing in the text of the case itself; distributing the functions and roles of the participants; developing a unified position of the group and presenting results in a comprehensive manner (Aikina, 2013).

At present methodologists distinguish different types of training cases. According to the volume and complexity of the tasks there exist: 1) full cases for work in a team during several days and 2) incomplete mini cases. When we deal with structured cases, situations are briefly described with a small amount of digital data. But when we deal with unstructured cases, a large amount of material and statistics is presented. The main purpose of such cases is the ability to distinguish the main things from the secondary ones and to assess the situation for a certain period of time (Ovchinnikova, & Kulgavyuk, 2014).

A review of theoretical literature has shown advantages and disadvantages of the case study strategy in various areas of vocational education. The essential idea behind this approach in teaching a foreign language is that as an effective means it increases students' motivation, improves their communicative, cognitive and strategic competencies during the process of studying foreign languages.

2. Problem Statement

The most widely accepted modern theories of teaching a foreign language suggest that students must acquire not only communicative skills, but also be capable of effective professional activities in a foreign environment, which requires the formation of various aspects of intercultural competence, development of the ability to analyze and compare the characteristics of different cultures, be able to make decisions in standard situations and when things are coming to a crisis.

The task of this study is to identify factors for successful appliance of the case study method during the process of studying and teaching a foreign language. By this method it will be possible to develop

strategic skills, to work in a team, to determine the role of the teacher and the role of students in organizing an effective process of studying and teaching a foreign language.

3. Research Questions

- 1) scope, varieties and target settings of the case method;
- 2) the main stages and principles of preparing the case during the process of teaching foreign languages;
- 3) the conditions for the formation of intercultural competence.

4. Purpose of the Study

The main objective of this study is to identify basic principles for successful appliance of the case-study method during the process of studying and teaching a foreign language; to create intercultural competence of students.

Following these studies, experiments concerning the case method named “The magistrates in Germany” were carried out. Experiments investigated and showed that there are different stages of the case-study procedure; the method is applicable to a group of students. From the results of the experiments it is found that communicative skills, understanding of intercultural differences, personal experience may be obtained by means of case method.

5. Research Methods

Theoretical base of this research are works on theory and methodology of such scientists Ryndina (2013), Pakhtusova (2014), Aikina (2013), Lozovskaya (2015) and others. A corresponding analysis of works on theory and methodology relating to the use of the case method during the process of teaching a foreign language has been supplemented by empirical research methods, such as questionnaires, testing, discussions and interactive exercises.

Let us consider an experiment in which the 4 year students of philology department took part. The case study “The magistrates in Germany” was suggested. It was drawn as close as possible to the real educational and professional life.

In the course of experimental work, it was sometimes necessary to refer to the methodological principles developed by Aikina (2013). The scientist assumes that the following stages of work do exist: getting to know the case, analyzing information, finding a solution, identifying the advantages and disadvantages of each solution, evaluating alternative solutions, presenting results, assessing students’ work and summarizing the whole work (Aikina, 2013).

The case “The magistrates in Germany” consists of several consecutive stages. It combines an individual work of each student with general search tasks of the group and vice versa group discussion of the problem and proposals prepared by each member of the team are assumed. The full set of tasks was worked out for 5 academic hours. General linguistic and country study information was introduced beforehand. Lexical skills concerning the topic “Education system in Germany” were practiced during the preliminary lessons of practice of foreign language.

The goal of the case was formulated as follows: “Imagine that you have received a grant for a study tour to Germany. The purpose of the tour is to get acquainted with the education system in Germany and to choose the university in which you would like to obtain a Master’s degree. Your task is to develop a trip route, to work out a plan for visiting German universities and to present the university you study at to your German colleagues”.

As an official document, students received a fictitious invitation from the German Academic Exchange Service, executed according to all standards of such documents. The invitation included specific dates, names of students and the total amount of money allocated for organizing the trip. In addition, the list of universities, in which there are Master’s programs having the direction of “Germanic philology”, was attached to the invitation. The task of the students at the first stage was to determine the overall plan of the working trip: which cities and when they intend to visit during a two-week trip. As a result of individual research work and a joint discussion during the lesson, five cities and universities were defined. They aroused the greatest interest. The result of the first lesson was writing the working plan of the trip.

The students were divided into 5 groups during the second lesson. Every group was to prepare a presentation about the city it has chosen. Then every group was to review the structure and curriculum of the university that was planned to attend. After the presentations a discussion was organized. The theme “Higher education in Germany and Russia” was suggested. The students highlighted common and distinctive features of the structure of education and peculiarities of content of the curriculum of universities both in Germany and Russia.

The third stage of work had a practical trend. It assumed a solution of such problem as allocating funds of the grant to organizing the study tour. It was necessary to choose the most profitable type of transport for a trip to Germany and to choose the most appropriate transport links between German cities.

The next task of organizing the trip was search of hotels and hostels. Every mini group offered various options for living in the cities assigned to them. They actively discussed actual prices for various vehicles. At last, thanks to joint discussion of the opportunities optimum accommodation and transfer options for all groups were selected.

The next task was connected with planning meetings with German professors and students, preparing questions about Master’s curriculum and student life, creating a presentation about the Kazan federal university. The task was carried out in groups. Positive and negative sides were pointed out in each presentation. At the end of the lesson the most successful presentation was mentioned depending on its’ content and design. Then the results were summed up.

At the last lesson the students were offered to speak out on the topic “Positive and negative aspects of the Bologna process in the higher education system”. The students exchanged their views. They discussed such points as changes in education systems of universities of Russia and Germany, attraction of Master’s curriculum in Russia and Germany. They gave their positive and negative arguments and shared their plans for the future.

As a final task, students were asked to fill in a questionnaire. They had to analyze how their perception of higher education in Germany had changed, to assess the improvement of their language skills and to point out the positive aspects they had found out for themselves by carrying out the tasks of this case.

6. Findings

The students were motivated to analyze and discuss a large amount of information related to the education system in Germany and Russia. They were able to think over and discuss possible solutions of such practical issues as transport, accommodation, prices of different services and other issues associated with staying in a foreign country. The participants of this case discussed indirect difficulties and contradictions that Russian students may face when studying in Germany.

The questionnaire survey showed a high level of satisfaction with the search and analytical work done: the students demonstrated expansion of their information resources about Germany in general and about the education system in particular. Their motivation to learn the language and improve language skills increased. In addition, four of the fifteen students expressed their desire to hold the Master's degree in Germany and they made their choice concerning a particular institute.

The main difficulties in managing the tasks were: inability to convince the interlocutors, to argue their own position and to allocate the time and responsibilities among the participants within the team. Also there were positive moments of work and managing the tasks of the case: finding out new information, dynamics, and the ability to share and discuss different points of view, practical value of new information.

7. Conclusion

The studies clearly demonstrate high efficiency and wide possibilities of the case method. It is obvious that the method is aimed at creating intercultural competence of students. On the one hand, case technology promotes the realization of such educational tasks as gaining new knowledge about foreign culture, acquiring the skills of analysis of intercultural differences, on the other hand, this technique contributes to the development of independent critical thinking, the ability to argue and convince the interlocutor, to improve the skills of strategic performing and decision-making.

As the main advantages of the case method, it is important to note that such qualities as dynamism, teamwork, increasing motivation to learn a foreign language were realized during the work. In addition, country study material is absorbed more deeply due to independent search for the solution of the situational task. This method allows students to become keen on the work having different language levels. It contributes to collective creative thinking, motivates students to profound penetration into lingua-cultural and mental features of the foreign language and culture. It is worth remarking that the use of case studies method during intercultural communication classes is of great value.

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