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THE BULGARIAN EDUCATION SYSTEM AND THE FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING

Abstract: *The paper discusses the modern Bulgarian education system within the context of foreign language teaching. The process focuses not only on the development of basic language competences, but also on building skills for full-fledged communication on a new level - communication that enriches us and connects us with those who are different from us.*

The ultimate aim is the social competence itself. Building intercultural competences is a crucial part of intercultural education, that sets knowledge, skills and competences and leads to a real change in the way of one's thinking. In fact, the foreign language teaching is related to the acquisition of social skills: for listening, for communication, for working in a group, for empathy.

Key words: foreign language teaching, Bulgarian education system, language skills, competences, socialization.

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Introduction

The article is provoked by the process of globalization, which has developed intensively in recent years and led to enhancement of interactions between different countries, peoples and cultures. The mutual influence itself is carried out through permanent cultural exchange and communication between state institutions, social groups, as well as through scientific cooperation, trade, tourism, etc. Meetings and communications with representatives of different countries become a part of our everyday life reality.

Moreover, educational institutions enhance exchange of students and academic staff; teachers organize joint projects and/or do internships abroad, thereby participating in intercultural exchange and dialogue. Mutual understanding in the process of intercultural communication is facilitated by acquired intercultural competences. These very competences refer to the ability to communicate in a foreign language, taking into account the difference in cultures and stereotypes of thinking. Knowledge of the language and assessment of the level of language

mastering is inevitably linked to the knowledge of the history, culture, and customs of the people who speak that certain language.

The formation of intercultural competences should be considered within the context of the development of students' ability to participate in the dialogue of cultures, based on the principles of mutual respect, tolerance of cultural differences and overcoming cultural barriers. The intercultural education aims at developing students' ability to communicate successfully and contributes to students' awareness of their belonging to a certain ethnic group. Also, it makes them getting to know the traditions and specifics of the representatives of another culture.

The modern Bulgarian foreign language education is being restructured on the basis of established humanistic values. More and more, it focuses not only on the development of the basic language competences, but also on building skills for full-fledged communication on a new level - communication that enriches and connects with those who are different. Taking these steps, the study is still in debt to the cultural tendencies of the countries in a

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united Europe. There are attempts to get to know other nations, but the image of the other, who is ethnically different, is seemed only as a general idea for further self-knowledge through getting to know different cultures, or the formation of the so-called third personality culture. This whole process of getting to know oneself and getting to know the other is embodied in the state educational standards and at the curriculum level. In learning English, for example, additionally to expanding and deepening basic language skills, special attention is paid to the sociocultural context of intercultural communication, i.e. of the development of intercultural competences, because language itself does not exist outside of culture. Being one of the human activities, it is a essential part of culture and a tool for its construction, and moreover, it is a "system of knowledge, skills, habits, ideas, traditions and value orientations" (Flier, 2000: 128).

Building intercultural competences is part of intercultural education, which is a set of knowledge, skills and competences and leads to a real change in the way of thinking. It enhances the spirit of rejecting confrontation with other cultures and creates attitudes of reciprocity and cooperation. It is related to the acquisition of social skills: for listening, for communication, for working in a group, for empathy. The ultimate aim is the social competence itself.

The reason to work hard on the formation of intercultural competences is that they guarantee the full realization of the personality in a more diverse world. Philip Pellman and Marc Verlot give the following definition: "Intercultural competence is the ability to understand the socio-cultural differences and to operate successfully in a diverse cultural environment" (Pelman and Verlot 2007: 124). This is not a new phenomenon, such competences have always been existing, since people have always lived in more or less multicultural societies. For this reason, we also talk about "generic" competence - not given at birth, but acquired in childhood from parents, from the environment.

The task of the university is to improve intercultural competences. Due to the fact that students come to the university with already formed "inherited" competences, teachers should outline it and develop it in future. This is done by enriching the interactions of the students and expanding them diversely in the context in which they are learning. Such interactions are realized through the development and experimentation of models of practical training in English, which include exercises and tasks for independent creative work related to the learning content and the building of intercultural competences, and exchanging ideas with partner universities under the Erasmus+ program.

The modern educational environment is intercultural. It is the mission of every teacher to accept this characteristic as a resource to successfully

incorporate into their practice. The intercultural dimension of foreign language learning has become in recent years a leading factor in a number of studies and analyses. Studies in the field of social psychology, as well as studies of intercultural communication, have provided insight into the necessary linguistic and social skills, knowledge and attitudes to be applied to effective international communication. When learning in an intercultural environment is analyzed, emphasis is usually placed on the learning of representatives of "other" ethnicities. We should not ignore the fact that learning in an intercultural environment is a process that must be analyzed from the positions of all learners, not only from the position of the "different" ethnicity. The successful functioning of an intercultural educational environment presupposes that the process is successful for all learners. A balanced education policy is needed. This means considering how ethnic diversity can enrich the educational process with different languages and cultures, build tolerance, so that this education is useful for all.

The training of the future pedagogical staff to work in an intercultural environment is an extremely important part of their overall pedagogical, psychological and methodological education. In this regard, the training of students who will teach English language at schools is an extremely important. The arguments in support of this claim can be summarized as follows:

1. The education is carried out through language, i.e. verbally.

2. The language learning is a condition for intercultural communication because language is a carrier of culture and a "bridge between different cultures" (Radkova 2016: 29).

Communicating in foreign languages is a competence that the modern intercultural environment requires. All students should study a foreign language. Thus, society's expectations are linked to building young people's skills not only for communication, but also for a positive attitude towards other cultures, intercultural understanding and formation of intercultural competences.

In the context of current academic priorities and values in the preparation of future pedagogical specialists, the application of active and flexible forms of education is required. Dialogic communication and interaction, creative and critical thinking, informed decision-making, dealing with unexpected situations or permanent problems come to the fore in the construction of their professional identity. The motivation and strategic goals in relation to the studied scientific areas are complexly linked to the dialogical interaction of the actors, the competitive beginning, the renewal, the humanization in the university education system.

Modern academic training of new pedagogical specialists focuses primarily on the quality of the

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educational process as an integrative property of university life. In addition, the new realities of the XXI century and the European educational space introduce dynamism in interactive communication, provoke intellectual activity, transform the social identity of the actors in the university society. Students are encouraged to take an active role as subjects in the educational process. The psychological qualities of readiness for action, commitment and responsibility are formed individually.

According to Eyubova, social-emotional functioning is a combination of innate characteristics, personal dispositions and social experience. Cultural values largely determine acceptable variations in social behavior and the expression of emotions (Eyubova 2018: 119). At the same time, new learning skills through the active participation of students help to deal with "hyperinformation", improve searching emotional-logical reflection, support self-analysis and the necessary metacognition. The key skills for solving problems with a practical orientation orient intellectual curiosity to the logical operations of concentrating and distributing attention, observing, surveying, analyzing, sifting terms and definitions, interpreting, visualizing, summarizing, conceptual awareness, associating, systematizing, arguing, etc. Verbal information coming from a variety of sources, traditional and modern (textbooks, manuals, studies, monographs, collections, periodicals, encyclopedias, reference books, dictionaries, Internet resources, etc.) is usually processed through discussion. The educational attitudes and expectations of the students are focused on didactic methods: interviews, presentations, discussions, research, solving problems and case studies, specific practical activities, etc. The construction of new academic knowledge these days is based on the systematic development of cognitive activity and the derivation to higher forms of cooperation and collaboration in the field of pedagogical disciplines, strategies, technologies and practices.

The real pedagogical process calls for and strengthens the intellectual curiosity of the students, nurtures creative abilities, critical, lateral and creative thinking, independence, initiative, ingenuity. In the last decade, trends have emerged for the construction of attractive, multidimensional, qualitative, competitive, innovative training. Theoretical-applied, psychological, therapeutic, special, social, art aspects of pedagogical knowledge are developed, forming specific pedagogical abilities, experiences and

competencies in accordance with the needs and requirements of the present.

Different types of competences and competences are discussed: professional competence includes functional, intellectual, situational, social, special, personal, individual, subject, communicative. Zimnya presents socio-professional competence with the blocks: basic, personal, professional and social. The European Association of Universities offers the following classification of competences: instrumental competences - ability to analyze and synthesize, ability to organize and plan, basic general knowledge, communication skills, elementary computer skills, information management skills, problem-solving ability, ability to decision making; interpersonal competences - ability to criticize and self-criticize, ability to work in a team, interpersonal habits, ability to interact with experts from other subject areas, ability to perceive diversity and intercultural differences, ability to work in an international context, attachment to ethical values; system competencies - ability to apply knowledge in practice, ability to learn, ability to adapt to new situations, ability to generate ideas, ability to lead, understanding the culture and customs of other countries, ability to work independently, ability to develop and manage of projects, ability to initiative and entrepreneurship, responsibility for quality, will to succeed.

The various methods, approaches and modern technologies applied in the foreign language training of the pedagogical staff are subject to one common principle - the principle of active communication, implemented in a variety of language situations (from social-everyday to problem-oriented and professionally oriented). With modern methods, special attention is paid to the development of cognitive skills. The study material is not presented ready-made. The manifestation of independence in the search for new information and in the assimilation of new knowledge is stimulated.

If the dominant features of modern foreign language education should be pointed out, its communicative orientation, intercultural nature and close connection with new information and communication technologies should be noted.

The personal qualities that it seeks to build or tolerate in students can be summarized as independence, creativity and tolerance of otherness.

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