

The Role of Foreign Language Learning as a Background of Tolerance and Cross-Ethnic Interaction Formation of Higher Educational Institutions' Students

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Abstract

The article deals with the role of language study in improving the level of tolerance and cross-ethnic interaction between students of higher educational institutions. The research methodology is based on the combination of general scientific and special methods that was ensured by the introduction of appropriate forms and methods of education, as well as the principles of objectivity, student-centricity, research and its results' verification. The systemic analysis of normative acts, documents and international experience resulted in deeper understanding of basic notions of research and the importance of foreign language learning in the formation of tolerance and cross-ethnic interaction. At the initial stage of the experiment, low level of the tolerance formation and cross-ethnic interaction in the process of learning a foreign language was determined. This is due to inability to conduct intercultural dialogue, misunderstanding of ethnic and cultural differences in the process of communication. This prompted development and implementation the authors' educational model, which provided realization of interactive forms and methods of learning as well as students' involvement into socio-cultural educational environment. The outcomes of final empirical research highlighted positive dynamics of tolerance formation of higher educational institutions' students when learning the discipline «Foreign Language for Professional Purposes».

Keywords: tolerance, cross-ethnic interaction, sociocultural educational environment, personality, foreign language

1. Introduction

In the globalized multicultural world, language serves as the main means of communication providing interaction with various ethnic groups, enhancing collaboration, enriching spiritual and cultural domain of different nations, developing the cognitive abilities of any individual. One of the most urgent challenges of the modern world and contemporary education is forming of tolerance among modern youth and spreading the ideas of tolerance in all spheres of human life and activities. Tolerance is respect for other people's ideas, beliefs, convictions, traditions, customs, and lifestyles. Implementation of the ideas of tolerance is the most urgent issue, especially for specialists who will work in the educational field.

The formation of tolerance in young people could face various problems that affect their perception and understanding of diversity and other cultural aspects. Here are some of the main problems that can arise: lack of education, social environment, media influence, lack of communication experience, etc. Young people may not have enough information about the diversity of cultures, religious beliefs, ethnic

groups, etc. Lack of knowledge could lead to stereotypes and misunderstandings. It is important to provide proper education and awareness about the diversity of the world and its values. Insufficient education and ignorance about the diversity of culture, religion, ideas and views could cause stereotypes, prerequisites for intolerance and rejection of others; also lead to the inability to argue one's views and respect other opinions. Family, friends, media and other social groups have a significant influence on the formation of tolerance in young people. If the environment supports intolerance, stereotypes or discrimination, this may be transmitted to young people and contribute to the formation of negative attitudes. The media has a great influence on the awareness of young people. They often present simplistic or stereotypical depictions of other cultures, groups or ideologies that reinforce intolerance and create conditions for conflict. If young people do not have the opportunity to communicate with people from different cultures, they cannot understand their needs, values and beliefs. It causes fear, mistrust and intolerance of the unknown. Therefore, the formation of tolerance among young people requires a complex approach. Some additional solutions include improving education, namely expanding curricula that cover the study of cultural diversity, the history of religions, ethnic groups, and other aspects that promote understanding and tolerance.

The process of globalization in higher educational institutions contributes to the tolerant consideration of the peculiarities of perception and application of knowledge in the educational process by representatives of different educational and cultural traditions. The UN Document ("Declaration of Principles of Tolerance", 1995) refers to the ability to perceive differences and characteristics of other ethnic groups: every person must recognize the fact of natural diversity in his/her "appearance, situation, speech, behavior and values, has the right to live in peace".

The war has a negative impact on young people for various reasons. In military conflicts, youth can be exposed to direct violence, loss of loved ones, evacuation and other traumatic events. These experiences can cause physical and psychological trauma, such as post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, anxiety, and other health problems. The essence of the quality of education and training in the conditions of war is not provided by proper conditions for the education and development of children and youth, despite the difficult situation accompanying the military conflict. Education in such conditions becomes especially important, providing young people not only with the knowledge, but also with understanding, skills and support necessary for the future recovery and development of their country. The main aspects of the quality of education and training in the context of the war are safety, security and accessibility. Conflicts cause the destruction of schools, institutions of higher education, forced relocation, loss of access to educational materials and resources. The quality of education in the conditions of war requires ensuring the availability of education for all children, regardless of their status or place of residence. Learning a foreign language can be an effective tool for building tolerance. Here are some ways for achieving this.

When learning a foreign language, it is important to include the study of the cultural context of the country in which the language is being studied. This additionally helps students to understand the traditions, values, views and way of life of other cultures; contributes to the expansion of the worldview and understanding, and respect for cultural diversity. Learning a foreign language must be combined with getting to know the culture and history of the country where it is spoken. This will complete broadening the outlook and understanding of different ways of life, values and traditions. Learning a foreign language includes studying the cultural aspects and traditions of other countries for students to expand their worldview and understand that there are ways of life, values and beliefs among themselves. They learn to respect and embrace diversity. Learning a foreign language has many advantages and can cause the need for such training; provides an opportunity to communicate with people from different countries and cultures. This contributes to the improvement of international communication based on mutual understanding and tolerance. Language is a key vehicle for the exchange of ideas, culture, research and trade.

Since learning a foreign language by representatives of different cultural groups traditionally includes teaching the principles and values of society, foreign language lessons could serve as a suitable option to instill tolerance (Atamturk, 2018).

In the field of higher medical education, we consider that the main factors of professionalism and competitiveness of the future medical worker is to have communicative competence, which includes: tolerance, emotional stability, respectful attitude towards different participants of communication, benevolence, empathy, ability to cooperate, dialogue, mobility of communication style, adequate self-esteem. The development of these qualities is an important component of professional training at institutions of higher learning. Formation of tolerance depends on a number of factors, including the social environment, existing stereotypes and ideas in society, the education system and relations between people, the value system on which the individual is oriented (Makarenko et al. 2022).

The issue of determining the level of tolerance formation among foreign students and influencing factors (socio-cultural environment, innovative learning technologies) on the process of forming tolerance during foreign language learning have been studied insufficiently, which prompted conducting our research. The question arose in the study of a person's attitude towards representatives of other ethnic groups and attitudes in the field of "intercultural interaction" (in our study - in the field of "intercultural communication").

An important role in this process is played by foreign language classes, where students acquire not only skills and abilities in the main types of speech activity, but also familiarize themselves with the culture of other countries, which becomes topical nowadays.

The relevance of solving problems related to communicative interaction between students, communication in everyday life, attitudes towards each other related to fostering of tolerance among students of medical specialties determined the choice of this article's topic.

Literature Review

Research analysis of the works of scientists A. Chernyakova & N. Pylypenko-Fritsak, testify that the formation of tolerance as a

personality quality is the most important task of the higher education system (Chernyakova & Pylypenko-Fritsak, 2021). Some researchers studied the development of foreign language communicative abilities of students while determining the peculiarities of the content, forms and methods of implementation of the gender approach in the higher educational establishments. They regarded such aspects as: personality of the teacher (development of his/her professional tolerance, sociability, formation of an individual style of pedagogical communication, improvement of the level of psychological preparation through the use of social-psychological trainings); student's personality (development of such qualities as openness, purposefulness, perseverance, activity, ability to self-regulation, etc.); communicative approach to mastering a foreign language; modeling of educational problem-dialogical situations taking into account the social context of educational tasks and gender peculiarities (Bloshchynskyi et al., 2022).

Compliance with the principle of tolerance in teaching foreign language to the students was studied by A. Sbruieva (Sbruieva, 2008). The creation of positive motivation to master professional terminology in a cross-cultural educational environment is reflected in the researches of (Avramenko, 2020; Avramenko & Homonyuk, 2017; Herman et al., 2022).

Some scholars emphasized that in order to perform communication, students should be prepared in advance, as well as be assisted in acquiring shape in order to immerse themselves into a meaningful foreign language environment. Therefore, the instructor's task is to help students overcome a communication barrier, establish psychological contact in the group, create an atmosphere of friendly and effective communication, open and free exchange of information between them, motivate students to speak a foreign language (Karpushyna et al., 2019; Herman et al., 2023). Offering students to go through a number of confidence-building exercises, to concentrate on breathing, to focus on the task, and on positive thinking using individual program of psychological support facilitates interpersonal communication skills as well as the abilities to prevent conflicts, contributes to high level of empathy and as the result – a high level of emotional intelligence (Lysenko et al., 2020; Hanif et al., 2023).

The issues of European values in the education of foreign students in the context of internalization of education are revealed in the works of (Chernyakova & Pylypenko-Fritsak, 2021). The analysis of the terminological units of the border guard sphere and comparing the professional terminology in communication was presented in the studies of (Bloshchynskyi et al., 2021; Yankovets et al., 2023). Semantic differentiations, significant from an anthropological or cultural point of view, which are related to gender variability were revealed by (Soloviova et al., 2021). Another research showed that understanding is marked by a small number of deviations from the author's idea when, firstly, a recipient has a rather wide cultural scope, which provides points of coincidence of dominant knots of the communicant and recipient, and, secondly, he or she has verbal thinking (Formanova et al., 2022).

A scientific group of Polish and Ukrainian researchers (Czepil et al., 2019) in their work substantiates the hypothesis that “the level of tolerance is largely determined by the personal qualities of the individual and their motivation to achieve success increases”. Some authors concluded that using Cultural Studies/Ethnopsychology (the political dynamics of contemporary culture, its historical foundations, defining traits, conflicts, and contingencies) students investigate the ways in which “culture” creates and transforms individual experiences, everyday life, social relations and power; examine the psychology and behavior of the people of a particular ethnic community they have to cooperate with (Kyrda-Omelian et al., 2022). A new approach to the concept of mutual reception between epistolary communicators of the epistolary dialogues between the son (Winston Churchill) and his mother (Lady Randolph) was presented in the article of (Semeniuk et al., 2022). They stated that the concept of mutual reception is determined as an ability to “tune” into an emotional wavelength of the epistolary communicator in order to build mutual communication links for keeping the epistolary dialogue flowing (Semeniuk et al., 2022).

Some researchers also raise the question of the influence of language learning on tolerance. Thus, Serbian scientists A. Gojkov-Rajić, J. Prtjaga in their work “Foreign language learning as a factor of intercultural tolerance” (Gojkov-Rajić & Prtjaga, 2013) determine “the statistical significance of differences in students' attitudes and perceptions of other nations before the start of learning another foreign language and after a year of study”. The scholars also study the extent to which learning a foreign language “contributes to a change in students' attitudes towards another nation, that is, knowledge about other nations has changed their attitudes” (Levenok, 2022). The issue of the language competence formation in foreign students of medical specialties taking into account tolerance and inter-ethnic interaction were not fully resolved.

2. Method

The purpose of the article is to study the role of a foreign language in the formation of tolerance and international interaction in students of higher educational institutions.

Sumy State University acted as an experimental base. The sample consisted of a total of 162 first-year medical students of various nationalities. The study was conducted on the materials of the discipline “Foreign Language for Professional Purposes” during the first year of study and the level of tolerance was assessed.

The following tasks have been identified to fulfil the goals of the research:

1. To conduct a theoretical analysis of regulatory documents and foreign experience regarding the formation of tolerance in foreign language classes.
2. To single out the peculiarities of the formation of tolerance of future doctors in the process of foreign language learning.
3. To prove that under the condition of using interactive forms, involving students in the socio-cultural educational environment of

the discipline “Foreign Language for Professional Purposes”, there were reliable changes in the level of formation of the indicator of tolerance and inter-ethnic interaction, which were measured.

In order to fulfil the first task, the method of scientific and methodological literature analysis was used. Completion of the second task involved comparison, generalization, and systematization of experience in the organization of learning a foreign language. To fulfil the third task, the reliability of changes in the levels of tolerance and inter-ethnic interaction was evaluated using Student’s t-criteria.

The purpose of the experiment is to carry out an analysis of the levels of the indicator of tolerance and inter-ethnic interaction formation before and after the experimental influence in a group of future doctors after studying the discipline “Foreign Language for Professional Purposes” using interactive forms, involving students in the socio-cultural educational environment.

The hypothesis of the experiment is that learning using interactive forms, involving students in the socio-cultural educational environment will contribute to the development of tolerance and inter-ethnic interaction among future doctors, namely, emotional stability, respectful attitude towards different communication participants, benevolence, empathy, ability to cooperate, dialogue, mobility of communication style, adequate self-esteem.

3. Results

Conducting classes in philological disciplines, in particular in the educational discipline “Foreign Language for Professional Purposes”, the teacher sets him/herself the task not only to convey the educational material, but also to develop tolerance, benevolence, respect, sensitivity, tact, delicacy, generosity, etc. in future doctors. For this purpose, in addition to the main types of educational classes (lectures, seminars, group exercises and classes, laboratory and practical classes, independent classes under the guidance of a teacher, tests, consultations, independent and individual work), conferences, round tables, cross-cultural discussions, project work and involvement of students in the socio-cultural educational environment were organized. Interactive learning forms and methods, case studies, brainstorming, writing e-mails and messages, public speeches, analysis of various situations were implemented in the course.

In the pedagogical research, which was conducted in the study group during the educational period, the effectiveness of the authors’ model was studied, which required the fulfilment of two conditions: the use of interactive forms and methods of education, the involvement of students in the socio-cultural educational environment. Based on the results of the pilot study, a group of 162 students from multicultural groups was selected. In the course of the experimental study, the quantitative and qualitative composition of the participants of the control and experimental groups was the following: 82 students of the control group (CG) studied according to traditional methods and 80 students of the experimental group (EG) who studied using the methods suggested by the authors. Students voluntarily participated in the experiment with verbal consent. The groups were not chosen specifically, so they had students with different grades.

To determine the level of the tolerance index and inter-ethnic interaction in the process of learning a foreign language, it is proposed to use the ethnic tolerance express test “Tolerance Index” (according to G. Soldatova, O. Kravtsova, O. Khukhlayev, L. Shaigerova).

The results obtained at the beginning of the pedagogical experiment are presented in the Table 1 and Figure 1.

Table 1. The results of the study of the level of tolerance at the beginning of the experiment in EG and CG according to the express test of ethnic tolerance “Tolerance Index”

Levels Groups	Low		Average		High		Together
	Number of persons	%	Number of persons	%	Number of persons	%	
CG	27	32,9	39	47,6	16	19,5	82
EG	26	32,5	40	50,0	14	17,5	80

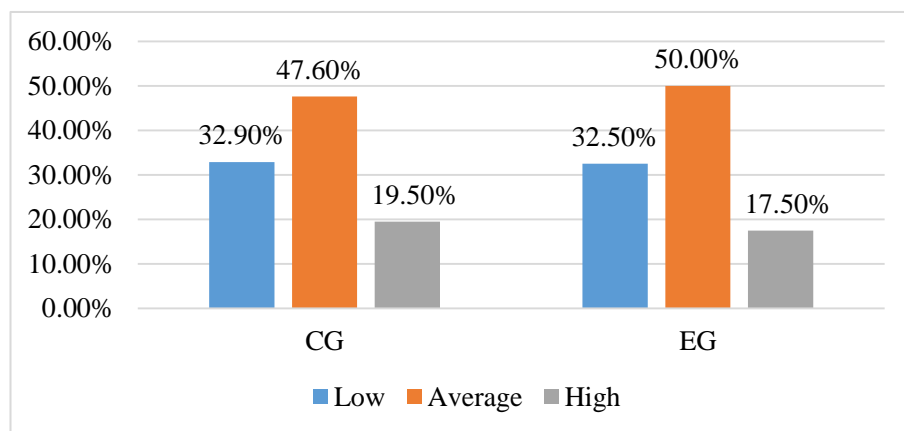


Figure 1. The results of the study of the level of tolerance at the beginning of the experiment in EG and CG according to the express test of ethnic tolerance “Tolerance Index”

The analysis of the research results shows a high level of tolerance in the control group, which was 19,5%, and in the experimental group this indicator was 17,5%; the highest indicators were recorded at the average level: in the EG they were 50,0%, in the control group – 47,6%. Upon completion of the implementation of the authors’ model of tolerance level formation, repeated testing was conducted and the following results were obtained (Table 2, Figure 2).

Table 2. The results of the study of the level of tolerance at the end of the experiment in EG and CG according to the express test of ethnic tolerance “Tolerance Index”

Levels Groups	Low		Average		High		Total
	Number of persons	%	Number of persons	%	Number of persons	%	
CG	15	18,3%	44	53,7%	23	28,0%	82
EG	8	10,0%	46	57,5%	26	32,5%	80

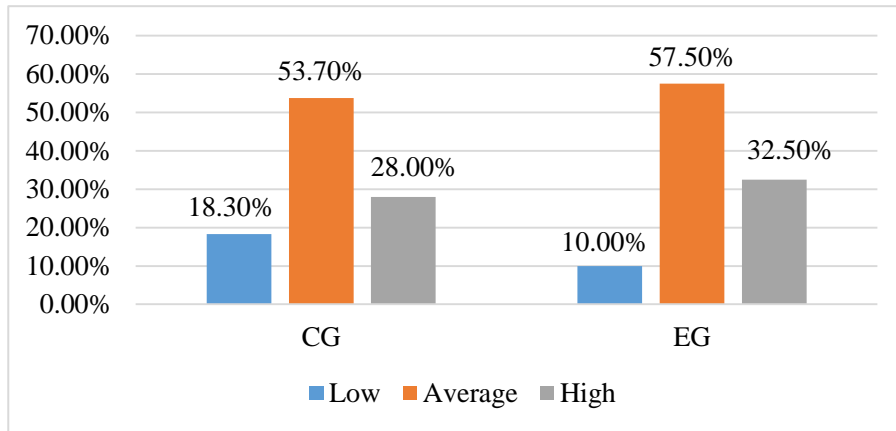


Figure 2. Results of the study of the level of tolerance at the end of the experiment in EG and CG according to the express test of ethnic tolerance “Tolerance Index”

The analysis of the results shows that after the introduction of the authors’ model, the indicators have changed. Thus, at the end of the experiment, the “Tolerance and inter-ethnic interaction” indicator in EG became higher on average level than it was before the experiment, so it was 57,5% (before the experiment, the indicator was 50,0%), for CG this indicator also became higher and was 53,7% (before the experiment – 47,6%). Low-level indicators decreased in both groups. In EG, the indicator decreased to 10% (before the experiment it was 32,5%), and in CG – to 18,3% (before the experiment – 32,9%). There have also been changes at a high level. For EG, this indicator for a high level was 32,5% (before the experiment – 17,5%), for CG, the indicator for a high level was 28,0% (before the experiment – 19,5%).

4. Discussion

According to the obtained results, we consider the indicated data to be positive, since foreign students are generally characterized by such professionally important qualities as humanity, compassion, benevolence, altruism, mercy, optimism, erudition, perseverance, responsibility, sociability, discipline. They show a tolerant attitude towards language, are mostly motivated to overcome difficulties in professional speech, and are characterized by average emotional stability. Foreign students strive to develop their own creative potential, although these indicators are still unstable. Professionally important character traits (humanity, compassion, benevolence, altruism, mercy, optimism, erudition, perseverance, responsibility, sociability, discipline) are regularly manifested, although representatives of this group are not always restrained in their emotional manifestations. This is due to national characteristics of students’ behaviour, as well as being in a different social environment.

We see the positive dynamics of the results, which is manifested in better socialization, adaptation to a foreign language environment, to intercultural interaction between participants of different ethnic groups, in the ability to find a common language with others, in the reduction of anxiety and the perception of a new sociocultural environment.

A tolerant person always shows a valuable attitude towards a person regardless of his/her beliefs, religion and nationality. Manifestations of tolerance are benevolence, respect, sensitivity, tact, delicacy, and generosity, which are related to the student’s empathy, his/her ability to empathize and sympathize. Tolerance implies a humane attitude towards people with different worldviews and prevents any conflicts between people.

We believe that the achievement of such results was due to the implementation of such pedagogical conditions as the use of interactive forms and methods of learning and the involvement of students in the socio-cultural educational environment to ensure effective foreign language communication.

In order to confirm the statistically significant dynamics in the personal changes of students in EG, we used the Student’s t-test to evaluate the averages. Averages were calculated for each indicator at the beginning and at the end of the experiment, which were subject to statistical

evaluation. For this purpose, the null and alternative hypotheses were formulated:

$$H_0: \mu_{EG} = \mu_{CG}, \text{ averages in the EG and CG groups are the same;}$$

$$H_a: \mu_{EG} \neq \mu_{CG}, \text{ averages in the EG and CG groups are statistically different.}$$

As a result of using the Excel software, the empirical value for the significance level of 0,05 was calculated (Table 3).

Table 3. The results of averages for indicators according to the Student’s t-test in EG and CG at the beginning and at the end of the experiment

Indicators		Average	Number	t _{emp}	t _{crit}	Hypothesis	
Indicator 1	CG	before	73,82	82	0,715	1,975	H ₀
	EG		71,05	80	0,721	1,980	
	CG	after	89,15	82	-2,19	1,975	H _a
	EG		96,43	80	-2,20	1,980	

As can be seen from Table 3, at the beginning of the experiment, $t_{emp} < t_{crit}$, which means that hypothesis H₀ is accepted, and hypothesis H_a is rejected. This means that the samples included in the pedagogical experiment are statistically the same that gives us the opportunity to pursue the developed authors’ model. Analyzing the data in Table 3, at the end of the experiment we have $t_{emp} > t_{crit}$, which means that hypothesis H_a is accepted, and hypothesis H₀ is rejected. This means the effectiveness of the involved approaches and methods for the formation of the tolerance index, that is, learning a foreign language makes students more tolerant of diversity in the multinational community of higher education institutions and improves inter-ethnic interaction during communication. Thus, the statistical analysis of the levels of the formation of tolerance and inter-ethnic interaction in the CG and EG groups at the significance level of 0,05 confirms the similarity of the samples at the beginning of the experiment and their statistical difference at the end, which is explained by the implementation of the specified pedagogical conditions.

5. Conclusion

An analysis of normative legal documents and foreign experience was carried out, which made it possible to understand more broadly the importance of a foreign language in the formation of tolerance and inter-ethnic interaction. Results of analysis of the researches conducted by foreign scientists prove that language expands opportunities for tolerant attitude and improves inter-ethnic interaction. The determined level of the indicator of tolerance and interethnic interaction in the process of learning a foreign language at the beginning of the experiment allowed us to confirm its low level of formation. This provided the basis to develop and implement the authors’ educational model, which provided for the fulfillment of two conditions: the use of interactive forms and methods of education, the involvement of students in the socio-cultural educational environment. At the end of the experiment, positive dynamics of the formation of tolerance among future doctors has been revealed, which is manifested in positive socialization, adaptation to a multinational and multilingual environment, to intercultural interaction of representatives of different ethnic groups, in the ability to find a common language with others, in reducing anxiety and perception of a new socio-cultural environment.

Using Student’s t-criteria, under the conditions of interactive forms and methods usage when teaching the discipline «Foreign Language for Professional Purposes» and students’ involvement into sociocultural educational environment, the positive changes in the measured level of tolerance and cross-ethnic interaction indicator formation have been confirmed.

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The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest in the publication of this paper.

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