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original article

Ethnographic project as a way to develop intercultural competencies of school students

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Abstract. This article describes the results of an experimental study on the impact of ethnographic project activities on the development of students' intercultural competencies. Intercultural competencies are important in growing diversity of multicultural societies and help a person to respond flexibly and properly, function in culturally significant situations. A three-level model of intercultural competence, including cognitive, affective and behavioral aspects is used as a theoretical and methodological basis for this study. We also used experimental methods developed for children to examine the intercultural competences of students. This study can be characterized as a formative experiment and was conducted among second grade students ($N = 18$). At the formative stage of the study the children were involved into extracurricular project activities related to the study of costumes of various ethnic groups. The work on the projects was divided into three phases. The first phase: gathering information about the ethnic group the students had chosen. The second phase: making an album of traditional clothes. The third phase of the project: creating an element of costume or jewelry. All three phases of the project were devoted to one ethnic group, which was chosen by the students. Students had the opportunity to complete the project individually or in small groups. At the control stage a positive change occurred in all three components of students' intercultural competence, but statistically significant changes were revealed only in the intercultural knowledge component ($p < 0.01$). Thus, the effectiveness of the developed ethnographic project activity, so as the scientific and practical validity of its application for the development of students' intercultural competencies, was proved.

Keywords: intercultural competence development; project activity; students of primary school age; formative experiment

There is no conflict of interest

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оригинальная статья

Этнографический проект как способ развития межкультурных компетенций школьников

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Аннотация. Представлены результаты экспериментального исследования по изучению влияния проектной деятельности этнографической направленности на развитие межкультурных компетенций учащихся. Межкультурные компетенции, позволяющие человеку гибко и адекватно реагировать, функционировать в культурно значимых ситуациях, являются ключевыми в условиях растущего многообразия поликультурных обществ. В качестве теоретико-методологической основы для данного исследования используется трехуровневая модель межкультурной компетентности, включающая когнитивный, аффективный и поведенческие аспекты. Межкультурные компетенции были изучены при помощи экспериментальных методик, разработанных для детей. Испытуемыми выступили учащиеся второго класса в количестве 18 человек. Данное исследование носит характер формирующего эксперимента. На формирующем этапе исследования мы разработали и реализовали проектную деятельность. В качестве темы проектов выступил народный костюм. Работа над проектами была разделена на три этапа. Первый этап был связан со сбором информации о народности, которой они выбрали. На втором этапе учащиеся создавали альбом с традиционной одеждой данного народа. Третий этап проекта был связан с выполнением элемента костюма или украшения. Все три этапа проекта были посвящены одному этносу, который выбрали учащиеся. Учащиеся имели возможность выполнять проект индивидуально или в малых группах. На контрольном этапе было выявлено позитивное изменение всех трех компонентов межкультурных компетенций, но статистически достоверные сдвиги произошли только в межкультурных знаниях учащихся ($p < 0,01$). Таким образом, была доказана эффективность разработанной проектной деятельности этнографической направленности и научно-практическая обоснованность ее применения для развития межкультурных компетенций учащихся.

Ключевые слова: межкультурные компетенции; проектная деятельность; учащиеся младшего школьного возраста; формирующий эксперимент

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INTRODUCTION

The processes of integration and globalization have expanded the scope of intercultural interaction between citizens. One way or another, all people communicate with representatives of different cultures throughout their lives, for example, with neighbors, relatives, colleagues, business partners. In the process of such com-

munication difficulties connected with the language barrier, differences in worldview and cultural characteristics can occur. Due to globalization, conflicts related to the perception of the world by representatives of different cultures occur in different contexts, for example, in professional sphere [1], at school [2; 3], during tourist trips and so on. The current situation requires the formation of tolerance and empathy, the ability to adapt quickly, understand and be

able to communicate with representatives of different cultures [4]. Only a person possessing intercultural competence will be able to function successfully in a multicultural society. Such skills and abilities are necessary for working or studying abroad, effective interaction in a multicultural team. Programs aimed at developing intercultural competence can help with that. Due to the fact, that the school is one of the main institutions for preparing a child for life in a globalizing, multicultural society, the need in strengthening its intercultural orientation becomes obvious [5]. In most countries, including Russia, where representatives of different cultures live, systems of culturally appropriate education (multicultural, intercultural, polycultural education) were developed.

The issues of development of intercultural competencies are also relevant for Russia. Russia is historically a multi-ethnic country, where representatives of about two hundred ethnic groups live and speak 193 languages, profess about seventy confessions and religions. The composition of the cultural diversity of Russian society in recent decades was enriched not only by representatives of the local population, but was supplemented by immigrants arriving in the country.

Despite the fact that the term “multicultural education” has been actively used since the early 1990-s after the collapse of the USSR [6], many scholars emphasize that international education in the Soviet era performed the same functions.

Officially, its aim was to foster a benevolent attitude towards people of other nationalities and it was integrated into the educational process of fifteen Union republics. Researchers of multicultural education in Russia distinguish three directions in its development, during which there was a transformation and addition of its goals and objectives. The tasks of multicultural education in the first direction were associated with the familiarization of students with their native languages and cultures, as well as with the simultaneous formation of a culture of inter-ethnic communication. This caused the growth of research of ethnocultural education [7]. The second direction of development of multicultural competencies expanded the use of multicultural programs for all levels and forms of education for teaching intercultural dialogue, increase resistance to ethnic, religious and political conflicts, the formation of religious tolerance and

tolerant consciousness [8]. The tasks of multicultural education were supplemented by the understanding that the process of development of the students' multicultural competence is impossible without formation of civic identity, the familiarization of the cultural riches of their country and the multinational people of the Russian Federation [9].

Despite the deep traditions of multicultural education in our country, the issues of taking into account the socio-cultural heritage of students are relevant both for the whole world and Russian Federation. Unfortunately, regardless of the fact that the concept of multicultural education is adopted in Russia today, there are many unresolved issues. There is no holistic concept and strategy for the development of education based on the ethno-cultural component and the principle of multiculturalism. The minimum requirements for the content of curricula of the ethno-cultural cycle are not developed, there are many unresolved issues regarding licensing and accreditation of national educational institutions [10], institutionalized practices for the inclusion and adaptation of migrant children in the educational space are not worked out [11]. In this regard, today, more than ever, the development of school student's intercultural competencies, the ways and means of their formation are of great importance.

Intercultural competence is the ability to communicate successfully with people from other cultures [6; 12]. Today many models that describe intercultural competence have been put forward [13], including the concept of cultural intelligence [14]. According to many scientists, intercultural competence includes: general cultural and cultural-specific knowledge, skills of communication with representatives of different cultures, policy and attitudes [15]. In other words, intercultural competence is the ability of a person to exist in a multicultural, multi-ethnic, multi-confessional society. For the current study, a three-level model was adopted as a theoretical basis, which defines intercultural competence as the ability to behave in culturally relevant situations. Intercultural competence includes cognitive (knowledge of cultures), affective (attitudes) and behavioral (ability to communicate) aspects [16].

According to M. Barret, T. Kohli and E. Haskollar [15; 17], and other researchers, af-

fective elements include respect, openness, curiosity, tolerance, empathy, which are not limited by a trusting attitude towards another culture – they form the psychological basis for effective intercultural interaction. The group of cognitive elements includes cultural-specific knowledge, which serves as the basis for an adequate interpretation of the communicative behavior of representatives of a different culture. They serve as the basis for preventing misunderstanding and for changing one's own communicative behavior. Behavioral elements of intercultural competence are strategies that are specifically applied in situations of intercultural contacts. There are strategies aimed at the successful flowing of such interaction, encouraging speech action, searching for common cultural elements, readiness for understanding and identifying signals of misunderstanding, using the experience of previous contacts, etc., and strategies aimed at replenishing knowledge about the cultural identity of the communication partner.

The importance of intercultural competencies in society inspires many researchers to study the ways and means of their formation. The development of intercultural competences of students primarily occurs in situations of communication with peers in culturally diverse classes [18]. Moreover, the presence of a high proportion of diversity in the college or high school classrooms is not always unambiguously positive for the results of intercultural learning and intergroup relations [19]. Also, many researchers affirm that such approaches to learning as multiculturalism, promotion of cultural sensitivity (fostering an approach of color-evasion), intergroup contacts are crucial for the formation of intergroup relations and intercultural skills [20]. At the school level, a culturally relevant (inclusive) curriculum, that considers the cultural background of minority students in the classroom as a resource for learning, can also be implemented [5].

In world practice a wide range of programs and methods was introduced to improve the intercultural competencies of people of different age categories and occupations, including programs of studying abroad [21], based technologies [22].

Pedagogical studies have repeatedly mentioned the positive experience of using group work in a culturally diverse team [23] and cooperative learning for strengthening friendship be-

tween students, accepting cultural differences, assessing the people's strong points, developing empathy and communication skills [24].

The key role of literary texts in the development of cultural consciousness was studied by same researchers. Analysis of films or plays along with texts [25] and method of storytelling can be used in classes [26]. One of the main arguments in favor of integration of fiction texts and writings into intercultural and second language classes is that literature allows readers to observe the world from different points of view and treat cultural diversity as a resource.

Ethnographic tasks also contribute to the development of intercultural competencies. They assume that students are observing or talking to people outside the classroom. Children bring their observations or notes back to class, which they can then compare, analyze and reflect on [25]. These tasks allow students to not only expand their knowledge about different ethnic groups, but also to learn to make contacts and relationships with ethnic communities and individuals [27]. Further analysis of the material allows considering situations from the point of view of different people, understanding differences in worldview [28]. Ethnographic tasks can be supplemented with reflections on one's own cultural heritage [29], which also contributes to a better understanding not only of the values of one's own ethnic group, but also the formation of a respectful attitude towards other nationalities.

Project-based learning is based on students solving real-life situations or tasks. Previous studies have found that projects, especially team projects, have shown a good contribution to the development of different components of learners' intercultural competence [26; 30; 31].

Despite the fact that a comprehensive understanding of culture develops only gradually during adolescence [32], the preparatory stage for this is the primary school age, during which intercultural competencies of children also develop intensively [32; 33].

A meta-analysis made by X. Zhang and M. Zhou (2019) shows that, while most of the studies were conducted with high school, college or university students, there is very little research on the development of intercultural competencies in primary school age [5]. Among the thirty-one selected for analysis articles only

one study was devoted to younger students. Our study aims to fill this gap.

The research purpose is to identify the impact of ethnographic project activities on the development of intercultural competence of primary school students.

METHOD AND MATERIALS

This study is formative. A description of the formative phase of the study is given below. Before and after formative experiment, we measured students' intercultural competence using a three-component model of intercultural competence [16] (G.-M. Chen and W.J. Starosta, 1999). To study the attitudes and knowledge of students about ethnic groups living in Russia and abroad, we applied S.N. Fedorova's scale [34]. Manifestation of the cognitive component of ethno-tolerance (children's ideas, their completeness, consistency, desire to acquire new knowledge). Knowledge are absent, sometimes erroneous or fragmentary, unsystematic, the child does not show a desire to expand them. The manifestation of the emotional component of ethno-tolerance (interest in representatives of different ethnic groups, the desire to organize meaningful joint activities with children of other nationalities). In the diagnostic technique, children's responses are evaluated on a three-point scale on both scales: knowledge and attitude, where one point corresponds to the minimum values, and three points to the maximum. To investigate the third – behavioral component of intercultural competence, we used the experimental method of E.K. Suslova "Treat candy" [33].

The study involved 18 students of the second grade, 10 girls, 8 boys. The parents of the children were informed in advance about confidentiality and signed a consent and authorization form for the participation of their children in the study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section describes the activities carried out to expose students to different cultures that children have chosen. This contains relevant activities that depict characteristics of the target cultures.

The intercultural experience activity that formed the basis of this study can be called as an extracurricular group project activity. The children's projects were related to the study of national costumes of their choice. The projects

could be individual or collective. Work on the projects lasted throughout the school year and had a multi-stage character. The first stage: gathering information about the ethnic group and preparing a presentation. The presentation had to reflect the place of residence, climatic conditions, lifestyle, crafts, traditions of the people. Also children could show other cultural features in their work. The second stage: making an album of traditional clothes. In the album children included men's and women's outfits, clothes for different seasons, festive and everyday clothes. Children described each costume in the album: what materials it was made of, who wore the clothes and on what occasions.

The third stage of the project: creating an element of costume or jewelry. While working on the project, children made jewelry, swords, headdresses. Some students sewed skirts, shirts, sundresses, embroidered shawls. Plasticine, cardboard, fabrics, waste materials (lids, plastic bottles), natural materials (feathers, rowan berries) were used for manual labor. At the end of the project, the teacher organized an exhibition of the students' albums and elements in the school museum.

The survey results showed that all three components of students' intercultural competence were higher at the control stage. Mean values and differences according to *t*-test of the intercultural competence before and after the formative series are shown in Table 1.

A paired *t*-test shows a statistically significant increase of knowledge from a mean of 1.37 on the first diagnostic to a mean 2.15 on a control diagnostic ($p < 0.01$). There was no statistically significant increase in such indicators of intercultural competence as attitudes and behavioral skills after the implementation of project activities with students.

Table 1
**Intercultural competence
before and after formative series**

Components of intercultural competence	Before	After	Mean values <i>t</i> -test
Knowledge	1.37	2.15	3.49 ($p < 0.01$)
Attitudes	1.74	2.57	1.02
Skills	3.63	3.78	0.63

A study of the literature on the development of intercultural competencies shows that there are rather conflicting data on the effectiveness of various kinds of organized influences on the development of the components that make up intercultural competence [5]. The use of project-based teaching was found to be effective in developing students' intercultural competence [35].

Our results show that not all aspects of intercultural competencies studied by us underwent changes to the same extent under the influence of project activities. Statistically significant improvement occurred only in such component as knowledge. Many works also indicate that the cognitive elements of intercultural competencies as awareness and knowledge can easier be changed [36]. But a number of studies also shows that there was no improvement in knowledge [37].

A number of studies shows that project-based methods were effective in developing students' intercultural skills [26; 27; 30; 31]. Attitudes are thought to be less amenable to change [38]. Although there are also experimental studies showing positive changes in student's attitudes under the influence of various types of

interventions in the educational process: ethnographic interviews [23], role-playing games [39], research tasks in the course of intercultural communication [40]. Our formative stage of research lasted for one academic year. Perhaps an increase in the duration of the work will improve the behavioral and emotional components of intercultural competence.

CONCLUSION

Children should be involved in intercultural education from an early age. Schools should also pay attention to this both in class and outside. Therefore, this study examined the influence of project activities in ethnography on the development of intercultural competence of primary school students. We found the benefits of learning through projects for significant changes in knowledge component of intercultural competence. At the same time, our work did not reveal a statistically significant shift in the improvement of intercultural attitudes and behaviours. Probably a longer implementation of work at this area of focus will change these components as well.

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