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UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' PREFERENCES IN STUDYING THE HUMANITIES IN BELARUSIAN AND AMERICAN CULTURES

Introduction. In the 21 century learning preferences of students have received unprecedented attention by scholars worldwide. However, there is always a need for new research that will investigate the problem of learners' motivation to study Humanities. According to the Cambridge Dictionary, the Humanities include literature, language, history, philosophy, etc. [1]. These subjects influence people's creativity, communication and critical thinking which are considered the core 21 century skills. Such studies became especially important because of social mobility of young people who aspire to get education at universities across the globe, including massive open online courses.

The necessity of researching the indicated subject is determined by the contradictions between the learners' inner representations of preferences, and a certain deficit of choice of Humanitarian subjects at universities. At the same time, there is a tendency for increasing virtual and traditional interactions between students in the modern world and providing personalized and inclusive education.

The purpose of this research is to find out students' preferences in studying Humanities in Belarusian and American universities. It was hypothesized that there will be a certain difference in learners' preferences in studying the Humanities in both countries.

Main part. The foundations for this study are taken from the theory of cross-cultural communication, which helps us understand how to communicate effectively within different parts of the world. As a result, people are able to realize how prevalent norms work to adapt to new cultures, and cross-cultural understanding occurs, that is the ability to value cultural similarities and differences.

Also, this research is based on the self-efficacy theory, the author of which is the psychologist A. Bandura. He suggested that, self-efficacy is a person's particular set of beliefs that determine how well one can execute a plan of action in prospective situations. Self-efficacy is a person's belief in their ability to succeed in a particular situation. It also involves determination and perseverance — seeing as how it helps one overcome obstacles that would interfere with utilizing those innate abilities to achieve goals [2].

This study was undertaken at universities in two cultures in March, 2022. The respondents of the survey were ten American students who study Linguistics and ten Belarusian students of Linguistic specialization. The age of the respondents was, on the average, 21 years; 60 % were females and 40 % were males.

The present research was organized in three stages. The goal of the first stage was to find out Humanitarian subjects in the curriculum which they: (1) like, (2) dislike, (3) would like to study. For this reason they were asked to answer the questions: (1) What is your favourite subject? (2) What subject don't you like? (3) What would you like to study to become more competent in the Humanities?

The form for the survey was designed in English for both American and Belarusian university students. As a result, we received the following data:

1) the subjects the learners like include: Pedagogy, Literature, History, English, Vocal, Russian (at American University); and Discourse Practice, Pedagogy, Literature, Typology, Semantics, Country Studies (at Belarusian University);

2) the subjects that respondents don't like include: Pedagogy, Psychology, PE (at American university); and Methodology, Belarusian language, Country Studies, Pedagogy (at Belarusian University);

3) the subjects which the students wish to study include: Arts, Foreign cinematography, Political Science, Russian, Psychology, History (at American University); and Art, Linguistics, Philosophy, Economics, Sociology (at Belarusian University).

All the mentioned subjects we grouped in three areas: language oriented, culture oriented, profile oriented disciplines.

The second stage of the study was aimed to process the obtained empirical data, summarize and compare the statistics on the responses received in the survey. The obtained data are presented in the tables below.

Having compared the obtained data which are presented in Table 1, it is seen that there is a big difference in learning the Humanities by Belarusian students who prefer language oriented subjects (70 %) much more than culture and profile oriented disciplines. As for American students, all the courses are preferable but culture oriented courses have a slightly higher position. Also, these statistics show a low focus by Belarusians on the future profession, only 10 %.

The courses in the present curriculum which students don't like are seen in Table 2.

Table 1 — The students' real preferences in studying the Humanities

Subject area	Belarusian students (%)	American students (%)
Language oriented	70	30
Culture oriented	20	40
Profile oriented	10	30

Table 2 — Outsider courses

Subject area	Belarusian students (%)	American students (%)
Language oriented	10	10
Culture oriented	30	—
Profile oriented	60	90

Comparing the data in Table 2, it can be noticed not too big difference in students' dissatisfaction of language oriented subjects: only 10 % in each group dislike them. The main area of courses that are regarded as non-favourite is profile, or profession, oriented subjects: 60 % in Belarusian, and 90 % in American culture. Also, the third of Belarusian students dislike the suggested culture oriented subjects, meanwhile Americans did not find them uninteresting.

Summarizing the data in Table 3 in cross-cultural perspective, the preferences in both groups are similar. They are both more interested in learning profile oriented subjects (60 %).

Table 3 — Optional subjects

Subject area	Belarusian students (%)	American students (%)
Language oriented	20	20
Culture oriented	20	20
Profile oriented	60	60

Having interpreted the data, we verified the hypothesis that there is a certain difference in learners' preferences in studying the Humanities in both countries. Self-efficacy, as a personal judgment of "how well one can execute courses, deals with prospective situations" [2]. Based on the ideas of self-efficacy theory, it is possible to suggest that students like certain subjects because they succeed in them or they are given an understanding easily, and vice versa. The reason why there are subjects that do not completely satisfy them is that there is no success in activities. One of the best proven ways to learn a new skill or to improve one's performance in a given activity is by personalizing learning and keeping in mind learning preferences by educators. It would allow the teacher to prepare strategies and techniques to provide student autonomy. It means the teacher will give instruction more effectively to achieve learning objectives.

Conclusion. The findings of this study prove that there is a certain difference in studying learners' preferences in the Humanities among the students of the USA and Belarus. As for Americans, they are satisfied with culture oriented subjects, as statistics show. The Belarusian students prefer the language courses. All the respondents are eager to have other profile oriented subjects. It could be an area of innovation at universities, or optional lessons as part of self-education in massive open online courses.

Interestingly, in cross cultural prospective, the students could be involved in mutually beneficial discussions about preferable courses for their education as all the students have similar aspirations. Also, the Belarusian students could inform more facts about language oriented courses.

In conclusion, the following recommendations can be given to educational institutions and cross-cultural researchers: (1) in general, our findings can be used in other cross-cultural studies and international educational projects; (2) university departments could introduce innovations in the course choice; (3) educators can improve methodological aspects of teaching the subjects which the students classify as outsiders.

References

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