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The article examines the growing importance of intercultural awareness in today's globalized society. Intercultural awareness is defined as the ability to understand and appreciate cultural differences, which is necessary for effective communication and the prevention of misunderstandings. The study examines the concept of critical intercultural awareness, which includes a deeper cognitive process of evaluating and understanding cultural practices and stereotypes. It discusses the importance of integrating intercultural education into university curricula using practical assignments and teaching methods consistent with Bloom's taxonomy. These tasks include defining key concepts, describing cultural characteristics, analyzing cultural stereotypes, and applying knowledge to real-world situations. The article argues that developing critical intercultural awareness is important for fostering empathy, adaptability, and respect in a diverse world, ultimately contributing to more inclusive and equitable interactions. The study concludes with recommendations for teachers to prioritize intercultural education in university programs, emphasizing its long-term benefits for students' personal and professional development.

Key words: intercultural awareness; critical intercultural awareness; cultural competence.

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Барановичи, Республика Беларусь, keda-anya@mail.ru***ПОВЫШЕНИЕ КРИТИЧЕСКОЙ МЕЖКУЛЬТУРНОЙ ОСВЕДОМЛЕННОСТИ
СТУДЕНТОВ УНИВЕРСИТЕТА**

В статье рассматривается растущее значение межкультурной осведомленности в современном глобализированном обществе. Дается определение межкультурной осведомленности как способности понимать и ценить культурные различия, что необходимо для эффективного общения и предотвращения недоразумений. В исследовании рассматривается концепция критической межкультурной осведомленности, которая включает в себя более глубокий когнитивный процесс оценки и осмысления культурных практик и стереотипов. В нем обсуждается важность интеграции межкультурного образования в университетские учебные планы с использованием практических заданий и методов преподавания, соответствующих таксономии Блума. Эти задания включают определение ключевых понятий, описание культурных особенностей, анализ культурных стереотипов и применение знаний в реальных ситуациях. В статье утверждается, что развитие критической межкультурной осведомленности важно для воспитания эмпатии, адаптивности и уважения в разнообразном мире, что в конечном итоге способствует более инклюзивному и равноправному взаимодействию. Исследование завершается рекомендациями для преподавателей уделять приоритетное внимание межкультурному образованию в университетских программах, подчеркивая его долгосрочные преимущества для личностного и профессионального развития студентов.

Ключевые слова: межкультурная осведомленность; критическая межкультурная осведомленность; культурная компетентность.

Introduction. In the context of globalization and integration of world cultures, critical intercultural awareness is an important skill which university students need in professional and social activities. Universities, as hubs of knowledge and future leaders, play a pivotal role in equipping students with the skills needed to thrive in multicultural environments. By raising critical intercultural awareness, we aim to prepare students for the challenges and opportunities of a globalized world, promoting empathy, respect, and effective interaction across diverse cultural contexts.

Main part. Intercultural awareness is becoming increasingly important in modern society. It involves two qualities: one is the awareness of one's own culture; the other is the awareness of another culture. Dourish defined awareness as "an understanding of the activities of others, which provides a context for your own activity". In 2002 Schmidt criticized the term for its fuzziness by pointing out that the term is found both "ambiguous and unsatisfactory" and that the notion of awareness would be "hardly a concise concept by any standard". In his understanding, awareness should lead to an increase in the effectiveness of individual or group tasks. Gutwin also stress that awareness' first mission should be to boost collaboration and particularly aspects of coordination, communication and assistance [1]. Understanding and accepting cultural differences helps to avoid misunderstandings and conflicts, promotes more effective communication.

In the context of globalization and integration of world cultures, cultural awareness is an important skill that is necessary for professional and social activities. In the Collins Dictionary, cultural awareness is coined as "an understanding of the differences between people and people from other countries or other backgrounds, especially

differences in attitudes and values". These similarities and differences can be large or small, and they are very important when interacting with people from a different culture. This awareness contributes to effective communication by helping individuals to:

- understand, acknowledge, and appreciate the perspectives of others. Individuals gain a better understanding of diverse viewpoints, leading to more informed discussions and decisions;
- avoid stereotypes and misunderstandings that might arise from cultural differences. By avoiding assumptions based on stereotypes, communication becomes more accurate and meaningful;
- build rapport, agreement, appreciation, and trust with people from different cultures. Fosters a sense of connection and friendship, making interactions more pleasant and productive;
- resolve conflicts, reduce tension, and achieve common goals in multicultural settings.

In that way, the benefits of cultural awareness lie in empathy, recognizing one's own biases, which leads to a more fair treatment of others. Awareness of cultural differences helps defuse potential conflicts, increases people's ability to adapt their communication styles to different audiences, and promotes active listening, ensuring that all voices are heard and appreciated during discussions. This concept is crucial in today's increasingly diverse society, where individuals from various backgrounds interact in personal, educational, and professional settings. By fostering cultural awareness, people can create more inclusive environment that promote equity and respect for all.

Intercultural awareness is the cognitive perspective of intercultural communication. It emphasizes the changing of personal thinking about the environment through the understanding of the distinct characteristics of our own and other's cultures [2]. It provides students with an opportunity to develop an understanding of cultural dynamics by reducing the level of situational ambiguity and uncertainty in intercultural interactions. Intercultural awareness can be considered as "a process of attitudinally internalizing insights about those common understandings held by groups that dictate the predominant values, attitudes, beliefs, and outlooks of the individual".

This process can be integrated into three levels: awareness of superficial cultural traits; awareness of significant and subtle cultural traits; awareness of how another culture feels from the insider's perspective. The developmental levels show that intercultural awareness is a learning process by which people become aware of their own cognitive growth, learning, and change regarding a set of cultural situations and cultural principles. Critical evaluation and reflection on one's own culture and other cultures is part of critical intercultural awareness. Byram defines critical intercultural awareness as "an ability to evaluate critically and on the basis of explicit criteria perspectives, practices, and products in one's own and other cultures and countries" Also, Byram defines critical intercultural awareness is "a set of abilities, including 'critical understanding, analysis, evaluation, and interpretation of sociocultural realities' that facilitates effective communication between people from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds" The integration of this abilities significantly leading to more respectful, informed, and effective interactions across diverse cultural contexts. Critical intercultural awareness helps students become aware of their own and other cultures and respect cultural differences. Critical intercultural awareness entails:

- identifying and interpreting explicit or implicit sociocultural values depicted in learning materials in one's own and other cultures in a non-judgmental way;
- critically analysing the events or documents based on explicit perspectives and criteria based on the given context of culture and situation;
- interacting and mediating in intercultural exchanges [3].

Also, critical intercultural awareness needs some skills, which mean an ability to do an activity or job well. They include managing differences among cultures, communicating across cultures, and being cautious of cultural contexts. However, there are several skills required for intercultural competence, which connected with critical intercultural awareness:

- listening actively and empathetically;
- asking questions to clarify understanding;
- modifying communicative styles according to a particular culture;
- demonstrating appreciation of diversity;
- establishing close connections across ethnic lines;
- effectively solving conflicts within a multicultural environment [4].

In the current age of globalization, migration, and immigration, integration interculturality into language teaching is essential in order to prepare language learners to become competent intercultural speakers [5]. Students who are future teachers of a foreign language should be able to interact with complexities and multiple identities and avoid stereotypes that accompany the perception of someone through a single identity [5, p. 5].

Byram posits that the qualities of an intercultural speaker "are seldom acquired without help, are seldom learnt without teaching" [5, p. 2], there by underscoring the critical role of the language teacher to incorporate intercultural learning into the foreign language class. Byram clearly stated that teachers should encourage students to acquire the ability to communicate with any speaker of another language [5 p. 55]. He emphasized that "foreign

language teaching should not attempt to provide representations of other cultures, but should concentrate on equipping with the means of accessing and analysing any cultural practices and meaning they encounter, whatever their status in society”. Learning about foreign cultures and people from around the world is a key aim of intercultural education. Cushner suggested that it requires a certain stage of development. Being able to understand and interact with people from another culture requires not only the “ability to project oneself into the other’s mind” (empathy), but also “the ability to think, perceive, communicate, and behave in [...] new and different ways”. Hence, concerted efforts have to be made on the part of educators to create a stimulating context within which students will be able to develop their intercultural perspective.

A first step is helping students develop their empathy and intercultural sensitivity. The next is important to help students develop awareness of themselves first, even more important for teachers to address their own identity. The idea is to support students in becoming aware, understanding, accepting, and in celebrating their own individuality. Teachers and students need to accept the premise that differences are to be valued and respected, even if they do not agree with them. Foreign language course books are good sources and photos and texts of other places, cultures, photos of people of other racial backgrounds can become tinder for discussion. Through the integration of authentic materials, students can challenge and develop their own attitudes and assumptions towards a culture in an open and non-judgmental manner [6].

The common denominator is to guide and support students in recognizing, respecting, and valuing cultural differences and similarities. The overall aim for teaching university students-pre-service foreign language teachers is to help them develop insights into a cultures. This will help them understand their own culture better and at the same time develop critical intercultural awareness. In the process of raising critical intercultural awareness, attitudes are considered a key starting point. The most effective methods for raising critical intercultural awareness are: cross-critical analysis of situations of intercultural communication; comparison of facts in native and foreign cultures; discussion on cultural studies; socio-cultural commentary; essay; debate; test; role-playing; problematic task or situation; project.

In our study, we rely on Bloom’s taxonomy, namely on lower-level skills. Namely, remember, understanding, and applying. These skills form the foundation of cognitive development and are essential for building more advanced competencies. By focusing on these foundational skills, we aim to ensure that students have a solid grasp of the basic concepts and can effectively apply their knowledge in various contexts. Based on these levels of Bloom’s taxonomy, the following tasks can be proposed to raise critical intercultural awareness of students. Based on these levels of Bloom’s taxonomy, the following tasks can be proposed for university students to raise critical intercultural awareness:

1. Definition of key concepts. Define the following terms: intercultural communication, cultural shock, stereotypes, cultural competence. The purpose of this assignment is to test the basic knowledge of key concepts in the field of intercultural awareness and ensure that students have a clear understanding of the underlying terminology needed for more advanced discussions and applications in an intercultural context.

2. Description of cultural aspects. Describe the main cultural characteristics of two different countries (for example, Belarus and the USA) in the field of religion, language, traditions, and social norms. The purpose of this assignment is to test students’ understanding of the main cultural aspects and their ability to identify and articulated the significant differences and similarities between the cultures of Belarus and the USA. This exercise aims to enhance students’ cultural knowledge and sensitivity, which are essential for effective intercultural communication and interaction.

3. Situational task: Imagine you are on a business trip to [specific country]. During your stay, you experience a significant culture shock. This could manifest in various ways, such as difficulties in understanding local customs, communication barriers, or unexpected social norms. Describe the possible causes of culture shock (differences in language, nonverbal cues, variations in etiquette, unfamiliar religious customs or cultural traditions) and suggest ways to adapt.

This task is designed to evaluate how well students can apply their theoretical knowledge of intercultural concepts to practical scenarios. By describing the causes of culture shock and proposing adaptation strategies, students demonstrate their ability to think critically and solve problems in real-world situations. This exercise is crucial for developing the skills needed to navigate diverse cultural environments effectively, which is essential in today’s globalized world.

4. Identify common stereotypes. Your country: list and describe common stereotypes that people from other countries might have about your home country. For example, common stereotypes about Belarus might include perceptions about Belarusian hospitality, work ethic, or political climate. Choose another country (e.g., the USA) and list common stereotypes that people from your country might have about it. For example, stereotypes about Americans might include assumptions about their friendliness, individualism, or consumer culture. Analyze the

stereotypes, discuss where these stereotypes might originate from. Explain how these stereotypes can affect cross-cultural communication.

This task is designed to help students develop a deeper understanding of the role stereotypes play in intercultural interactions. By analyzing and discussing stereotypes, students can learn to recognize and challenge their own biases and assumptions. This critical awareness is essential for effective cross-cultural communication and for fostering more inclusive and respectful interactions in a globalized world. The task also encourages students to think critically about the sources of stereotypes and the potential consequences of perpetuating them, thereby promoting a more nuanced and empathetic approach to intercultural encounters.

Conclusion. In conclusion, raising university students' critical intercultural awareness is a vital step towards preparing them for the challenges and opportunities of a globalized world. By fostering empathy, critical thinking, and effective communication, we can create a more inclusive and culturally competent society. This study highlights the importance of integrating intercultural education into university programs and provides practical recommendations for achieving this goal. As we continue to navigate an increasingly diverse world, the development of critical intercultural awareness remains a fundamental and transformative educational objective.

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