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## STUDENTS' CROSS-CULTURAL COMMUNICATION AS A KEY COMPONENT IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE BLENDED LEARNING WITHING EUROPE

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*Крос-культурна комунікація студентів розглядається в статті як визначальна ознака сучасної цивілізації, а міжкультурне порозуміння як один з найважливіших і комплексних викликів сучасності. Крос-культурна комунікація студентів у Європі має соціальні, культурні, когнітивні та власне мовні аспекти. Автор приділяє особливу увагу змішаному навчанню іноземній мові як прояву інтернаціоналізації українських університетів. Співвідношення взаємодії змішаного навчання іноземній мові з глобальним культурним контекстом визначає процес крос-культурної комунікації студентів як ключового компонента комунікативного акту, завдяки якому студенти набувають специфічної міжкультурної компетентності та вдосконалюють свої професійні й мовні здібності. Пропонується, що у навчальному плані змішане навчання іноземній мові має взаємодіяти і підкреслювати культурний аспект даної мови, навчити студентів факультету іноземних мов оснащуватися електронними інструментами для посередництва між культурами.*

**Ключові слова:** *змішане навчання, іноземна мова, студенти, міжкультурне спілкування, Європа.*

**Introduction.** Foreign language blended learning aims to prepare students for interaction with people of other cultural backgrounds, teaching them skills and attitudes as well as knowledge. Every country supports foreign language blended learning because better language skills enable more people to study and work abroad, and improve their job prospects; speaking other languages helps students from different cultures understand each another – essential in a multilingual and multicultural Europe.

More than that, the issue of cross-cultural education is key within Europe, as there is a continuous wave of immigrants, as well as migrant workers from less developed countries with their own cultural peculiarities. As a result, intercultural education and intercultural pedagogy have been developing in the UK, Germany, Austria, France, Poland and other European countries, which helps to build understanding and cooperation between natives and foreigners. The close connection and interdependence of foreign languages teaching and intercultural communication are evident. A foreign language is the main and most important means of intercultural and cross-cultural communication, giving an opportunity for students to enter into the universal multicultural space, to feel a full participant in the world cultural process. A promising learning approach that may support students in professional directions is blended learning.

**Theoretical Framework.** Both foreign and native scientists deal with the problem of blended learning in Europe. In particular, some aspects of e-learning education have been studied by E. Anderl, Ph. Budka, K. Hagspiel, E. Mader, J. Stockinger; basic principles of foreign language blended learning are investigated by J. Kazelleova, K. Lothridge, H. Mayringer, S. Mckay, T. Vanova and others. The educators of all over the world have been paying special attention to the

process of multicultural education: O. Arakelyan, Yu. Davydova, L. Nikolayeva, S. Jensen, P. Danaher; intercultural studies: V. Apelt, N. Denson, V. Nicke, J. Oveden, M. Savva. The issues of cross-cultural communication are represented in the works of M. Smith, J. Shiman, N. Smelser etc.

**The primary aim** of the paper is to analyze the benefits of foreign language blended learning within Europe, as well as to highlight the promising ideas of students' cross-cultural communication in foreign language blended learning, which should be taken into account in order to improve the foreign language teaching in Ukraine.

**Discussion (Results).** Students' cross-cultural communication, as a well-known fact, has become, in our depth beliefs, the defining feature of the modern stage of world civilization, as all contacts between representatives of different ethnicities or cultures are regular — from the highest intergovernmental political level to private relations between individuals. Globalization processes cause interdependence and the persons' mutual responsibility on the world stage, which is growing mobility and, accordingly, the intensity of interethnic communication, from the results of which the vectors of further development and the fate of entire countries and peoples depend on.

Today it becomes apparent that the key to effective communication process between representatives of different cultures is the perfect possession in foreign languages and knowledge of the material and spiritual culture of another folk, moral values, worldviews, which collectively define the behavior model of partners' communication. But if in the communicative process each of the interlocutors relies only on command of the language, without considering the fact that he/she communicates with a representative of another culture, then understanding is much more complicated. In general, the relation between language and culture has always been a cornerstone since Plato's time when it was considered that language creates culture (Гавриш, 2017, с. 25).

Thus, the content of cross-cultural communication is based on the integration of the most important components:

- 1) *a language* that reflects the culture of the folk;
- 2) *a culture* that conveys the features of socio-historical conditions;
- 3) *a personality*, which is formed during the educational and social activity. In our case we mean students.

That's why in European pedagogical institutions, the program for foreign language teachers training provides for specialization in one or two subjects. Future teachers of foreign languages have the right to choose both subjects of their own choice. For example, the subject "English" is often combined with the subject "Culturology". We consider that such a combination requires explanation.

Since the main purpose of foreign language learning involves the development of students' ability to intercultural communication, thus the very communication should be a means to achieve this goal. Future foreign language teachers are attracted to active interaction, to independent search for solutions to communicative tasks in the process of communicating with representatives of different linguistic cultures. It is known that there is a comparison in the perception of another culture with the experience in native culture. However, when mastering a foreign language, there is also a comparison with the culture of the people the languages of it being studied. N. Galskova and N. Gez emphasize that foreign language learning should be accompanied by the culture study from the very beginning (Byndas, 2018, p. 17). Students of higher educational institutions should participate in cross-cultural communication, to master linguocultural experience. When learning the culture of the people of the language being studied, it is desirable to address both the native culture and the culture of a foreign language. After all, this approach contributes to expanding the worldview of future foreign language teachers, enriching the palette of the picture of the world, understanding the place of their native culture in the multicultural world.

Professor V. Negrea considers that the raise of students' cultural awareness and sensitivity through the development of cross-cultural skills are targeting:

- effectiveness of cross-cultural communication;
- awareness of students' own cultural characteristics;
- understanding behaviors and attitudes in the learning units considering their particular cultural extraction;
- facing general culture patterns of particular English speaking countries;
- raising the respect for cultural differences;
- increasing adaptability in various cultural working environment;
- providing the student with the know-how to detect cross-cultural communication problems;
- developing the actual cultural skills needed to resolve specific problems related to the cross-cultural communication (Negrea, 2015, p. 3).

Students' cross-cultural communication, as a key component in foreign language blended learning, can be carried through foreign language blended learning as well.

Blended learning enables to use many different forms and methods in foreign language teaching. On-line or distance courses leave room for any inclusion of many listening texts and video files. In order to facilitate the language study to the students teachers prepared on-line or distance courses of professional English, courses of area studies of English speaking countries, courses for developing the cultural skills, a course for translators, written business English course and others. These courses are based on tutors' and students' needs, students' knowledge, on teachers' long term experience, and, of course, on the positive attitude of ICT students (and not only of them) to modern technologies.

We regard blended learning as a combined teaching – a combination of standard face-to-face teaching with e-learning or distance learning. Current theories see two basic types of teaching which can be combined in blended learning – a synchronous and asynchronous teaching. The synchronous teaching proceeds in a real time, in which all participants accept the presented experience simultaneously and they can react mutually. The asynchronous teaching is usually applied in different times to different students. They can choose the pace and the way of accepting experience, but they cannot react mutually in a real time (Hubackova, Semradova, & Klimova, 2011).

The great necessity for distance education or blended learning in Eastern Ukraine, for instance, emerged in 2014. After the evacuation of Luhansk Taras Shevchenko National University in 2014 from Luhansk to Starobilsk (the Faculty of Foreign Languages was displaced to Poltava) was organized blended learning or distance education and LMS Moodle Platform was chosen in such conditions. A feature of the implementation of such a system was the large number of courses with very limited technical resources. In order to simplify administration and monitoring, it was decided to create one site for 11 institutes (faculties), 60 specialties, for three educational levels and two forms of education. Over a year, more than 14,000 distance courses and more than 16,000 logins were created. Later on, the decision was made to divide into two sites: for the day department and correspondence forms of training, but with the only one leased server. Unfortunately, it did not provide expected performance outcomes.

While creating a new site for distance learning, [do.luguniv.edu.ua](http://do.luguniv.edu.ua) (on an independent foreign hosting), the following categories structure was selected: 'Institute (faculty) - specialty - course (year of study) – semester', in which the distance/online courses were created. According to the results of the first year of work, there was a big load on the site. Therefore, it was decided to create another site ([do1.luguniv.edu.ua](http://do1.luguniv.edu.ua)) for the correspondence form of training and transfer a part of distance courses and users to it. The output data for the site [do.luguniv.edu.ua](http://do.luguniv.edu.ua) and [do1.luguniv.edu.ua](http://do1.luguniv.edu.ua) are given in the table via Luhansk Taras Shevchenko National University.

It is not a secret that some problem issues with such approach are predicted: problems with access rights of tutors-coordinators from different institutes, faculties; the monitoring process is complicated by groups, institutes, faculties; it is necessary to change the approaches to the formation rules of the short course name; needs to change the way of identifying courses with the same name, but different teachers (Byndas, 2018, p. 27).

LMS Moodle Platform can really support the students' writing skills. This tool allows a simple way of getting the students to upload their written work in stages, which can be quickly provided feedback on.

LMS Moodle Platform allows students to upload individual assignments as files or even to write directly onto a page, which the teacher can access. This allows a simple way for students to submit their work, feedback can be provided and the students can then re-submit. It is also a way of allowing the students to write in stages. They can upload their introduction, then later the main body, etc. This makes the whole activity more process-based. There is an opportunity to look back and compare early drafts with the final products. It can be quite time-consuming, but it is very rewarding for the students and by having the content loaded onto Moodle it is much easier to access and provide feedback.

Independent assessment can be carried out in a more reflective way by responding to students, rather than just correcting. Students are encouraged to go over their work again through questions, recommendations and suggestions where improvements can be made. By having the student work drafts loaded onto LMS Moodle Platform, it is much easier to access and provide feedback on the textual use of English. Students are also encouraged to do peer review in the online text discussion boards and this has helped develop friendships as well.

LMS Moodle Platform is a very large tool that offers a whole array of possibilities. It is free to download but requires a server to run on, and so often the decision to run a virtual learning environment as LMS Moodle Platform is normally made at institutional level. More than that, buying server space is not so expensive and it is not so difficult to download and run your own version of Moodle. Many higher educational establishments are beginning to implement these types of systems into their teaching and learning process (Byndas, 2017, p. 96).

More than that, there is another form of distance education or foreign language blended learning for students' cross-cultural communication within Europe: International teaching and research exchanges that play an important role. Spending a semester or two abroad and encountering new people and cultures is a unique experience. Students can seize the chance to improve their language skills, expand their knowledge base and their professional competences. They can spend one or two semesters in their partner universities in Europe, Asia and Africa. In addition, they welcome visiting students to their institution, above all from Asia and Europe, based on LMS Moodle Platform as well. Therefore, using digital platforms such as tablets and laptops for reading may make us more inclined to focus on concrete details rather than interpreting information more abstractly.

Since 2014 Luhansk Taras Shevchenko National University has been implementing not only distance education or foreign language blended learning for students' cross-cultural communication but blended learning at all faculties while using the above mentioned strategies. They help both the teachers and the students to cooperate in the learning process in order to get the highest result.

E-learning, distance education or foreign language blended learning may also be implemented and set up with some European educational institutions and Ukrainian universities. Moreover, distance-learning units may be offered for every study program. The use of new media is of central significance in this connection.

Recognition of the university in the modern European and world educational space, active partnership and entry into the international educational and scientific organizations is a strategic objective of the Ukrainian University.

The implementation of students' cross-cultural communication within Europe includes: development of cooperation with European universities and research centers, foundations in the sphere of education, research and training of scientific and scientific-pedagogical personnel, search of international grants;

bilateral agreements with universities in other countries on the mutual recognition of diplomas; the achievement of mobility of students, teachers, researchers, university administrators; restoration work and the creation of new centers of education, science and culture of the partner countries of Luhansk Taras Shevchenko National University with educational and cultural mission as well as to increase the contingent of foreign students (Byndas, 2018, p. 28).

The international service provided by the Center for International and Educative Work operates at the university to promote international cooperation and students' cross-cultural communication. The Center helps the research and teaching staff and the university administration to improve skills by coordinating international educational contacts with relevant institutions abroad. In addition, the Center provides the implementation of scientific and methodological support and execution of appropriate documentation, as well as working with foreign citizens – students of LNU in accordance with normative legal acts of Ukraine governing the provision of educational services to foreigners and providing the conditions for their stay in Ukraine.

Considering the issues of international cooperation of LNU, it should be noted that according to the results of scientific cooperation with the university of Switzerland in 2015 the university received a grant from the Research Foundation of Switzerland to organize and conduct the course “Certification of Distance Learning Teachers e-Tutor» jointly with “KROK” University (Kyiv), Zurich University of Applied Sciences (Switzerland) and Ankara University.

During October – December 2015 sixty representatives of the teaching staff of LNU were trained according to the program developed by the Zurich University. At the end of the program, participants received international certificates, which correspond to the certificate of completion of training courses, which should be held once in 5 years (Byndas, 2018, p. 21).

Thanks to the cooperation with the Embassy of South Korea in December 2015, the university received help to ensure quality of the educational process in the form of computer and office equipment, two digital cameras, server equipment, special equipment for the studio and special air conditioner for server technology. Improvement of material and technical base allowed to improve the work of all departments of the University and to expand opportunities for the educational process.

In 2016 the university received a grant from the British Council in Ukraine for the Project Research Capacity Building: A case study of Displaced University jointly with Cambridge (United Kingdom) within the framework of Higher Education Internationalization.

During the last two years thanking to the signing of contracts with the University of Lodz (Poland), the University College of Tourism and Ecology in Sucha-Beskidzka (Malopolska, Poland), Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University (Tbilisi, Georgia) students of LNU were able to get a parallel education in a foreign university. During 2014 – 2016, twenty students of LNU study free at the University of Lodz. Within the exchange program the same number of students' study in Chinese universities.

In November 2018 the Romance and Germanic Philology department on behalf of its Chief and the Department of Administration and Sociology of Pomoria academy in Slupsk, Poland, entered into an agreement about teachers' and students' cooperation.

And it is obvious that successful cross-cultural communication is the basis for cognitively engaging with new content. Unfortunately, the need to provide language support for the students is a tricky issue many subject tutors and teachers have to deal with. However, before you can exploit the content of a video/ podcast, you need to make sure that your students understand it properly. It is therefore in the teachers' best interest to provide some basic language support.

Nowadays the way to the successful development of students' cross-cultural communication within Europe is the social activity of the teaching staff and students. Scientists of European Universities are always actively involved in actions aimed at the development of educational technologies, distance education or foreign language blended learning for the best future.

**Conclusion.** Summarizing, it should be said that the development of students' cross-cultural communication and encouraging them to tolerate other cultures is the key in foreign language blended learning. Verbal and non-verbal communication, as well as reading, listening and writing texts are important skills for the development of students' cross-cultural competence. In curriculum design we can suggest that integrated students' local content into communicative activities to both improve students' motivation in foreign language blended learning and also train students as a cross-cultural speaker or an ethnographic learner. That is, foreign language blended learning is proposed to emphasize the cultural dimension of foreign language teaching and to train foreign language students to be equipped with e-tools to mediate between cultures. Beside the foreign language knowledge, the anticipated socialization creates the premise for a better social insertion. The virtual platform, as well as the in class meetings, address the affective dimension through various simulations of different cultural spaces.

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OLENA BYNDAS

**STUDENTS' CROSS-CULTURAL COMMUNICATION AS A KEY COMPONENT IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE BLENDED LEARNING WITHING EUROPE**

*Students' cross-cultural communication is considered in the article as the defining feature of modern civilization and intercultural understanding is considered to be one of the most important and complex challenges of nowadays. Cross-cultural communication of students in Europe has social, cultural, cognitive and linguistic aspects. The author pays special attention to blended foreign language teaching as a manifestation of the internationalization of Ukrainian universities. The correlation of blended foreign language learning with the global cultural context defines the students' cross-cultural communication process as a key component of the communication act whereby students acquire specific intercultural competences and improve their professional and linguistic abilities.*

*The article focuses on the opportunity that students' cross-cultural communication provides through the use of foreign language blended learning which is able to commit students to professional cross-cultural networking and global education target within Europe. The challenge consists in the active involvement of the students in engaging foreign language blended learning experiences in order to rise their sense of ownership and responsibility of their language learning experience and to develop the students' commitment to build professional culture experience. It stresses that the content of cross-cultural communication is based on the integration of the most important components: a language that reflects the culture of the folk; a culture that conveys the features of socio-historical conditions and a personality, which is formed during the educational and social activity. In our case we mean students.*

*The author highlights the promising ideas of students' cross-cultural communication in foreign language blended learning and analyzes the benefits of foreign language blended learning within Europe. The need to relate foreign language blended learning interaction to the global cultural context redefines the process of students' cross-cultural communication as a key component of the communicative act that make students acquire the specific cross-cultural competence and improve their professional abilities. The great necessity for distance education or blended learning in Eastern Ukraine, for instance, emerged in 2014. After the evacuation of Luhansk Taras Shevchenko National University in 2014 from Luhansk to Starobilsk (the Faculty of Foreign Languages was displaced to Poltava) was organized blended learning or distance education and LMS Moodle Platform was chosen in such conditions. A feature of the implementation of such a system was the large number of courses with very limited technical resources. More than that, the international service provided by the Center for International and Educative Work operates at the university to promote international cooperation and students' cross-cultural communication. The Center helps the research and teaching staff and the university administration to improve skills by coordinating international educational contacts with relevant institutions abroad. In addition, the Center provides the implementation of scientific and methodological support and execution of appropriate documentation, as well as working with foreign citizens – students of LNU in accordance with normative legal acts of Ukraine governing the provision of educational services to foreigners and providing the conditions for their stay in Ukraine.*

*In conclusion, foreign language blended learning is proposed to emphasize the cultural dimension of foreign language teaching and to train foreign language students to be equipped with e-tools to mediate between cultures. The virtual platform, as well as the in class meetings, address the affective dimension through various simulations of different cultural spaces.*

**Key words:** *blended learning, foreign language, students, cross-cultural communication, Europe.*

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