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МЕЖДУНАРОДНЫЙ КУЛЬТУРНО-ОБРАЗОВАТЕЛЬНЫЙ ПРОЕКТ «ГЛОБАЛЬНОЕ ПАРТНЕРСТВО В ОБРАЗОВАНИИ»: ОПЫТ УРАЛЬСКОГО ГОСУДАРСТВЕННОГО ПЕДАГОГИЧЕСКОГО УНИВЕРСИТЕТА

КЛЮЧЕВЫЕ СЛОВА: глобальные компетенции; межкультурный диалог; межкультурное взаимодействие; виртуальное образовательное пространство.

АННОТАЦИЯ. В статье рассматривается необходимость использования виртуального образовательного пространства как средства межкультурного взаимодействия и обобщается опыт межкультурного взаимодействия, накопленный в УрГПУ в рамках Глобального проекта взаимопонимания (Университет Восточной Каролины, США). Проект реализуется в УрГПУ с 2012 года. В статье также анализируются возможности проекта по отношению к развитию компетентностей, имеющих первостепенное значение для успешной самореализации в глобальном мире. Активное включение в межкультурное взаимодействие является важным условием для установления взаимопонимания между народами. В этом контексте важно создать образовательную среду для межкультурного взаимодействия. Создание такой среды в УрГПУ осуществляется успешно благодаря не только наличию современных технологий, но и специально созданным информационным ресурсам. Анализ содержания и форм проекта определяет образовательные возможности активного межкультурного взаимодействия. Эта новая онлайновая деятельность позволяет студентам УрГПУ быть глобально компетентными людьми. Она способствует межкультурному диалогу, укрепляет мобильность и межкультурное сотрудничество в борьбе за мир, стабильность и социальную инклюзию.

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THE INTERNATIONAL CULTURAL-EDUCATIONAL PROJECT
"GLOBAL PARTNERS IN EDUCATION": URAL STATE PEDAGOGICAL UNIVERSITY EXPERIENCE

KEYWORDS: global competences; intercultural dialogue; intercultural interaction; virtual learning environment.

ABSTRACT. The paper considers the necessity of application of virtual learning environment as a means of intercultural interaction and summarizes the experience of international intercultural interaction carried out at Ural State Pedagogical University (USPU) within the Global Understanding project (East Carolina University, USA). The project has been realized in USPU since 2012. It also analyzes educational opportunities of the project with respect to development of competences crucial for successful self-realization in the global world. Extensive involvement in international interaction is of paramount importance to establishing mutual understanding with other cultures. Within the given context it is vital to create the learning environment for intercultural interaction. Establishing such an environment at USPU is rather successful not only due to modern technology support, but also to purposely designed information resources. Analysis of forms and content of the project defines educational opportunities of interactive intercultural collaboration. This new on-line educational activity allows students to be globally competent. It promotes intercultural dialogue, strengthens mobility and international cooperation for peace, sustainability and social inclusion.

The 21st century is an exciting time, full of hope in the future that lies ahead of us. We cannot predict what will happen in the future, but we still know that the nations and cultures of the world will be interconnected. Our students will shape that future. To provide their successful self-realization in the global world it is crucial to develop new forms of professional education. As Draft Medium-term strategy, 2014-2021, approved by 37th UNESCO General Conference (Paris, 2013) states: "Education system designed for the second half of the 20th century begins to fall short of meeting the demands for 21st century knowledge societies" [4:11]. The issues of cardinal environmental changes of existence of a modern person and the necessity of preparing young people to life under new conditions have been discussed within the last decades in science, education and culture. Education executives should respond to new tendencies of contemporary world marked by rapid change, increased complexity, uncertainty and emerging new trends and challenges. To successfully implement the capabilities in times of global changes, young people need new forms and patterns of education.

One of the major requirements of 21st century connected with globalization and sustainable development is the promotion of intercultural dialogue that is necessary for social inclusion and durable peace. "No single country, however powerful, can cope on its own with the challenges that have arisen." [4:11] One of the five so-called key competences adopted by the European Union a young European should be equipped with meets this requirement [15]. The competences indispensable for life in multicultural environment are acceptance by the young people of differences, respect for others and ability to live with people of different cultures, languages and religions [6]. These competences are formed within the framework of an education system. If to speak about intercultural competences, their basis is built up on lectures and seminars through learning the peculiarities of different cultural groups. However it is necessary to create the conditions for the students to implement the knowledge. At present the realization of this intercultural dialogue has become possible due to IT communication technologies and cultural relations between countries.

In our article we would like to share Ural State Pedagogical University (USPU) experience of intercultural on-line interaction that serves to form students' competences indispensable for successful professional work and personal development in modern global and digital era. Being a member of the Global Partners in Education organization, USPU is involved in the Global Understanding programme initiated by East Carolina University, USA. The Global Partners in Education was formed in 2007 [5, 8] and since then it has provided technology based interactive global activities for students from around the world. Presently, the Global Understanding project participants are 59 institutions in 33 countries. It has become a truly global classroom and a forum for the students to share their ideas, thoughts, research, and hopes for the future. USPU joined the project in 2012. The Memorandum of Cooperation between USPU and ECU was signed, and in April 2012, the educational course began in the pilot format. Since this time, USPU is one of the fissile participants of the project. More than 100 students have participated in the project, out of which 76 – in the course "Global Understanding" and 26 – in "Global Leadership". Among them are students of Institute of Foreign Languages, Institute of Psychology, Institute of Philology and Intercultural Communication, Institute of Social Education and others.

The Global Understanding course, which is realized each semester, consists of intercultural communication between USPU students and students from a partner-university (usually three partner universities per semester). Each class session includes live discussion in small video groups, one-to-one keyboard chat and e-mailing.

To organize joint classes with the synchronous participation of partner universities a special learning environment (Global Virtual

Classroom) is provided. Theses classes are designed to make the most of interactive technologies to give students the opportunity to communicate with students in different countries live time. The cultural exchange is provided by means of "web-streamed" face-to-face dialogue. Students from each university see their partners from another university on a big screen. They participate in the collaborative discussion of the course curriculum. This produces an impression of synchronous interaction in a shared environment. Meetings are held twice a week, each session lasts for 50 minutes. The communication is carried out in the English language. On linking days a group of students is split into two subgroups. These subgroups are involved in the two alternating types of activity. One group participates in videoconferencing, students of the other group communicate with their partners in individual chatrooms. Groups alternate days in videoconference/chat. For discussions in group videoconferences a class leader is appointed at the beginning of each class. The class leader is expected to greet partners, introduce the topic, and facilitate the short discussion.

The content of the Global Understanding course is defined by its syllabus. During online meetings students discuss culturally-relevant topics such as college life, cultural traditions, family, the meaning of life, and stereotypes and prejudices. These topics are universal for students worldwide and significant for intercultural interaction.

The course requirements include studying available online resources about different aspects of partner country's culture, writing short newspaper summaries of current happenings in a partner country, preparing discussion points, communicating in forums and emailing to partners outside of class time.

Besides, a required component of the Global Understanding course is the collaborative project. Partner teachers should collaboratively choose a set of topics from the list provided in the Instructor Guide. Then each student arranges with their partner for the final topic. The topic should be a cross-cultural one and should include the analysis of partner countries' similarities and differences. The most popular topics with USPU students are the following:

1) Describe your life at 35. What do most people around the world want in life by their mid 30s?

2) Describe how together you would spend $1 million US dollars to help other people who are less fortunate than you. Worldwide, who do you think deserves the most help when it comes to charity?

3) How do you define success in life? What might be a global definition of success?

4) Discuss two or three people from each culture (past or present) who you think have had the most influence on your culture. Describe their contributions and why you think they are important. Write a description of a fictional character who could have a significant and positive impact on the world.

Collaborative projects are presented to both classes through videoconferencing on the final linking day.

Despite the fact that the structure and content of the Global Understanding course are clearly defined, there may be a range of objective and subjective difficulties. The authors came across these difficulties while realizing the Global Understanding course. One important objective factor which should be taken into consideration while arranging classes in the form of intercultural interaction is time difference in the countries of partner universities. According to the agreement among the project participants, linking days start at 8 AM (East Carolina University time, GMT -05:00) which corresponds to 6 PM Yekaterinburg time (GMT +05:00). Evening classes might be inconvenient for those students who have their regular classes in the first half of the day. Besides, because of the time difference our partners have a link early in the morning (at 7 AM or 8 AM). This results in the decreased level of psychological and physical activity of those students who need time to acquire optimal ability to work. Our students tend to ignore the time factor and interpret their partners' low activity as a lack of interest. To avoid misinterpretation, we remind the students before each video session what time it is at the moment in a partner university.

The time difference may also lead to delayed responses to partners' emails. For example, the letter sent by our student in the morning may be received by their partner at night and read only after classes the following day, and vice versa. As a result of all these time shifts even diligent pen-pal partners may produce an impression of being indifferent and undisciplined. That is why it is worthwhile to discuss with students beforehand how regularly they are expected to email their partners taking into consideration the influence of the time factor. As our experience proves, overall, such discussions contribute to the favourable psychological atmosphere of intercultural interaction and decrease the tendency to misinterpret partners' behavior.

The next objective factor that may interfere with intercultural online interaction is connected with technical support. To provide the feeling of simultaneous presence of stu-

dents from both universities in the same classroom there is usually a video image of the whole group on the screen. That is why images of separate faces become very small and it is almost impossible to differentiate mimic movements on a speaker's face. Difficulties relating to differentiation of mimic movements lead to the loss of information which could contribute to speech utterances. To compensate for the influence of this factor it might be effective to use zoom of the video camera to make the image of the speakers' face bigger.

Apart from the objective factors, intercultural communication may be influenced by the psychological ones. According to our experience, the most significant psychological factors are group psychological factors which describe group's influence on person's behavior.

The first factor is the so-called presence of *others*. During videoconferences students interact by means of speaking English with peers from their culture as well as students from partner university. According to the results of social-psychological experiments, in the presence of others a person is worried about the impression he/she produces on people around which leads deterioration of complex actions [3]. Communication in English is a challenging type of activity for students with low competence in the English language. That is why they might experience more difficulties while making utterances in the presence of others. Such failures may lead to their passive participation in collaboration.

The second group psychological factor is determined by distribution of roles in an academic group. Observing students' behavior during on-line videoconferences the authors discovered that participants' roles in intercultural collaboration varied. Almost in every Global Understanding group leaders may be clearly defined during the first links (approximately 3-5 people in a group of 16 students). Regardless the fact whether they are actually appointed as formal leaders of discussion or not they get actively involved in collaboration, and the level of their activity remains equally high during the whole link. On the whole, such leaders are a positive factor for both the group and the project since they provide uninterrupted on-line collaboration which in its turn leads to the accomplishment of the project's goals. On the other hand, active communication of group leaders decreases activity of the rest of group. They agree to be passive listeners because they doubt whether they will be a success in comparison with group leaders. Since role distribution gets stable along with the group development, gap in the use of videoconference opportunities by active and passive participants widens.

To provide participation of all students in on-line videoconference it is possible to use experience of group discussion management accumulated by social psychology. Since only one student is chosen as a class leader during videoconferences, it is worth reminding him/her about the necessity to involve all group members in verbal interaction with students from the partner university. It is also advisable to make a class leader familiar with particular techniques which may be effective in regulating activity of group members. If there are too active students in the group, a leader may shift attention to other participants. After each videoconference students may reflect upon effectiveness of the class leader's actions in organizing discussion.

The factors enumerated above influence intercultural communicants' behaviour and may lead to decrease in effectiveness of intercultural interaction. That is why the faculty involved in teaching the Global Understanding course are recommended to explore these factors and choose the corresponding techniques to reduce their undesirable influence.

The project "Global Partners in Education" fosters various learning opportunities for all its participants: students, faculty and university. The students master a wide set of competences, including those that are global [10] and key competences [14]; they will help the future specialists not only effectively execute their professional work, but also be successful in this complex ad rapidly changing world. They will also shape their future educational agenda. These competences correspond to concrete kinds of educational activity carried out by the students during the course "Global comprehension" (the table below). We also have included in this list two competences from the Federal State Standards necessary to be granted a bachelor degree (General Cultural-5) and of master degree (General Educational-1), and have arranged the competences in three groups: general cultural, intercultural, and general educational.

Many of the above mentioned competences implicitly or explicitly presuppose mastery of the English language. Though English language study is a part of all major programs in Russian colleges and universities, students' language skills are passive, not applied to the solution of practical goals of communication and very often are lost. Classes of "Global Understanding" and "Global Leadership" create for the students the conditions when the use of English is indispensable for academic activity and interaction. If the partners in such interaction are native speakers (e.g. the students of an American university), Russian students get additional opportunities to perfect their language proficiency. These includes extension of

knowledge of the language in a special social context (e.g. verbal and non-verbal means of greeting and leave taking, manifestation of emotions, etc.), comprehension of difficulties of intercultural communication which can be further analyzed with the supervisor, possibility to improve pronunciation, motivation for vocabulary replenishment and perfection of idiomatic and grammatical authenticity.

Table 1

Competences formed in the course "Global Comprehension"

Competences	Kinds of academic activities contributing to formation of competences
I. General cultural (GC)	
Capacity to communication in oral and written form in Russian and a foreign language to solve problems of interpersonal and intercultural communication (GC-5, bachelor degree).	Participation in group discussions with students from partner universities in English in the form of videoconferences, via emails and social network.
Mastery of written and oral communication relevant for professional and social activities [6].	
To be able to act showing independence, sound judgement and personal responsibility [10].	Formulation and substantiation of the point of view concerning different aspects of social and cultural life of the country and country of the partner university (in group discussions and written communications).
II. Intercultural	
To learn to live together, educating comprehension of each other and sensation of mutuality; to execute the joint projects and to be ready to settlement of conflicts in conditions of respect of values of pluralism, of mutual understanding and peace [10].	Work on the final joint project with the partner from other country.
To learn to live together, developing knowledge of other cultures, their history, traditions and way of thinking [10].	Analysis of accessible on-line material about the country of the partner university, reading of newspaper articles about events in the country of the partner university.
Acceptance of differences, respect for others and ability to live with people of other cultures, languages and religions [6].	Analysis of similarities and differences between cultures concerning issues discussed in the joint project.
To realize the increasing interdependence, to jointly analyze the risks and challenges of the future, to fulfill joint projects [10].	Coordination of current topics for the joint project with a partner from other country. Analysis of differences and similarities between cultures related to the issues of joint project.
To have socio-cultural skills: to interpret adequately and to forecast the causes of behavior of the interlocutor, to coordinate the behavior considering the conventions and the social norms of the partner's culture [7].	Participation in group discussions in videoconferences in English.
III. General Educational (GE)	
Readiness to conduct professional oral and written communication in Russian and foreign languages to solve professional problems (GEC-1) (FSRS, master degree).	Participation in group discussions on- line, in videoconferences in English. Written communications with a student from the partner university in English in chats, by means of e-mails, social networks.
Team work [10].	Coordination of a current topic for the joint project with the partner from another country. Team work on the final project with the partner from another country.
Ability to be responsible, to participate in making group decisions [6].	
To use modern means of telecommunication for joint activity [6].	

Besides, students have an opportunity to participate in international conferences held by partner universities. For example, in 2014-2016 USPU students attended the Global Issues Conference organized by Krosno State College, Poland and East Carolina University, USA. The Global Issues Conference is a week-long virtual conference with multiple sessions covering a wide range of topics which impact young people and their futures across the globe. The scope of the conference includes, but is not limited to: Language and Global Education, International Business and Economics, Global Film, World Health, Women's Issues Around the World, Global Tourism, Global Leadership, Human Rights and Children's Rights Worldwide, World Health Issues, Global Terrorism.

Professors working in the project have opportunities to conduct joint research and exchange ideas, to create new professional contacts with colleagues from partner universities. They get language proficiency to deliver lectures in English. The results of the research carried out by USPU faculty within the framework of the project "Global Partners in Education" were presented at the annual conferences and published in academic journals [1, 2, 7, 9, 11, 12, 13].

On the whole, USPU participation in the intercultural project is, first and foremost, an opportunity to present the university as a modern up-to-date educational institution. Nowadays it is the university that plays a paramount importance in shaping global educational agenda alongside fulfilling its traditional functions.

The perspectives of USPU participation in the project "Global Partners in Education" are connected with enhancing of international co-operation and mobility of students and faculty, promotion of intercultural dialogue, strength-

ening of international academic cooperation for peace, sustainable development and social inclusion. New partnerships with universities around the world will provide additional opportunities for high quality standards of education in USPU.

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