

USING THE TANDEM-METHOD IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING FOR DEVELOPING INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE

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The article describes the main priorities of tandem method using in English language teaching as an alternative way of forming intercultural competence. Authors considered that this method is one of the most productive and effective. Its main aim is to learn the partner's language and culture in a situation of real or virtual communication. This article presents the main peculiarities of studying in tandem. The main principles of this method are reciprocity and individual autonomy. Authors believe that the organization of learning in the bilingual environment based on the tandem method will contribute to the formation of intercultural and linguistic competences. In order to check this assumption, authors developed the algorithm of intercultural competence's formation in bilingual environment based on the tandem method. The proposed algorithm was implemented on the basis of the Noncommercial training linguistic centre «Dialogue» (Michurinsk). Conducting experimental study with the use of the tandem method encouraged the growth of motivation and cognitive activity of students, improved the quality of knowledge, the formation of intercultural competence. The results revealed the effectiveness of using tandem-method. Despite emerging difficulties in understanding certain cultural characteristics, participants get an opportunity to learn how to become more tolerant and friendlier to each other, to express their thoughts and emotions.

Ключевые слова: tandem, English language teaching, method, self-development, intercultural competence, bilingual environment

The rapid changes happening in today's world demand the formation of students' intercultural competence. The concept of «intercultural competence» is treated differently in foreign and domestic methods of foreign languages and cultures teaching. A well-known British researcher M. Byram has defined «intercultural competence» as the ability to communicate with other people, to accept the views and perception of the world, to become a mediator between different views [1; 2]. G. V. Elizarova believes that intercultural competence is the competence of a special nature, based on knowledge and skills, ability to exercise intercultural communication by creating a common communicative meaning for both participants of communication. Intercultural communicative competence has no analogy with the communicative competence of language and may be unique to a mediator of cultures – linguistic identity, learning a foreign language. The goal of forming intercultural communicative competence is the attainment of this quality of the language identity that will allow to go beyond their own culture and to acquire the qualities

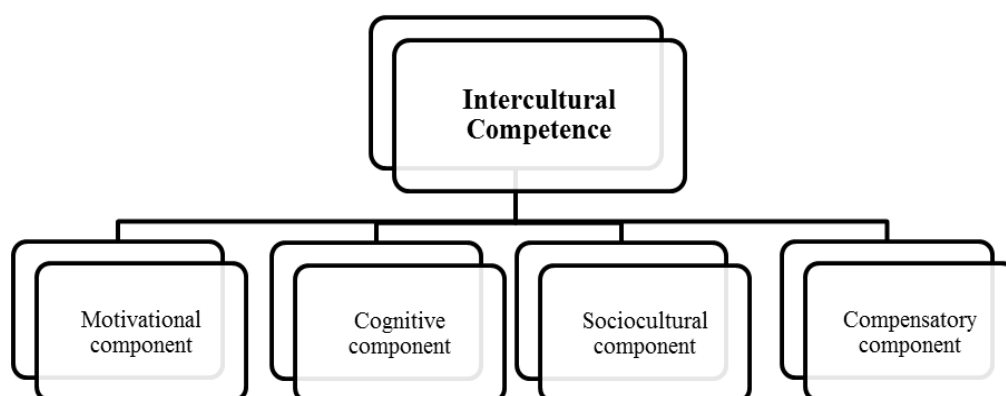
of a mediator between cultures, without losing their own cultural identity [3; 4].

It should be emphasized that neither M. Bayram, nor G. V. Elizarova reflect the specifics of a foreign language as a subject in their definitions of intercultural competence. However, they provide intercultural competence some features which belong to communicative competence [5].

Examining the theoretical base of the research, we propose to understand intercultural competence as the individual ability to engage in dialogue with representatives of different cultures and successfully interact with them.

There is no doubt that foreign language skills and knowledge about the culture of the country are necessary for successful communication and interaction. The aim of intercultural competence is the development of generic skills for interaction with representatives of various countries and cultures, in this case, the language plays the role of mediator.

We offer the following model of intercultural competence (scheme 1).



Scheme 1. Model of intercultural competence

We consider that intercultural competence consists of 4 components: motivational, cognitive, sociocultural and compensatory components.

The motivational component includes:

- the need for intercultural interaction;
- the need for knowledge about the representatives of other cultures.

The cognitive component involves the following knowledge and competences:

- linguistic competence;
- knowledge of own and other cultures;
- views about the similarities and differences of cultures.

Socio-cultural component is characterized by the following:

- understanding and accepting the values of other cultures;
- tolerance towards cultural peculiarities of other cultures.

The compensatory component includes:

- ability to adapt the familiar model of conduct to the peculiarities of other cultures;
- ability to use paralinguage competently for an act of communication;
- ability of demonstration non-verbal reactions in appropriate ways.

It should also be noted that the content of intercultural competence teaching will be different depending on the goals, needs and motivation of students.

We believe that one of the most productive means of formation of intercultural competence is the organization of education in bilingual environment using the tandem method.

The term «tandem-method» is understood as a way of learning a foreign language when two partners with different native languages work in pairs. The main aim of tandem is to master the language of their

partner in a situation of real and/or virtual communication, culture of the country of the learning language, as well as to receive information in various fields and areas of knowledge that are equally interesting for both tandem partners [6].

Tandem method is characterized by two main principle of learning:

- 1) the principle of reciprocity;
- 2) the principle of personal autonomy.

The principle of reciprocity suggests that each participant of the training receives the same benefits from interaction and mutual learning. The principle of personal autonomy is based on the fact that every communication partner is not only solely responsible in its training for the selection of goals, content and means of education, but also for the final results.

Thus, it is possible to say that studying in tandem is one of the most perspective directions of modern technologies aimed at self-learning and self-development. This is due to the following features of this method:

1. Tandem is an individual and social aspect of learning foreign languages and culture. Unlike traditional contexts of foreign language learning, tandem helps to create high socialization and high individualization in the process of learning. On the one hand, the creation of curriculum in tandem is based on the needs and motivation of the partners, thus, it is learner-focused and open to individualization. On the other hand, the tandem contributes to the interaction through collaboration, making the social and cultural aspect of the essence of this approach. In the context of tandem learning the individual and social aspects are associated in original, innovative and harmonic ways. This interaction increases the level of motivation of tandem partners, the fact of communicating with a native speaker provides an incentive aspect to further development of necessary linguistic and

communicative skills. In addition, the tandem partners get an opportunity to use the target language in practice, self-assess their results, and to trace the dynamics of the success and productivity of learning in general.

2. The role of participants in the tandem course. As it is known, the roles of teachers and students are clearly delineated in each conventional academic context, as for the tandem, it is characterized by a mixture of roles. As native speakers, tandem partners know more about their mother tongues and it gives them certain power to feel confident. The rhythm of learning is also quite flexible and open to negotiation between partners. They can meet every week, twice a week or agree on other time intervals. In the period between two sessions, both of them can organize their study schedule according to their needs, objectives and preferences.

3. Special relationships between the partners. In traditional classes there are normally 2 types of relations between participants of the educational process:

- asymmetrical (teacher-student);
- symmetrical (between students).

As for learning in tandem, the partner who acts as a language expert will always take a less authoritative stance, when he will act as a pupil. Therefore, unlike other contexts of communication, a native speaker will not cause discomfort with his/her tandem partner. In addition, this change of roles teacher-student eliminates the negative effects of the asymmetry between more and less experienced language learner from the point of view of the interlocutors, which can cause a feeling of uncertainty in everyday life, fear of making mistakes, shyness, etc. On the other hand, such a role reversal shows the positive aspects of asymmetry, in cases where cognitive or emotional support for a more competent interlocutor is needed.

4. The natural mechanism of motivation. In addition to internal and external motivation, each participant of tandem has some additional learning motivation. Students can receive from their partner only what they are ready to give. If one of the participants wants his partner to be more involved in the process, he/she should demonstrate the same. If one of the participants is not ready to work hard enough, the tandem course will be doomed to failure because it is based on complete mutual understanding.

5. Internal student autonomy. Autonomy in tandem has its unique feature: the process of learning occurs not in isolation, but in interaction. Learning a foreign language in tandem means the independence and acceptance of responsibility for learning, as well as the ability to organize the learning process. The

principle of tandem defies the stereotype that the learning process is a mechanical process of giving knowledge, which is possible with the assistance of a professional teacher only. Learning a foreign language in tandem is a natural process of interaction, which is the realization of communicative intentions.

6. The effective component of the learning process. This peculiarity of tandem is the ability to get pleasure from carrying out intercultural interaction. According to a commonly accepted belief, training can be complicated and boring. Learning in tandem can be attributed to the above models of perceptual learning, as the tandem is a direct communication with your tandem partner. But this is impossible without partners' spontaneous active and interactive participation and involvement. Training in tandem implies a good sense of humor, moderate emotionality and readiness to exchange experience, however, the course of learning in tandem can be sometimes characterized by the emergence of some negative feelings such as tension, rivalry, frustration, irritation and even resentment. However, studies have shown that negative feelings during the learning process are extremely rare.

Thus, we believe that the organization of learning in the bilingual environment on the basis of the tandem method will enhance the formation of intercultural and linguistic competences.

The experimental training has been organized in order to check the validity of this assumption. It was conducted in 2013/2014 and 2014/2015 academic years on the basis of the Independent Noncommercial Organization of Extended Education Training Linguistic Centre «Dialogue» (Michurinsk). There were 5 participants in 2013/2014 academic year, in 2014/2015 academic year the number of participants has increased to 10. The levels of language proficiency of participants were from A2+ to B2+ on the common European scale. Communication partners were English-speaking students who volunteered to participate in the project by sending their profiles in order to find a tandem partner. The results of communication were discussed in the English classes in the centre «Dialogue». Both categories of students pre-discussed and chose topics for studying (books and articles in cultural studies, films, works of literature and art, etc.). The focus of study was the formation of the intercultural and language competences of the Russian- and English-speaking participants of the tandem course [7; 8; 9].

In the process of the experimental study we used the following forms of control:

- observation;
- mutual control;

– self-control.

During realization of the tandem project one can clearly see the dynamics of all the components of intercultural competence. This suggests that the formation of intercultural competence in the bilingual environment on the basis of the tandem method is an achievable goal.

As a result, the students' motivation for further study of the foreign language and culture has increased. It could be concluded that foreign language teaching could significantly be improved through introducing the tandem method as a means of forming intercultural competence of students.

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