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## **UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' SELF-DEVELOPMENT THROUGH THE ONLINE CROSS-CULTURAL INTERACTION IN THE FOREIGN LANGUAGE INFORMATION FIELD**

The article deals with the process of formation of a competitive specialist during training at a university, which requires the use of various types of activities that stimulate and stipulate students' self-oriented need for personal and professional growth. Cross-cultural interaction as a productive ground for self-development of students is regarded from the viewpoint of communicative approach and competency to be achieved while mastering a foreign language. Some problems of motivation for studying are also considered (lingua-phobia, unclear educational aims) and some ways to solve them are reviewed (points evaluation system, active methods and techniques). Online-based educational tools involving international participants are reckoned positive, efficient and highly productive measures and steps to boost the level of learners' motivation and their activity. The authors highlight valuable possibilities for cross-cultural interaction among students' bearing an important significance, namely digitally executed interpersonal contacts on dialogue basis among agents of education, organized through different online platforms known as "massive open online courses".

**Key words:** foreign language learning, personal self-development, professional competence, cross-cultural interaction, active methods, teaching techniques, distance learning, massive open online course (MOOC).

Current world situation is being characterized by the deep global culture and civilization changes. Transition from industrial towards information society has destined the intercultural dialogue as the basis of human understanding, as the top priority in the world of integration. Meanwhile, the aim of language learning has mostly remained to be able to understand information on the other languages, and does not concern personality development. Here emerges the problem of cross-cultural communication and interaction, which we regard as the basic component of students' studies within University.

The ultimate purpose of higher education system worldwide is to graduate an educated specialist competent in his or her (their) professional activities; able to work competently with information and media [1]; sociable; able and apt to work together in various subject areas including pro-themes [2]; preventing or skillfully leaving (reasonably assumed) any conflict, risking or aggressive situations aside; capable for progressive self-enhancement and growth [18].

One of the important conditions for the students' success is to help future experts in their forthcoming professional career image construction. Therefore, higher education ought to be regarded not only as a time-period of focused and directed learning, but also as a snippet and fragment for personal and professional maturation and professional work

preparation, that provide an urgent necessity to determine pedagogical conditions for forming the student's own business career [7].

Any specialist (regardless of their degree obtained) can be considered as "competitive" if he or she has a "bundle of": professional competency, ability to make decisions and take responsibility for them, ready for their own personal and professional development and is able to activate this demand from others [12], [10].

Forming a professional career should begin during training at a university, this requires the use of various types of activities that stimulate and stipulate (to some extent) the self-oriented need for personal and professional growth, student's independent work organization, as well as research activities, opportunities for combining study and work as well as the professional orders performance, and of course, the industrial practice [6].

The process of learning of any foreign language at most higher education establishments in Russia begins mainly in the first term (semester), thus a tutor needs to organize the educational process in such a way that students from the very first day of their study realize the 'true necessity' of their exceptional activities in order to achieve success. To succeed, it is important to use a variety of inter/active learning methods and tools that encourage student's activity in a foreign language learning process [16]. Discussions, debates, case

studies, business games and role plays, PowerPoint presentations, Forums and work on various projects improve communication skills and develop communicative, general and polyethnic cultural and professional competency, as well as form multicultural tolerance [19]. At the initial stage of learning a foreign language at university, it is recommended to use these teaching techniques to create an atmosphere of real free communication. It should be emphasized that in the friendly relations context inside the students' group (even with the low level of language training) mostly all students are eager to take part in the suggested interaction and general communication training [25].

In accordance with the requirements of the new educational standard future specialist must possess an active vocabulary of professional terminology in a foreign language that is why it is important to use the principle of presenting educational material with increasing complexity when teaching students [13]. At the initial stage of training, it is extremely important to reduce to any possible minimum the so-called psychological barrier (aka "lingua-phobia"), to teach students to feel the absolute and self-sufficient Freedom of Communication. It has been proved by V.P. Bezdukhov, V.L. Temkina, A.V. Osiyanova to base the current discussion on topics concerning previously assimilated grammatical material; and to take into account the different levels of language mastery [22; 14]. Therefore, it is necessary to organize the work in subgroups, which involves active verbal behavior of all participants. At a general discussion of the problem, you can listen to the representatives of subgroups. These, as a rule, are students with high language proficiency, and then the function of speakers can be rendered to students with an average knowledge [8].

Evaluation system recently introduced to and since then used at Orenburg State University when students receive points not only for appropriate answers but also for relevant participation in work [23], undoubtedly contributes to the students' activity. Active performance while in the learning process turns out to be a prerequisite for an active life position. Foreign language classes held at our department promote organization of role-training communication. Classes of the kind are constructed in such a way that encourages students not only to communicate, but also to arouse interest in a 'role' [17]. Playing a game or a dialogue role of a

successful person motivates a desire to become the one in future. Naturally, it is the desire mostly of all students, but it may remain only dreams if the goals have not been and are not be supported by the knowledge or aspirations for their own improvement. In this regard, it is necessary to organize classes so that students realize the importance of their study results for the immediate future career.

Elements of informal communication in the classroom effect students' free speech behavior and stimulate their activity. This activity is manifested not only in the form of speech acts in the classroom, but also reveals in other forms of interaction: in research and extracurricular work [20]. As a rule, students who are active, apt and able to speak freely and to experiment in the auditorium, lack psychological barriers, are easier to encounter people and to build interpersonal relationships [26]. That is also true from the viewpoint and in terms of cross-cultural interaction regarding university student's polyethnic tolerance and multicultural competence [9].

Teaching students to freely express their opinions on everyday topics, you can begin to "spice it up" with the professional terminology based on professionally oriented texts; do the exercises for the development of all kinds of speech activity [21]. Exercises and activities aimed to practice the vocabulary allow developing and strengthening the communication skills (such as speaking and listening in particular) necessary for professional communication [3]. It is likewise necessary to comply with the well-known teaching principles as novelty and educational material availability, as well as gradual increasing of difficulty tenet.

Positive, efficient and highly productive measures and steps to boost the level of learners' motivation and their activity are to invite foreign international students along with the most successful graduates of the hosting university to participate in online discussions, forums, web PowerPoint presentations, Skype-mediated conferences [11], [28], 'blind' peer reviews and assessments, etc., while defending students' course final projects. This work animates the process of learning to communicate and positively affects the understanding of the need to improve foreign language learning, enhancing its' axiological potential to an unprecedented scope [5], [24].

Yet, nothing is perfect... The leaders of online education, amongst which are *COURSERA*, *UDACITY* (Stanford University) and “*EdX*” (Harvard University and MIT), suggest diversified courses that are still a way ‘conservative’ and old-fashioned in terms of light-speed online education theory and practice development. This is true considering their curricula, which may resemble full-time department requirements, focused on ‘content-above-form’ approach [27] and rather doubtful and ambiguous methods and means of their assessment and evaluation system.

Meanwhile, as it always works with creativity and insight, some of the most striking, innovative and effective proceedings within the structure of online educational system have appeared from idea to challenge these very issues. Here are reasonable reduction of traditional control for conventional achievements in learning and its’ evaluation componential essence; at the same time, gradual displacement of content priority to the values of studying process itself, involved community and acquired learning connections and networks; and dealing with more clear research-based diagnostic methods of evaluation, among which, for instance, are electronic and multimodal tasks and assignments, blind peer review assessment and assignments implemented by groups virtually organized through the institutional platform.

In the paradigm of students’ relations within cross-cultural interaction one more core issue of online learning bears an important significance, namely digitally executed interpersonal contacts on dialogue basis among agents of education (tutors-students, and students-students). We agree that “this is what drives good online education: contact may be heavily mediated, but it is still there, and it is still the key determinant of generative teaching and high levels of student satisfaction” [15].

To make a successful career requires not only the experience in practical activity, but also means a constant desire to improve the skills. The first step towards this could be a participation in the research work. The sooner the future specialist learns to be engaged in research, thus adding to his intellectual potential, the sooner he/she realizes the importance of personal and professional self-development. As the basis of the research is the independent work, students while their daily preparation for full-time classes learn to attract and handle additional

material and information as much as possible. Later, this experience is easily transferred on to their online tuition routine. Accordingly, the learner should not be given strictly regulated home assignment but only be identified with the subject of the forthcoming classes. This, either, induces students to look for references and supplementary readings on their own (self-motivated) and, based on their own beliefs, experiences and aspirations, to make their original conclusions and to build statements.

Our practical experience being tutors and consultants for students shows that participation in massive open online courses (MOOCs) activates cognitive and creative students’ activity, not to mention speech activity; they discuss various problems from their own point of view, leaving communicative fears ‘offline’ which often leads to parity poly-dialogue within cross-cultural interaction among international Internet-mediated members. Similar to that, students are prepared for independent, individually implemented written work, for example, publishing an article in a scientific journal or conference.

Tutor’s cooperation in training for such type of work is preferred to be limited mainly to the consultations and/or supervision while student must deal with the selection and literature study, drawing his/her own conclusions and opinions.

During our research work since the year of 2003 we have discovered that the process (also by itself) of making student’s individual educational module is an important and very productive form of cross-cultural interaction in the educational field that in general develop scientific logics, critical thinking, person’s creativity and improves his/her professional motivation. It can be realized through online tools powered by free Internet services, labs and companies, including but not limited to (due to its’ enormous flexibility and infinite creative possibilities): PowerPoint presentation, website, Wiki article, Pinterest board, music video, PC game, mp3 song, YouTube reel, blog, Live Journal series of posts, Facebook, Myspace or VK page, illustration or animation and sharing it with ‘MOOC-mates’ or specifically and/or individually targeted to someone in order to discuss, assess, peer review, argue, etc.

Personally tested, recently completed by V. Tomlin himself (February, 2015: [www.](http://www.)

coursera.org/account/accomplishments/certificate/7ZQLPLD65S) as a good introduction for online tuition we can recommend the self-paced MOOC authorized by University of California, San-Diego “Learning how to learn: Powerful mental tools to help you master tough subjects” by Dr. B. Oakley and Dr. T. Sejnowski offered through COURSERA [4], one of the most popular among educational platforms.

### Conclusions

Personal and professional students’ self-development in the online cross-cultural interaction tends to be a successful outcome and result if the learning process deals sufficiently with the foreign culture, forming simultaneously polyethnic tolerance and intercultural competence among with the ‘readiness to and for’ this type of activity, and develops communicative and reflective skills.

Effective educational ground for achieving all these aims is MOOCs that have had recently stunning reviews and reaction in media. Yet, some of the features applied to them are being truly exaggerated. We believe that MOOCs and online education in general can do a good favor for making the education free, more influential on a student in terms of pedagogical approaches and more democratic. They can offer a wide range of new opportunities not previously available for traditional classroom education. These are: good

teaching by famous tutors and professors, leading specialists in the field worldwide, along with interesting curricula to a mass of students; matching a lot of students’ concerns, interest, demands and expectations from higher education with the real assortment of courses specially elaborated by the best universities; dealing with thousands of learners internationally involving multiple productive forms of cross-cultural interactions, being a vehicle and trajectory in the framework of collaborative project for self-developing of students’ personal and professional qualities, characteristics, features and competencies.

### Further exploration and research work.

Distance e-learning and online education acquires more and more popularity each day shifting from being only a mere trend field, where MOOCs might be regarded as a genuinely new form, rather efficient, high-profile and productive ‘ed-tech *du jour*’. Considering the speed of creating new courses, their spreading and the profoundness of problems and issues they raise, in the aspect of aims and purposes of higher education, tendencies and the possibilities of the university in future, further exploration of the phenomenon seems to be relevant and necessary. Subject areas for research works may include, for example, lingua-communicative problems and barriers of multi interaction and multi dialogue, digital cultures stereotypes in the Internet collaborations, etc.

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