

# DEVELOPMENT OF INTERCULTURAL LEARNING: NEW CHALLENGES FOR HIGHER EDUCATION IN UKRAINE

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## **Abstract**

*The paper depicts the new challenges facing higher education institutions in Ukraine in the context of necessity of developing proper intercultural knowledge, skills, and competences of contemporary graduates. It also provides the background for the increasing role of higher education in respect of enhancing intercultural learning. The paper emphasizes the importance of introducing changes in curriculum design, improvement of teaching qualifications, and growing students' intercultural socialization. Finally the paper proposes some recommendations for achieving positive transformations of higher education in Ukraine in regards of addressing the challenges of modern pluralistic society.*

**Key words:** *intercultural learning, higher education institution, student's socialization, globalized world*

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## **Introduction**

It is a generally acknowledged fact that today the role of higher education is enormous and complex. The whole range of challenges has emerged for higher education with corresponding implications on social, political, economic, and cultural spheres. In the present global transformation climate, higher education institutions (HEIs) may often operate within the international environment, with faculty and students from different countries. The HEIs have entered a new stage of development which involves changing goals and tasks in response to the reality of modern world. The world is becoming increasingly global and its complexity requires a better understanding of cultural diversity. The globalization is an objective and inevitable phenomenon in the world civilization, but, in addition, this is also realization of a subjective factor, activity of individuals, social groups, states, political parties and organizations. In this paper we refer to the idea that globalization provides us with an opportunity to consider and develop a new concept of a university and its role in an increasingly interconnected world society (Brown 2007, p.29). The context of globalization and interconnections of societies are to a great extent the result of the circulation of ideas and people. This process displays that multicultural coexistence is essential to ensuring world peace and security. In this respect we consider one of the most significant challenges for higher education institutions to enhance their potential in educating citizens who are prepared to understand and respect cultural diversity in a global age.

## **Changing situation in Ukraine**

Ukraine has changed considerably in the twenty years of its independence and has become an important member of the world international community. The interest of foreign students in studying in Ukraine is growing, the international cooperation of businessmen, scientists, art workers and public servants has been also greater than ever. Nowadays the Ukrainian government promotes the consolidation and development of the Ukrainian nation,

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of its historical consciousness, traditions and culture, and also the development of the ethnic, cultural, linguistic and religious identity of all indigenous peoples and national minorities of Ukraine. But despite the existence of progressive legislation, Ukraine's ethnic minorities continue to face discrimination in the workplace and their personal lives, and in some areas ethnic minorities are underrepresented in politics, educational organizations, and the media. The adoption of Ukrainian as the official language of Ukraine continues to be a highly contentious issue for native speakers of Russian or other minority languages. This situation needs to be under special concern of lawmakers, politicians, NGOs and especially of academic society. Development of intercultural awareness and intercultural competence is to go through educational methods and it needs to concern itself with knowledge, feelings, attitudes, and behaviors.

Although higher school reform has been implemented world-wide, it has not yet led to significant changes outside the school. We can observe the actions which discriminate against foreigners, we can read reports about someone's failure to adapt abroad (Hapgood and Fennes, 1997). Thus, today it is an urgent necessity for school to educate a multicultural person who can see a reality from a variety of perspectives.

### **The intercultural frameworks for the role of higher education in Ukraine**

Ukraine has inherited from the soviet regime a well-built, comprehensive higher education system. Since its independence in 1991, one of the top priorities of the young state has been to diminish Russian influence in public life and to promote the Ukrainian language and culture. And today globalization and integration processes force the government to search the ways of reforming the education system directed at addressing the needs of local, regional, national, and international labor markets.

During the post-independence period higher education institutions have made a significant contribution to national human development due to the demands of the new market economy in Ukraine. New specialties were open, new disciplines were introduced into the study programs. The new intellectual community is being created in response to the challenges of new social-economic life. In the context of intensive transnational moving and interethnic contact, migratory processes, changes of ideological and political vectors of the development intercultural interactions get new specificity.

It should be fairly stated that the issues of cross-cultural interaction were extensively studied in the Soviet historical sciences. At that time those studies were rigidly adhered to "Communist party directives". They were clearly delineated by propaganda character and usage of ideological terminology such as "strengthening historic ties", "fraternal cooperation", "proletarian internationalism", "fraternal nations", "class solidarity", "friendship of peoples", etc. In late 1980s in the Soviet Union the concept of "dialogue of cultures" became popular in various disciplines according to many researchers.

Since then the significant changes have occurred in the interpretation by historians of the content of intercultural relations - due to the consideration of the latter in the context of ethnic and national processes, development of national consciousness, formation of a national idea. The corresponding terminology has acquired an appropriate scientific description: "relations", "contacts", "conflicts", "ethnic conflicts", "stereotypes", "mentality", "resistance to cultural influences", etc.

After falling in 1991 of the Soviet regime, the study of the problems of intercultural interaction, especially those of its levels as interethnic and interethnic acquired a new impetus within historical research. Processes of democratization, nation-building process, identity crisis, the expansion of cultural space actualized the problem of updating the historical sciences. This update is manifested in a consistent de-ideologization of historical science, the

search for alternative schemes, and methodological approaches, expanding databases, address to the discovery of other social sciences and humanities.

The formation of intercultural communication skills was one of the key learning outcomes at the lessons of foreign languages. Nowadays this tradition still prevails: studying foreign languages is also considered as the grounds for raising awareness and understanding the differences between native and foreign cultures, the cross-cultural literacy and readiness for dialogues of cultures, as well as acquiring intercultural communication skills. Besides, such disciplines as political sciences, psychology, pedagogy, sociology, and cultural sciences focus on teaching cultural diversity and national-cultural peculiarities of different countries, bringing up a tolerant attitude towards representatives of other culture, and decreasing the level of ethnocentrism.

The necessity to study intercultural communication aspects in the post-Soviet space and in Ukraine in particular have been justified mainly by pragmatic and didactic motives. However some issues were left underestimated especially in the field of intercultural training. Obviously, the general theoretical training of students in the field of cultural studies does not meet the requirements of modern life. Globalization, migration processes, development of mass media, business, and tourism requires a focused "intercultural learning". The latter involves study of mental features, customs of other cultures, norms, rules and styles of intercultural communication; acquisition of intercultural skills, formation of personal readiness to interact. Even so, in most cases teaching about other cultures is frequently mistaken for a pedagogy of intercultural learning, and the following problematic issues remain vital:

- Lack of conceptualization
- Diffuseness of the conceptual-categorical apparatus
- Insufficient adaptability of Western cross-cultural achievements
- Dominance of traditional sectorized nature of research over interdisciplinary
- Eclecticism (multiple theories, ideas)

Nowadays in Ukraine there are around 900 HEIs and 290 of them offer the programs in Management in different fields of Economics. The new disciplines like Intercultural Communication, Cross-Cultural Management, International Negotiation Skills and other have been introduced in the curriculum of the International Management programs. These disciplines have become an integral part of preparation undergraduate and graduate students majoring in international and general management. This is conditioned by the importance of introducing proper international culture behavior as a crucial factor of increasing business competition, which requires from the management staff not to remain static but to develop new approaches and practices for being successful in international business.

The Ukrainian government initiatives on reforming higher education system focus mostly on the national needs. Institutional initiatives to address global problems have been so far quite limited. There is a need for new types of higher education institutions to capable to tackle global issues. The most promising approach here is to introduce intercultural learning at all level of education and to be open to changing curriculum and pedagogy. The essential part of this movement has been implemented through the internationalization of higher education (Kehm and Wit, 2005). On the other hand, it is impossible to become instantly multicultural. Learning how to understand cultural differences does not mean simply to learn about culture. One can distinguish it clearly between "learning about culture" and "understanding a culture" (Varner and Beamer, 2005). Therefore the approaches require a

conscious choice of methods that link learners, teachers and the subject. And more important is to research the outcomes of intercultural learning, and to trace the demands of society.

Ukraine's accession to the Bologna process, constant broadening contacts with foreign universities, development of academic and professional mobility prove the necessity of forming scientific approach to the questions of international education, internationalization of study courses. By observing best practices of European universities Ukrainian HEIs develop programs of multicultural orientation based on a learner-centered approach followed by educating a specialist who possesses not only professional knowledge, but also definite skills of effective intercultural interaction and observance of human rights in a modern multicultural society.

It has become a good practice for many national higher education institutions which are interested to operate at the international education market to implement actively the policy of internationalization of education process, sign agreements about collaboration with foreign institutions, elaborate programs of double-degree diplomas with European universities, develop degree-programs taught in the English language, create appropriate environment for training and accommodating international students.

In this respect higher education system in Ukraine is able to use a positive foreign experience, to transform the accumulated for many years its own experience and come forward at the international market of educational services with new interesting suggestions. These could be the following:

- Enhancement of pedagogy by applying new research and teaching methodologies and tools. This work will significantly improve the content, depth, and effectiveness of intercultural learning provided in Ukraine,
- Raising students' and faculty's awareness of the multinational nature of society in which they live and their attitude towards foreigners,
- Providing the academic community with the compact information about the significance and role of intercultural dialogue in security and stability issues.

The ongoing Bologna process is a tool for harmonization of higher education systems and can be mutually beneficial way of forming a common European market of highly skilled labor. Ukraine's participation in this process will ensure strengthening position of national higher education establishments at the international education market. Taking into account the modern tendencies of development of higher education of Ukraine in the context of globalization processes, it has become an urgent necessity to introduce the principles of intercultural dialogue, to form a new understanding of social problems in society, and to promote a wide circulation of values of tolerance and multiculturalism at all levels of the education system.

Research is considered to be a crucial part of the role of HEIs. However, there is a growing need to question the relationship between research carried out by Ukrainian HEIs in the sphere of intercultural learning and its application in a society. Unfortunately, there is a certain range of constraints, including poor infrastructure and material resources, a lack of human resources, an academic environment that is not adequate for the research, and assumptions about the processes by which knowledge is generated.

In general it should be pointed out that new policy measures in Ukraine are engaged, but they rely on a poor understanding of consequences of underestimating of education of citizens in respect of intercultural awareness and competence.

## Challenge for educators



Almost in all Ukrainian HEIs educators of intercultural issues are underprivileged due to the lack of their intercultural personal experience. In most cases they are equipped only with theoretical knowledge. The American researcher J. Mestenhauser (2000) pointed out the similar problem in his local academic environment by stressing the need for formation of the international competences of teachers, because very often they try to build students' skills, which they do not possess themselves. He raises the related question: "how to teach the teachers" and "how to integrate international and intercultural knowledge in interdisciplinary". Teachers can not develop and train for internationalized curriculum, if they are not internationalized. They create the content and teach courses, and so their development is essential in achieving the successful internationalization of higher education in the content of the universities. Therefore, development of international competence of higher school teachers is a key component in the transformation of curricula and teaching methods for better training students for their future work in a diverse global environment. Certain number of the international scientists (Teekens, 2003; Otten, 2003; Paige, 2003; Mestenhauser, 2000; Whalley, 1997; Knight, 2004; Maidstone, 1996, Crichton, Papademetre, and Scarino, 2004) explored the world of internationalized curriculum integration with the development of international competence of teachers. They all underline the crucial point of acquiring of the international competences of teachers in the internationalization of higher education content, and try to find the effective instrument for creating an internationalized curriculum, which will combine intercultural competence and international expertise perspectives.

Education that is multicultural provides an environment that values diversity and portrays it positively (Gollnick and Chinn, 2002). Effective teaching strategies should be implemented in the curriculum and help students think critically about cultural differences. In most Ukrainian universities the students' audience is homogeneous that is why it is difficult for educators to develop students' skills solely on the basis of their similar group membership. For this purpose there should be elaborated solid scientific and educational-methodological resources helpful to assist students to aware cultural diversity of modern pluralistic society and apply this knowledge effectively in private and social life. It is also important to sustain the education process as a ground for intercultural environment with high investment in staff training, intercultural curriculum developing, cooperative learning models creating as well as establishing the twinning links with monoculture schools in foreign countries.

### **Intercultural socialization of students**

The reality of multicultural coexistence to our opinion must be especially taken into account when educating young generation. Each day young people may encounter this international world in a variety of ways. Contemporary students must be familiar with and understand the interconnected ways of life in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The necessity of reformation of the higher education system of Ukraine in this respect, its enhancement has become an important socio-cultural problem, which is to a great extent stipulated by the international flow of knowledge and by the necessity of forming positive conditions of development of any person, his/her socialization and self-realization in a modern globalized world.

In today's socio-economic, institutional, communicative changes the problems of intercultural socialization of students has become the issue for research, largely due to the rapidly expanding information space with an increasingly strong characteristic of cross-cultural communication. It is obvious that Ukraine's future largely depends on the level of socio-cultural and professional capacity of today's young generation, on the extent of their knowledge and skills for productive activities.

Universities have traditionally maintained a central role in promoting international relations, improved solidarity and intercultural understanding. Mobility of faculty and

students in higher education institutions encourage to develop intercultural dialogue within academic society, to experience different cultural values, and to confront and deal with stereotypes and prejudice. As a result of exchange programs students become more open-minded, and tolerant; they can develop wide social networks abroad. Students are included in the new information reality, characterized by significantly increased access to a variety of knowledge and information. Under the conditions of transformation of society, and drastic change of the system of values, norms and attitudes it is necessary to create an adequate model of the socialization of students in general and in the field of intercultural communication in particular. Socio-cultural and professional socialization of students appropriate to modern realities is possible by means of communication of different cultural forms, which enrich the consciousness of students, reveal and activate their potential of effective socialization. In the process of cross-cultural communication the formation of a new international educational environment is occurred, where the national interests of its existing members could be implemented by more effective forms and a joint search for solutions of the problems of socio-professional development of students can be conducted (Gudkow, 2000).

The system of obtaining and transmitting knowledge about the world, codes of conduct and the ways of adaptations to the surrounding social environment depends entirely on the development of cross-cultural communication processes, information flows, communication channels. In the process of cross-cultural communication the refraction of social norms and values occur through the prism of human consciousness that leads to real social consequences based on reflecting and understanding the information received. Nowadays students are undoubtedly considered as the most mobile social group. Common orientation to travel abroad is strongly observed among modern students all over the world. They tend to dynamically use all the new opportunities to travel abroad for studies, internships, and temporary work. Students' international migration, as any movement has its tasks, motives and resources. Analysis of the motivational structure of contemporary university students showed that their motifs for cross-cultural interactions are closely associated with the most significant values (success, freedom, self-improvement, interesting work in the future) and are dominant in the process of socialization (Kargopoltseva, 2002). Students independently and voluntarily take the path of academic and professional mobility. Participation in programs of cultural exchange students is one of the most accessible means of implementing cross-cultural communication needs of modern students of Ukraine. Participation in mobility programs allow students to broaden their horizons, raise their cultural level, to become stress-resistant and tolerant to others. In consequence, at the beginning of the professional activities they can apply their skills and abilities into practice and succeed in the professional development.

In establishing general concept of cross-cultural communications and individual programs of academic mobility, the main point is the issue of developing a unified state policy in education, science, innovation and economic development, and international cooperation must be one of the most important instruments for its implementation. At the present stage of development of Ukrainian society there is need for a formation the general policy of development of international student exchange programs. In this case, it is possible to build advanced short- and long-term programs of international cooperation in the implementation of cross-cultural needs of students at the fundamentally new level, as part of agreements on economic, cultural and social cooperation between Ukraine and foreign states as complex networking projects. This will lead to a qualitative change in the forms and methods of international cooperation of students, which will require implementation of the

strategy of modernizing the management of international activities in higher education in Ukraine.

## Conclusions

Development of the principles of intercultural dialogue, training practical skills of the intercultural communications becomes today the international tendency at all levels of higher education system. The reality that accelerating globalization process creates for operation of higher education institutions is whether they can adapt to modern reality or can be left behind. They must accept that they need to change as the labor market has changed enormously. The new role for higher education today is to train a specialist with an intercultural expertise.

New social-economic environment in Ukraine is a solid challenge for higher education system. The economic and socio-political changes in society inevitably require the other approach to the development of higher education system. The government has been conducted gradually a policy of a deregulation of higher education system, providing to it more authority and autonomy. New requirements of labor market compel the institutions of higher education to line up the conceptions of competitive advantages and to determine the strategy which will provide steady harmonious development. It is impossible to develop, to move forward and to remain as an immobile academic structure, irresponsive to a changing world.

Under the modern tendencies of development of higher education in Ukraine, it has become an urgent necessity to introduce the principles of intercultural dialogue, to form a new understanding of social problems in a society, and to promote a wide circulation of values of tolerance and multiculturalism at all levels of an education system.

The following could be recommendations for the higher education institutions willing to prepare inter-culturally educated specialists:

- to review current principles and practices of intercultural learning in the system of higher education in Ukraine
- to contribute to the conceptual development of intercultural learning in HEIs
- to overcome structural barriers to introduction of innovative disciplines into the study programs in the HEIs
- to promote curriculum reforms that focus on the intercultural learning
- to start intercultural awareness activities inside the institutions and facilitate the international cooperation including students and faculty mobility
- to enhance teaching-learning intercultural opportunities for students and faculty
- to adapt to the situation of globalization and multiculturalism, taking into account the fact that contemporary graduates will live and work in global environment.
- to contact with partner universities for similar experience and promote joint activities in this field.

In respect of the future role for higher education system in intercultural learning in Ukraine, the main demand is that higher education should give answers and recommend policies in order to foster human rights through elaborating adequate responses to cultural diversity.

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### Abstrakt

*Dokument przedstawia nowe wyzwania stojące przed instytucjami szkolnictwa wyższego na Ukrainie w kontekście konieczności stworzenia międzykulturowej wiedzy, umiejętności i kompetencji współczesnych absolwentów. Jest również tem dla rosnącej roli szkolnictwa wyższego w odniesieniu do poprawy edukacji międzykulturowej. W artykule podkreśla się znaczenie wprowadzenia zmian w projekcie programu nauczania, podnoszenia kwalifikacji dydaktycznych i rozwijania międzykulturowej socjalizacji uczniów. Wreszcie artykuł proponuje pewne zalecenia dla osiągnięcia pozytywnych przemian szkolnictwa wyższego na Ukrainie w odniesieniu do wyzwań współczesnego społeczeństwa pluralistycznego.*