



# New Trends and Issues Proceedings on Humanities and Social Sciences



Issue 5 (2016) 144-153

Selected paper of 4th Cyprus International Conference on Educational Research (CYICER-2015) March 19 – 21, 2015, Girne American University in Kyrenia, CYPRUS

## **Peculiarities of Teaching Cross-Cultural Communication in the Republic of Kazakhstan: Comparative Study in Russia and USA**

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### **Suggested Citation:**

Nurtazina, M., Kulmanov, K., Alimova, A. & Murzabekova, G. (2016). Peculiarities of Teaching Cross-Cultural Communication in the Republic of Kazakhstan: Comparative Study in Russia and USA. *New Trends and Issues Proceedings on Humanities and Social Sciences*. [Online]. 05, pp 144-153. Available from: [www.prosoc.eu](http://www.prosoc.eu)

Selection and peer review under responsibility of Assoc. Prof. Dr. Cigdem Hursen, Near East University

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### **Abstract**

This paper is dedicated to the comparative study of teaching cross-cultural communication in Kazakhstan. The project submits recommendation on further enhanced strategies that will help in the development of cross-cultural communication education in line with modern trends in curriculum issues. It concludes that for any meaningful advancement to be made in the education sector there must be a conscious, deliberate, purposeful, directional policy formulation of the implementation of the curriculum. The criteria of formation of critical thinking in students when teaching cross-cultural communication are considered here. Moreover, this paper analyses the problem of motivation of students to use information technology to search for specific information for the understanding of cross-cultural communication.

Keywords: Cultural education; cross-cultural communication; information technology; comparative study; intercultural competence.

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## **1. Introduction**

In today's world there is a tendency to expand and deepen international contacts in various spheres of economic, political, social and cultural life that determines the need for addressing problems of intercultural communication (*hereinafter* – ICC) (Law of the RK, 2012). Therefore, occurrence of a new concept in education which focuses on how to prepare future professionals for the life in a multicultural space, in terms of intercultural communication as Kramsch noted (1996) is very important.

Current global socio-political and economic changes have contributed to an increasing interest in foreign languages which is accompanied by a study and comparison of customs, traditions and customs of different people. Improper interpretation of the features of other cultures disrupts communication and hinders interaction of different cultures, and can also cause cross-cultural conflicts.

### **1.1. Background and Purpose of Research**

#### **1.1.1. The aims of this research are:**

- to define criteria of formation of critical thinking in students when teaching ICC;
- to find ways to motivate students to use information technology to search for specific information for understanding ICC;
- to single out ways of teaching students the ability to analyze, compare, categorize relevant information about ICC by means of information technology;
- to determine techniques for developing students' ability to critically evaluate the proposed aspects.

#### **1.1.2. Methods**

In this paper we used and carried out the following research tools to provide empirical materials for a comparative analysis of ICC: interviews and surveys, literature review, etc. For example, written and oral structured focus-interviews (such as face to face, by telephone, or by e-mail) were conducted when we studied the problem of ICC. The objective of these interviews was to receive more detailed materials from students and identify the influence of teaching, learning and assessment when we conduct various teachers' trainings. Furthermore, we used such empirical methods as observation, questionnaires, analysis of the products of students' and teachers' activities, ascertaining and forming pedagogical experiments, computer data processing, their use in the form of charts, tables and figures, and statistical treatments.

In addition, it was important for us to demonstrate how we develop critical thinking in the classroom with students' use of information technology, taking into account the implementation of such information technology functions as educational, developmental, and educational-creative. We believe that critical thinking in students by means of information technology produces a controlled process of interaction of the teacher and the student. Such multimedia tools as Internet technologies, the package Microsoft office, training apparatus, on-line tests help us to carry out analysis, synthesis, comparison, classification of facts, phenomena and processes, identify and solve problems from the standpoint of logic. In addition, these technologies let students preserve their own knowledge and skills acquired in non-standard situations as well as a positive attitude to criticism and reflection exercise, and evaluate phenomena and processes from different perspectives with the socially accepted cultural and moral values.

## **2. Theoretical Frameworks. New Paradigms**

First of all, based on the study of the scientific literature (Lehtonen, 2003; Meagher, 1996; Samovar, 1997; Nurtazina, 2012) we came to the conclusion that when teaching ICC we need a tiered approach to the subject, i.e. review of cross-cultural interaction in a single coordinate system. This occurs when there is a single field of comparisons, for example, when we consider all of the provisions in a single system of categories (traditions, customs, lifestyle, etiquette), or unity, or a radical dissimilarity of cultural value systems. We take the point of view of Savignon (2005) and, accordingly, allocate such levels in ICC into language skills, communicative level, ethno-psychological level, ethnographic level, level of regional studies, art history level and didactic level.

### **2.1. Language level**

Language is the main tool in the knowledge of the world and determines the type of attitude. The presence of a common world view provides participants with understanding of communication because it is precisely the semantic framework of an utterance. Titova (2011) has studied the problem of cultural potential of linguistic facts which are revealed using a vocabulary. Lexical comparisons lead to the discovery of similarities and differences in the vocabulary of the compared languages. According to Nurtazina (2012), comparative analysis of lexical units can detect specificity of national images of the world. On the linguistic level we identify lexical, grammatical and stylistic gaps. Differentiation of pictures of the world for training purposes allows us to construct a classification of cultural opposition which can be the basis for learning in the context of intercultural communication.

### **2.2. Communicative level**

This level analyzes characteristics of national communicative behavior of Kazakh, Russian and English, both verbal and nonverbal. This creates a basis for a successful interaction of various languages and representatives of different cultures.

### **2.3. Ethno-psychological level**

There are the following fundamental aspects of ethnic-psychological comparisons: national character, allocation of the main components of ethnic and social stereotypes, the relationship (universal and national, ethnic and social, ethnic and social stereotypes); interdependence of stereotypes of other nations. For example, speaking about peculiarities of the national character of the Kazakhs, many researchers have observed such qualities as seriousness, openness, chivalry, humanity, a great sense of humor, self-esteem, etc. (Sysoev, 2012; Meagher, 1996).

### **2.4. Ethnographic level**

Comparison of traditional cultures can be conducted in the following areas: a) national calendar and calendar rites (folklore, holidays); b) life-cycle rituals in contacting people (birth, childhood, marriage, funerals); c) traditional material culture (clothing, shelter, utensils, food, arts, and crafts).

### **2.5. Cultural level**

At this level we analyze regional geographic characteristics of the matched linguistic and cultural communities: a) natural and cultural landscapes, images of Russian and Spanish space. Comparison of spatial thinking of different nations can occur by comparing spatial vocabulary or landscape descriptions in literature; b) social world: education and culture, science, social values and norms; c) religion; d) history of cultural interaction; d) history of the country.

## **2.6. Level of art history**

At this level, there can be a comparison of musical traditions of the contacted people, works of art and literature. Particular attention should be paid to the Kazakh or Russian way into American literature and American way – into Russian or Kazakh literature.

## **2.7. Didactic level**

At this level, it is advisable to consider the culture of teaching in Kazakhstan, identify national educational traditions, to determine the possibility of their use in the way we develop methodical system of teaching English to Kazakhs in Kazakhstan. Intercultural learning is a development of basic features of a non-native culture. The process of moving from ethnocentric position will enhance the potential to realize evaluation and respect an unfamiliar culture.

The organization of work in the context of intercultural communication is particularly important in the formation of the ability to understand the phenomenon of a foreign language and culture and to make the transfer to their national traditions and native culture phenomenon. From the standpoint of psychology, the transfer of acquired learning activities to the new situation is an indicator of cognitive mastery of generalized ability and model activities on subject content.

In this paper, we focus only on the analysis of communicative and didactic levels of ICC description.

## **3. Results and Findings**

### **3.1. Pedagogical Experiment**

We use the following pedagogical technology as holding cultural-specific trainings, cultural education and lectures. The aim of our study is to investigate the effectiveness of different types of intercultural learning. The hypothesis of the study is as follows: the use of active methods of intercultural learning increases the probability of formation of intercultural competence.

Structure of the study:

1) The group of subjects in the amount of 28 people was divided into three groups with 9 people each. The sample included 28 people, men and women, aged 18-28. In addition, we involved in the investigation Americans – high school students who go to schools in Astana, Kazakhstan.

The program shows a variety of methods of intercultural learning in terms of activity leaders and participants, the content of specific methods, focus on cognitive, emotional or behavioral domains. We compiled these programs based on multiple sources of literature, guidelines and based on the understanding of the formation of intercultural competence in intercultural theory of sensitivity suggested by Kramsch (1996). Such training as role interaction, working with artifacts, designs, attribute exercises include such topics as: customs and traditions, family relationships, behavior in a conflict situation, the problem of choice. In the first place in the training exercises students should work with their own feelings, thoughts and senses, their awareness and acceptance, and only then – obtain information. During the discussion, exercises revealed different points of view on this or that question. If during the first meeting participants showed almost complete unanimity in determining the image of Kazakh, Russian, American, by the end of the third meeting there were different opinions. Much attention is paid to differences in teaching participants to Kazakh, Russian and American cultures. The information was a surprise to them as it showed differences in attitudes, values and norms of the three cultures but not the fallacy of expectations for the US, Russian or Kazakh culture. In the final discussion participants noted that the provision of information is particularly interesting if they can verify it for themselves (for example, in the exercise with the US or

Kazakh holidays such as Nauryz, the Day of Unity of Languages (Kazakh, Russian and English) in Kazakhstan and familiarity with their cuisines).

The main purpose of cultural education is to introduce students to the US and Kazakh culture with the help of visual information. It is presented in the form of a presentation and a lecture description. The substantive content of cultural education coincides with the substantive content of the lecture. Topics covered are accompanied by photographs, pictures and maps that provide visibility of the material provided. Presentation is accompanied by a story leading to summarized information on the relevant topic. The program also included cultural enlightenment of visual information concerning American and Kazakh movies. The cultural education program caused concern among participants for the very form of a non-conventional lecture and seminar and its content. During the first meeting, participants mostly listened and watched, during the second and third meetings they manifested great activity, asked questions, participants were included in mini-discussions on various aspects of the program. The following topics aroused special interest: family, parenting, attitudes toward authority, traditional cuisine. A quiz was compiled in the process of teaching a competitive moment. When discussing the revealed results special interest and positive emotions were aroused by viewing episodes of American and Kazakh films. Some participants expressed a desire to see the entire movie data and learn more about the Russian, Kazakh and American cultures.

Processing of the results was carried out using SPSS-13 Program as well as high-quality processing techniques "Attributing qualities" (Savington, 2005). Thus, with the help of a pilot study we tested the hypothesis that the use of active methods of intercultural teaching increases the probability of formation of intercultural competence. Some knowledge about another culture and awareness of the presence of stereotypes forming attitudes aimed at tolerant behavior are based on the understanding of intercultural competence. It follows therefore that successful implementation of programs of intercultural teaching enables students to widen their worldview. Changing the emotional and evaluative aspects of intergroup perception concerning stereotyping as well as the overall presentation of ethnic groups shows that the subjects are at an early stage of formation of intercultural competence. Thus, we can conclude about the effectiveness of intercultural teaching in the process of development of intercultural competence in students. However, the effectiveness of these programs and their possible outcomes depending on the duration of the meeting still remains as an open question.

Therefore, we can say that a tiered approach to the understanding of ICC helps students understand the typical national traits of many people and let them in a different way comprehend the relationship between them. Below we demonstrate the results of the conducted research.

### 3.2. Data and Perceptions

We use the following pedagogical technology as holding cultural-specific trainings, cultural education and lectures. The aim of our study is to investigate the effectiveness of different types of intercultural learning. The hypothesis of the study is as follows: the use of active methods of intercultural learning increases the probability of formation of intercultural competence.

**Table 1. Typical Kazakh by perception of Americans: Myths and Realities.**

Before coming to Astana	Now
1. All Kazakhs are rich because they have a lot of oil, gas and mineral resources	1. There is an extreme social stratification: there are rich and at same time poor people but in general they live well
2. Seemingly Kazakhs like Europeans	2. They resemble Asians but there are a lot of people of European appearance in Kazakhstan
3. Clothing: Kazakhs like bright, colorful	3. Kazakhs have a good taste and wear beautiful and fashionable

<p>outwear: men wear skullcaps and women wear a paranja.</p> <p>4. The level of teaching in universities is low</p> <p>5. Business relationships are built on an equal footing</p> <p>6. No relationship of mutual dependence</p> <p>7. A clear gradation while meeting people</p> <p>8. Very restrained, rarely show their emotions</p> <p>9. Do not look into the eyes of another person at conversation and business meetings.</p> <p>10. There is no gradation in communication with people of different ages.</p> <p>11. Not always friendly.</p> <p>12. Always complaining about bad life.</p> <p>13. Do not go on a rough tone while talking.</p> <p>14. Never look directly into the eyes of another person, especially in business communications.</p> <p>15. There has been no shift of one form of communication to another.</p> <p>16. Rarely used non-verbal forms of communication.</p> <p>17. Multiples of conversation options.</p>	<p>cloths which are not always convenient.</p> <p>4. The level of teaching is quite high</p> <p>5. Business relationships are based on interpersonal relationships</p> <p>6. The well-developed system of mutual dependence and mutual obligations (“You scratch my back and I’ll scratch yours”.)</p> <p>7. Hospitality (always welcome any guest who can come even without an invitation)</p> <p>8. A lot of singing, dancing, almost all play national instruments</p> <p>9. Always listen carefully to their interlocutors without ever interrupting them</p> <p>10. Particularly respectful of elders, using a special vocabulary</p> <p>11. Always friendly</p> <p>12. Never complain about bad life</p> <p>13. When swear they switch to Russian language using jargons</p> <p>14. In conversation always look into the eyes of their interlocutors</p> <p>15. Rapidly move from formal to informal communication</p> <p>16. A well-developed system of non-verbal means (handshaking, kissing, depending on the gender dimension)</p> <p>17. Thematic variety of conversations</p>
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**Table 2. Typical Russians by perceptions of American: Myths and Realities (Russia).**

Before coming to the country	Now
1. A large ungovernable country	1. A big but diverse country
2. It is very cold	2. The weather is quite changeable
3. All people drink alcohol	3. Drink a lot of alcohol at parties and weddings
4. Bad policy	4. Sustainable policies
5. The economy is wrong	5. They know the way of development
6. Constantly at war with Caucasus	6. Try to talk less about wars
7. A gloomy, unhappy life	7. Very friendly people but often complian
8. Very discreet	8. Sincere and emotional, sometimes too much
9. Dress up too pretentiously.	9. Wear tasteful, beautiful and fashionable cloths, wear a lot of jewelry

**Table 3. Typical American in the eyes of Kazakhs and Russian (in Kazakhstan).**

Before coming to Astana	Now
1. Independence (in dress, language, and judgment)	1. Sociability
2. Enterprise	2. Informality in communication
3. Practicality (especially clothing)	3. Emotionality
4. National self-centeredness (all seen from the perspective of American culture)	4. The desire not to affect personal topics
5. Law-abiding	5. Occasionally reserved and remote
6. Priority business relationships over personal preferences.	6. The ability to adjust their behavior depending on the situation of the listener

At the last stage of the study, we decided to carry out the so-called associative experiment with students from Kazakhstan who were studying in the United States via a variety of programs, including the Presidential Program “Bolashak”, and then identify the modification of their behavior after the adaptation period. This program has existed since 1999, each year about 3,000 students have an opportunity to travel abroad to study by this program. According to the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan from 1999 to 2013, 8347 people were trained in the United States and more than 548 students are still studying there.

On the basis of the association experiment we proposed to explain, associate and formulate concepts. We can report of result of a fall 2013 survey conducted among of 79 young Russians and 92 Kazakhs (aged 17-32) who studied in America regarding their views toward America and the problems of adaptation, cross-cultural communication, language barrier, gender aspect, and other issues.

The survey was attended by 181 people. We decided to analyze the components of the mentality of the Kazakhs in Kazakhstan, the Russians in Russia and the Americans in the United States. We concluded that the components of mentality can be linked to different aspects: expression of personality (openness – in Kazakhs and Russians; privacy – in Americans), manifestation of knowledge (if Russians and Kazakhs dominated knowledge of the character that appears in the essay, then American Prospect essay present creative individuality), and others. This is described in detail in the paper by Nurtazina (2012).

Many students from Kazakhstan and Russia have successfully completed training in the US, after returning home they experienced a so-called secondary shock. They have become well-balanced in perceiving their own culture which they had previously considered to be very clear and understandable. Many of them work in public institutions and universities. We conducted a survey with students to figure out the next characters:

1. Was your adaptation successful when you arrived home from a different cultural environment?
2. What issues surprised you?
3. Did you change in yourselves? (Whether you became more patriotic, began to smile more, became more tolerant, tolerant to the judgment of others, received a good and prestigious education; whether you use the acquired knowledge for the good of your country; whether you have plans and ideas to implement in your home country).

Now we would like to go considering the issues of adaptation of Americans that came to live and study in Kazakhstan. Let us study their opinions about Kazakhstan, particularly the problem of adaptation to life in Kazakhstan.

#### **Adaptation of Americans in Kazakhstan**

- the most difficult thing is to get used to the weather (26%): a sharply continental climate.
- the living conditions in the hostel (21%) are as follows: students are supposed to share a room with another person.
- there is a constant need to communicate in Russian (18%), but they would like to communicate more in English.
- americans find it difficult to get used to a different way of life (14%): Kazakhs and Russians are sociable, communicative and sometimes too bothersome.
- they respect others (11%): a lot of people are very surprised to see a foreigner and they ask a lot of questions (because Kazakhs and Russians want to practice English).
- distance from family (5%) and

- they are not always satisfied with the features of Kazakh and Russian cuisines (3%).

### **Experimental Procedure**

We conducted an experiment in 2013 and 2014 with university students. The aim was to identify the way to effectively use information technology which helps them understand many issues regarding intercultural communication. The experimental work was carried out in the study in order to single out the students' ability to compare, analyze and classify information by intercultural means of information technologies. In addition, we were interested in how students are able to critically evaluate the proposed sites.

As a result of analyzing the perception of students from various sites at the stage of ascertaining experiment, we concluded that the level of students' motivation to use information technology in the control group (CG) and experimental group (EG) was average and low. The low level at the stage of ascertaining experiment showed that students divided into: CG – 49%, EG – 46%. In the average level students fell into: CG – 36%, EG – 38%. A high level of motivation of students to use information technology to search for specific information was demonstrated by students of CG – 15% and students of EG – 16%.

The ability to analyze, compare and categorize relevant information by means of information technology showed a low level: CG students – 48%, EG students – 46%; on average: CG students – 32%, EG students – 33%; on the high level: CG students – 20% and EG students – 21%.

The ability to critically evaluate the proposed sites at a low level showed the following results: CG students – 42% and EG students – 43%. The average level of consistent orientation was as follows: 58% of CG students and 57% of EG students. The high level showed only one subject.

Especially popular among the students is the use of Internet services for the coordination of collective research activities. We mean "SurveyMonkey" program. Information received after the consultation with the help of "SurveyMonkey" can be demonstrated by the Internet service in the form of graphs, charts, tables available on the website of virtual research laboratory. Thus, one of the areas of multicultural education in the electronic information-educational environment is the organization of research students in a virtual laboratory. Here they extend and deepen knowledge about different cultures and their representatives, peculiarities of establishing interpersonal relationships with different cultures.

Hence, the results of experimental work confirmed the correctness of the hypothesis about the effectiveness of the organization based on Internet 2.0. This final control showed improvement in the quality performance of independent work of students of EG which indicates an increase in their level of integrated development of informational, educational and foreign-language communicative competence. We would like to highlight the significant progress of the development of writing skills of students which is difficult to achieve in the process of traditional education. There has been an increase in indicators of motivation to implement the 2.0 Internet. There was a positive impact on the acquisition of this program as a whole. There markedly improved the performance of students' reflective skills (flexible thinking, idea generation, system thinking, awareness and funds based on their own activities, etc.) in the process of language training.

### **4. Conclusions and Recommendations for Future Works**

The analysis of features of realization of teaching intercultural communication in Kazakhstan compared with Russia and the United States led to the following conclusions.

1. While educating students we should use the Internet encyclopedias, educational online portal, providing them with opportunities to explore text publications, view educational videos. It helps them increase knowledge about their native culture, especially the interaction with different cultures. The



formation of students' perception of cultural diversity in today's world helps to better understand the issues of intercultural communication.

2. Organization of students visiting virtual exhibitions, virtual tours as well as the creation and placement of electronic information-educational environment is conducive to familiarizing students to the Kazakh, Russian, American culture, and awareness of students of historical and cultural process as a complex interaction of different cultures.

3. Coordination of teaching and research, and the project activities of students by means of "Moodle" help students expand knowledge about the diversity of cultures in the world, form a tolerant attitude towards representatives of different cultures and develop skills of productive intercultural interaction.

In the future, we are planning to study the dynamics of the level of development of critical thinking among students in the study of ICC issues.

### **Acknowledgements**

The authors acknowledge the support of Grant of the Ministry of Education and Sciences of the Republic of Kazakhstan, No 5552 and No 4290/GF4 2015-2017. We would like to thank L.N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University and S. Seifullin Kazakh Agro Technical University, Astana, Kazakhstan for providing full support in the completion of this study.

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