

CROSS-CULTURAL COMMUNICATION COURSE AS A FORM OF INTERNATIONALISATION AT HOME WITHIN RUSSIAN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

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Abstract. *Internationalisation of higher education at home is a relatively new phenomenon for Russia but, as a concept, it is one that is both broad and variable. The internationalisation of higher education at home has been influenced by the globalisation of economies and societies and the increased importance of knowledge. It is driven by a dynamic and constantly evolving combination of political, economic, socio-cultural and academic rationales. These motives take different forms and dimensions in different regions, in institutions and within their educational programmes. This study covers an intensive course named “Cross-cultural Communication” and its impact within Tempus, Erasmus+ and other funding programmes as well as traditional content of this course. The content of the course is evaluated through several approaches. The starting point is to consider how particular courses are taken into account in long-term strategies of universities, and on the other hand, how these intensive courses advance the implementation of internalisation strategies. Another approach concerns internationalisation at home and helps find out how, specifically, intensive courses advance internationalisation. The next point covers education and teaching development and shows what role particular courses have in the transfer of teaching methods, materials and whole course concepts in Russian higher education institutions.*

Keywords: *internationalisation, globalisation, internationalisation of higher education at home, higher education, cross-cultural communication.*

Introduction

The trend of globalisation with the increasingly popular internationalized activities signifies the need for nurturing global citizens with effective intercultural communication skills. Growing interest in internationalisation of higher education can be explained by different reasons: the process of globalisation of the economy and labour markets; demand in internationally competent workers with knowing of foreign languages, social and intercultural skills; the need in maintaining economic competitiveness and fostering intercultural understanding. Advantages of internationalisation of higher

education are also apparent: improved quality of training, joint research projects, implementation of international quality standards and enlargement of international cooperation.

This paper examines some aspects related to this theme and is a reflection of the importance and current attention paid to the international dimension of higher education in Russia. Russia joined international processes later than other countries, and there is a growing demand of IHE from both national and institutional authorities and from students themselves.

The object of the research is the process of internationalisation of higher education (IHE), particularly internalisation at home. “Internationalisation at home”, integrating international and intercultural learning outcomes into the curriculum for all students, is a contemporary phenomenon which has not yet been widely recognised by higher educational institutions, especially those in provincial cities.

The methods of investigation used by the authors include deduction, comparative and logical analysis, as well as observation and generalisation methods. This article demonstrates that internationalisation at home can be considered a comprehensive model for preparing every student with the global competencies for today’s interconnected and diverse society.

Internationalisation of higher education: development and contemporary state

Over the last two decades, the European programmes for research and education, Tempus and Erasmus+ programmes in particular, have been the motor for a broader and more strategic approach to internationalisation in higher education in Europe and an example for institutions in Russia (Knight, 2003, 2004, 2006; Huisman & van der Wende 2004; de Wit 1995; de Wit et al., 2015; Kupriyanova-Ashina & Jhu, 2013; Lopukhova & Suchkov, 2016; Makeeva & Spaubeck, 2016, Lopukhova et al., 2017, etc). Let us lend some brief insight into the history of this phenomenon.

In the context of education, the term *internationalisation* became popular at the end of the 1980s. For almost two decades it was mainly defined only at the institutional level as a set of activities (Arum, 1992). Later, J. Knight updated the definition of internationalisation as “the process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the teaching, research and service functions of the institution” (Knight, 2003). She also suggested distinguishing external internationalisation which is “international academic mobility (education abroad, cross-country education, trans-border education)” and internal internationalisation (that is the “implementation of world educational standards, intercultural programmes, internationalisation of educational programmes and

courses”) (Knight 2003, 2007). In the European Parliament study, published in 2015, the definition of internationalisation is expanded to “the intentional process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions, and delivery of postsecondary education, in order to enhance the quality of education and research for all students and staff, and to make a meaningful contribution to society” (de Wit et al., 2015). Still, a broader definition, which goes beyond the specific dimensions of teaching, research, and service, was offered only a year later and goes as “Internationalisation is an ongoing process of change whose objective is to integrate the institution and its key stakeholders (its students and faculty) into the emerging global knowledge economy” (Hawawini, 2016). It calls for changes in the institutions’ existing structure, operating modes, and mindsets in order for the institutions to join and contribute to the shaping of the global knowledge economy. This transformation of the definition shows that the concept of the internationalisation of higher education is moved from the fringe of institutional interest to the very core of national interests.

In Europe, it is apparent that the internationalisation as a strategic process began with Erasmus. The programme created common understandings and drivers for internationalisation in most countries, and this was further reinforced by the Bologna Process. But even in Europe, seen around the world as a best-practice case for internationalisation, there is still much to be done, and there is an uneven degree of accomplishment across the different countries, with significant challenges in Southern and, in particular, Central and Eastern Europe and countries of the former Soviet Union, including Russia.

At the same time, internationalisation strategies are substantially different for different fields of education as well as for different countries. It remains fairly difficult to talk about internationalisation in Europe in generic terms. “Unity in diversity,” which has famously described much of the political and economic integration in the framework of the European Union, is equally valid in the sphere of higher education (Progler, 2014). Indeed “internationalisation at different speeds” may be one of the best ways to describe the European context. What unites most European higher education institutions is their strong interest in acquiring or enhancing their international profile and reputation, but there has been some uniformity and joint actions. European states have been encouraged to cooperate with other European counterparts in a range of international activities, particularly in terms of mobility and creating joint and double degrees. The trend has also been to foster a friendly yet competitive approach with the rest of the world. Support for internationalisation activities has also penetrated the nation-level policy discourse.

So, there are different accents and approaches. Internationalisation strategies are filtered and contextualised by the specific internal context of a university, by

the type of a university and how universities are embedded nationally. Internationalisation strategies are shaped at the programme level by the different relationships these programmes have with the market and society.

Russian higher education institutions on the path of internationalisation

In Russia, about thirty or so years ago (the times of so-called “Cold War”), activities that can be described as internationalisation were usually neither named that way nor carried high prestige and were rather isolated and unrelated. In the late 1980s (the times of the “Iron Curtain” fall) changes occurred: internationalisation was invented and carried on, ever increasing its importance. New components were added to its multidimensional body in the past ten years, moving from simple exchange of students to the big business of recruitment, and from activities impacting on an incredibly small elite group to a mass phenomenon. Since the mid-2000s, internationalisation has been high not only on the agenda in European and but also in Russian higher education policies (Law on Education of RF ... 2012; Kupriyanova-Ashina & Jhu, 2013; Marginson, 2014; Stukalova et al., 2015).

Today, with increasing internal and external pressures Russian universities as well as many universities in the world are expected to develop strategies in all areas, including the international dimension to make their competitiveness appealing to both domestic and global markets. Russia’s education potential has traditionally been seen as an essential resource for the country’s development. In addition to that, on the national level the management of internationalisation process of educational has always been determined by the state policy in the sphere of education and controlled by the national government. Yet, recent initiatives of the government in the area of higher education give more freedom to universities and include innovative educational projects, development and support for national research universities and most recently, international competitiveness programmes. Russian state policy in the sphere of education shows that it’s based on the creation of conditions that favour the integration of the national educational system with those of other countries (Law on Education of RF ... 2012; Stukalova et al., 2015).

Thus, in recent years not only European but also many Russian universities have participated in exchange programmes, established cooperation with abroad universities, also this period is marked by active work of international organisations. With increasing internal and external pressures, Russian government has really being developing a successful strategy in the area of the international cooperation in higher education to make universities more competitive and appealing to both domestic and global markets.

Internationalisation of higher education at home as a worldwide phenomenon

Thus, over the years internationalisation has moved from added value to main-stream. Increasing competition in higher education and the commercialisation and cross-border delivery of higher education have challenged the value traditionally attached to cooperation, such as exchanges and partnerships. However, universities can no longer rely only on study abroad programmes that serve few and often elite students. Instead, higher education institutions must design, deliver, and measure such multilevel curricular and extra-curricular activities that all students have the opportunity to increase their knowledge of and engagement with the world.

It all shows that it is also vital for universities to work out comprehensive strategies that go beyond mobility and encompass many other types of academic cooperation such as joint degrees, support for capacity-building, joint research projects and distance learning programmes. And they need to prepare for internationalisation at home those 80-90 % of students who will not be mobile because of different reasons. That is why, the internationalisation of the curriculum and the teaching and learning process (also referred to as 'internationalisation at home') has become as relevant as the traditional focus on mobility.

So, internationalisation of higher education at home focuses on the curriculum, teaching and learning, and learning outcomes. It developed in Europe in 1999 through *the Internationalisation at Home' movement* as a reaction to the strong focus on mobility and the Erasmus mobility target of 10 % of students, with the goal of providing an international dimension to the other 90 % (de Wit et al., 2015).

It was originally defined as "any internationally related activity with the exception of outbound student and staff mobility" (Crowther et al., 2001) but was later better described as "a set of instruments and activities "at home" that focuses on developing international and intercultural competences in all students" (Beelen & Leask, 2011). A recent revising of the term has led to a revised definition of IHEH as "the purposeful integration of international and intercultural dimensions into the formal and informal curriculum for all students within domestic learning environments" (Beelen & Jones, 2015). In other words, in contrast to internationalisation abroad, IHEH encourages students to attain intercultural competencies without leaving their own universities.

Coming back to the situation in Russian higher educational institutions, we can remind that the analysis of the Russian state policy in the sphere of education shows it's based on the creation of conditions that favour integration of the national educational system with those of other countries (Stukalova et al., 2015).

In most cases, internationalisation discourse was mostly concentrated on the need to harmonize the national system with global standards, especially European. Then higher education institutions took the lead in developing their own policies and practices for internationalisation at home, curriculum internationalisation, learning objectives and in the development and implementation of collaborative degree programmes with international partners.

Still, there is a certain obstruction which should not be underestimated. Language barrier is one of the main factors that hampers the inflow of foreign students to Russia and prevents Russian students from going abroad. In the European context, implementation of English-taught programmes appears to be a strategic choice to strengthen internationalisation efforts by enhancing attractiveness to international students, improving domestic graduates' readiness for employment in a more global or international context. Still, many Russian students and faculty are simply not operating effectively in English, a sad fact putting them at a disadvantage for both teaching and learning.

Besides, lack of financial support at the institutional level is identified as the most important obstacle for internationalisation.

These are the main reasons why many universities in Russia try to seek other options of internationalising their activities in their own way. They are investing in the preparation of students for their international mobility, especially by enhancing internationalisation at home. Some invite guest professors, attract faculty from international academic market, introduce courses in English, find partner institutes in Russian-speaking countries of the former Soviet Union or simply recruit students from low-income countries to come and study in Russia. Still, all these activities can only partly be referred to as IHEH.

Firstly, IHEH does not require the presence of international students. At the same time, simply providing a programme in English is insufficient for it to be considered an internationalized curriculum. If the programme content and learning outcomes are not internationalized, and remain the same as in the original language, merely changing the language of instruction will not make them so.

Just as with internationalisation of the curriculum in general, IHEH is specific to the content of a discipline and, within that, to a programme of study in a given university.

Cross-Cultural Communication Course: traditional approach

“Cross-Cultural Communication” has been taught for about a decade as a compulsory course for students of the faculty of foreign languages in many Russian universities. For many years previously, culture has been neglected or being treated as a supplementary topic in English as a Foreign Language teaching. The CCC course was introduced to meet the demand of rapid globalisation. The

course was the only opportunity for students of provincial universities to explore differences and similarities in cross-cultural communication by comparing different cultures and nations.

The CCC course has been originally designed to develop students' competences through communicating with people from different cultures (mostly from the cultures of the languages learnt by these students). The practical and conceptual framework generally included cultural variations in communication behaviours and motivations, and verbal and communication activities across a variety of cultural contexts. The course aimed at developing an individual's intellectual appreciation for cultural differences and sensitivity regarding intercultural interactions, mostly through the use of the language. Thus, we can say that this course presented rather a linguistic approach which looked at communication as a rule-governed process of signification. The main objective of the linguistic approach was to help students overcome cross-cultural communication problems by providing them with a fixed set of rules and strategies for communication. Up to this moment, in many universities the CCC course is taught in this framework.

For example, in Samara State University of Social Sciences and Education, the CCC course is offered to second-year bachelor students. It includes 5 double-classes of lectures, 9 double classes of seminars and a set of tasks for self-study work, based on reading materials. Lectures are given in class and are supported by Power Point presentations. For seminars, students are expected to read the assigned materials in advance and come prepared to participate actively in the discussions. Classroom activities are designed to generate discussions and exchanges of ideas and opinions among the students. In the end of the course students also write a paper (15-20 pages), based on a topic selected by the student and agreed upon by the teacher. This assignment asks students to apply some basic concepts and conceptual framework that they have learned in the course and discuss topics they are interested in. They are also encouraged to conduct short and easily manageable empirical investigations. Students are traditionally assessed in the end of the term according to their performance: this includes attending the classes regularly, coming to classes on time, coming prepared and participating actively in classroom discussions, and contributing positively to classroom environment.

The main topics covered in the course are as follows:

- verbal communication;
- different cultural values in language expressions;
- cultural linguistics;
- laws and principles of communication;
- stereotypes in cross-cultural communication;

- academic communication in different cultures;
- humour as a part of national cultures;
- translation as a type of cross-cultural communication;
- etc.

As a result, by the end of the CCC course, students acquire comprehensive knowledge of cultural differences, but do not gain cross-cultural communication skills, and are not able to apply cross-cultural terms, concepts and theories to real life situations, current events and information learned from the course materials. But only being able to communicate cross-culturally increases the success in international business, enables productive interpersonal contacts and decreases mutual misunderstanding which are all aims of internationalisation.

Though English-medium courses are of interest to local students and can help promote “internationalisation at home”, the CCC course as it exists does not satisfy the conception of IHEH and cannot be offered to students of other faculties or institutions. To promote the CCC course as a part of IHEH and to bring the course up-to-date, faculty should rethink the course design paradigm, moving from content coverage to the focus on student learning outcomes. It is necessary to do that as internationalisation at home approach requires that faculty members and administrators work collaboratively to design deliberate and meaningful spaces of integration, thereby creating international, intercultural, and global learning experiences for all students. These actions will lead to the settlement of a conflict between the contemporary and the traditional approaches.

On the way to redesigning internationalisation at home through a Cross-Cultural Communication Course

To prepare students for the twenty-first century, institutions of higher education are engaging in multiple strategies to provide students with global competencies that are aligned with new professional requirements and heightened citizenship expectations. Traditional strategies have involved programmes of student mobility through such pathways as bringing international students in and sending home students abroad. There are, however, increasing demands that institutions look inward to renew curricula and extra-curricular programming to reflect new paradigms for global knowledge production and learning.

For that reason higher education institutions in Russia establish English-medium programmes and courses in order to produce graduates who can contribute to the global workforce, and promote international profile of the institution.

Internationalisation on the level of the university is the process of transformation of the national university into the international one, inclusion of

the international aspect into all the spheres of its activity in order to improve the quality of educational process and scientific research. To do that, Samara State Technical University joined the project “Entrepreneurs for Tomorrow” (within the framework of TEMPUS IV grant) and established a new Master programme for Sustainable Entrepreneurship in the Volga Region (Russian Federation). Its main objective was to contribute significantly to a sustainable economic development of this region at grassroots level with an important emphasis on sustainable development (people-planet-profit). The students who were involved into the programme have to develop essential skills how to set up a new company or how to work successfully in the growing number of Small-and-Medium Enterprises in the region. Besides, this project was considered a major part within the university internationalisation programme.

There were different activities organized for students who participated in the project: they attended partner institutions, had mutual one-line courses with students from other Russian and European universities, worked under the supervision of tutors from partner institutions and so on. They also had courses taught by European professors in English. One of them was a Cross-Cultural Communication course.

In designing this CCC course, the staff made an attempt to provide some insights on dealing with people from different cultural backgrounds. Thus, this subject course “Cross-Cultural Communication” aimed to help students not only learn distinctive cultures and different cross-cultural communicative patterns and skills, but use the target language meaningfully, and thus accelerate acquisition.

The pedagogical approach in this course is Action Learning. The course programme was designed to develop maximum innovative and intercultural skills in students, enabling them to global environment effective communication and the ability to connect to other cultures. Their knowledge, skills and attitude were trained in an integrative way, with continuous reference to real-life situations. By putting real-life cases as the central themes in this course it was ensured that students were optimally prepared to learn theory and practice.

Besides, unlike courses, traditionally designed by Russian Universities, during this course much attention was paid to Non-verbal communication (NVC). The key message of the course was “Words exist to make your thoughts unacceptable for people”. Words account for 7 % of a message as far as feelings and attitudes are concerned. NVC or body language account for 38 % of a message. Facial expressions account for 55 % of a message. In other words, the actual words we use are less important than the way in which we say things. And the manner of speaking as well as a body language differs in different cultures. The same is true about the way we do business. So, in this course students were taught how people convey meaning in NVC through their posture, gestures, eye contact, physical distance they keep when communicating and how they dress.

Still, this course lacked linguistic aspects though students hoped to improve their language competencies as well.

We realize that only a combination of these two courses best practices – a linguistic approach and Action learning + NVC – would stimulate development of IHEH mindset that, in its turn, would encourage the development of global competencies in students. Ideally, at the end of this process, the CCC course will align seamlessly course goals, authentic assessments, global learning outcomes, innovative and interactive pedagogies, engaging activities, and the production of knowledge.

Thus, we believe, that a key approach to the enhancement of IHEH in Russia will be through further development of the curriculum and learning outcomes. Elements of curricular change will include enhanced intercultural competences and global perspectives through better defined internationalised learning outcomes, better use of the increased diversity in the classroom, and stronger language acquisition. These developments will align with the internationalised curriculum, learning outcomes, assessment tasks, teaching methods and support services of a programme of study. They will also align with internationalisation at home as defined by Beelen and Jones (Beelen & Jones, 2015): “The purposeful integration of international and intercultural dimensions into the formal and informal curriculum for all students within domestic learning environments.”

Curriculum and course internationalisation demands that staff merge their disciplinary and professional objectives and means of analysis with global perspectives, skills, attitudes, and knowledge. Only then will a curriculum achieve global learning outcomes that are as meaningful for specific disciplines as they are for broader global competencies set forth by institutions. In other words, to increase intercultural communication, a successful cross-cultural teaching model should find the balance between theory and application.

Conclusion

In the broad definition of what internationalisation is, there are two key components in the internationalisation policies and programmes of higher education that are constantly evolving and becoming increasingly intertwined. One is internationalisation abroad, understood as all forms of education across borders: mobility of people, projects, programmes and providers. The other is internationalisation at home, which is more curriculum-oriented and focuses on activities that develop international or global understanding and intercultural skills.

This research demonstrates that Russian higher education nowadays has an international aspect, though organized differently than in other cultures. Internationalisation of higher education at home is a relatively new phenomenon

for Russia but, as a concept, it is one that is both broad and variable. At the same time, IHEH may launch a new era for Russian higher education, indeed making it part of global academia with no cultural boundaries or national borders.

The described implementation of internationalisation at home presents Russian university staff with an opportunity to enforce academic professionalism and promote their status in the world education market. A stronger focus on curriculum and learning outcomes is likely to encourage greater academic engagement in internationalisation.

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