Developing a student's polycultural identity in ESP learning

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*Abstract. The study **aims** to highlight the specifics of developing a student's polycultural identity in an ESP (English for specific purposes) course. **Methods** of analysis, synthesis, generalization, and systematization were exploited in combination to study sources on the research problem. **Results.** It is stated that polycultural identity is one of the main characteristics of a specialist in the technical sphere, allowing them to effectively carry out their professional activities in the conditions of cultural diversity of society. A technical specialist with the developed polycultural identity is able to perceive themselves as a subject of a polylogue of cultures. The main components of forming a polycultural identity of a future technical specialist are outlined. The pedagogic conditions of developing a polycultural identity of future specialist in the technical sphere are considered. The interdisciplinary role-playing pedagogy "Reacting to the Past" as an effective tool in forming a technical student's polycultural identity is covered. **Conclusions.** The process of formation of a polycultural identity in the course of ESP in a technical university is a close interrelation of four components: the motivational component, which ensures the appropriation of values of native and foreign cultures, the determination of the individual's place in the world culture; the content component, which determines the selection of professionally oriented material, facilitating the study of native and foreign cultures in the context of their mutual influence; the procedural component, which determines the place of the professionally oriented approach in education, its interactive methods and techniques (e.g., role-playing method); reflexive, including the individual's awareness of themselves as cultural and historical subjects and at the same time multicultural subjects.*

* **Keywords:** ESP, technical student, identification, interactive methods, multiculturalism, polyculturalism, polycultural identity, role-playing method.*

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Анотація. Метою *дослідження є висвітлення специфіки розвитку полікультурної ідентичності студента в курсі англійської мови для спеціалістів (ESP).* ***Методи*** *аналізу, синтезу, узагальнення та систематизації використовувалися у комплексі для вивчення джерел з проблеми дослідження.* ***Результати.*** *Зазначено, що полікультурна ідентичність є однією з основних характеристик спеціаліста технічної сфери, яка дозволяє йому ефективно здійснювати свою професійну діяльність в умовах культурного різноманіття*

сучасного суспільства. Технічний спеціаліст з розвиненою полікультурною ідентичністю здатний сприймати себе як суб'єкта полілогу культур. Окреслено основні компоненти формування полікультурної ідентичності майбутнього технічного спеціаліста. Розглянуто педагогічні умови розвитку полікультурної ідентичності майбутнього спеціаліста технічної сфери. Схарактеризовано міждисциплінарну рольову педагогіку «Реакція на минуле» як ефективний інструмент формування полікультурної ідентичності студента технічної галузі. Висновки. Процес формування полікультурної ідентичності підчас вивчення англійської мови спеціального вжитку (ESP) представлено через взаємозв'язок чотирьох компонентів: мотиваційного компонента, який забезпечує засвоєння цінностей рідної та іноземної культур, визначення місця особистості у світовій культурі; змістовного компонента, який визначає відбір професійно орієнтованого матеріалу, що сприяє вивченню рідної та іноземних культур у контексті їхнього взаємного впливу; процесуального компонента, який визначає місце професійно орієнтованого підходу в освіті, та передбачає застосування інтерактивних методів навчання (наприклад, методу рольової гри); рефлексивного, що охоплює усвідомлення студентами себе як культурно-історичних суб'єктів та водночас мультикультурних суб'єктів.

Ключові слова: *англійська мова спеціального вжитку, студент технічного факультету, ідентифікація, інтерактивні методи, мультикультуралізм, полікультуралізм, полікультурна ідентичність, метод рольової гри.*

Introduction. Humanity is moving towards pluralism, dialogue, polylogue, and the search for a harmonious balance between cultures. Integration into the pan-European educational space in the field of identity studies should take place taking into account cultural differences. Modern education presupposes, first of all, the development of the personality of students, their cognitive abilities, the formation of a holistic system of universal knowledge, and not just mastering the sum of knowledge

in certain academic subjects. Its goal is not just to prepare a highly professional specialist in a particular field, but also a "person of the world" capable and ready to communicate and cooperate with people of different nationalities, religions and cultures, peaceful and fruitful coexistence in modern society. In a dialogical encounter of different cultures, each, while maintaining its unity and open integrity, simultaneously enriches each other. It is becoming increasingly obvious that humanity is developing along the path of expanding the interconnection and interdependence of various countries, peoples and their cultures. In such a way globalization with its contradictory phenomena, which tend to intensify, puts forward a priority task for higer education in general and learning English for specific purposes (ESP) in particular – the preparation of future specialists for professional activity in a multicultural environment, the formation of skills to communicate and cooperate with people of different social groups, nationalities, religions. Professional training carried out within the framework of a technical higher educational institution should pursue the goal of acquiring professionalism in a broad sense by a future specialist in the technical sphere, i.e., it should be oriented towards acquiring not only the content knowledge and hard skills, but also towards the formation and enhancement of professionally significant personal qualities, which are integral components of a specialist's professionalism. A modern technical university should resolve issues of preparing students – future technical specialists – for multi-level interaction within a diverse spectrum of intercultural communications.

Therefore, the problem of forming a polycultural identity, capable of seeking and finding ways to resolve socio-cultural frictions, to show tolerance, is becoming increasingly relevant. In this regard, the formation of a polycultural identity occupies a significant place in the education of future technical specialists.

Analysis of significant research and publications. Nowadays, the scholarly literature has widely discussed the issues of personal identification and identity. In particular, Ukrainian scholars K. Zhurba, I. Bekh, O. Dokukina, S. Fedorenko,

I. Shkilna have analyzed this problem in terms of its cultural aspects [2]. They argue that the phenomenon of identification reflects the influence exerted by one individual on another individual or individuals, and which is expressed in the desire of this other or others to follow certain behavioral or personal characteristics of the influencing person and reproduce them in their own behavior. So, operational identification can be considered as the maintenance of behavioral or personal characteristics of another person, as a real reproduction of either similar behavioral acts or its symbolic forms. The latter include the actions of the subject of identification, not necessarily absolutely identical to the actions of the object of identification, that is, those that reproduce only the motivation of the actions of a significant other [2, p. 26].

Given the aforementioned, the identification is a special social phenomenon that constantly exists in human life as a process. It constantly affirms, expands, deepens and ensures the definition of oneself for oneself and others. The process of identification begins at birth, gradually transforming from spontaneous into more or less conscious.

Currently, multicultural education is considered as a cultural phenomenon, a mechanism for transmitting sociocultural experience, a sphere of cultural values, a new information environment, and a paradigm of education in the 21st century. In the scholarly literature in the last few decades, cultural identity has been investigated from a bicultural perspective to understand how people influenced by two cultures, often stemming from their ancestral and non-ancestral roots, try to manage them [5]. In particular, studies of polycultural identity integration have found that the extent to which bicultural individuals perceive their dual cultural identities as integrated (blended and harmonious) versus unintegrated (separated or conflicting) is associated with behavioral responses to cultural cues and psychological adjustment [4]. Two ways of achieving polycultural identity integration – a hybrid style that involves merging cultural identities and an alternating style that involves switching identities depending

on the context – have also been associated with different motives and demographic factors [16].

As scholarly studies have become increasingly interconnected and culturally complex due to globalization and international migration, today, it is important to consider the impact of more than two cultural influences on individuals and how they contribute to their identity [12; 17]. In this regard, scholars are turning to the concept of polycultural identity. The paradigm of polyculturalism views culture as a flexible set of attributes that are loosely associated with a particular group and are transmitted between groups through social interactions; cultural influences on people as partial, multifaceted, and dynamic; and the boundaries of culture as flexible [15].

In the era of increased intercultural contacts, multiculturalism promotes the maintenance of fixed boundaries between cultural groups, whereas polyculturalism may discourage the use of culture to divide people. On the one hand, multiculturalism, which assumes fixed group boundaries, expects individuals to fully acquire all the main cultural traits in constructing their polycultural identity [13]. On the other hand, assuming flexible group boundaries, polyculturalism expects individuals to partially acquire some attributes associated with a given cultural group in constructing their cultural identity, as well as attributes of other cultural groups under mutual influence. In the latter case, scholars focus on the formation of a polycultural identity. The issues of polycultural identity in the context of intercultural interactions are the focus of modern multidisciplinary study by education experts, linguists, anthropologists, communication specialists and others who are interested in various issues of values and identity formation [16].

Polycultural identity in the theory of educational sciences, unlike linguistics, is considered not simply as the sum of everything spoken and written, taking into account its linguistic competence, but as a bearer of value orientations and a creator of texts in different cultural contexts. It is worth emphasizing that the text in this case is understood in its broad sense, namely it as any instance of the organization of human

signs. The only limits seem to be that the "text" in question should be a cultural object produced by people rather than a natural object untouched by human hand or mind.

Identification of previously unresolved parts of th general problem. Taking into account the existence of a widely developed theoretical basis on the problem under study, the educational process of the modern technical university still remains traditional and does not have sufficient potential to solve this problem. One of the reasons for this is the lack of a holistic approach to the formation of a student's polycultural identity in the educational process by means of different academic disciplines, e.g., though the ESP course. Furthermore, pedagogical conditions have not been developed to ensure the effective formation of a polycultural identity of future technical specialist when teaching an ESP at a technical university.

Formulation of the article's objectives (setting the task). The article aims to highlight the specifics of developing a student's polycultural identity in an ESP course. The realization of this aim presupposes the following objectives: 1) to cover the main components of forming a polycultural identity of a future technical specialist; 2) to single out pedagogic conditions in the ESP course which facilitate the development of a technical student's polycultural identity; 3) to study the impact of interdisciplinary role-playing pedagogy on developing a polycultural identity of a future technical specialist.

Presentation of the main research material. It is well-known fact that society as a carrier of symbolic cultural programs can develop only under the condition of preservation, interaction and progress of its constituent ethnic groups, their languages and cultures. In turn, the problem of the relationship between language and culture is of exceptional importance for linguodidactics in particular and modern education in general. Moreover, it is necessary to especially note the nature of the mutually conditioning bilaterality between them (i.e., between language and culture). In this regard, the meaning and functions of a foreign language in the development of a polycultural personality in the conditions of a multicultural university environment are

actualized. At the same time, language is understood as a special world in which the personality is immersed. Mastering more than one language also means mastering worlds filled with ethnic and cultural specifics [11]. E. Cassirer [7] argues that language and the world seem to be very similar phenomena.

Today, polycultural identity is one of the main characteristics of a specialist in the technical sphere, allowing them to effectively carry out their professional activities in the conditions of cultural diversity of society. A technical specialist with the formed polycultural identity is able to perceive themselves as a subject of a polylogue of cultures. They have an active life position, a developed sense of empathy and tolerance, emotional stability, and they are capable of productive professional activity in the conditions of multicultural world. The main components of forming a polycultural identity of a future technical specialist are as follows: cognitive (knowledge of culture as a social phenomenon, of the development trends of the modern multicultural world, the idea of a polylogue of cultures as the only possible philosophy of existence, of the specifics of technical work, awareness of one's own multicultural affiliation), motivational and affective (manifestation of empathy, tolerance, emotional stability) and active (the ability to apply adequate means in solving professional problems of interaction with people of different cultures, the ability to relieve tension in relationships, conflict resistance).

Given the aforementioned, it can be argued that a foreign language has the necessary potential for the formation of a technical student's polycultural identity. This potential is fully realized if the following principles are observed in the educational process: interdisciplinarity; the principle of dialogue of cultures; bilingual education; independent search and research activities; interaction with representatives of different cultures [**9**]. In the educational process, the formation of a polycultural identity of future specialists in the technical sphere is facilitated by:

- the appropriate selection of topics and structuring of the content of educational material in a foreign language based on the socio-cultural approach and the principle of professional focus;

- the extensive use of interactive methods (e.g., discussions, role-playing games, project technologies).

As for the latter abovementioned point, modern studies of the significance of role-playing as one of the interactive methods are consistent with its usefulness for gaining multifaceted experience in the educational process, during which youth master knowledge in different dimensions and contexts, focusing on acquiring skills important for different spheres of life [1, p. 104]. In general, role-playing is an effective educational and cognitive activity for studying complex topics or solving problems in different spheres, in which it is necessary to analyze different points of view in order to better understand the educational material [3; 8]. Role-playing consists of a spontaneous representation of a real or hypothetical situation to present a problem or information related to the content of the discipline. Each student plays their own role, although they can also change roles in order to approach the solution of the problem from different points of view and understand different interpretations of the same situation [1, p. 106].

We consider the interdisciplinary role-playing pedagogy "Reacting to the Past" is an effective tool in developing a technical student's polycultural identity. This pedagogy keeps students engaged with a revolutionary, immersive game. Students playing a particular "game" learn to read and use primary sources effectively, and most importantly, to argue persuasively within a given role in order to influence other characters and persuade those characters of their own position. Each Reacting to the Past game divides players into groups called factions. The remaining students are the undecideds, those who can be persuaded, cajoled, and bribed to vote for one faction or another that leads to victory. Therefore, faction members must make persuasive arguments in their speeches to influence the undecideds, who are often unaware of their

power. Working together in these groups, students have both individual and collective goals to achieve through studying history, reading, writing, and speaking, and finally colluding and manipulating; in short, through subversion.

Let us turn to one of the Reacting to the Past role-playing games which can be used in an ESP class for technical students "Engines of Mischief: Technology, Rebellion, and the Industrial Revolution in England, 1817-1818" (https://reactingconsortium.org/games/engines1817). It focuses on the problem of the disruption of new technology in particular and gender in general. It starts with reading a news article entitled "Robots will take our jobs!" (Human workers are being replaced by automation). And students are supposed to respond to the challenge whether they resist or embrace this new technology. The role-playing game *Engines of Mischief* explores a very similar situation in the past – in Manchester (England) in 1817-1818. Players are faced with different choices about how to live and prosper at the dawn of the Industrial Revolution. They use new economic theories, and news reports to debate the pros and cons of factories, and the extension of political rights down the social order. But players do not just debate. Characters from various classes of society must take action to improve their lives. Hand weavers and spinsters have to choose between violently resisting the new technology, joining factories, forming unions, or gaining political rights. Middle-class entrepreneurs decide how best to run their businesses to maximize profits and how to treat their workers. Craftsmen/inventors decide what type of new machines to build. Aristocrats must maintain control over government while deciding whether to support the working or middle classes, the old world or the new. Above all players must make ethical decisions about how to balance their individual interests with the good of society as a whole, which, in its turn, contributes to forming their identities.

Therefore, the Reacting to the Past role-playing pedagogy designed to evoke an emotional response and encourage students to consider a problem, idea, or concept in a new and creative way [14]. For a group of students on the edge of adulthood,

especially those who have been taught to follow society's rules, such activities are not only useful but vital to the development of their own identities, including polycultural one.

Conclusions. The process of formation of a polycultural identity in the course of ESP in a technical university is a close interrelation of four components: the motivational component, which ensures the appropriation of values of native and foreign cultures, the determination of the individual's place in the world culture; the content component, which determines the selection of professionally oriented material, facilitating the study of native and foreign cultures in the context of their mutual influence; the procedural component, which determines the place of the professionally oriented approach in education, its interactive methods and techniques (e.g., role-playing method); reflexive, including the individual's awareness of themselves as cultural and historical subjects and at the same time multicultural subjects through co-study of the English language and comparison of different cultures. At the same time, the process of interaction between the student and the ESP becomes the most important, since it is during this period that the foundations for future professional communication are laid.

The scope for further research lies in studying pedagogic potential of general education in forming polycultural identity of technical undergraduate students.

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