

MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION: FROM IDEA TO PROJECT

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Abstract

The article is devoted to the study of multicultural education as a social and pedagogical phenomenon in the modern system of higher education in Russia. The aim of the work is to summarize the experience of multicultural educational Russian universities platforms created as a result of an international project «Actions of Lifelong Learning addressing Multicultural Education and Tolerance in Russia» under the program TEMPUS IV (2013-2016). The activities of multicultural educational platforms are aimed at developing new conceptual approaches and models of practical activities in the field of multicultural lifelong learning.

The necessary conditions for the development of multiculturalism and tolerance of an individual are justified - special state policy and regional programs, continuous multicultural development and education from preschool to the elderly, educational courses and trainings for intercultural communication, thematic volunteerism.

These theoretical foundations formed the basis for a multicultural educational platform, established in the Mari State University (Republic of Mari El, Russia). The main purpose of this platform is the educational activity of multicultural content with three target groups: students - future teachers; professionals - educators, teachers, psychologists, heads of educational institutions; elderly people - pensioners, grandparents, transmitting successful life experience in the future through children and grandchildren.

The article describes the contents of specially developed educational programs of three levels and approaches to assessing the quality of the training received. At the same time the authors combine the classical foundations of Russian didactics with modern European technologies of multicultural education.

The research showed that the multicultural orientation of the educational process at the university ensures the formation of the students' competence in intercultural communication, socialization and personal adaptation. Thus, the multicultural educational platforms of universities become "growing points" for tolerance and positive relations in a multinational society.

Keywords: multicultural education, intercultural education platforms, tolerance, ALLMEET project.

1. INTRODUCTION

One of the priority tasks of the modern world educational system is to ensure the development and formation of an individual who is capable of self-realization and harmonious coexistence not only in the habitual society, but in the conditions of intercultural dialogue. The role and importance of education is changed, which should turn into a new mechanism of social development of a single human civilization. The diversity of coexisting educational structures complementary to each other form a complex mosaic of the multicultural educational environment, and it has become a direct consequence of large-scale social transformations that changed the established foundations of the society and determined a new, multicultural paradigm of the development of an individual.

In Russia and abroad, there are different approaches not only to defining the goals and methods of organizing a multicultural education, but also the practice of its realization. In foreign researches, the main goal of multicultural education is to obtain quality education at all levels by every member of a society, despite the differences in race, ethnicity, social, gender, cultural and religious relations (McLaren P. (1997), Bennett J.M. (2011), Sheller M. & Hurry J. (2006) and others).

Models of multicultural education in Russia are built on the principles of preserving and developing national languages in the multicultural environment of the region and the country, creating the implementation of practices of multicultural education for the development of national culture and social development of people. In recent years, many international organizations and funds of the European Union have paid special attention to the development of multicultural education and intercultural communication. One example of this was the large international network project "Actions of Lifelong Learning Addressing Multicultural Education and Tolerance in Russia" (ALLMEET), which received a three-year funding for the TEMPUS IV program in 2013.

The ALLMEET project focuses on the problem of cultural integration based on multicultural education and tolerant relations in Russian institutions of higher education through international cooperation of partner countries with the aim of increasing mutual understanding between peoples and cultures of the European Union and the Russian Federation.

The specific aims of the ALLMEET project are:

- to build a common theoretical background on concepts regarding intercultural education;
- to map the existing knowledge, practices and policies regarding migration and conflict resolution at local, regional and national level;
- to enhance the capacity building and participation of Russian Higher Education Institutions in planning, establishing and reinforcing positive actions on issues related to migration and minority groups through the establishment and the implementation of six Intercultural Education Platforms.

To implement the project, an international consortium was formed, which included major Russian universities (Siberian Federal University, Krasnoyarsk; Northern (Arctic) Federal University, Arkhangels; Kazan Federal University, Republic of Tatarstan; Moscow City Teacher Training University; Institute of Pedagogy and Psychology of Mari State University, Republic of Mari El) as well as well-known European educational centers (University of Bologna, Italy; University of Glasgow, UK; Universidade NOVA de Lisboa, Portugal; The Foundation European Center for Valuation of Prior Learning, Netherlands).

2. RESULTS

During the first stage of the joint implementation of the project, partner universities participated in a brainstorming session on developing common theoretical frameworks and highlighting concepts related to intercultural education.

Multicultural education has been defined as the education that supports the diversity of cultures, their values and interactions, and languages, reinforcing solidarity among contexts with different levels of resources. The main principles of multicultural education: multicultural education – is antiracist education; this is important part of generally available education; this education is inclusive and characterized by omnitude; this education aims at achieving social justice; this is a developing and dynamic process connected with the constructing relationships between people (Intercultural Glossary ALLMEET,2015).

All Russian partners of the project deeply studied the current state of interethnic relations in their regions, for which the leading scientists-sociologists were involved as experts. As a result of the survey conducted in the Republic of Mari El - the multicultural region of Russia, where Russians (45.1%), Maris (41.8%), Tatars (5.5%) and other nationalities (7.6%) live, it was revealed that the majority of residents are satisfied with the state of interethnic relations (Morova N.S., Lezhnina L.V., Biryukova N.A., Domracheva S.A., Makarova O.A., 2015, pp. 171-181). Answers to the question: "How do you feel about representatives of other nationalities?" showed the following: "good" - 68.5%; "satisfactory" - 24.5%; "unsatisfactory" - 2.6%; "I find it difficult to answer" - 4.42%. In the course of the survey, 1564 people from all cities and districts of the republic were interviewed, so the results reflect the overall picture: 55.6% of respondents are completely satisfied with the state of interethnic relations; 31.4% - partially satisfied; 5.1% - not satisfied; 7.9% - found it difficult to answer.

An analysis of the conditions of such development of multiculturalism and tolerance has revealed the important role of special state policies and regional programs covering continuous multicultural development and education from pre-school to the elderly age. Multicultural orientation of the educational environment, special training courses and training of intercultural communication, as well as volunteer activity are of great importance (Morova N.S., Lezhnina L.V., Kuznetsova L.V., Talanova T.V., 2015, pp. 182-187).

At the second stage of the project, the Mari State University conducted educational activities with three target groups: early adulthood (students), adulthood (professionals), and late adulthood (pensioners). For these target groups, educational programs of three levels were developed and implemented:

1. The main professional educational programs for students in the areas of training "psycho-pedagogical education" and "teacher training", which include specially created academic courses on the project's theme: "Pedagogical conflictology" with the module "Tolerance formation", "Multicultural education", "Psychological and pedagogical interaction of the participants of the educational process" with the module "Development of Tolerance", "Fundamentals of Spiritual and Moral Culture", "Training of Pedagogical Communication" (with exercises on the formation of tolerance) and other disciplines. Over the years of the project implementation, 7 courses were developed and introduced into the educational process, which were attended by about 400 students - future teachers and psychologists.

2. Programs of additional education for working specialists of the educational system (educators, teachers, psychologists, professors) in the form of advanced training courses and professional retraining. Thus, for the university professors in the 2015-16 academic year, the advanced training courses "The Curator's School: the Psychological and Pedagogical Foundations of Educational Work in a Student Group" were developed and organized. For young teachers and psychologists in 2016 - courses "Counselor school: the organizational and content foundations of pedagogical work in a summer children's camp". For the specialists of the preschool education system, the program of professional retraining "Pedagogy and methodology of preschool education" with the module "Tolerance formation in children and adults" is implemented. Over the period of the project implementation, this level of educational programs covered more than 75 practitioners of the education system of the Republic of Mari El.

3. Hobby courses for a special category of students (pensioners) entitled "University of the third age" is an innovative form of educational activity of the Institute of Pedagogy and Psychology of the Mari State University, which allows to implement the principle of life long education for the elderly. Here pensioners receive new knowledge, and also take an active part in university activities together with students. The curriculum of the " University of the third age " includes more than 15 modules, the content of most of them also implements the ideas of multiculturalism and tolerance. For example, the module "Family Academy: psychological bases of interaction with children and grandchildren" includes topics: "Prevention and resolution of conflicts", "Formation of tolerance". 62 retired people were trained in this module over the years of the educational program "University of the Third Age" .

In addition to educational activities, a series of various social, scientific, methodological events were held in the framework of the multicultural educational platform, including seminars and roundtables on the problems of intercultural interaction, master classes on the development of tolerance for trainers among teachers, psychologists, heads of educational institutions, as well as briefings with the participation of prominent political and public figures of Russia and the Republic of Mari El.

At the third stage of the project implementation, it was assessed for sustainability. The quantitative criteria of sustainability were the growth in the volume of the main indicators of the effectiveness of the intercultural

educational platform (increase in the number of courses and the number of students on the problems of the project); expansion of the scope of relations with external partners (representatives of the media, other higher education institutions, public organizations interested in the development of multicultural education, etc.) and internal partners (interaction with other units of the university). It was reflected in lowering the level of costs and increasing the relative indicators of the activity of the intercultural educational platform (participation of representatives of all target groups in project activities - conferences, seminars, roundtables, etc.). Qualitative criteria for the sustainability of the project were the deepening of knowledge about the educational needs of participants in the three target groups, the growth of their tolerance index and the effectiveness of intercultural interaction.

In total for a three-year period of the ALLMEET project implementation, the team of the project members has planned and successfully implemented more than 20 multicultural educational events.

Project participants are actively engaged in scientific activities and it is reflected in their numerous publications. More than 20 scientific works on the problem of tolerance and intercultural interaction were published, including articles in journals cited in the international Scopus database, in peer-reviewed journals in Russia.

During the project implementation period, the performers took part in 3 foreign congresses and forums, 8 international conferences, and 5 all-Russian conferences, 4 regional and interregional conferences.

3. CONCLUSIONS

The multicultural educational platform created during the implementation of the ALLMEET project at the Mari State University allowed:

1. Expand the range of basic and additional educational services for the formation of intercultural tolerance of representatives of different age groups (students, mature professionals, pensioners);
2. To improve the content of educational programs, thanks to the European experience of intercultural education received within the framework of the international consortium;
3. To establish close interaction with social partners in the prevention of intercultural problems.

The ALLMEET project showed that if conditions for active interaction of representatives of different nationalities of each target group are created in the intercultural educational environment, a positive result will be an increase in the attitudes of tolerant consciousness. It serves as a good start for launching the processes of exchange and disclosing people for the purpose of understanding and recognizing the difference of other people.

The implementation of the ALLMEET project ensured the launch of the multicultural educational platform of the Mari State University, which contributes to the improvement of intercultural dialogue and the promotion of cultural diversity at the regional level.

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