

JOURNAL OF MODERN SCIENCE



JoMS 4/19/2013, ss. 55-64

ANNA ZELENKOVÁ

INTERNATIONALISATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION AND THE NEED FOR NEW TEACHER COMPETENCES

Anna Zelenková

Faculty of Economics,
Matej Bel University in Banská Bystrica
anna.zelenkova@umb.sk

ABSTRACT

The internationalisation process of higher education space in Europe has resulted in joint-degree programmes and study programmes offered in foreign languages. This process is similar to globalisation trends in other spheres of social and economic life: intensified contacts and communication between people of different cultural backgrounds. Universities in Central Europe face a new reality which they were hardly ever prepared to deal with: teaching multicultural groups of students and using a foreign language as a medium of instruction and learning. The new situation calls for new requirements in the sphere of pedagogy, teaching methods and approaches and for a new range of competences of teachers involved in this process. Teachers must have some abilities, knowledge and skills to be able to master the cultural diversity and the intercultural communication process within their professional activities, such as teaching, guiding and coaching. This paper presents some aspects of the internationalisation of higher education in Slovakia and arguments for the need to raise teachers' pedagogic and intercultural competences.

KEY WORDS:

higher education, internationalisation, teacher competence, teacher profile

INTRODUCTION

The internationalisation of the European higher education system started in 1999 by signing the Bologna Declaration. The common goal clearly defined in the Declaration was creating a European space for higher education in order to enhance the employability and mobility of citizens and to increase the international competitiveness of European higher education. The Slovak Republic was one of the first signatory countries

that transferred and implemented the main ideas of the Declaration into the conceptualisation of higher education development and resulted in the new law on higher education in 2002. Since 1999 many other European documents have been issued by the Council of Europe, the European Commission and the European Parliament documenting the language and education policy of the European Union. Programmes, such as Erasmus, Grundtvig and Socrates have been designed to support the mobility.

After more than a decade since the Declaration was called into life, Slovak universities can observe all the abrupt changes this document had initiated. They have become partners in the European efforts to eliminate the obstacles to free mobility of students, including trainees and graduates, and teachers, researchers and higher education administrators. One of the impacts these documents had on the system is that the universities are becoming „real actors, rather than objects, of this essential process of change“ (Declaration). Universities are changing their curricula, co-operate in pedagogic and research fields and exchange students whose mobilities are financially supported by the European Union. The institutions of higher education can apply for financial support of projects that aim at improving the higher education system.

Even if the internationalisation of higher education is often associated with attracting foreign revenue to make up for reduced public sector fundings, there are other important aspects that present a challenge and need consideration, such as pedagogic, curricular and intercultural issues.

INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION CONTEXT IN CENTRAL EUROPE: NEW CHALLENGES

As Stone (2006) observes, other issues that present a challenge for teachers and the management of universities when dealing with the internationalisation process, are curricular issues and support services for both local and international students from diverse cultural backgrounds. New study programmes in foreign languages are launched and joint-degree-programmes created to enable students to enrol in study programmes at two different universities and study in a foreign language. At Slovak universities, English-medium programmes prevail but there are also French-medium and German-medium programmes.

Slovak higher education system is not lagging behind in this process. On the contrary, foreign-language medium programmes are being de-

veloped between Slovak universities and foreign partner universities. An example may be a joint-degree study programme developed between the Faculty of Law, Matej Bel University in Banská Bystrica and the University of Warmia and Masury in Olsztyn (*Law*), or a joint degree programme between MBU Banská Bystrica and the Catholic University Eichstätt-Ingolstadt (*Tourism and Regional Planning*). Another example at the master level is the joint-degree for *Marketing Management* studies developed by the Faculty of Economics, MBU and the Faculty of Management, Cracow University of Economics, or the *Finance and Accounting* programme with the High School of Banking in Chorzów. Programmes between Slovak and French/German universities are also available, where students can study in other foreign languages, e. g. in French or German respectively (These data are an output of the Project *Enhancing Foreign Language-Medium Programmes in Higher Education*. MBU in Banská Bystrica, 2010-2013. Unpublished material).

Besides this trend of creating joint-degree programmes, individual courses or study programmes are offered in foreign languages. In these programmes local students or international students (e. g. Erasmus mobility programmes) can study a selected number of courses usually in English as English has become a lingua franca in higher education.

What requirements does this development put on all stakeholders in this process: teachers, students and administrators? Are they prepared to deal with this problem effectively? Stone (2006, 336) suggests a list of necessities to internationalise students learning contexts effectively. Among them, on the level of administration, are the following:

- ensuring curriculum content and design to be appropriate for graduates who will be operating in an increasingly international environment,
- identifying benefits of international experience (e. g. exchange and mobility programmes) for staff, students and institutions and maximisation of these benefits,
- collaborative management of developing the joint-degree programmes with foreign partners, as well as collaboration in research,
- delivering programmes collaboratively or unilaterally.

On the level of pedagogy we can see the following challenges in this process:

- delivering courses and whole programmes in foreign languages (foreign-language knowledge and skills, language competence of all involved),
- developing appropriate learner-centred teaching methods that would cover the needs of students from different cultural backgrounds (pedagogic, didactic competence),
- developing communicative and social skills, facilitating positive social interaction and enduring professional relationships (interactive, social competence),
- providing opportunities for staff and students to develop „global citizenship“ competence providing the opportunities for exploring, understanding and promoting cultural diversity (cultural or intercultural competence) (adapted from Stone, 2006, 336).

LINGUISTIC COMPETENCE

Teaching a subject (course) in a foreign language requires a set of pedagogic and linguistic competences. The communicative language competence does not involve only „knowing the language“ or „knowing“ specific, e. g. English, subject-specific vocabulary. It requires specific skills of communicating in the target language (Schneiderová, 2003) and using the foreign language in the classroom management process to enable students to study, read and write in that language on the academic level. This approach is called CALLA - Cognitive Academic Language Learning Approach (Chamot - O'Malley, 1994) and is used to mediate the subject content and at the same time to develop foreign language skills. This approach requires the following communicative language competence of the teachers:

- to introduce topics from major content subject;
- to develop academic language skills, such as listening (to lectures); speaking (in discussions, presentations); reading (of articles, books and learning materials); and, writing (notes to lectures, seminar works, abstracts and final thesis);
- to instruct in learning strategies for both content and language acquisition, such as metacognitive, cognitive and social/affective strategies.

Hence, the communicative competence of the teacher teaching a course in a foreign language will consist of:

- linguistic competence, which means knowing the system of the target language, grammar, vocabulary, etc;
- discourse competence as an ability to use the language for academic and pedagogical purposes, in presentations and discussions,
- socio-cultural competence to use the language appropriately in different situations, in student-teacher interactions and management of the classes;
- strategic or compensatory competence to be able to communicate the message even if there are some drawbacks in the knowledge of the language system.

We believe that these abilities and skills should be part of teacher training courses, both for in-service and pre-service teachers.

INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE

Intercultural competence is an inevitable part of teachers' abilities in order to function successfully in a multinational education environment. So far, little has been done in the preparation of university teachers in this field. In the past two decades the stress on cultural awareness has gained on importance but usually focused on developing this awareness in students who study foreign languages. Foreign language teaching itself has always been emphasizing the intercultural component, as learning a foreign language usually requires knowing also the culture of that language. In the past two decades foreign language methodology has attempted to conceptualize the cultural direction of foreign language acquisition and stress the knowledge of culture and communication in culturally different environment (Kollárová, In: Ries – Kollárová, 2004, 34-46). As Chlopek (2008, 10-19) suggests, the intercultural approach to foreign language teaching and learning cannot be restricted only to the specific culture of the target language, as, for example, English has become a language of instruction for students from different cultural backgrounds. When speaking about teaching EFL (English as a foreign language) students, she argues that intercultural training should involve „the ability to compare students' native cultures with other cultures, to evaluate critically and interpret the results of such comparisons, and to apply this knowledge successfully in both verbal and non-verbal communication“ (Chlopek, 2010, 12).

We believe that the same kind of intercultural competence goes for teachers. They should be able to understand culture (in the most general

term) as a phenomenon that influences communication. Their cultural awareness needs to be raised as they are exposed to multicultural groups of students. Culture is a phenomenon that is present in daily communicative situations (Höhn, 2011) and as such it influences also the educational environment, e. g. the interactions between teachers and students of different cultural backgrounds. It reflects the native and the “foreign” cultural values, beliefs, behaviours and body language, which students and teachers bring with them to the class.

NEED FOR CULTURAL TRAINING

The present higher education system is more often than ever before marked by frequent intercultural exchanges and exposures to different cultural issues. To meet the aims of successful multinational/multicultural university education, teachers must be equipped with a whole a set of specific cultural knowledge, intercultural skills and positive attitudes.

Kollárová (2004, 45) argues that the present system of teacher training is lacking the cultural education and suggests the profile of a culturally competent teacher consisting of three components: ethical culture (covering the understanding of the C-culture, i.e. literature, arts, music, etc), linguistic culture and communication culture. In her writings the profile concerns the teachers of Russian, but in our view it can be equally applied to any teacher working in a multicultural academic environment.

The cultural component of teacher training should enable teachers to understand all aspects of cultural diversity, such as different cultural values, deep anchored beliefs, norms, attitudes and ways of thinking which determine the behaviour of members of different cultures. Teachers should be able to look at their own culture from a different perspective, to overcome stereotypical thinking and evaluate the contribution of all cultures to the global world dialogue of cultures. We believe that this knowledge and attitudes of openness, curiosity and willingness to gain new cultural knowledge will lead to accepting other cultural identities and respecting them.

Multicultural university education should be understood as a way of viewing the present world reality and a way to develop the intercultural dialogue, which should not stop at raised awareness of differences among various ethnic, racial, and cultural groups (often limited to presenting national cuisines, folklore, funny stories from students’/teachers’

visits abroad, etc). Cultural diversity should be understood as the dynamics of development (evolution) - cultures need each other and each culture should be valued. Diversity should be understood as a means of enrichment rather than as a problem area. The American multicultural education principle of 'diversity based on equality' (Parkay – Stanford, 2009, 123) can be well placed in our context as part of the cultural understanding of the challenges of present society.

CONCLUSION

The internationalisation of higher education calls for new teacher competences. Among them a good intercultural competence of teachers is a precondition for teaching a subject in a foreign language and working successfully in multicultural academic environment. As teachers educate the new generation of young people who will work in multicultural working environment, they themselves should have developed the necessary level of cultural awareness, language knowledge, intercultural communication skills and attitudes to be able "to accept values, beliefs and behaviour that may conflict with their own" (Chlopek, 2010, 18).

REFERENCES

- Chamot, A.U., O'Malley, J. M. (1994). *The CALLA Handbook. Implementing the Cognitive Academic Language Learning Approach*. Addison Wesley Publishing Company.
- Höhn, E. (2011). The sociology of culture in the context of cultural regional development. In: *Universities in Central Europe, 20 years after*. Volume 1: Transformations and stakes. Bruxelles : Bruylant. s. 225-235.
- Chlopek, Z. (2008). The Intercultural Approach to EFL Teaching and Learning. In: *English Teaching Forum*, Vol. 46, no. 4, p. 10-19.
- Parkay, F. W., Stanford, B. H. (2009). *Becoming a Teacher*. 8. vyd. Boston : Prentice Hall.
- Project *Enhancing Foreign Language-Medium Programmes in Higher Education*. MBU in Banská Bystrica, 2010-2013. Unpublished material.
- Ries, L., Kollarova, E. (eds). (2004). *Svět cizích jazyků – Svet cudzích jazykov dnes. Inovačné trendy v cudzojazyčnej výučbe*. Bratislava : Didaktis.
- Schneiderova, A. (2003). Komunikácia v cieľovej kultúre. In: *Kulturoológia v procese osvojovania cudzích jazykov*. Nitra: FEM Slovenskej poľnoho-

spodárskej univerzity v Nitre, p. 234 – 239.

Spencer-Oatey, H., Franklin, P. (2009). *Intercultural Interaction. A Multi-disciplinary Approach to Intercultural Communication*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Stone, N. (2006). Conceptualising Intercultural Effectiveness for University Teaching. In: *Journal of Studies in International Education*. Vol 10, No. 4, Winter 2006, s. 334-356.

Zelenkova, A. (2005). Developing Teachers' Cultural Competence: A Course Design. In: *IATEFL Teacher Trainers and Educators SIG Newsletter*, 3/2005, p. 28-30.

Zelenkova, A. (2010). *Interkultúrne vzdelávanie v cudzích jazykoch na vysokej škole. Metódy a ich reflexia*. Banská Bystrica: Univerzita Mateja Bela, Ekonomická fakulta.

Zelenkova, A., Spisiakova, M. (2012). Enhancing Foreign-Language Programmes in Higher Education. A Project Report. In: *Foreign Languages as a Bridge to Subject-Area Knowledge and Skills*. Banská Bystrica : Univerzita Mateja Bela, Ekonomická fakulta, p. 107-111.