

INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION IN UKRAINIAN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

COMUNICAÇÃO INTERCULTURAL EM INSTITUIÇÕES DE ENSINO SUPERIOR UCRANIANAS

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ABSTRACT

Ensuring intercultural communication in modern learning conditions is an urgent problem for research, given the globalization of the educational space. The article aims at analyzing intercultural communication in higher education institutions in Ukraine. To implement this goal, a systematic method of research was used, which allowed to comprehend intercultural communication as a dynamic phenomenon, and a method of thematic categorization, which allowed to outline the main research problems. The results of the study found that intercultural communication is the idea of interaction between multilingual and multicultural individuals through the establishment and arrangement of interconnection and the search for mutual understanding. The important role of the teacher as a mediator in the organization of the educational process is also emphasized: teaching work today also involves establishing the intercultural interaction between applicants for education, who often belong to different cultural environments. In Ukrainian realities, this work is complicated by Russian aggression, but the dynamics of the increase in the number of foreign students in Ukrainian universities demonstrated that the process of establishing cultural communication not only existed, but also developed. In conclusion, attention is drawn to the importance of ethical moments of interaction, since in different cultures there is a different perception of respect, morality, the role of gender, etc.

Keywords: Intercultural communication, Intercultural competence, Intercultural conflicts, Cultural adaptation, Internationalization of higher education, Cultural diversity, Intercultural education, Intercultural understanding.

RESUMO

Garantir a comunicação intercultural em condições modernas de aprendizagem é um problema urgente de pesquisa, dada a globalização do espaço educacional. O artigo tem como objetivo analisar a comunicação intercultural em instituições de ensino superior na Ucrânia. Para implementar esse objetivo, foi usado um método sistemático de pesquisa, que permitiu compreender a comunicação intercultural como um fenômeno dinâmico, e um método de categorização temática, que permitiu delinear os principais problemas de pesquisa. Os resultados do estudo revelaram que a comunicação intercultural é a ideia de interação entre indivíduos multilíngues e multiculturais por meio do estabelecimento e da organização da interconexão e da busca de entendimento mútuo. O importante papel do professor como mediador na organização do processo educacional também é enfatizado: o trabalho de ensino hoje também envolve o estabelecimento da interação intercultural entre os candidatos à educação, que geralmente pertencem a ambientes culturais diferentes. Na realidade ucraniana, esse trabalho é dificultado pela agressão russa, mas a dinâmica do aumento do número de alunos estrangeiros nas universidades ucranianas demonstrou que o processo de estabelecimento da comunicação cultural não apenas existia, mas também se desenvolvia. Concluindo, chama-se a atenção para a importância dos momentos éticos de interação, já que em diferentes culturas há uma percepção diferente de respeito, moralidade, papel do gênero etc.

Palavras-chave: Comunicação intercultural, Competência intercultural, Conflitos interculturais, Adaptação cultural, Internacionalização do ensino superior, Diversidade cultural, Educação intercultural, Compreensão intercultural.

Introduction

Given the current globalization processes and challenges associated with the war, the need to train future specialists who can understand different views, distinguish different cultural ideas, attitudes and values, adequately and tolerantly relate to representatives of other cultures, and therefore practice intercultural communication, in order to become progressive informed citizens and, in this way, democratize Ukrainian society, becomes especially noticeable (YURII, 2022; GÉRARD, NIYONZIMA THOMAS, 2023). Higher education plays an important role in these processes, its task is to prepare professional specialists capable of counteracting any challenges and difficulties of globalization. The standards of higher education include both general (for example, perfect command of the state and one of the languages of the Council of Europe; skills of collecting and researching information; the ability to make impartial decisions, the ability to understand others, resolve intercultural conflicts, etc.) and special competencies (including perfect mastery of the chosen specialty). Modern researchers prove that the modern education system should contribute to the development of an environment of intercultural communication, which is an important trend in current higher education (YIN, 2017; GAO, 2015). At the same time, modern literature has also proved that a well-formed environment of intercultural communication can prepare professional specialists who can understand the differences between peoples and tolerate them (BUTTS, 2007). It is also proved in the literature that the process of deepening international contacts in various areas of social life actualizes the importance of intercultural communication within the increasingly active interaction of national cultures and linguistic diversity of the global educational community (RYABCHIKOVA, 2018). Ukraine has made a significant step forward by signing the Association Agreement with the European Union. At the same time, the acceleration of this process of democratization and internationality occurred after the beginning of the Russian aggression against Ukraine. Besides, despite the hostilities, foreign students from around the world study in Ukraine. Given these circumstances, it is now extremely important to implement an effective intercultural

environment in higher education in Ukraine, even in conditions of war. Thus, this study aims to comprehensively characterize intercultural communication in higher education institutions in Ukraine. The following tasks will be implemented for this purpose:

1. Describing the role of intercultural communication in higher education in Ukraine.
2. Studying the main ways of development of intercultural communication in Ukrainian higher education.
3. Identifying the difficulties in implementing intercultural communication.
4. Outlining the key aspects of the implementation of successful intercultural communication in the Ukrainian higher education system.

Literature review

Modern researchers have repeatedly addressed the problem of clarifying the role of intercultural communication in education. Some researchers consider it especially important for the European education system. In literature, the concept of intercultural communication is defined as a set of different forms of relationships and communication between individuals and groups belonging to different cultures (ARASARATNAM-SMITH, 2017; BINDER, 2017). In particular, BJERREGAARD; LAURING; KLITMØLLER (2009) consider this concept as a special form of communication between representatives of two or more different cultures or certain cultural associations through the lens of exchange of information and cultural values. Other works emphasize that the term includes the realization of communication between different cultures, ethnic groups or races (FUJIMORI et al., 2015; KAPLINA, 2021). BRASLAUSKAS (2023) demonstrates the importance of intercultural communication to combat ethnic stereotypes. The researcher demonstrated how critical thinking can affect the destruction of many stereotypes associated with different cultures. The work of GUT, WILCZEWSKI, GORBANIUK (2017) also addresses a similar problem and explores certain cultural differences and related stereotypes. These researchers also characterized the role of communication needs with different peoples for the implementation of effective intercultural communication. Some concepts of intercultural communication through the lens of religious differences are described in detail in the work of JAMAL and ISGANDAROVA (2021). At the same time, MACOVEI (2017) outlines the main advantages of owning intercultural communication in the global educational space. In the works of modern scientists, it is also proved that, in accordance with the increase in international contacts, there is a need to consider issues of intercultural communication in the field of education, which may be related to the ethnopsychological features of the participants in this communication. At the same time, today there is an urgent need to implement an ethnolingualturological approach to student learning. This is due to some important factors, in particular the deepening of global economic ties, and the increase in international cooperation

in the field of higher education. These aspects are presented in detail in the works of PALCHYKOVA (2019) and NIKOLOVA (2021). In the opinion of PALCHYKOVA (2019), intercultural communication is especially important when learning a foreign language, because it contributes to the formation of important practical communication skills. At the same time, MARYNCHENKO (2021) described the features of the formation of communication skills of future teachers. NIKOLOVA (2021) investigated the significance of intercultural communication in the current linguistic space. Thus, modern researchers were interested in various aspects of intercultural communication in the field of higher education, they identified its main aspects, features of the development of the intercultural environment. However, this topic still remains unsolved. In particular, the analysis of the main challenges of the formation of intercultural communication in institutions of higher education is the main aspect for further research.

Methodology

Given the main purpose of this work – a comprehensive description of intercultural communication in higher education institutions of Ukraine, methodological tools are based on the principles of consistency and analysis of qualitative and quantitative data. Thus, the work is of a mixed type.

Data collection

The data collection for this theoretical work was based on the choice of the main keywords, which were subsequently entered into the search scientometric databases. These keywords included such phrases as "intercultural communication," "intercultural environment," "innovative education," "higher education of Ukraine," "universities," "intercultural interaction," "communication skills."

The literature inclusion was also based on specific criteria:

1. Relevance of research – preference was given to research over the past 10 years (except for some fundamental works).
2. Compliance with Ukrainian or European realities – when choosing literature, it was important that the study concerned Ukrainian higher education, or European (some fundamental works do not meet this criterion).
3. Availability of a detailed research methodology – the study should describe the course of the study, the stages of collecting and processing the information.
4. The main focus is on the analysis of intercultural communication.

The study also used some statistics from the official website of the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, which contains data on the total number of foreign students in Ukraine.

Data analysis

A systematic method of research is used in the work, based on which intercultural communication is highlighted as a constantly developing dynamic phenomenon (especially given the individual globalization challenges). The work also uses the method of thematic categorization, which outlines the main common topics that relate to intercultural communication in the system of higher education.

The statistical data received were processed using Excel software. This data is entered into tables and processed in this program based on special tools.

Results

The intercultural diversity of Ukrainian society encourages individuals to form constructive interaction, to create a positive attitude towards representatives of other nationalities, to form powerful knowledge about the cultures surrounding them.

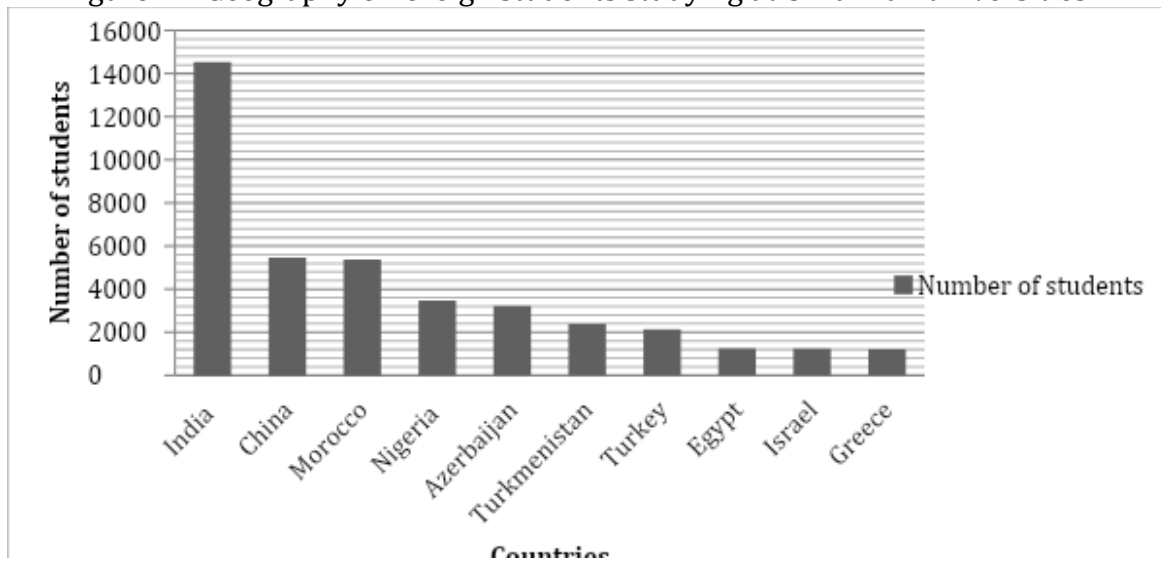
An important task of modern higher education is to educate an individual who can learn and create culture through dialogical communication, which requires all participants in the educational process to possess a high level of intercultural communication culture, developed communication skills (ZBYR, 2023). It becomes possible under the conditions of a properly organized intercultural dialogue, which has a noticeable meaning for the development of modern higher education.

Modern scientists and teachers emphasize that intercultural communication is the idea of interaction of multilingual and multicultural individuals-communicants through establishing and arranging the interconnection and the search for mutual understanding. Such interaction aims at adequate understanding of all participants in communicative acts related to various national cultures (VOVCHASTA, 2015). At the same time, in cultural theory, the term "intercultural communication" is used to refer to the communication process between members of diverse cultural communities (BRASLAUSKAS, 2023). In turn, this concept also includes the group interaction of key factors such as values, beliefs, individual national norms and individual scenarios of their interaction.

The presence of foreign students is an important indicator of the presence of intercultural communication in a higher education institution. Before the full-scale invasion of the Russian Federation, a positive trend regarding the training of foreigners in higher education institutions in Ukraine was noticeable. In particular, by February 24, 2022, more than 84 thousand foreigners from 160 countries of the world studied in Ukrainian universities. However, due to military operations, national universities lost more than 20 thousand foreign applicants. Another indicator is the decrease in the number of foreigners wishing to study in Ukraine. For example, before the war, almost 60 thousand study invitations were registered

at the Ukrainian State Center for International Education. However, as of 2023, more than 13 thousand were registered (MINISTRY OF EDUCATION AND SCIENCE OF UKRAINE. INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS IN UKRAINE, 2023). Despite this, the geography of the countries of foreign students remains quite wide. The students from India are in first place, Chinese students are in second place, the students from Morocco are in third place (see Figure 1).

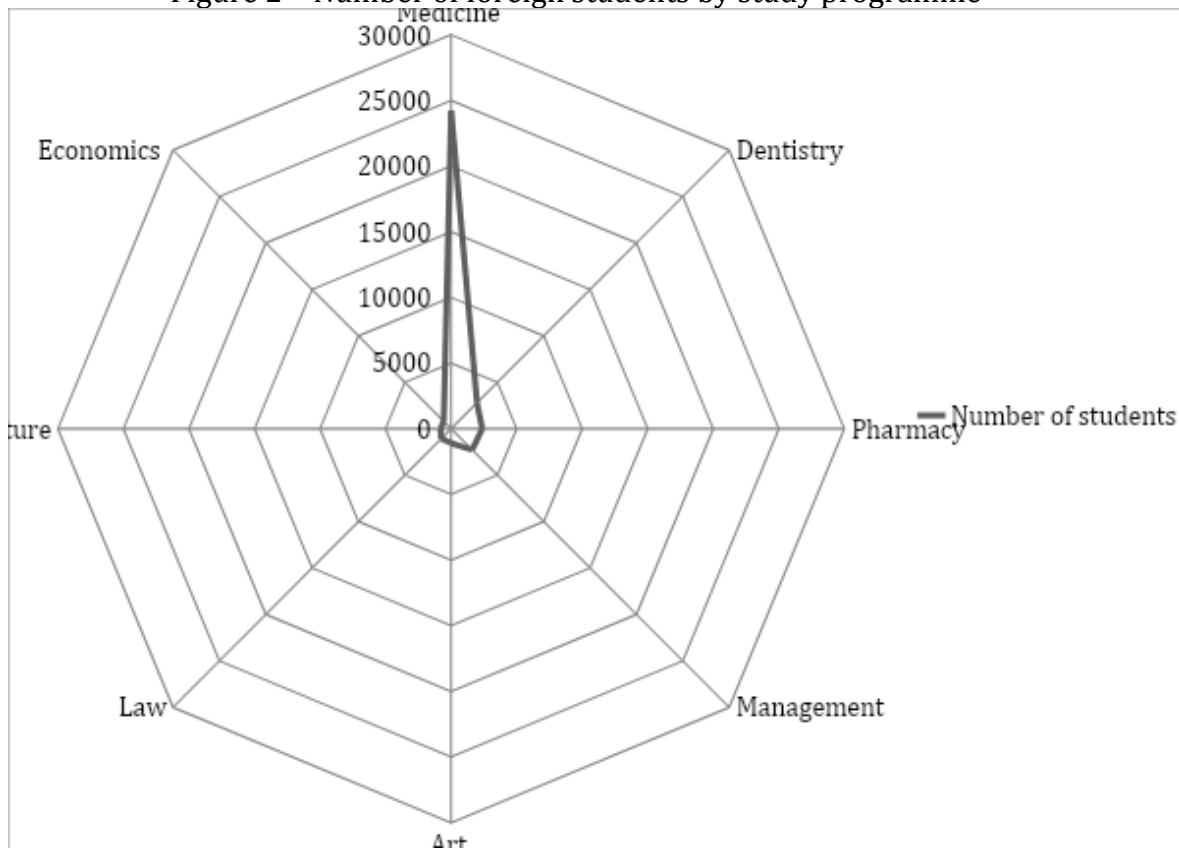
Figure 1 – Geography of foreign students studying at Ukrainian universities



Source: MINISTRY OF EDUCATION AND SCIENCE OF UKRAINE. INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS IN UKRAINE, 2023.

Medicine, dentistry, pharmacy, management, art, law, architecture, economics, etc. are the most popular specialties for foreign entrants. Most foreigners study for Bachelor's and Master's degrees; however, more than 1 thousand people are studying for postgraduate and doctoral degree, which is also an important indicator of the formation of an intercultural environment in Ukrainian universities (see Figure 2).

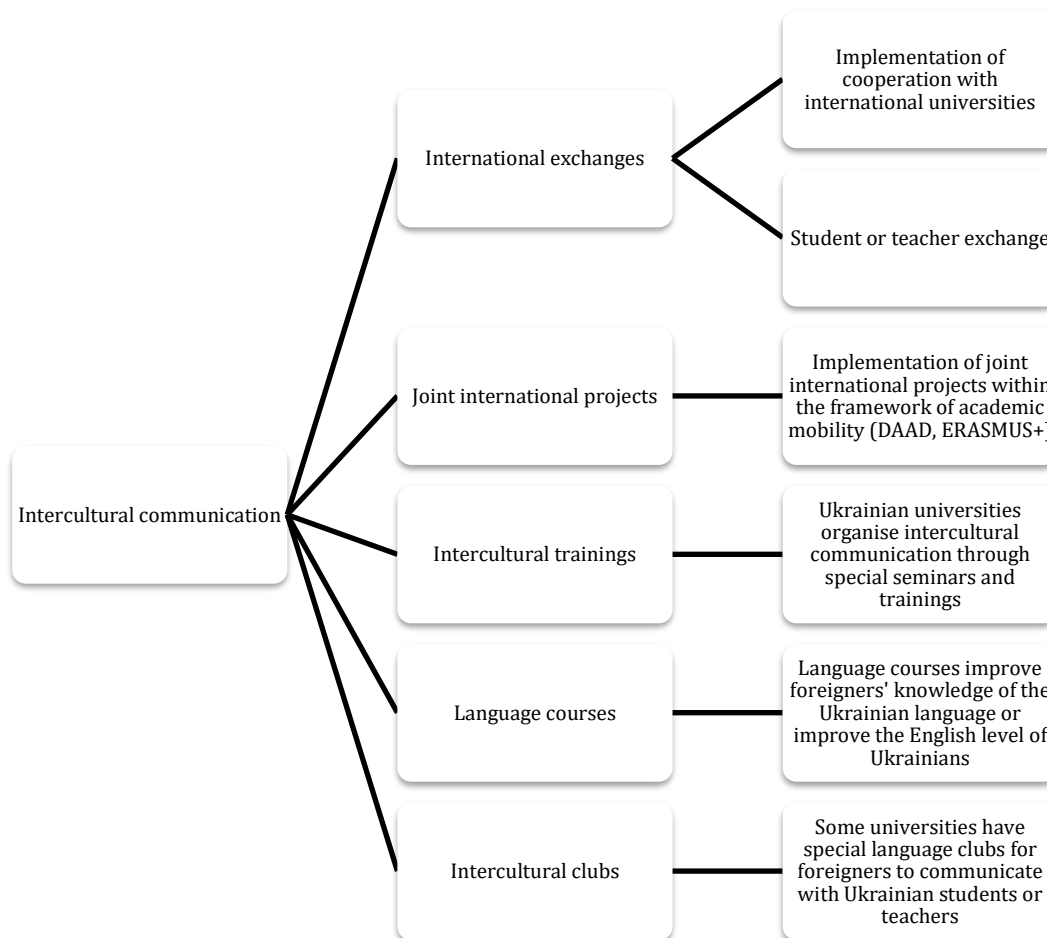
Figure 2 – Number of foreign students by study programme



Source: MINISTRY OF EDUCATION AND SCIENCE OF UKRAINE. INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS IN UKRAINE, 2023.

Therefore, despite the hostilities, foreigners are still studying in Ukraine. At the same time, as can be seen from Figure 2, almost a third of all foreign students are studying in medical specialties at Ukrainian universities. At the same time, intercultural communication in Ukrainian universities is formed in other ways. It is important to implement various initiatives and activities, including international exchanges, intercultural seminars, trainings, language courses, cultural events and exhibitions (see Figure 3).

Figure 3 – The main ways of forming intercultural communication in Ukrainian universities



Source: Adapted from NIKOLOVA (2021); SATTOROVICH (2020).

Thus, there are different ways of developing intercultural communication in Ukrainian universities that contribute to the formation of an open and tolerant educational space in which both teachers and students learn within the framework of intercultural interaction. As can be seen from Figures 1 and 2, the intercultural environment may consist of different representatives of cultures and nations, so it is important to tolerate their national feelings and beliefs. Despite this, there may be some difficulties in the Ukrainian system of higher education associated with the development of intercultural communication. Among them, language barriers play an important role. The Ukrainian language is official and taught at many faculties in the state, and this can be a difficulty for many foreigners who find it difficult to master Ukrainian. On the other hand, some faculties introduce teaching in English

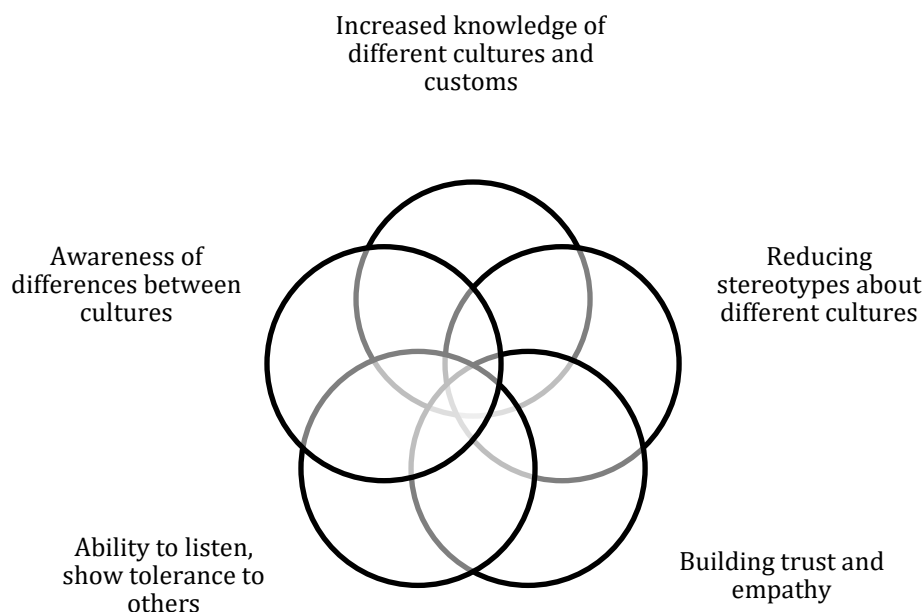
for foreigners, which can be a difficulty for Ukrainian teachers. At the same time, the difference in cultural views and values may be another important challenge. In particular, the understanding of ethics and categories such as respect, morality, and the role of gender may differ in many cultures (KOKKONEN et al., 2022). At the same time, inattentive awareness of certain cultural differences can in turn become a noticeable challenge in the implementation of the educational process.

Despite these difficulties, Ukrainian higher education institutions conduct intercultural interaction between all participants in the educational process through various educational events, seminars, academic mobility and the organization of intercultural clubs (RYABCHIKOVA, 2018). During the organization of various speaking clubs, students have to overcome many communicative challenges, using knowledge and skills of verbal and non-verbal communication, psychocultural difficulties associated with cognitive and emotional uncertainty (SATTOROVICH, 2020). For this reason, the role of the teacher as an intercultural mediator becomes noticeable. In particular, its role becomes important in the transfer of knowledge about language and culture. Separately, it is important for the teacher to inform applicants for education about what the acceptance of another person depends on and how individual contacts with other cultures will allow them to get more information about others, and therefore about themselves (KRYLOVA, 2023). Despite this, it is especially important that interaction in the educational space be formed on feelings of trust and respect, and ensure equality between teachers and students. For this reason, the role of the teacher, his tolerant activity in the context of the formation of interaction with applicants for education, which contributes to the next Europeanization of learning, is important. Therefore, in the environment of intercultural communication, the role of the teacher should be based on several fundamental principles:

1. Polite attitude to intercultural diversity.
2. Promoting cultural harmony.
3. Formation of the social structure of the learning environment so that all participants in the process can communicate effectively with each other.
4. Developing the skills of awareness of all participants in the educational process regarding cultural diversity and forming a sense of respect for all cultures and traditions (KOKKONEN et al., 2022; BINDER, 2017).

Thus, intercultural communication is important in resolving certain intercultural conflicts that may arise with foreign students. Developing intercultural interaction skills helps individuals understand individual national and cultural differences, find common ideas and achieve peaceful solutions to problems (ZHUK, 2023). Figure 4 presents the main aspects of the role of intercultural communication in resolving intercultural conflicts.

Figure 4 – Main aspects of the role of intercultural communication in resolving intercultural conflicts



Thus, the implementation of effective intercultural communication promotes awareness of the difference between different cultures, increases knowledge about different cultures, their customs and values, reduces stereotypes through joint

interaction and conversations of all participants in the educational process. This intercultural dialogue helps identify common values, attitudes and traditions. This, in turn, contributes to increasing justice and reducing inequality, as well as the formation of ideals of tolerance and solidarity between all cultures within the framework of higher education in Ukraine.

Discussion

In the course of this work, the importance of international communication for the further development of Ukrainian higher education was demonstrated. Despite the hostilities, a sufficient number of foreigners from different parts of the world study at Ukrainian universities. Therefore, modern applicants and teachers should have the skills of international communication, tolerate representatives of other cultures and understand their values. Besides, despite the hostilities, academic mobility programs are also developing in Ukraine, which promotes intercultural exchange and the formation of an intercultural environment. In part, these thoughts are confirmed in the work of MARAIEVA (2022), which highlights an innovative view of the formation of a new worldview in connection with the development of information and communication technologies. In general, modern scientists prove that the development of information technology has influenced the improvement of the educational process, increasing the motivation of applicants for education and the development of academic mobility (ALIYEVA et al., 2023). This, in turn, contributes to the intercultural discussion of both students and teachers by means of technology in different parts of the world. Opinions on the importance of intercultural communication are also confirmed in other studies that, based on a survey, determine how students understand the experience of studying intercultural interaction through an online environment (KOKKONEN et al., 2022). The study confirmed that students gained confidence in communicating with students from other universities, with people of different backgrounds and improved their communication and interaction skills (KOKKONEN et al., 2022). Modern scientists generally emphasize the effectiveness of using technologies that

improve students' perception of information and allow them to learn from different places of residence (TURCHYN et al., 2023; KAMINSKY, VIESOVA, 2022). These aspects also resonate with this study, since modern means of communication allow implementing intercultural communication in the educational environment of the university.

The work also partially confirms the connection between the development of intercultural communication and the overcoming of established stereotypes about certain cultures. This problem is more fully addressed in the studies of ZHUK (2023) and BRASLAUSKAS (2023). In particular, BRASLAUSKAS (2023) demonstrates the importance of developing critical and creative thinking to overcome intercultural stereotypes. The author demonstrated how these two different types of thinking can change a person's perception of certain established thoughts and stereotypes. Despite this, it is worth considering that education based on intercultural communication is in constant transformation and change, which this study showed. However, the scientists suggest that such a paradigm transformation, or turbulence, actually demonstrates a wide intensive development of the social sciences and humanities (KOKKONEN et al., 2022). Additionally, it should be emphasized that the Russian aggression against Ukraine influenced the attitude of Ukrainians to representatives of other cultures, which affected a much greater tolerance for foreigners. Even the existence of military challenges did not distract foreign students from Ukrainian educational institutions completely, although some of them had to adhere to official recommendations and leave the war-torn country. The obtained results allow to agree with the conclusions of SYDORENKO (2024) that, despite the circumstances, the role of teachers is important, which in conditions of instability become the main intermediaries in intercultural communication. Based on such cooperation between teachers and applicants for education, tolerant work is formed during the educational process, which allows to further bring Ukrainian university education to European and world levels.

The proposed study undoubtedly has certain limitations that are associated with the methodology used. In particular, the search for the necessary scientific publications by keywords took place primarily in Ukrainian and English. This range

of sampling of research sources is quite wide, but it has certain limits: first of all, it is possible to skip important scientific publications published in journals in other languages. Also the chronological framework of the studied works may be a limitation. One talks about the use of the latest research, although to implement the dynamics of the development of intercultural communication in Ukrainian institutions of higher education, it is possible to turn to ancient research. True, it is difficult to find research on such issues in older scientific works, since researchers, in general, did not pay much attention to this issue. These limitations do not undermine the overall level of work, but demonstrate further vectors for the possible strengthening of its results in the future.

Conclusions

In modern higher education, the role of intercultural communication is extremely high. The Russian invasion complicated the Ukrainian experience of its implementation, but interaction with foreign students has not stopped. In Ukrainian higher education institutions, tangible attention is paid to the process of forming a tolerant attitude to the national feelings and beliefs of foreigners. Language barriers are distinguished among the main difficulties, since the knowledge of foreign languages among Ukrainian youth is at a fairly moderate level. On the other hand, although the state Ukrainian language is official and taught at many faculties, its mastery can be difficult for foreigners, since it speaks of various lexical and grammatical constructions. The experience of introducing teaching in English for foreigners at some faculties is important, which greatly simplifies communication, but complicates the work of Ukrainian teachers. At the same time, the difference in cultural views and values may be another important challenge. In particular, the understanding of ethics and categories such as respect, morality, and the role of gender may differ in many cultures. At the same time, inattentive awareness of certain cultural differences can in turn become a noticeable challenge in the implementation of the educational process.

Attention is drawn to the important role of teachers, who in modern working conditions turn not so much into the main source of information as into intercultural mediators who carry out intercultural verbal and digital interaction between all participants in the educational process. For this reason, it is necessary that teachers inform applicants of the importance of cross-cultural ties and the free exchange of views and information. In the modern educational process and environment of intercultural communication, teachers should be polite to cultural diversity, contribute to the formation of cultural harmony, create social structures of the educational environment, ensuring the most tolerant level of communication, develop the skills of awareness of all participants in the educational process regarding cultural diversity and the formation of a sense of respect for all cultures and traditions. Thanks to such constant work, it is possible to achieve an appropriate

level of communication, which will help avoid conflicts between Ukrainian and foreign students. The development of intercultural interaction skills will allow educational applicants to understand individual national and cultural differences, find common ideas and achieve peaceful coexistence and cultural exchange.

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