

# Enhancing reflection activity as a condition for the effective development of students' humanitarian culture in the process of learning a foreign language

## Mejorar la actividad de reflexión como condición para el desarrollo efectivo de la cultura humanitaria de los estudiantes en el proceso de aprendizaje de una lengua extranjera

PAVLOVA Lubov, PULEKHA Irina, VTORUSHINA Yuliana, RAKHIMOVA Nuria, AKASHEVA Tatiana 1

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#### ABSTRACT:

Teaching a foreign language can be an effective means of students' personal social and humanitarian development. However, the existing system of teaching foreign languages in higher education institutions does not fully implement the humanitarian development potential of foreign language education. These tasks can be achieved by elaborating technologies and methods for the holistic development of students by means of a foreign language. The article deals with the issues of enhancing students' reflection activity in the process of mastering a foreign language. Furthermore, the definition of humanitarian culture, which is considered as an integral and multicomponent characteristic of a socially mature person, is presented. It is proved that reflection and self-reflection ability is an important

#### RESUMEN:

Enseñar un idioma extranjero puede ser un medio eficaz para el desarrollo social y humanitario personal de los estudiantes. Sin embargo, el sistema existente de enseñanza de idiomas extranjeros en instituciones de educación superior no implementa completamente el potencial de desarrollo humanitario de la educación en idiomas extranjeros. Estas tareas se pueden lograr mediante la elaboración de tecnologías y métodos para el desarrollo integral de los estudiantes por medio de una lengua extranjera. El artículo trata sobre los temas de mejorar la actividad de reflexión de los estudiantes en el proceso de dominar un idioma extranjero. Además, se presenta la definición de cultura humanitaria, que se considera como una característica integral y multicomponente de una persona socialmente madura. Está comprobado que la

component and condition for the development of humanitarian culture in an individual. The practical significance of this study is to develop a methodology for enhancing students' reflection activity in the process of mastering a foreign language, including a set of stages, forms, means and techniques that ensure an effective development of humanitarian in students.

**Keywords:** foreign language education, methodology, enhancing students' reflection activity, reflection ability, development of students' humanitarian culture.

capacidad de reflexión y auto reflexión es un componente y condición importante para el desarrollo de la cultura humanitaria en un individuo. El significado práctico de este estudio es desarrollar una metodología para mejorar la actividad de reflexión de los estudiantes en el proceso de dominar una lengua extranjera, que incluye un conjunto de etapas, formas, medios y técnicas que aseguran un desarrollo efectivo del humanitarismo en los estudiantes.

**Palabras clave:** Educación en idiomas extranjeros, Metodología, Mejora de la actividad de reflexión de los estudiantes, Capacidad de reflexión, Desarrollo de la cultura humanitaria de los estudiantes.

## 1. Introduction

Considering the orientation of the Russian education system towards entering the world educational space, there is a tendency to upgrade foreign language education. Within the framework of the competence paradigm in education, the task is to form a personality with effective self-realization and active interaction with others. Key competences of value-semantic orientation, communication, reflection, and constant self-education and self-development, which are holistically integrated in person's humanitarian culture as an integral individual characteristic, is of importance (Pavlova, 2016). It is referred to rethinking the goals, content, principles and methods of teaching a foreign language in order to achieve personal learning outcomes.

Thus, the relevance of this study arises from the need to find new educational practices and methods, ways and conditions that realize the humanitarian development potential of foreign language education at the university.

The research object is the process of developing humanitarian culture in students while learning a foreign language at the university.

The purpose of the study is to develop methods for enhancing students' reflection activity as a condition to advance humanitarian culture when mastering a foreign language.

The novelty of this methodology implies the organization of educational and cognitive activities as a process of cultural reflection, so that the students know how to reflect on their activity, their speech and nonverbal behavior, the values of their own and other cultures. Due to the activation of reflection activity, students form a reflection attitude to knowledge, assimilated values, activities, and themselves as subjects of activity, which, as a whole, ensures improvement of humanitarian culture in students.

The hypothesis of the study is as such: a group of students with a Linguistics major using the developed methodology to enhance reflective activity when learning a foreign language will demonstrate a higher level of reflection ability than students taught on the basis of traditional reproductive methods.

## 2. Literature review

This article is based on the analysis of Russian and foreign literature. Many works consider the possibilities of a language in the process of individual's socialization and justification of the leading role of a language in it (Karaulov, 2004; Vereshchagin & Kostomarov, 2005; Mechkovskaya, 2009; Ter-Minasova, 2000; Pesina & Druzhinin, 2016; Nazarova & Pesina, 2016).

A number of scholars consider a foreign language as the most important means of personality's social development (Ariyan, 2011; Safonova, 2014; Sysoyev, 2015). This approach is very relevant for us, because we address a foreign language as one of the important ways to master the mankind's social experience. However, it does not cover exhaustively all the possibilities to achieve personal development results of foreign language education. In particular, it seems important to expand and enrich the possibilities of students' personal development as regards their humanitarian culture in this process.

Modern scientific pedagogical research (Slastenin & Chizhakova, 2003; Shiyanov, 2007;

Zapesotsky, 2002) views humanitarian culture as a set of universal moral values, as the main element of human exposure to the conditions and standards of existence in society. Such an interpretation, in our view, is too general, therefore it is necessary to include this concept regarding the person as a subject of humanitarian culture and the subject of its acquisition and development. This made it possible to define the personal humanitarian culture as an integral feature of a socially mature individual, which includes a system of humanistic value orientations, and such manifestations of the personality as the reflection ability and social subjectivity, which determine the activity-based attitude of the individual to the world and man, his key competences of continuous self-education, self-regulation and self-improvement (Pavlova & Savva, 2017). Thus, the reflection ability is an important part of the concept under consideration.

We have also figured out that the development of a personal humanitarian culture in the process of foreign language education is inextricably linked with the processes of understanding, awareness, and the formation of one's own personal value relation to socio-cultural knowledge, one's own activities, i.e. with the process of reflection.

In philosophical and psychological research, reflection is considered as a form of human activity of a socially developed person, aimed at understanding all of one's own actions and their laws; reflection is an activity of self-knowledge that reveals the specifics of the human spiritual world (Alekseev, 2002; Karpov, 2004; Savva et al., 2017; Gnevek et al., 2017).

The most relevant within the context of our issues under study are the works by G.P. Schedrovitsky (2005), V.V. Semenov and S.Yu. Stepanov (1987), researching reflexive processes in the psychology of thinking. G.P. Shchedrovitsky (2005) considers reflection as a special kind of activity, the basis for which, in his opinion, is reflexive output, which is manifested in the individual's change of his former position, that of the "agent", to a new, external position related to the future projected activity and to the former already completed activities.

I.N. Semenov and S.Yu. Stepanov (1987) substantiate the role of reflection in solving creative problems, where reflection is viewed as an awareness of the ways, means and bases of mental activity that control it. The mentioned works contribute to the understanding of the general principles of reflection development, but do not reveal the ways to develop personality reflection when studying, in particular, a foreign language.

In this regard, it is markedly important to conclude that the acquired social experience in a different culture is comprehended from the point of view of its significance, novelty, relevance and compliance with its own moral attitudes and spiritual values, identifying individual sense, etc. So, in the relationship and interaction of cognitive and communicative processes, there are ample opportunities to develop the reflection ability of an individual while learning foreign languages. Beyond that, on the basis of reflection, not only assessment, but also self-correction of personal qualities and the organization of one's own activity are carried out (Ariyan, 2011).

Considering the above, we view the reflection ability as the most important part of a person's humanitarian culture. The main features of the reflection ability, developed by means of a foreign language, include: the ability to practice the reflection of a new socio-cultural experience, its activities; to adjust behavior, including a speech one; to apply methods and means of cognition, training and self-control for one's intellectual development and the desire for self-improvement in all spheres of life.

Despite a rather active upgrade of certain aspects of the implementation of the humanitarian development potential of foreign language education at universities (Sysoyev, 2015; Anikanov, 2015; Nikitina, 2018; Teltevskaia & Shorina, 2018; Kozhevnikova, 2017; Carson & Fisher, 2006; Maclellan, 2016), it is difficult to speak about the existence of a holistic approach to its the decision. The prevailing practice of teaching foreign languages in higher education allows stating that the methodological aspect of the problem has not obtained theoretical and practical completion. Guided solely by a pragmatic approach to learning, the university often turns students' personal development in teaching foreign languages into a spontaneous, poorly controlled process, thereby learning is deprived of its basic possibilities of creating conditions for students' full socialization. In order to overcome these

shortcomings and ensure the individual development nature of foreign language education, it is necessary to make significant adjustments, in particular, in terms of developing methodologies that contribute to enhancing reflection activity as a condition for the improvement of humanitarian culture in students by means of a foreign language.

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### **3. Materials and methods**

To achieve the required solutions (determining the categorical apparatus of the problem, development and testing methods for enhancing students' reflection activity when teaching a foreign language, developing diagnostic tools, evaluating the results of implementing the technique), the following research methods were used: theoretical methods (analysis, interpretation and generalization), empirical methods (observation, conversation, questionnaire, testing, experiment), methods for processing results (statistical methods for processing research results, methods of computer data processing and visual presentation of the results).

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### **4. Research results**

The most essential prerequisite for the successful development of students' humanitarian culture in the course of mastering a foreign language is the enhancement of their reflection activity. In the process of learning, this means that students make their own social and communicative activity the object of their thinking and influence, changing, perfecting or rebuilding it, which indicates their ability to reflect. It should also be noted that in the context of the development of students' humanitarian culture by means of a foreign language, the reflection and self-reflection processes promote the formation of the moral self-consciousness of the individual and the ability to self-control and self-regulation.

Elaborated in the course of the study, the method for activating reflection activity is aimed at developing humanitarian culture in students, and it is an integral set and operating procedure of personal, instrumental and methodological means aimed at ensuring the students' reflection activity in foreign language education at the university.

The subject of the proposed approach is the communicative interaction between the subjects of the educational process (teachers and students), organized on the basis of designing and systematizing the techniques, means and forms of development of reflection activity to achieve a sustainable predictable result: the formation of socio-cultural knowledge and skills and students' ability to reflect in the process of foreign language education in high school.

The main stages of the method of activating students' reflection activity in foreign language education are: motivational and preparatory, informational and organizational, communicative and activity-based and diagnostic and results-based.

At the motivational and preparatory stage, an analysis and consideration of students' motives is carried out when organizing humanitarian developmental, communicative and cognitive activity. The need for self-esteem "objectifies" socio-psychological motives: to show oneself, to be at the level of the demands upon others and to get approval. The need for cognition, which is also realized in the receptive types of foreign language speech activities, is the basis of the following motives: to ask, to encourage active speech actions and to get some personally significant or just interesting information (Ariyan, 2011).

At the informational and organizational stage, the forecasting of communication situations, integrating linguistic, socio-cultural and interdisciplinary knowledge, is made. Mastering foreign language speech activity should be built as a process of socially communicative interaction in problematic social situations (Ariyan, 2011; Safonova, 2014; Pavlova, 2016). Such situations give rise to a mental state of intellectual challenge, in which the solution of the problem requires learners to designate their own moral position, contemplate the existing social and cultural experience of the individual (Pavlova, 2016; Pulekha, 2016; Rakhimova et al., 2018). Basically new in our study is that the point of reference for the mechanism of introspection is a value-centered problem-based situation, fostering verbal and cogitative activity, requiring the learner to express an active life position related to assimilable values and cultural models while communicating in foreign languages.

The communicative and activity-based stage implies the preparation of a series of tasks, forms and means of modeling the value-based, reflection-developing context of a foreign language learning and students' cognitive activity.

To enhance students' reflection activity, a complex of communicative reflection-actualizing tasks aimed at developing speaking skills is proposed. These exercises are aimed at integrating sociocultural experience through reflection and emotional experience of assimilable values, as well as the expression of their own assessments and socio-moral attitudes. The developed set of tasks includes socially-oriented discussions, social diagnostic problem-based tasks and intercultural trainings (Pavlova, 2016).

In a socially oriented discussion, the problems should address urgent social issues, combine national and universal values and ensure the comprehension of social patterns.

To meet students' cognitive needs a solution to social diagnostic issues is offered. It is known that a problem is a task whose independent solution is drawn, based on the known, to obtain new knowledge about nature and society (Ariyan, 2017). Socio-diagnostic problem-based tasks are aimed at expanding students' perceptions of various aspects of the social, cultural, and political life in the target languages countries grounded on the analysis and generalization of information received from authentic materials in reading and listening (Safonova, 2014).

At the stage of active acquiring of new socio-cultural experience and its reproduction, intercultural training is of particular importance. This technique involves a training of self-awareness, as a result of which students should become aware of themselves as representatives of a particular culture, comprehend the norms, values and rules of behavior in their culture. Conscious mastering the values and concepts underlying the native and foreign world views is inextricably linked with the development of critical thinking as a purposeful act of reflection, in which judgments are questioned, arguments are tested, own conclusions are formulated, which generally leads to qualitative changes in the personality in terms of developing the ability to regulate one's own activities (Kuklina & Cheremisinova, 2018; Vtorushina, 2006; Makhmutova et al., 2018).

We used cognitive workshops that give information about another culture; behavioral workshops teaching practical skills necessary for life in a different culture; and attributive trainings explaining social behavior from the point of view of another culture.

Diagnostic and results-based stage is a prognostic testing and monitoring the level of development of students' reflection ability in the context of applying the elaborated methodology.

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## **5. Results and discussion**

In an experiment aimed at testing the effectiveness of methods of enhancing students' reflection activity in the process of foreign language education, the fourth year students at the Language Department, Specialty Linguistics (147 persons in total) at the Nosov Magnitogorsk State Technical University took part. During the ascertaining experiment, the test "Determining the Level of Formation of Personal Reflection" (Carson & Fisher, 2006) was the main diagnostic tool. The results of the beginning-of-experiment assessment showed that students' reflexive abilities are mostly at low (on average – 40.7%) or average (45.2%) levels of development. Thus, the results of the ascertaining stage of the experiment confirmed the urgency of the problem of developing the reflection and self-reflection skills in students and made it possible to formulate the assumption about the interdependence of the level of reflection and the level of development of humanitarian culture.

Then three experimental and one test groups (EG and TG) were formed and experimental training was conducted in EG based on the developed methodology.

At the motivational and diagnostic stage, it was found that the main motives of students' participation in foreign language communication include: the desire to discourse upon, discuss, express their opinions, comment, advise, express their point of view, learn to speak in a foreign language about any issue, using adequate strategies of speech courtesy, to explain the observed phenomenon and understand the relationship among people.

At the informational and organizational stage, designing problematic communication situations on an interdisciplinary basis was carried out. These situations helped delve into the challenges of a social and moral nature that encouraged students' reflexive activity, rendering their cognitive activity a humanitarian and developing character. The analysis of various points of view within the framework of a problematic situation contributed to reflection and a better understanding of the meaning of values inherent in the culture of the target language country, as well as comprehension of the similarities or differences in the native culture values.

Within the framework of the communicative activity-based phase grounded on addressing students' needs and motives, the teacher posed a socially significant problem, or a series of issues for discussion, that were perceived by students as relevant and stimulated their communicative-cognitive motivation and reflection at foreign language classes. For example, students were asked to express their own point of view (for example, on the problem of punishment in school); to substantiate interpersonal problems in which the conflict between the rights, duties and needs of the individual arises. Such tasks motivate the expression of one's own attitudes, vital interests, assessments, make it possible to realize the proposed socio-communicative problem as relevant and contribute to the formation of socially valuable personal qualities.

In a socially oriented discussion, students developed a project of an imaginary "house of values" in which they substantiated the universal values which could be the "foundation" of a house, serve as a roof, walls and supporting structures. Using certain examples, students explained how these values are refracted in their native and foreign-language cultures, argued their choice, learned to critically estimate the values of a foreign-language culture, identify differences and identify common universal values. It has been revealed that these creative tasks contribute to the realization of students' individual qualities, the manifestation of their personal assessments, provide an understanding of global problems and fostering their sense of civic responsibility. Also, the described technique actualizes such personality traits as: critical thinking, the desire for evidence, readiness to listen and understand the interlocutor, to be responsible for their own words and actions.

When solving the social diagnostic problematic task "Speaking strategies of the British people in various communication situations", students were acquainted with the sociocultural and political realities of the target language country, the peculiarities of speech behavior of native speakers in comparison with the specifics of speech behavior in their native culture, integrated their knowledge and skills acquired when studying diverse humanitarian subjects.

The implementation of intercultural trainings showed that they contribute to the formation of skills of identifying cultural similarities between representatives of different cultures, developing mutual understanding, skills to express their feelings, understand the emotional state of a partner, and realize themselves as multicultural subjects, which contributes to the accumulation and integration of students' positive social and cultural experience.

Experimental training within the framework of the developed methodology was followed by measurements with the following tools: 1) "Tolerance Index" (Soldatova, 1998), 2) methods for determining the reflection in thinking (Karpov, 2004) to diagnose skills to record and analyze one's own gaps in knowledge and skills; 3) a questionnaire developed by us to identify student's ability for self-development (Pavlova, 2016).

Let us analyze the results of the formative experiment regarding changes in the level of development of students' reflection and self-reflection ability as a result of applying the developed technique (Table 1).

**Table 1**  
Changes in groups regarding the level of development of reflection and self-reflection skills during a formative experiment

Groups	The experiment results according to the activity criterion			Number of persons
	Low	Average	High	

	number	%	number	%	number	%	in the group
EG-1 (B)	20	41	22	45	7	14	49
EG-1 (End)	10	20	27	55	12	25	49
EG-2 (B)	20	40	23	46	7	14	50
EG-2 (E)	9	18	29	58	12	24	50
EG-3(B)	19	40	22	46	7	14	48
EG-3(E)	9	19	25	52	14	29	48
TG (B)	21	42	22	44	7	14	50
TG (E)	20	40	23	46	7	14	50

It has been revealed that the emphasis on value-centered materials and reflection-actualizing tasks when learning a foreign language is helpful in the development of basic indicators of the reflection ability in students of EG-1, 2, 3, namely: to promote critical reflection on the acquired values of the target language culture, take guidance in the world of values, develop the ability to manage their speech behavior; be tolerant towards other people and cultures.

We found out approximately similar motivation for continuous self-education and personal development in EG and TG, which indicates a general, rather high professional motivation of students. At the same time, students in EG -1; 2; 3 showed a higher level of ability to capture and analyze their own gaps in knowledge, skills and personal qualities and the ability to plan, monitor and evaluate their activities compared with the TG. This is due to the fact that without the training organized in a special way, students of the TG simply have no idea about the basics and principles of reflection; about the ways of determining personal development. The greatest difficulty for all students is the choice of adequate methods of self-education activities corresponding to their goals.

By the end of the experiment in EGs, the number of students with a high level as regards this criterion has reached 26% and with the average level – 55%. At the same time, 19% of students remained at a low level. On average, the number of students with a high level has increased in EGs by 1.9 times and that with a low level decreased by 2.1 times. The value of the absolute increase in the TG relative to the criterion under study shows that the number of students with a high level of development of reflection has remained unchanged.

On the basis of the data obtained, it can be concluded that the proposed method provides a higher level of development of the reflection and self-reflection ability in students in EGs in comparison with students of the TG, where the training was conducted according to the traditional methods.

Thus, the method of activating students' reflective activity, developed taking into account their motives in communication, cognition and self-expression, as well as the substantive content of foreign language speech, shows that the process of learning a foreign language actively contributes to the change and enrichment of the personality, manifested in the development of students' reflection and self-regulation skills. As a result of constant comparison and self-esteem, students develop the ability not only to see themselves from outside, but also to take into account the interlocutor's opinion and emotional state and to develop psychological flexibility and empathy.



## 6. Conclusion

Thus, this article summarizes the solution of an important scientific issue – the realization of the humanitarian and developing potential of a foreign language education having an important theoretical and practical significance. Activation of students' reflection activity when mastering a foreign language at a university is a condition for the effective development of humanitarian culture.

The elaborated method of enhancing students' reflection activity is aimed at developing their reflection and self-regulation skills. During the active reflection activity, students explore the target language culture, critically interpret values under study, learn themselves as a social subject and, therefore, get new knowledge about themselves as individuals (degree of their own sociability, tolerance, communicative empathy, psychological flexibility, etc.). On the basis of reflection, correction of personal qualities is carried out, as well as the restructuring of the elements of one's own activity into a new activity and determining its relationship with external conditions, that is, with goals, principles, content, techniques, technologies, means and learning process. As a result of such reflection, students see themselves as if from the outside, and this contributes to the formation of adequate self-esteem.

The study also concludes that the development of reflection contributes to combining the need for obtaining new and updating previously acquired knowledge, integrating new knowledge, ways to use it in various situations of foreign language communication, as well as the need for self-knowledge and self-improvement.

Consequently, in combination with the external methodological conditions provided by the teacher and accepted by students, the method of enhancing reflection activity as an internal condition for developing reflection and self-reflection ability creates favorable pedagogical space to develop humanitarian culture in students while mastering a foreign language.

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