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# Self-identification Features of Russian-speaking Primary Schoolchildren in the Cultural Aspect of Educational Activity as a Way to Optimize Learning a Foreign Language

Olga V. Starinina\*

*North Caucasus Federal University, 355017, Stavropol (Russia), 1 Pushkin street,  
nt0014@mail.ru*

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## Abstract

The paper focuses on considering the application of the principle of cultural specificity in teaching a foreign language to primary schoolchildren as well as to the study of the features of national self-identification's formation of primary schoolchildren in the general scale of national values of representatives of Russian-speaking culture.

Scientific data and materials have been obtained as a result of applying the following methods of investigation: analysis, comparison and generalization. The main research method was a semi-structured interview technique and an analysis of the scale of national value orientations of the Russian people.

In the given article we make an attempt at defining the level of ethnic and national identity of primary schoolchildren because in the modern educational process there is a need to use nationally-oriented teaching technologies and to expand the application of the principle of cultural identity in teaching a foreign language. For the successful development of foreign language education it is necessary to organize the educational process taking into account the national and cultural characteristics of a particular ethnic group.

*Keywords:* the principle of cultural specificity, cultural-specific features, national identity, ethnic identity, foreign language, self-identification, primary schoolchildren, traditional values.

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\* Corresponding author. E-mail: nt0014@mail.ru

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## **Introduction**

Despite the process of globalization in the world there is a tendency of nations to save a cultural identity and original value orientations. National identity means a sense of a person's belonging to a specific nation, ethnic group and culture, a view of his country and nation united by a common historical fate and basic national values that are passed down from generation to generation as they are stored in the cultural, religious and historical traditions of peoples. Each ethnic group has a unique picture of worldview which affects on the mental attitudes of society especially in the field of education.

As a result of the increased interest in these issues we can observe an active search for new approaches to education in the modern educational environment one of which is the principle of cultural specificity. Proclaimed by Disterweg (1956) the principle of cultural specificity is going through a peculiar period of rebirth today. In its general pedagogical meaning this principle implies the need to take into account the cultural-specific features of an ethnos when developing a nationally-oriented teaching technology as well as an analysis of factors that influenced the mental characteristics of a particular society: climatic and geographical conditions, the specificity of national life and education, features of socio-political history. An outstanding Russian teacher Ushinsky (1948-1952) argued that there is no same educational system for all nations. Each country should have its own national educational system that takes into account the cultural and historical realities of a particular ethnic group.

## **Purpose and objectives of the study**

The purpose of this study is to study the formation features of primary schoolchildren's self-identification in the general scale of values of the Russian-speaking culture's representatives as a determining factor in the process of optimizing educational activities when teaching a foreign language.

## **Literature review**

In the methodology of teaching foreign languages within the framework of a culturally-oriented paradigm, several approaches are distinguished such as linguocultural (Vorobev, 2008; Vereshchagin & Kostomarov, 1979; Milrud, 2016), sociocultural (Safonova, 2014; Bakhtin, 1979; Sysoev, 2009), intercultural (Khaleeva, 1999); Furmanova, 1994). Each of these approaches reveals the features of intercultural learning based on the principle of cultural specificity which equally takes into account the specifics of both the native culture and the culture of the country of learning language. The principle of cultural specificity

was widespread at the school of dialogue of cultures of Bibler (1996) and the culturological school of Valitskaya (1998).

A large number of scientific works is devoted to the Russian national school Lunina (2004), Belozertsev (2000), Goncharov (2009), as well as the structure of ethnic identity (Boronev & Pavlenko, 1994; Romanova, 1994; Stefanenko, 2006).

Acquaintance with any culture involves not only the study of the historical, geographical and economic characteristics of the country but also the research of the nation's way of thinking, familiarization with the peculiarities of the national mentality. The national mentality is characterized by a variety of traits, characteristics and manifestations of the same ethnic group. Each particular community has a national specificity of mental processes and conditions especially relationships, interactions and communication between people. The mentality and character of thinking, the national logic of world perception and world outlook have an impact on the perception of the surrounding reality, world outlook and communicative behavior of representatives of a particular ethnic group. Taking these features into account should become an integral part in the educational process since innovations introduced to facilitate and increase the effectiveness of training may not correspond to the mentality, thinking and lifestyle of students so much that they threaten their value system so that learning becomes impossible.

## **Methodology**

In our work we used comparative and descriptive research methods including analysis, comparison and generalization. A semi-structured interview technique was chosen as the main research method. We made an analysis of the scale of the Russian national value orientations to solve the tasks.

Numerous sociological studies show that in modern Russian society there is an increasing need for the distinctive development of Russia considering the peculiarities of Russian culture and national mentality based on Russian national values. In order to understand what is Russian culture it is necessary to determine the historically established traditional values of Russian people.

From the presented table it becomes clear that the basic value orientations of the Russian people have been preserved for centuries and are passed on from generation to generation. Mastering their own culture the people maintain the connection of times and show a high level of development of national self-awareness. National identity is formed in interethnic education which includes a respectful attitude to oneself, to people of their or other ethnicity. Particular attention should be paid to the early development of national identity of primary schoolchildren where the foundation for the comprehensive development of the

personality is laid, an intensive process of national identity's formation is underway, a sense of dignity, national pride, interest and respect for people of their own and other nationalities is being formed.

Table 1. Traditional values of Russian people

<b>Patriotism</b>	Love and extraordinary devotion to Russia, homeland, their people, their small homeland, the desire to serve for the good of the country and deep respect for the many nations of both their own country and beyond.
<b>Family</b>	Love and fidelity, health, respect for parents, care for elders and younger.
<b>Social Solidarity</b>	National freedom, justice, mercy, honor, dignity, compassion, empathy, warmth, generosity, simplicity and tolerance.
<b>Language</b>	Language is the spiritual value of the Russian people which reflects the national character, lifestyle, traditions, customs and system of cultural values.
<b>Religion</b>	Consciousness which is understood as an interethnic and interfaith way of achieving national harmony.
<b>Collectivism</b>	The need to exist together with your society is one of the most striking features of the Russian people. The goals and interests of the team are always higher than the personal interests and goals of a single person.
<b>Culture</b>	Art, literature, beauty, harmony, the spiritual world of person.

Awakening the national identity of younger schoolchildren is a complex process that not only helps schoolchildren relate to one or another nationality but also form their ideas and attitudes towards the culture of their people and peoples of other countries. According to Likhachev (1998) the real values of culture develop in contact with other cultures.

## Results

In accordance with the stages of the child's mental development and age-related features the process of ethnic and national identity's formation of primary students goes through a number of stages. Swiss scientist Piaget (1994) distinguishes three stages in the development of ethnic characteristics. At the first

age of 6–7 years the child acquires the first unsystematic knowledge of his ethnicity. At the second stage (8–9 years) the child already refers to his ethnic group and knows the nationality of the parents and the name of the country of residence. At the third stage at the age of 10–11 years ethnic identity is fully formed. The child notes the uniqueness of the history and culture of his country.

Consequently the ethnic self-identification of primary schoolchildren is a process of identifying a child with a certain ethnic community. To identify the level of ethnic identity we conducted a study whose purpose was to determine the degree of ethnic awareness of younger students. To solve this problem we used a semi-structured interview technique by Romanova (1994). This technique uses 11 questions. (*Annex 1*). If the child answered positively to 1 to 4 questions then he has a low awareness of ethnic identity, if 5 to 11 questions received a positive answer then we can talk about a high degree of awareness. In the course of our study 30 children aged 8-10 years were interviewed. According to the results of the study 81% of the pupils surveyed answered 5-11 questions positively.

#### Ethnic identity of primary schoolchildren

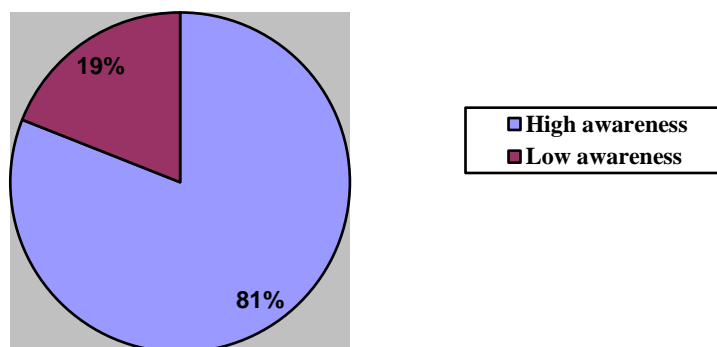


Figure 1. A level of awareness of primary schoolchildren's ethnic identity

Based on these results we can conclude that children of primary school age have a fairly well-formed sense of national identity and there is a high level of awareness of ethnic identity. These results suggest that in the educational process there is a need to use nationally-oriented teaching methods especially in the context of foreign language education where the so-called “dialogue of cultures” takes place where on the basis of the universal factor the common feature between the cultures of the native country and country of learning language is determined but at the same time the national originality of each culture stands out. According to Bakhtin (1979) with such a dialogical meeting of two cultures they do not merge and mix. Each culture preserves its unity and open integrity.

## **Discussions**

The problem of integrating culture into the system of foreign language education is one of the most important in the methodology of teaching foreign languages. Over several decades a large amount of information about the role and status of culture in the linguistic educational space has accumulated in Russia and abroad that demonstrate the progressive development of a culturally significant ideology, the emergence and approval of a holistic cultural linguodidactic paradigm.

Nowadays it seems that many approaches to teaching a foreign language still do not perform in our country the functions that are necessary in a school environment. The reasons for this undoubtedly lie in the field of culture. Being guided by features of the western mentality they in many respects run counter to value orientations traditional to the Russian society. That is why students of Russian schools are often reluctant to complete tasks that should be of keen interest by their content, form and diversity.

In intercultural studies of the indicated problem it observes a desire to determine the values of each culture and not to attach to it the features that characteristic to another culture for example Western communication.

The application of the principle of cultural specificity in the process of foreign language education makes it possible to organize the educational process in accordance with the peculiarities of a national and cultural nature, choose technologies and teaching methods, select the content of educational material in accordance with national-specific, psychological, pedagogical and age-specific characteristics of primary schoolchildren.

Currently the main task of foreign language teaching is the development of speech skills, teaching language as a real means of communication. A communicative-active approach helps to achieve this goal most effectively because it establishes a connection between the study and use of a foreign language. The application of a communicative and active approach in the teaching of Russian-speaking primary schoolchildren helps to solve the problem of strictly hierarchical relations between the teacher and students inherent in our society. This feature of the Russian educational system is completely not characteristic of the western one where the student is considered as an equal participant in the communicative process. In Western countries most people feel uncomfortable in hierarchical relationships. This kind of relationship causes them negative associations with the control, manipulation and suffocation of individuality. Therefore mentors and students from such cultures often prefer relationships with each other more reminiscent of friendship between equals. In our country it is assumed that the teacher should be treated with deep respect and reverence. The training is explanatory and focused on the teacher who in such a system is not perceived as an assistant and an equal participant in communication since students are afraid to express a point of view that is opposite to the

teacher's opinion. The communicative-active approach helps to solve this problem by realizing the educational process in such a way that students themselves actively participate in the educational process which is aimed directly at the students. And the teacher's task is to involve the child in the educational process, to observe and support, to help during the difficulties that have arisen, to take them into account in further training and also to create an atmosphere that would be conducive to communication.

Another distinctive feature of Russian society is collectivism, mutual assistance, friendliness, orientation to common goals and generally accepted norms of behavior, understanding of one's duty and priority of collective interests. Social goals are traditionally set higher than personal ones in contrast to Western society where the individualism of a person and everything connected with it are highly valued: personal space, private life, personal time, plans and obligations. Mutual assistance in studies is absent in the Western education system schoolchildren try to do without the help of classmates everyone copes with his difficulties. We do not approve of the desire for individuality and standing out from the team. Russian primary schoolchildren perceive classmates as friends whose direct duty is to help each other in the learning process for example to prompt during an answer, to write off, etc. Taking into account this particularity of Russian primary schoolchildren the most effective way is the use of work in pairs and groups in the educational process. This type of work helps students more willingly express their thoughts, correct each other and find mistakes as Russian-speaking younger students feel more comfortable and freer in conversation with their comrades.

Russian society is characterized by traditionalism, the desire for constancy, unwillingness to change the usual way of life. Education in our country has always been seen as a serious occupation requiring a huge investment of time and effort. Knowledge of a foreign language was always highly valued and was an important achievement both for a person learning a foreign language and for a family as it was symbol of a certain social status. This feature of the national attitude to the study of a foreign language is important to consider when choosing methods and training materials. The teaching methodology characteristic of Western society does not correspond to the Russian school with its traditional academism. This is one of the reasons why Russian younger student accustomed to working according to the traditional method perceive with distrust and unwillingness new techniques and methods of working in the class.

## **Conclusion**

In a situation where in many cultures there are disagreements about the role of the teacher in the learning process as well as different views on the personality of the student it becomes important to use the principle of cultural specificity in learning as well as the using of different teaching approaches and the connection

of these approaches with the mentality, way of thinking nation and types of its culture. It is necessary to orient the process of teaching a foreign language to the students themselves, i.e. organically realize the educational process in accordance with the characteristics of the national mentality of the trainees. This concept of training will prepare students for real communication with representatives of other cultures in the domestic and professional fields.

From this we can conclude that learning takes place within a specific cultural context and only within that context we can talk about “effective teaching”. And therefore to argue that what works well in one sociocultural environment will also work well in another means completely ignoring the fact that teaching based on the Western cultural tradition and views on education cannot lead to effective results in teaching a foreign language to Russian schoolchildren with their culturally specific features.

It follows from this that there cannot be any universal technologies and approaches in teaching a foreign language that can be equally successfully used in different national and cultural contexts. The principles and approaches to teaching a foreign language should always be addressed to a specific national audience taking into account belonging to a particular culture.

*Annex 1.*

#### **Questions for interviews on the study of ethnic identity of primary schoolchildren.**

1. Do you know that people of different nationalities live in the world?
2. What nationalities do you know?
3. What do you think is the difference between people of different nationalities?
4. How did you find out that people come from different nationalities?
5. What is your nationality?
6. What about your parents?
7. What country do you live in?
8. What are the inhabitants of your country called?
9. And what are they? (It is proposed to describe a typical representative of this nationality.)
10. What do you know about national holidays and customs?
11. If you were offered to choose a nationality which one would you choose?

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