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Cultural Universals as a Means of Common Human Values Assimilation in Foreign Language Learning

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Abstract

The relevance of the work is due to the fact that a university graduate must be proficient in a foreign language as a means of communication in the context of a cultures and civilizations dialogue in the modern information environment. They must have universal value orientations and the world culture assimilation motivation.

The cultural universals in the educational process contribute to the humanistic educational environment, the culture erudition high level and a stable positive attitude to universal human values constituting the basis of the world culture. Pedagogic artistic aids (artistry component) used in foreign language teaching are aimed at assimilating the cultural human values to which a person is involved in the process of life and education.

The purpose of this study is to justify and experimentally test the effectiveness of the extra artistic component application for the universal values positive attitudes formation and the assimilation in foreign language training by means of active learning forms. The main research methods are pedagogical experiment, monitoring, testing, and statistical method for the processing of the research results. The experiment involved 62 first-year students of the Automechanical faculty in Naberezhnye Chelny Institute located in the Republic of Tatarstan, aged 17-19.

On the whole, we consider that the artistic component with humanistic orientation including means of ethnopedagogy, poems and popular songs, revealing cultural universals, reflects the mankind spiritual and moral priorities, people's attitude to reality and introduces students to other and their own cultures in foreign language learning. It is based on the needs of students, meets the curriculum scientific and pedagogical requirements and characterized by: the communicative cognitive emotional and practical training aspects integration; artistic education means, reflecting cultural universals; a variety of agon learning forms.

Keywords: cultural universals, artistic component, assimilation, creativity, universal values, sayings, educational activities, humanistic orientation, means of ethnopedagogy, agon principle

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Introduction

In the era of global changes and problems (the political situation tension, interstates conflicts, social inequality, the threat of terrorism, environmental disasters, morality decline) the humanistic education paradigm remains in demand. Safekeeping of spiritual universal human values created by peoples over the centuries, introducing the younger generation to the world culture is one of the most important tasks of modern education. The universal human values interiorization remains a priority and takes place in terms of education and self-education, organized on the basis of a person's emotional comprehension and creative development, mainly, of the world culture samples. They concretize the universal norms content, moral and ethical principles, universally valid concepts and humanistic representations that represent the foundation for the individual's humanistic and complex value orientations formation. The foreign language teaching to students of different nationalities is determined by the principle of the universal values priority, ideas of humanism, recognition of the contribution of various peoples to the world culture heritage. Universal value orientations should not only accompany a person at all stages of his/her life, but should also be reflected in pedagogical activity (Gershunsky, 1992). Common features of cultures called universals are being formed in the process of globalization. Universalism is understood as a collective concept, revealing the community of peoples inhabiting our planet. For many centuries a particular community (civilization, state, nationality, etc.) has created its own culture, which accompanies an individual throughout his/her life and is transmitted from generation to generation. As a result, many cultures have arisen. Cultural universals exist because all people in the world are similar physically, have the same biological needs and face common problems that the humanity poses to the environment. People are born and die; therefore, all nations have traditions and customs associated with birth and death. People live together; they have songs, dances, games, greetings, labour division, etc. Cultural universals are peculiar variations of development, elements of cultures: norms, values, rules, traditions, properties inherent in all cultures, regardless of geographical location, historical time and social structure. The American sociologist Parsons (2004) substantiated the existence of evolutionary universals (a system of communications, education, kinship, religion, technology, social stratification and cultural legitimization, bureaucracy, a market economy, social norms, and democratic associations).

Cultural universals are a kind of the civilization experience. No matter what nationality a person belongs to, no matter what time he/she is born, what views and ideas he/she adheres to, and no matter what social environment he/she belongs to, there is a certain system of signs that encodes common ideas for all people on Earth about the world and about interaction with it. This happens because all representatives of the human race live according to the same biological laws, they have the same needs, they are all equal in front of the tasks that nature sets before them. Culturologists distinguish more than 80 universals: tools manufacture, joint

work, body decoration, games, dancing, sports, language, education, religion, rituals and many others. The role of cultural universals is seen in the fact that different cultures contribute to meet basic human needs (physiological, psychological and social). There are two opposite approaches to cultural universals:

1) relativism, which is based on the principle: Every culture must be comprehended due to its values and norms ...

2) ethnocentrism based on the principle: My culture is the best, and the rest is worse ...

The modern era is characterized by the formation of a planetary civilization, a universal human culture based on the idea of the world integrity. This process involves adopting the system of universal values, attitudes, and guidelines by representatives of various national cultures (Ignatyeva, 2014).

However, cultural universalization does not mean unification, i.e. reducing the diversity of national cultures to a single model. It is, first of all, about the relationship, mutual understanding of national cultures, which is possible subject to the adoption of common cultural prerequisites.

Purpose and objectives of the study

Purpose of the study is justification and introduction a special artistry component into the curriculum, containing cultural universals with a humanistic orientation; experimental verification of the effectiveness of the methodology based on active forms of training to ensure the students' universal human values assimilation in foreign language learning.

Literature review

According to the analysis of pedagogical literature, the concept of "a cultural universal" was not in the language learning models that take into account the cultural component. The study of cultural elements and culturally related linguistic units uses was carried out by direct comparison of both the formal aspects of statements and the substantive elements underlying them, which, in most cases, led to the strengthening of stereotypes.

In philosophical, cultural and sociological studies of value issues universal values are of lasting importance for the field of education and find reflection in pedagogical activity. We considered the universal values concept, the national and universal relationship, the provisions on universal human values, on the interconnection of national, interethnic and universal human values in the works of Bogomolova (1998) and Volkov (1974).

The theses of Gershunsky (1992) and Karakovsky (1993) are of particular interest to our research, as they recognize the priority of universal spiritual values in pedagogy. The provisions on the humanization of technical education in studies of Mukhametzyanova (1996) and Nemensky (1989) are of particular interest to our research, as they promote to prerequisites for humanistic education environment in a technical school.

As for the specificity of cultural universals classifications we observed the works of Murdock (1949) and Parsons (2004) to point out general behavioural categories presented in all cultures and applied in technical higher schools.

According to the main provisions of humanistic psychology about self-actualization revealed in studies of Frenet (1990) and Fromm (1992), facilitation is the only necessary function of a higher school teacher. A creative outcome to the task is filled with personal meaning; it becomes the moving force of speech behaviour, increases the student's self-esteem.

Analysis of the literature and scientific researches shows a large variety of assessments, opinions, attempts to explain cultural studies approaches to teaching a foreign language: Byram and Esarte-Sarries (1991), Galochkina (1999), Safonova (1996), Ter-Minasova (2000). The studies on the theory and methodology of foreign language communicative teaching, research on the theory and methodology of teaching a foreign language in a polysensory environment as well as pedagogical and psychological aspects of linguistic training in higher schools are discussed in the works of Kunin (2005), Galskova and Gez (2007), Kitaygorodskaya (1992) and others. Analyzing diverse current principles of value issues, we distinguished the pedagogical principles of optimization and artistry in foreign language training, discussed by Gutfrant (2011), Karpichenkova (1990), Steiner (1997), as the most applicable for our research. The communicative learning represents the process of intensifying communication between a teacher and students implementing a facilitative approach to training, creating positive emotional environment and preventing xenoglossophobia - the fear of learning foreign languages (Filippov et al., 2011).

All the above stated theoretical propositions say that universal human values interiorization in foreign language training is the most important indicator of future specialists' acculturation and language proficiency.

Methodology

The cultural phenomenon analysis and the mechanisms of its embodiment in the language convincingly demonstrated the uniqueness of each culture and the refusing comparison procedure productivity as an analytical mechanism. The thing is the category of comparison always implicitly assumes a single criterion

by which the comparison is made. Such a criterion, in turn, implies a greater or lesser amount of a certain attribute and its evaluation by means “more or less” and, depending on the quality of the attribute (positive or negative), further comparison by the parameter “bad or good”. However, the knowledge of cultures from an emic perspective, that is, from the point of view of their internal structure, with the subsequent relativization of cultural meanings, consists precisely in the fact that in most cases these meanings have such different nature that they are incommensurable. In order to avoid a direct comparison of cultures and the inevitably evaluating attitude to foreign language culture, the concept of “cultural universal” is introduced. On the one hand, it provides the basis for the cultures comparison with respect to global concepts that include all possible manifestations of some quality (combine both furniture and wood), and on the other hand, they make it possible at the initial stage of acquaintance with culture categories to avoid the extrapolation of their own cultural ideas’ to a foreign language culture. The embodiment of the cultural universals principle allows broadening the outlook of students, avoiding comparisons attributing positive or negative shades of meaning, and introducing into the conceptual apparatus of a linguistic personality the concept of “relativity” of cultural categories.

Since national cultures are diverse, cultural universals are used to overcome social, cultural, mental and linguistic barriers, bringing together different cultures, facilitating the acculturation of students and the universal values assimilation. Murdock (1949) and colleagues developed a classification of cultural components that have universal application. It contains 88 general behavioural categories presented in all cultures. With the similarities of universals, their specific cultural content may be different. For example, family forms of life can be found in all cultures, but some societies prefer monogamy (one spouse), others polyandry (several husbands), and third polygamy. Therefore, it is generally accepted that the true universal features are not the identity of the content, but the similarity of the classification. Cultural universals also include the phenomenon of language. All languages have vowels and consonants, similar grammatical forms. Speakers of different languages can discuss not only events, actions, people, but also existential states such as fear, hatred, enthusiasm, etc. These ones and other categories confirm that the existence of languages is based on universal mental operations. The cultural universals, studied at university and related to professional activities (globalization, marketing, industrial developments, business etiquette, technology, IT technologies, collective cooperation, etc.) help students to facilitate the world cultural achievements assimilation and intercultural interaction. This process is impossible without studying in the aggregate a foreign language and the dominants of world culture based on universal human values. The educational aim of a foreign language teacher is to ensure the transition of cultural universals with humanistic orientation through a component, containing artistry and folk pedagogy means, which have universal significance and ensure mutual understanding in dialogue communication, familiarization with universal spiritual human values, which contributes to the formation of the unified and at the same time diverse global world.

Results

General cultural universal moral priorities (ethical and aesthetic ideals, norms and patterns of behaviour, the best samples of traditions and customs), widely represented in ethnopedagogy, influence the harmonization of interethnic relations (Volkov, 1974). The national aspect contains the cultural and social features of other nations, mastered, mediated as a result of close mutual communication. In their essence, traditions, and, consequently, truly national ideas, are international. The better a person is acquainted with the spiritual heritage of various peoples, the easier it is for him/her to perceive another culture, and therefore, be more tolerant. The teacher organizes the study of foreign-language cultural phraseological and paremiological material based on the national samples of folk wisdom. Idioms, proverbs and sayings in verbal form conclude the practical experience of the people, their worldview and, most importantly, the attitude of people to the surrounding reality, an idea of their importance on earth, their valuable orientations. Proverbs include not only the popular “model of education”, but also the result of education - a “model of behaviour”. Proverbs and sayings reflect cultural universals: the historical experience of people, ideas related to work, people’s lives. The folklore means comparison of different nations provides an opportunity to make the study of a foreign language as an element of verbal cultural enrichment. “Honesty is the best policy”; “Live and let live”, “The best part of living is love and giving” - there are no such proverbs in Russian, as well as in English there are no analogues to Russian sayings: “Work is not a wolf, it won’t run away into the forest”, “Die yourself but save a comrade”. In idioms containing a complete thought, new words are more easily remembered, therefore, proverbs and sayings are firmly laid in memory. Consequently, the assimilation of ethnopedagogical means brings the student closer to the real cultural environment, which, ultimately, provides the teacher with the opportunity to effectively solve practical and educational tasks. The English idioms, proverbs and sayings learning enriches students’ vocabularies, promotes to learn the language imaginative system, develops memory and assimilates a student to folk wisdom.

The use of ethnopedagogical means in foreign language teaching is an effective way to the creatively students’ interest growth in co-learning the language and the world cultural values, increase their working power in the classroom, as they help to introduce the gaming element into the process of language acquisition (Kunin, 2005). For example, using the game situation “Complete the idiom with the choice”, students choose from the options proposed in the idiom “including” figuratively associative thinking: “Dead face, clock, pan, plate” (stone face), “Kick away, down, in, back” (bribe), “Duck, goose, chicken, turkey soup” (trifling matter) or “Give an adequate translation of a famous quote”: “Never be afraid to fail. Failure is only a stepping stone to improvement. Never be afraid to fail. Failure is just another step towards improvement”. Interpreting idioms, proverbs, sayings, students comprehend the variability of the language,

its expressive means, perceive and, what is especially valuable, “appropriate” the language, creatively respond, bringing in addition to an adequate understanding of the personal attitude, which is the basis for the acquisition of both linguistic skills, and aesthetic feelings.

The wide functional capabilities of phraseological units: proverbs, sayings, tongue twisters, conversational clichés allow to work out pronunciation in an easy way, master rhythmic and intonation skills, activate various grammatical phenomena, expand the students’ vocabularies, feel the emotional expressiveness of the language, develop memory and creative initiative (Gutfraint, 2011).

The simplicity of foreign language learning is directly dependent in the aggregate on figurative and semantic thinking, on understanding the material being studied. Poetry is remembered much faster than meaningless syllables (Artyomov, 1964). Students notice the rhythm of poetic forms and intensify activities for the development of poetic creativity from the word game (rhyming) - one of their fascinating activities to the poetic creativity abilities development, shown in their own poems.

The communicative learning with the gaming elements based on the agon activities (competition) represents the process of intensifying communication between a teacher and students implementing a facilitative (the way contributing to creating an enabling environment when the student achieves the correspondence of external behaviour to his/her inner experiences and shows his/her personality) approach to training. The special emotional state, the desire to win raises students’ interests in gaining knowledge and eliminate the main causes of xenoglossophobia (from the Greek *xenos* “alien” and *glossa* “language”) – the fear of learning foreign languages (Filippov et al., 2011) namely, the fear of being stupid, the fear of making mistakes, inability to succinctly express their thoughts, the fear of being worse than others, the fear of public speaking.

The world hit songs (Imagine, I just called, Words, Show must go on, Yesterday, etc) in the educational process form a tradition dating back to the origins of world civilization. They combine, on the one hand, easy-to-remember tunes and on the other hand, meaningful didactic lyrics about common values, maintaining students’ attention, improving memorization, and increasing thinking efficiency by mobilizing their internal energy resources.

Thus, the foreign language teacher’s main goal is to transmit the cultural universals through the artistic education means with universal significance and to ensure mutual understanding in dialogue communication. Poems, songs, idioms, proverbs and sayings keep and reflect the main cultural universals: eternal values, the people wisdom, the nations’ historical experiences and achievements, ideas related to people’s lives. They create additional opportunities for educational material optimization and teaching

process enhancing, arousing students' interest in foreign language learning, the world culture human values assimilation. The intensive learning with the agon gaming elements facilitates the intensifying communication teacher-students activities process.

Experimental work

According to Karakovsky (1993), the former headmaster of a secondary school in Moscow and the team headed by him, one should turn to those common human values - fundamental concepts, the orientation towards which give rise to good feelings in a person. Based on the above interpretation, Karakovsky (1993) identified and listed the following universal human values: Man, Family, Labor, Knowledge, Culture, Fatherland, Earth and World.

A diagnosis was carried out to identify the initial level of students' positive attitudes in the CG and EG to universal human values (Man as such, Man as another, Family, Fatherland, Earth, World, Knowledge, Labor, Culture) and to represent the experiment comparative analysis results, using the modified "Personality growth" questionnaire elaborated by Lizinsky (2003). The questionnaire is a list of 63 questions-judgments (7 propositions for each concept of value). Students expressed the degree of agreement or disagreement with the judgment in the point system from - 4 to + 4, entering their estimates in the form next to the number of the judgment.

Students gave answers to the statements such as, for example: there are nations and peoples that do not deserve to be treated well (-); even the strangest people with unusual interests should have the right to defend themselves and their views (+). Here are some more (+) positive statements in the questionnaire: in the classroom, we get acquainted with the family traditions of other countries. I also like when our family goes on a visit, we celebrate a holiday at a common table, as they do in civilized countries; thanks to the famous politicians' quotes in English classes, I am convinced that any conflict can be resolved without resorting to force; there are a lot of important professions in the world, I'll carry out any work that benefits society; getting acquainted with the life of various peoples, you understand that a housewife can also be a creative person; the more I study English proverbs, the more I find common human priorities in national and foreign cultures: in popular western hits, as well as in famous Russian songs, the main theme is love; reading poetry in English enriches one's own speech and motivates rhyming. The surname on the participant's form was not indicated.

From +15 to +28 points – LPA (lasting positive attitude) – the value is highly significant for students. They personal responsibility for maintaining value.

From +1 to +14 points – SPA (situational-positive attitude) – value matters to students, but the fact of the presence of value is perceived by them as natural.

From -1 to -14 points – SNA (situational-negative attitude) – attitude to the value, as a rule, consumer. Students try not to show their attitudes to the value.

From - 14 to - 28 points – LNA (lasting negative attitude) – the value for students does not matter, in all forms causes their rejection.

Table 1. Initial indicators of the attitude of students of the CG and the EG to universal human values

Students attitude to:											
Groups	Type of relations	Fatherland	Family	Earth (nature)	Peace	Work	Culture	Knowledge	Man	Man as another	To all values
Cg	LPA	5	7	3	1	1	4	3	3	0%	10,8%
	SPA	16	14	17	16	14	14	15	15	45,1%	48,8%
	SNA	10	9	10	12	13	9	11	10	35,5%	33,9%
	LNA	-	1	1	2	3	4	2	3	19,4%	6,5%
Eg	LPA	2	5	8	2	-	8	8	-	6,5%	13,3%
	SPA	18	18	18	15	21	15	16	16	41,9%	55,2%
	SNA	9	8	5	12	7	6	5	12	41,9%	25,8%
	LNA	2	-	-	2	3	2	2	3	9,7%	5,7%

The CG students studied English fulfilling special thematic creative tasks, doing lexical and grammar exercises based on artistry, learning words and phrases in lyrics poems. For this purpose, some manuals, textbooks, guidance (Baklanov, 2010; Kabakchi, 2004; Lebedinskaya, 2000; Skorodumova & Sutormin, 1992) were used in agony language training forms.

Table 2. Final indicators of the attitude of students of the CG and the EG groups to universal human values

Groups	Type of relations	Students attitude to:									
		Fatherland	Family	Earth (nature)	Peace	Work	Culture	Knowledge	Man	Man as another	To all values
Cg	LPA	6	9	5	3	-	6	4	4	3,2%	14,9%
	SPA	15	14	14	18	18	11	16	15	54,8%	48,8%
	SNA	10	8	11	10	12	11	11	11	32,2%	33,8%
	LNA	-	-	1	-	1	3	-	-	9,7%	2,5%
Eg	LPA	10	9	9	8	4	9	9	4	13%	25%
	SPA	15	14	15	15	18	12	15	18	51,6%	49,5%
	SNA	6	8	7	8	9	10	6	8	32,2%	25%
	LNA	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	3,2%	0,4%

The final comprehensive diagnostics to identify the level of positive attitude of students of the CG and the EG groups to universal human values after experimental work allowed to determine the rate of effectiveness of students' involvement in world culture and to record the changes that took place for each of the 9 values. The number of students in the EG groups with LPA increased by 11.7%, while in the CG groups it increased by 4.1%. The percentage of LNA to universal human values among students in the EG groups dropped from 5.7% to 0.4%. The absence of EG students from LNA towards the World, Family, Fatherland, Earth, Culture, Labour and Knowledge gives the right to affirm their personal growth and positive changes in relation to the universal values.

The results in the control groups studied English on the program in accordance with the curriculum also changed. In the CG groups the percentage of students with LPA to the World increased by 6.5%, Culture by 6.5% and Knowledge by 3.2%, perhaps in the language training and learning activities processes, as well as due to self-education and awareness of the young generation of the special role for their future. The graph below shows comparative percentages of the relations of students from the CG and EG groups to universal human values. During the experimental work, the students of the EG groups underwent changes in the direction of a stable positive attitude (LPA) to all universal values.

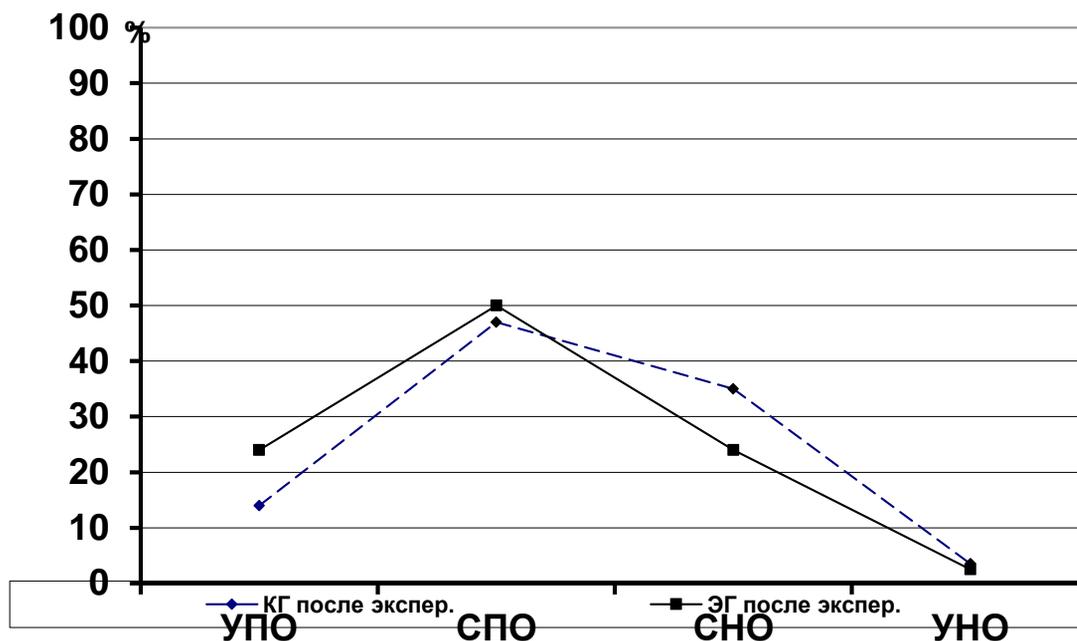


Figure 2. The graph of the final data of the LPA to the universal human values of the CG and EG groups

Table 3. The final comparative analysis of attitudes towards the universal human values in CG and EG groups

Relationships	CG		Increased (+) or decreased (-)	EG		Increased (+) or decreased (-)
	before	after		before	after	
	experiment			experiment		
LPA	12	19	+7	20	39	+19
SPA	71	75	+4	76	76	0
SNA	56	53	-3	43	35	-8
LNA	14	6	-8	14	3	-11

According to the comparative data presented in the Table 3, it is quite simple to determine quantitative changes in the steadily positive and steadily negative relations of students of the CG and EG groups to universal human values before and after the experimental work.

Discussions

At university the process of foreign language training is bidirectional: the world culture values' interiorization is accompanied by the language skills improvement. The process of the world cultures' values assimilation is complex; it takes time, immersion in the cultural environment, and thorough deep language learning. Artistry materials, containing cultural universals and representing the best spiritual and moral values, create additional opportunities for enhancing educational process, widening the students' outlooks and erudition, arousing their motivation and interest in foreign language learning through world culture achievements assimilation. It is necessary to emphasize while learning rhymes, limericks, riddles during the academic year some students in the experimental group intensified their learning playing word games so called rhymes creation and succeeded in writing their own little verses. As a result of introducing an artistic component into the foreign language learning at the automobile faculty, there were identified significant positive changes for all universal values according to Karakovsky's (1993) list in the experimental group and no substantially significant differences were observed in the control group for same period of time.

Conclusions

Given the shortcomings of the carried out diagnosis, it should be noted that the curriculum, including the artistic education element, revealing cultural universals with humanistic orientation meets scientific and pedagogical requirements and is characterized by: the change in the structure of training forms, the communicative, cognitive, emotional and practical aspects integration in learning, a variety of class gaming forms with agon elements.

Developed lexical and grammatical exercises, creative tasks with ethnopedagogical means (idioms, sayings, proverbs), for example: match the English choices to the Russian proverb and vice versa; selection of an appropriate explanation for the proverb; joining parts of the proverb; imitation of the situation the proverb can be used in; addition of proverbs from the proposed options; compilation of proverbs from the presented group of words; imitation proverbs with the subsequent definition of meaning; interpretation of idiomatic expression; substitution of words for phraseological units, etc used in training based on competitive games principle contribute to students' growing interest in the foreign language creative studies and the effective world cultural heritage assimilation.

Rhymes, songs, counters, tongue twisters, limericks and sayings are used as phonetic drills, as the lexical and grammatical materials consolidation on a specific topic, as the national and global cultural human values perception give the training in class fascination and effectiveness.

Lyrics and poems about friendship, peace, happiness, love, nature, homeland, family, friendship endowed with universalistic pathos with an elaborated set of various exercises, bring the desired dynamics into the process of foreign language learning, strengthening its cultural component. Such artistic materials not only contribute to the foreign language skills development in communication and reduce the level of xenoglossophobia, but they also enrich the inner spiritual world of an individual, ensuring the person's real introduction to the world culture on the basis of universals due to their artistic value and methodological perfection.

Some ways of ethnopedagogical means studying, the specific songs and poems selection, active language training forms based on the agon principle, the specified set of thematic creative tasks, lexical and grammar exercises based on artistry elements are recommended for practical classes in non-language educational schools of higher and secondary vocational education and at foreign language courses.

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