

THE IMPORTANCE OF UNDERSTANDING NATIONAL CULTURE IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING

Ukraine is the largest country in Europe in terms of land area among nations fully located within the geographic boundaries of the European continent. Many Ukrainians need to communicate with people from various countries, both abroad and within Ukraine. Furthermore, Ukraine is a multicultural state with ethnic groups such as Bulgarians, Greeks, Jews, Crimean Tatars, Poles, Russians, Romanians, Slovaks, Hungarians, and others residing within its borders. Therefore, effective cross-cultural communication between different nationalities is currently of utmost relevance [7, p. 5].

The Constitution of Ukraine enshrines the equality of all nationalities within the state and guarantees their rights, including the right to education. Ukraine's spiritual enrichment relies on the unity of all nationalities in addressing socially significant issues (Articles 10, 11, 53) [2]. Achieving tolerance and respect toward the culture of various ethnicities is facilitated by multilingual education.

At present, Ukraine's government is making every effort to join the European Union. Due to the full-scale invasion, many Ukrainians were forced to leave their homes and move to safer places abroad. Those Ukrainians who are proficient in languages like English found it easier to adapt to new environments than those with limited language skills. In some countries, such as France, where historical context affects language attitudes, locals may be less inclined to switch to English. This creates a need to quickly learn a new language, and immersion in the culture of the target language country can be beneficial. Since the full-scale invasion, Ukrainian students have received more opportunities to study abroad. For instance, in Estonia, Ukrainian students are allocated free study places for some specialties, provided they have B1-level proficiency in English or B2 in Estonian.

Learning foreign languages is both exciting and essential for personal development. Being bilingual positively impacts cognitive processes and enhances one's interaction with the environment. Goethe once said, "The more languages you know, the more human you are," highlighting that each language embodies a nation's cultural heritage [8].

Understanding the culture of the language being learned aids in grasping the language itself and its formation process [1].

Education introduces a person to the world of culture throughout life. This applies not only to education within one's native country but also to learning foreign languages and cultures. While native culture is paramount, studying foreign languages and cultures fosters respect for global cultural heritage and helps overcome cultural centrism [3, pp. 157–158].

A popular teaching approach is storytelling, which involves presenting learning material through engaging narratives. Developed by David Armstrong, the head of Armstrong International, storytelling uses psychology to create interest and motivation. Stories evoke emotions, aid cognitive thinking, and are remembered better than dry facts. Storytelling is widely used in business, advertising, and education [6].

Combining cultural knowledge with storytelling in language learning has proven effective. Many educators already employ storytelling for teaching languages, and when stories are based on the cultural heritage of the target language country, learners gain a deeper understanding of the people's psychology. This helps form neural connections in the brain, making it easier to retain new words, phrases, and grammar rules [9].

Multilingualism significantly contributes to child development, as shown by psychologists E. Peal and W. Lambert. They found that bilingual children demonstrate greater creativity and originality. For effective bilingual education, one native language should dominate, reducing the risk of incomplete language mastery. European countries widely use multilingual education, promoting communicative competence in multiple languages [5].

In conclusion, the more languages a person knows, the broader and more comprehensive their worldview. Multilingual individuals communicate more freely, adapt quickly to new environments, and, through storytelling and cultural immersion, find language learning easier and more effective. Their communicative competence improves, preventing cultural centrism. A respectful attitude toward other cultures fosters an appreciation of global culture and each nation's heritage. Cross-cultural communication strengthens understanding of global society's shared interests, motivating people in every country toward multilingual education and intercultural interaction.

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