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## **DEVELOPING INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION SKILLS IN TEACHING FRENCH**

**Abstract.** The research article discusses the new methodologies in the teaching of French as a second language for the development of intercultural communication in higher education. The study focuses specifically on cross-cultural interaction that relates to the study of French as a foreign language in the context of a university classroom in Azerbaijan. The primary goal is to explore contemporary methods for developing intercultural communication skills, analyze various scientific and theoretical issues in addressing the problem, and present contemporary methodological approaches appropriate to the local context. It is well known that the use of French on international platforms as a new communication tool has become essential in the age of globalization and that its use in the context of the nation has increased for a variety of purposes. Observations prove that the systematic organization of speech activities for the development of cross-cultural communication skills during the teaching of the French language remains a problem in teaching. There are constantly felt gaps in order to acquire the necessary competencies in this area. To address these issues, the research study ran an experiment involving twenty-eight (28) students and four (4) teachers. Data were collected to explore students' perceptions of multiculturalism in French-speaking nations and their communication skills across cultures while learning the language. The descriptive methodology is applied during the experiment as an effective tool. Moreover, the method of observation and interviews entail with respondents to identify the issues. The experiment's findings showed that university professors and teachers encounter a variety of challenges when preparing students for the development of intercultural communication. These challenges include student tolerance, language barriers, a lack of instructional materials, time restraints, and a lack of

effective knowledge about intercultural teaching pedagogies. In order to adequately learn French, students need to have some communication skills. Therefore, the study explores that foreign language teaching programs should be prepared with techniques that foster the development of cross-cultural communication skills in higher education. The research study can be used as a useful tool for experienced French teachers to increase their knowledge of teaching cultures in communication and to develop new guidelines for the development of multicultural perspectives. Finally, the article can contribute to improving the preparation of French language teachers and students for study abroad opportunities by increasing the minimum language skills and cultural knowledge requirements for exposure to the French-speaking world.

**Keywords:** intercultural communication; sensitivity; tolerance; language barriers; cultural skill.

## INTRODUCTION / ВСТУП

**Formulation of the problem.** Regarding to the significance of comprehending the world's cultural diversity, effective intercultural communication has emerged as one of the top priorities today. According to Chinnappan, McKenzie, and Fitzsimmons (2013) [10, p. 14] "intercultural communication" is an important skill promoting personal and professional growth. However, the term "*intercultural*" suggests communication among various contexts. Studying the transitions of teachers and students between interactions of international students enrolled in a particular program is possible from an intercultural perspective. Thus, the concept of "cultural adaptation" is cross-cultural. However, the term "*intercultural*" suggests communication among various contexts. Studying the transitions of teachers and students between interactions of international students enrolled in a particular program is possible from an intercultural perspective. Thus, the concept of "*cultural adaptation*" presents a cross-cultural meaning.

According to B. Ismailov [2], G. Elizarova [3] noted that this term is valued for one's capacity to assess the differences and resemblances in relationships between their system and those of other systems.

It is common knowledge that intercultural communication makes it easier for people from different cultural backgrounds to interact daily, which benefits global employment opportunities, educational exchange programs, and international travel. However, there are enough issues and challenges in

this area. There are a number of issues with teachers and students learning contemporary methods for developing cross-cultural communication in higher education. The learning outcomes in the educational program for the study of cultures are too straightforward; the technology-based teaching methodology, participation in international platforms, and the teacher's experience are all lacking [4], [6].

On the other hand, the lack of interest in teaching the French language in Azerbaijan, the innovative activity of this country in the international economic and political world, and the lack of information about its cultural outlook are constantly felt. It is known that the use of the French language as a new means of communication on international platforms is of great importance in the age of globalization, and there is increasing interest in its use for various purposes in the context of the nation [2, p. 8]. One of the important goals of the study is to discuss the importance of developing communication skills necessary for multicultural exchange in the process of teaching French and in everyday life. Another goal of the study is to consider the structural content of teaching intercultural competence, characterizing communication with "dialogic" or "non-dialogic" situations.

**Analysis of major research and publications.** Recently Russian methodologists Elizarova [2], Sisoyeva [6], and Safonova [5] have presented the value of using an intercultural approach when teaching foreign languages in general education in their publications. They emphasize the effectiveness of this strategy works at helping students develop important cultural competencies. Many studies, such as Berardo, Kate, and Darla K. Deardorff [8], D. Ismailova [13] introduce this problem at the middle level of instruction and explained the necessity of studying intercultural communication skills to learn about the cultures of various nations and people could communicate with one another. These studies explain the ways of using only dialogue or reading texts about several cultural traditions of various countries in textbooks. The arguments recommended by scholars could not fully explain the issue at the higher education level. Therefore, multicultural education curricula in higher education, however, are insufficiently effective to achieve intercultural communication in the French language. For this purpose, this study will be a valuable resource intended to help students develop their intercultural competence.

#### **AIM AND TASKS / МЕТА ТА ЗАВДАННЯ**

The *aim* of the study is to present the effectiveness of multicultural

communication in higher education.

To achieve the goals, the study planned the following **tasks**:

- to investigate various studies investigating the advantages of important cultural competencies;
- to define contemporary requirements for teaching intercultural communication in terms of pedagogy;
- to assess current scientific focuses on fostering intercultural communication in French;
- to clarify the ways to improve French language skills for intercultural communication.

The article drove the following research question to investigate the main issues:

- 1) *How do cultural differences affect the process of teaching and learning in higher education?*
- 2) *What ways are effective in developing intercultural communication in foreign language?*

## **THE THEORETICAL BACKGROUNDS / ТЕОРЕТИЧНІ ОСНОВИ ДОСЛІДЖЕННЯ**

It is known that the quick growth of global communication in getting international education, modern technology, social-economic progress, and innovations, as well as trends toward globalization, have significantly improved the ability of people from different cultures to interact with one another. Moreover, communicating with European countries, particularly demonstrating adequate language skills among French-speaking countries requires to have practical language proficiency in speaking and sharing cultural views in all areas. With over 274 million speakers worldwide, F. Dervin (2009) [11, p. 169] estimates that French is the sixth most spoken language in the world. It is recognized as a foreign language that is acceptable in Azerbaijan's tertiary institutions.

Many scholars highlighted that one of the main objectives of teaching a foreign language is to help students become more interculturally and linguistically competent by establishing goals that recognize and address their unique needs, such as going on vacation, making new friends, staying up to date on social media, etc. [14], [16].

*Intercultural communication in teaching*, B. Dignen, and, J. Chamberlain (2014) [12, p. 19] proved that communication has become an essential part of everyday life and it is difficult to imagine how a society would be able to

function without modern communication systems. In general, we communicate primarily to share and provide instructions, exchange information, learn about various cultures, and obtain new competencies. Therefore, communication in a foreign language is essential for lecturers because it is a means of knowledge transfer and for students to communicate in a multilingual, multicultural environment context of higher education. L. Arasaratnam (2013) [7], and M. Byram (1997) [9] stated that to develop lasting relationships when interacting with people from different cultural backgrounds, it is essential to understand the subtleties of how various cultures function. L. Gomez Chova, A. Lopez Martinez, and L. Candel Torres (2014) [14, p. 1534] assert that various cultures have different ways of gathering and interpreting information. This is primarily due to the fact that individuals use their own cultural values, traditions, beliefs, and norms as a guide when interacting with individuals from other cultures.

Rosina C. Chia, Elmer Poe, and Karl L. Wuensch (2009) [15, p. 16] explain that students should have an international perspective to develop intercultural communication. It should be highlighted that UNESCO has given specific credit since the 2000s for teaching various subjects that help students in higher education develop multicultural competencies. Teaching and learning are organized at the university about the interdisciplinary study of humanitarian and scientific topics is appropriate for gaining cross-cultural communication. A 45-hour teaching load has been set for subjects that teach intercultural communication in universities in France, Spain, Italy, and Sweden. The credits and course material at each university follow the curriculum through achieving learning outcomes. Whether the global audience counts toward credits or is only added to the curriculum is up to each university's teaching system. The collaboration of the students is valued well and it is also significant to state that thousands of projects have been developed in French and English over the past ten years to foster cross-cultural communication. Most of these projects are presented as news articles and movie reviews. University students can have real-time video or text conversations, communicate their feelings, and introduce themselves with technological tools. The importance of interactivity among young people has been recognized in this form of communication. The project is conducted in French and English languages [12], [13].

*Pedagogical character of intercultural communication.* Pedagogical aspects of intercultural communication skills are based on integrative teaching. It is an expectation that students acquire cultural topics on Content Integrated Language Learning (CILL) principles [2], [3], [4].

Regarding the review of pedagogical principles, Chinese scholar Song Hu (2014) [16, p. 51], examines the contradictory aspects of the problem and points out that the learning objectives in the study of cultures are gradually different. Moreover, her interpretation proves that the implementation of foreign languages in universities set more teaching hours for cultural communication. At this time, teaching a foreign language not only understands the instrumental nature of the language but also strengthens its humanistic nature. To this end, both teachers and students have given more space to cultural competence in their curriculum system by developing listening, speaking, reading, writing, and translation skills. Song Hu states that the main content of intercultural communication is interpreted as outlook and values; verbal behavior on cultural characteristics and non-verbal communication in teaching. Thus, it turns out that the teaching of foreign languages in universities of higher education in our country doesn't take into consideration enough the humanistic character of the language. In this case, the cultural nature of the foreign language doesn't get any place in the teaching curriculum.

Furthermore, D. Ismailova (2021) [13, p. 123] asserts that the language history, style, lexicology, grammar, methodology, and translation of a foreign language taught in our universities that not based on the study of its humanistic nature. In the implementation of instrumental goals, humanistic goals are not reflected in the teaching. Therefore, to achieve intercultural communication gets behind in teaching foreign languages. It can be concluded that the need for daily use of a foreign language is noticed at a time when international exchanges are more frequent to achieve intercultural communication, political, economic, and cultural exchanges are growing more intensively and rapidly. From this point of view, the teaching of foreign languages lags behind in the development of intercultural communication.

For this purpose, the opportunities for cross-cultural social communication have shifted into an increasingly significant problem. In order to create an audience of global understanding in French language teaching at our university, it is necessary to increase the humanistic nature of the language and focus on cultivating talents that promote different cultures. Recent advancements in each area have shaped students' cultural views, using advanced Internet technologies to strengthen the role of teaching this language in the dissemination of culture in French-speaking countries [3], [4], [5].

*The ways of developing intercultural communication skills.* Several helpful techniques are used in learning to develop cross-cultural communication. Teaching culture involves using authentic materials in a foreign language,

conducting meetings through online projects, reading on cultural subjects, setting up discussions, and exchanging trips with locals [7], [8], [10].

There are a number of ways to develop intercultural communication skills, according to literature reviews.

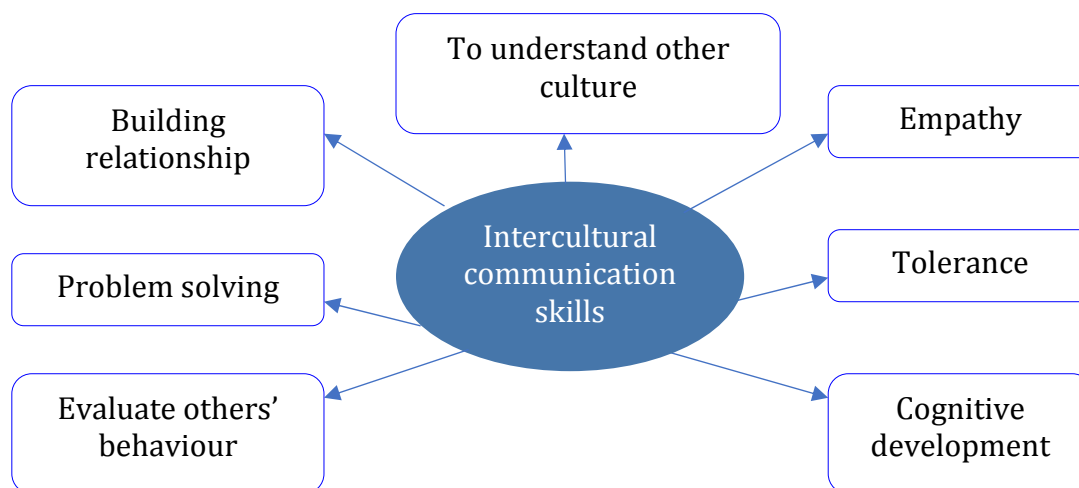


Figure 1 Intercultural communication skills (2013)

It is essential to be aware of the different intercultural communication techniques that affect personal cultural diversity (figure 1). Asaratnam (2013) [7, p. 54] stated that using authentic materials boosts the development of intercultural communication; understanding other peoples' cultures and making interactions between various cultural groups impact communication behavior. As a result, one perspective on intercultural communication is that it takes place in symbolic intercultural settings.

*Cultural empathy* is accepted as the ability to relate to the emotions, ideas, and actions of people from various cultural backgrounds. Dialogues and role plays are the best methods for fostering empathy and understanding cultures [13], [14].

Individuals can be *tolerant* in communication; to produce effective outcomes. Being tolerant provides a more cohesive, peaceful society through intercultural communication. Therefore, it matters whether people are tolerant or intolerant of other beliefs and cultural components studying cultures.

Cognitive development is primarily a social process and how cultural perspectives affect personal development. It takes place as a result of cultural interactions with learners who have good knowledge and skills, S. Kurbakova, & A. Kurchenko (2015) [14, p. 5321] asserts that reading cultural topics and

watching different countries' documentary films improve cognitive aspects of intercultural communication and it is understood as developing language diversity of linguistic consciousness, such as grammatical, lexical, and phenomenal aspects. Students enrich their borrowing vocabulary, other etiquettes, "do's" and "don'ts" through cognitive development [6], [8], [9].

Many aspects of *evaluating behavior* can only be understood through direct observation and the behavior evaluation in cultural diversity is the quality of the interaction.

F. Dervin (2009) [11, p. 170] explains that *problem-solving* skills are one of the most crucial abilities in intercultural communication. Participating in demanding situations inspires language learners to assess circumstances, seek counsel, exchange knowledge, and grow more confident. Problem-solving involves managing emotions and analyzing cross-cultural communication. For these reasons, it is appropriate to promote language acquisition of pragmatic knowledge for problem-solving.

The most significant intercultural communication theories, concepts, and techniques help students develop fruitful, *building relationships* with individuals from other nations and cultures [11], [12]. Carrying out online projects on various cultural subjects, and arranging Zoom for promoting cultural exchange identities and abilities are very successful in fostering positive relationships among students.

Benefits of involving intercultural communication. Several scientific works proved that collaboration and trust are fostered by cross-cultural communication. M. Byram [9, p. 134] explains that instead of emphasizing the right message, students focus on giving the right response, interacting culturally, and having different turn-taking customs on different cultural backgrounds.

S. Minyurova, S. Krylova, and N. Rudenko (2013) [17, p. 12] prove that colleague communication helps students build a strong vocabulary, learn and share fascinating cultural details, use appropriate speech manners, and favor appropriate values over formalities and politeness rules.

## **RESEARCH METHODS / МЕТОДИ ДОСЛІДЖЕННЯ**

The research planned to implement the experiment involving twenty-eight (28) students and four teachers investigating major problems in solving them. Data collection was about students' interest, passion, and motivation of engaging in intercultural communication in teaching and learning French. The first step was preparing questionnaires and surveys to examine students' prior



knowledge of culture study. The second step planned to implement observations and interviews about respondents' intercultural communication skills during the experiment. The following inquiries were tried to be answered by this study:

3) *How do cultural differences affect the process of teaching and learning in higher education?*

4) *What ways are effective in developing multicultural communication in foreign languages?*

### **RESULTS OF THE RESEARCH / РЕЗУЛЬТАТИ ДОСЛІДЖЕННЯ**

The research study has examined a number of findings in intercultural communication instruction and learning in French. The students learned about various resources and cultural approaches to learning French. According to the survey results, the respondents' perspectives on cross-cultural communication varied. They emphasized that this subject is consistently neglected during instruction and the university core curriculum of the foreign language doesn't include learning outcomes in culture study. Nevertheless, the students were able to show their aptitude for learning different cultures. They could exhibit important abilities in learning various cultures and realize practical ways to hone these abilities. The students were encouraged to demonstrate role-plays; joined various groups in discussing cultural topics in social networking and prepared questions to open discussions on intercultural communication. It was explored that respondents needed more instruction or systematic training on using intercultural communication to improve their language abilities. In the first step, a survey was conducted to examine respondents' attitudes to culture study and intercultural communication in the French language. The question was as follows.

*Table*

#### **The survey analyses of respondents' opinions on communicating across cultures**

What impression do you have of your cross-cultural communication skills?					
	Respondents	Weak	Average	Almost	Completely
1	Students	4	16	6	2
2	Teachers		2		-

From the table, it is clear that the respondents participating in the research at the university do not have very high knowledge about intercultural

communication skills in teaching French (table). The results of the analysis conducted according to the table show that most of the students (16) have an average level of opinion about this skill. The teachers' answers were met at the same level. It turned out that the university does not have a textbook on the teaching of cultures or the learning outcomes of the program. This problem is rarely satisfied by reading and discussing cultural topics in textbooks. Only six (6) students were able to answer the survey almost level and two (2) students were able to answer the question correctly. It means that respondents didn't have complete ideas about learning intercultural communication. Respondents were given several instructions on how to obtain useful handouts on cross-cultural communication in the second stage. Furthermore, they were engaged in doing quizzes, playing music, and demonstrating greetings, traditions, and food names, all while using real materials and acting out scenarios from various cultures. Then, it was explained to the students how to complete cultural projects, take part in online discussions, create a booklet about French culture, etc. They learned intercultural communication techniques and appropriate and inappropriate behavior. Finally, respondents were involved in workshops for developing learning outcomes for teaching cross-cultural communication.

Furthermore, observations were applied to the demonstration of students' intercultural communication skills during the learning.

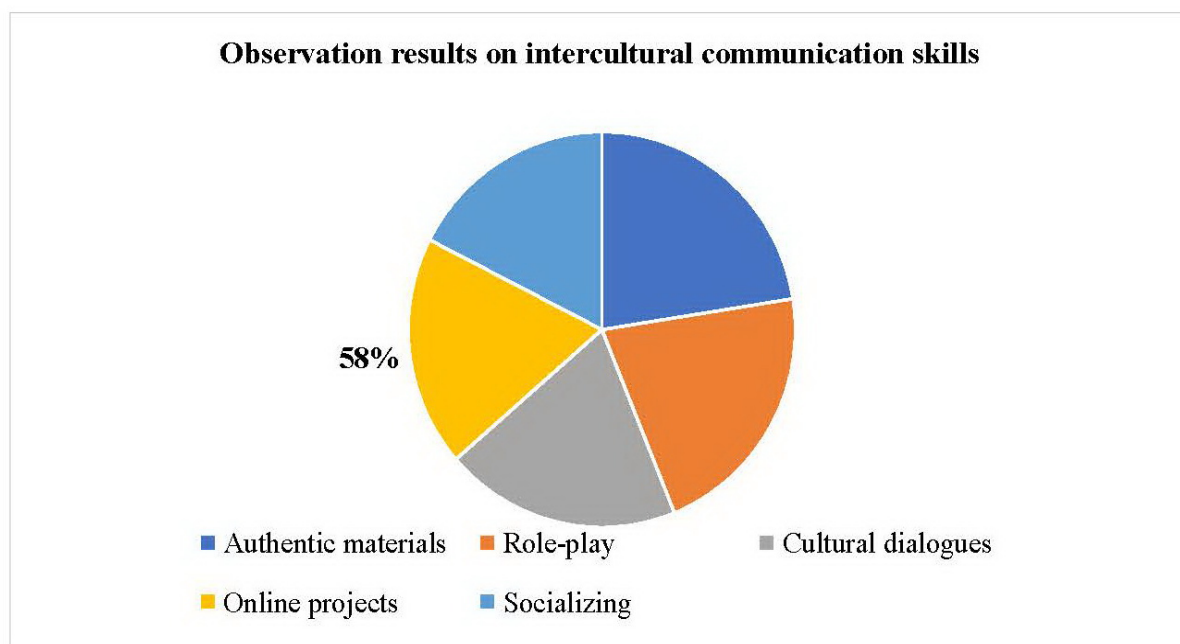


Figure 2 Observation results on getting intercultural communication skills

The figure makes it obvious that students followed a balanced approach to acquiring sufficient intercultural competence (figure 2). Students were able to achieve a sufficient level of intercultural communication skills with a medium score of 80–100 points. A total of 19–20 students, along with watching movies, reading about other cultures, and creating magazines about those cultures, were able to use authentic materials to understand cognitive development (68 %).

Using rich vocabulary, word phrases, speech etiquette, greetings, slang, etc., 17–18 students (65 %) could demonstrate role-plays.

17 students (60 %) were able to demonstrate empathy, tolerance, problem-solving abilities, the ability to take turns, body language, making eye contact, or displaying facial expressions while engaging in cultural dialogues.

To foster productive relationships, 16 students (58 %) have participated in online cultural and ecological projects with other nations.

By participating in various cultural groups, displaying cross-cultural symbols, and learning about social, cultural, and economic advancements, 15 students (53 %) were able to develop socializing skills.

Thus, it became clear from all of the discussions that learning cross-cultural communication skills is the best way to benefit from the best and most universal aspects of other cultures.

## **CONCLUSIONS AND PROSPECTS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH / ВИСНОВКИ ТА ПЕРСПЕКТИВИ ПОДАЛЬШИХ ДОСЛІДЖЕНЬ**

*Thus, the article presents the following results:*

- Intercultural communication is one of the key competencies in learning French speech culture at the university level.
- A current scientific and theoretical foundation should serve as the foundation for the development of intercultural communication skills dealing with the issue.
- The findings proved students' interest to participate in intercultural communication activities.
- Pedagogical aspects, ways of developing intercultural communication skills, and benefits of culture study should be taken into consideration in teaching and learning.
- Communication skills include the use of authentic materials, reading about different cultures, acting out cultural behaviors in role-plays, and having cultural dialogues to foster cognitive development.

- Due to survey analysis, 80 % of respondents have low knowledge of intercultural communication learning French.
- Applying modern intercultural communication instructions is helpful for students to develop adequate skills.
- University teachers have to participate in professional development training in teaching culture at the university;
- a majority of significant findings revealed that 70–75 % of students had acquired the anticipated intercultural communication skills.
- Universities must create a curriculum for studying cultures and teaching intercultural communication skills effectively in foreign languages.

**Prospects for further research in this direction.** According to this paper's findings, intercultural communication is a highly anticipated skill in today's labor market requirements and linguistic development.

Students and teachers will receive efficient cultural skills in the French language by understanding the information in this paper and gaining useful skills.

The scientific studies will guarantee that teachers have the background knowledge necessary to develop intercultural communication skills and flexible teaching methods. Consequently, this research study will be useful to university instructors and students as an efficient language tool.

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## **РОЗВИТОК НАВИЧОК МІЖКУЛЬТУРНОГО СПІЛКУВАННЯ ПІД ЧАС ВИКЛАДАННЯ ФРАНЦУЗЬКОЇ МОВИ**

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**Анотація.** У статті розглядаються нові методики викладання французької мови як другої для розвитку міжкультурної комунікації у вищій школі. Основна мета статті – дослідити сучасні методи навчання французької мови в умовах розвитку міжкультурної комунікації, проаналізувати різноманітні науково-теоретичні питання вирішення проблеми та представити сучасні методичні підходи, що відповідають місцевому контексту. Загальновідомо, що використання французької мови на міжнародних платформах як нового інструменту спілкування стало необхідним в епоху глобалізації та що її використання в контексті нації збільшилося для різноманітних цілей. Спостереження доводять, що системна організація мовленнєвої діяльності для розвитку навичок міжкультурної комунікації під час навчання франкомовного спілкування залишається проблемою у навчанні та постійно відчуваються прогалини для набуття необхідних компетенцій у цій сфері. Щоб вирішити ці проблеми, дослідники провели експеримент за участю 28 студентів (6 хлопців і 22 дівчат) і чотирьох (4) вчителів. Було зібрано дані, щоб дослідити уявлення студентів про мультикультуралізм у франкомовних країнах та їхні навички спілкування між культурами під час вивчення мови. Описова методологія використовується під час експерименту як методологічний інструмент. Крім того, метод спостереження та проведені інтерв'ю передбачають виявлення проблем з респондентами. Результати експерименту показали, що викладачі та викладачі вищих навчальних закладів стикаються з різноманітними проблемами, готуючи студентів до розвитку міжкультурної комунікації. Ці виклики включають толерантність студентів, мовні бар'єри, брак навчальних матеріалів, часові обмеження та відсутність ефективних знань про педагогіку міжкультурного навчання. Для того, щоб адекватно вивчити

французьку мову, учні повинні володіти певними навичками спілкування. Таким чином досліджується, що програми навчання іноземних мов у закладах вищої освіти мають складатися з використанням методів, які сприяють розвитку навичок міжкультурного спілкування. Дослідження може бути використане як корисний інструмент для досвідчених вчителів французької мови, щоб підвищити свої знання про культуру викладання в спілкуванні та розробити нові вказівки для розвитку мультикультурних перспектив. Нарешті, стаття сприяє покращенню підготовки вчителів французької мови та студентів до можливостей навчання за кордоном шляхом підвищення мінімальних вимог до мовних навичок і культурних знань для знайомства з франкомовним світом.

**Ключові слова:** міжкультурна комунікація; чутливість; толерантність; мовні бар'єри; культурна майстерність

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