THE DEVELOPMENT OF STUDENTS' INFORMATION CULTURE AT ENGLISH-LANGUAGE CLASSES

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The abstract focuses on the importance of the development of students' information culture. It contains references to related official documents and works of Belarusian and Russian scientists. The authors present an idea that English-language classes have a high potential for forming and developing students' information culture. They provide concrete examples from practical experience of class organisation and offer feasible ways for its improvement. The applied methods and techniques have proved their efficiency in the test group and led to the enlargement of their English-language vocabulary in the sphere of mass media discourse, contributed to the broadening of learners' cultural outlook and promoted a more conscientious approach towards the consumption of the news content among the students.

Keywords: information culture; media and information literacy; cultural intelligence; mass media discourse; critical thinking.

РАЗВИТИЕ ИНФОРМАЦИОННОЙ КУЛЬТУРЫ СТУДЕНТОВ НА ЗАНЯТИЯХ ПО АНГЛИЙСКОМУ ЯЗЫКУ

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В настоящей статье рассматривается вопрос важности развития информационной культуры студентов. В тексте приводятся ссылки на соответствующие официальные документы и труды белорусских и российских ученых. Авторы выражают мысль о том, что занятия по английскому языку имеют высокий потенциал для формирования и развития информационной культуры студентов. Они приводят конкретные примеры из практики организации занятий и предлагают возможные пути совершенствования информационной культуры обучающихся. Применяемые методы и приемы в экспериментальной группе доказали свою эффективность и привели к расширению словарного запаса студентов на английском языке в области дискурса СМИ, способствовали расширению их культурного кругозора и формированию более осознанного подхода к потреблению новостного контента.

Ключевые слова: информационная культура; медийная и информационная грамотность; культурный интеллект; дискурс СМИ; критическое мышление.

In accordance with the Decree of the President of the Republic of Belarus N 156 as of May 7, 2020, which outlines priority areas of scientific, technical and

innovative activities for 2021–2025, the development of information society is currently listed among the key fields of research [1]. The Doctrine of Information Security of our country underlines that it is a national priority as accessibility of information and its mindful use is essential for social progress [2]. Dz. Mihun, a PhD of Historical Sciences of the National Institute for Higher Education, believes that the quality of information presented in the mass media space defines the efficiency of state institutions, a country's economy, and its defense capacity [3, p. 3]. A similar opinion is shared by a large number of other representatives of the national scientific community, for instance, I. Liashchynskaya, Doctor of Philosophy of the Belarusian State University [4, p. 85].

The importance that the state and our scholars attach to the development of knowledge-based society necessitates upgrading learners' media literacy and building up their information culture. It is worthy of note that Iryna Afanasjevna Mazurok, a PhD of Pedagogical Sciences from Francisk Skorina Gomel State University, a renowned expert in this field, mentions that there is considerable room for improvement in the outlined area. Based on multiple research results, she claims that students tend to have limited awareness of the possibilities of how to use various information resources, search engines and databases. Moreover, they often lack the skill of critical analysis of information and mostly demonstrate the reproductive level of academic activity [5, p. 382].

In this article we are going to clarify the notions of media literacy and information culture. We will also dwell on the potential of English-language classes in increasing learners' ability to effectively use various information resources and provide concrete examples from the practical experience of class organisation for achieving this goal.

It has to be said that media literacy and information culture are related terms that significantly overlap. For the time being, media and information literacy (MIL) is regarded as a vital soft skill of future specialists for a wide variety of specializations. UNESCO Institute for Information Technologies in Education (IITE) states that it is an important part of the 'XXI century set of skills'. It embraces a complex combination of related competencies that allow an individual to effectively analyze, critically evaluate, licitly generate and aptly use mass media content [6].

At the same time, N. Gendina, Doctor of Pedagogical Sciences, Professor from Kemerovo State University of Culture and Arts, a recognized authority on the subject, points out that the notion of information culture is wider as it includes an ideological component which reflects a person's capability to perceive and evaluate information through the cultural prism [7, p. 67]. We cannot but mention that such an idea goes in unison with an official position laid down in the national Doctrine of the Information Security. P. Kirichek, Doctor of Social Sciences, further develops the ideas of N. Gendina, and focuses on the importance of culture as a qualitative category which also impacts the ways of how information is processed and disseminated in a particular community for ensuring its stability and effective functioning [8, p. 278–279].

From our perspective, English-language classes may significantly upgrade students' media literacy and contribute to the development of their information culture. Moreover, they may also increase their cultural intelligence (CQ) as

interpreting English-language mass media content at an expert level requires certain cultural knowledge about the economic, social and political systems of the countries of the target language. David Livermore, President of the US Cultural Intelligence Center, advises reading newspapers in the foreign language and watching the programmes of established news agencies in order to be able to improve the cognitive component of CQ [9, p. 201].

Below we will describe some ways of how the work on the English-language mass media discourse has been recently carried out among the students of the Faculty of International Relations of the Belarusian State University.

At the introductory stage, we conducted a standard survey on information culture preferences among 20 students of the Faculty of International Relations. It contained 10 multiple choice questions aimed at determining the general level of students' information culture. Inventories like that are often used by libraries of the national educational establishments in order to assess user satisfaction with their funds and resources, or by curators of academic groups who carry out ideological and didactic work. The learners were supposed to answer questions concerning their ways of using library information resources, the importance of information technology as an academic subject, their priorities in terms of professional development, etc. The survey conducted among the test group of 20 students demonstrated an average level of their information culture (60 points out of 100, with 75 points as a threshold that marks a high level). Based on the survey results, it was recommended to the learners to pursue a more systemic recourse to the library catalogue and to develop a more conscious approach to regulating information flows in everyday life so as to avoid a cognitive overload. This may also mean spending less time on social networks.

At the same time, 80 % of the canvassed gave a positive answer to question 10 which was connected with learners' preparedness to conduct an excursion around their native city or town. We believe it is quite a good result as it indicates a positive motivation for engaging in oral speech activity and the possession of relevant knowledge. 60 % of students answered they would show a guest around historic places, 20 % – around other places of interest. It has to be mentioned that such a type of task – telling about a native place – is often used for testing speech production at international language exams.

During the classes of English the information culture of students may be upgraded by means of working on topical language materials in various forms: written and audio texts, hypertexts, video podcasts. Clearly, all the materials have to present a high communicative and cultural value. Undoubtedly, this requires conscientious preparation on the part of the lecturer.

Following the recommendation of the aforementioned Dr. D. Livermore, working on the news content of recognized agencies (Al Jazeera, BBC, France 24, Reuters, RT, etc.) is quite a good option for upgrading one's media literacy and information culture. It is also practical: we have to mention that one of the requirements of the present-day curricula is connected with the necessity of writing a video test at the end of the semester during the senior years of study. Such a form of control is aimed at checking students' skills of listening comprehension of mass media discourse (mostly at the level of content). A typical test consists of 4 or 5 podcasts up to two or three minutes in length.

Standard tasks include multiple choice, correcting false statements, filling in the blanks with the missing words, answering short questions.

As part of a preparation for the video test, students may be given the task of working in pairs on particular news items picked by the lecturer. Such an assignment includes several stages. First, the students are expected to create a script of the news podcast. Then, they develop exercises for checking listening comprehension at the level of content (gap-filling, multiple-choice, and true/false questions) together with the keys. Additionally, each pair formulates a question for a follow-up discussion. This is designed to encourage critical thinking and achieve understanding at the level of meaning. An example of such a question may sound like that: «What does the podcast convey about the system of checks and balances?». To answer it properly, one has to know such a legal concept. The draft versions are expected to be sent to the lecturer in advance for creating a final version of the hand-out.

In class, the process follows a structured sequence. First, the teacher presents the news materials. Then, the students fulfil the necessary tasks. Once they are ready, the group reviews the exercises, analyzing them in detail. Finally, a discussion session takes place, where students debate on key aspects of the news, share their opinions, reflect on the issues presented, and summarize key vocabulary. The learners are encouraged to include new words on the semester's glossary. Such an approach not only enhances listening skills but also fosters critical thinking and promotes acquisition of cultural-based knowledge in the foreign language.

We have tried such a form of work over a time frame of one academic year. To gain feedback about its effectiveness, we launched a Google Form with a range of questions. Based on the survey results of our test group of 20 students, the respondents increasingly regard mass media literacy as an essential skill in today's world (85 % of respondents). 15 % of the students consider media literacy to be crucial for their future career. Furthermore, 85 % of students agree that understanding cultural background is crucial for comprehending the news content at the level of meaning. Additionally, 75 % of students actively compare the news from foreign agencies with local broadcasters, which reflects a mindful approach to media consumption. The participants of the survey have also rated the effectiveness of the given form of work. 75 % of respondents have mentioned that it has been beneficial for enriching their English-language vocabulary and cultural knowledge. They do not have a confusion connected with understanding mass media discourse associated with the initial stage of the experiment. These findings suggest that students acknowledge the significance of mass media literacy, actively engage with various news resources in the foreign language, and aspire for further development of their information culture and cultural intelligence which are interconnected at the cognitive level.

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