The Place of Value Attitudes in Competence-Based Learning at Universities

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Abstract

Our future of education depends very much on what goals are set by institutions of higher education and how these goals are implemented. Currently universities focus their study programmes on competence-based teaching/ learning.The competence being understood as the unity of knowledge, skills and values, academic knowledge must be conveyed and skills developed in an integral way, providing the conditions for the development of a very important component of competence - value attitudes that are necessary for our students' professional and personal life and consequently for the future of our society as well. Therefore, the teaching/ learning process at universities should be aiming at the development of all the components of competences without leaving value attitudes behind. What is more important, specialists of education have to find ways how to make the teaching/learning process of different subjects (especially that of foreign languages) at contemporary universities to serve the development of students' value attitudes.

The article provides some aspects of the development of foreign language students' value attitues in foreign language teaching/ learning process at contemporary universities. It is based on the analysis of the educational project that aimed to find out and experimentally verify the educational prerequisites of the development of value attitudes at universities. It has been revealed that one of the prerequisites is associated with the development of students' ability to search for and make optimal moral judgments. The results of the educational project suggest that by creating favourable learning environment and using active student-oriented teaching methods (communicative, dilemma discussions, case analyses, oral and written reflection) as well as focusing students' attention on the requirements of values and possible personal and social consequences of moral judgments, students' value attitudes can be fostered.

1. Introduction

Our future of education depends very much on what goals are set by institutions of higher education and how these goals are implemented. The documents of European Union consider value attitudes to be one of the components of competence alongside knowledge and skills. Bearing this in mind the development of value attitudes is becoming a significant part of university education. Currently universities in European area of higher education and in Lithuania as well focus their study programmes on competence-based teaching/ learning. The competence is considered to be the unity of knowledge, skills and values, therefore, the teaching/ learning process at universities should be aiming at the development of all the components of competences without leaving value attitudes behind [9, 29] Value attitudes are of great importance for university graduates who are to become our future entrepreneural leaders shaping social and economic opportunities of our societies.

Previous studies on education in Lithuania [1, 5, 12,18] and in foreign countries [2, 7, 11, 21, 27] prove the importance of value attitudes for the development of a personality and integration of values in the teaching /learning process. In spite of the acknowledgment of the relevance of value attitudes, several issues still remain to be addressed: how the teaching/learning process of universities should serve the development of students' value attitudes so that they remain in the focus of attention in terms of expected learning outcomes despite the fact that value attitudes are difficult to be measured. Thus, **the aim of the research** is to reveal the educational prerequisites of the development of value attitudes at contemporary universities. **The aim of this article is** to present some possibilities of the development of foreign language students' value attitudes in foreign language teaching/ learning process at contemporary universities. **The aim of the article** is specified by the following research tasks:

- To present a theoretical foundation of the educational project.
- To describe the aims, implementation and results of the educational project targeted at experimental verification of the development of sudents' value attitudes.

2. Methodology
2.1. The methods of the research
Theoretical: the analysis, comparison and evaluation of scientific literature on education and psychology concerning the concept of values, their structure, manifestation, measurement, etc.
Empirical: educational project: long-term direct observation of the participants of the project, essay writing, dialogue, discussion.

2.2. The research sample
The educational project was carried out at the Institute of Foreign Languages of Vilnius University. There were a total of 60 (19-23 year old female) participants: 30 in the project group and 30 in the control group. Thirty second-year students of the English language and English language teaching programme of the Institute of Foreign Languages took part in a three-month-length educational project, which helped to verify and validate the meaningfulness and effectiveness of pedagogical prerequisites of the development of value attitudes at universities.

2.3.The methodological basis of the research
The research is grounded on:
humanistic psychology and pedagogy, according to which education and self-eduation are the most necessary factors in the development of a personality; education inspires one's efforts to improve, favourable conditions of education provide the possibility for one's sef-realisation and free choice of values [20, 28];
a *three-component attitude model* comprising of inter-connected cognitive, affective and connotative (potential behavioural) components, the analysis of the content of which allows for a better prediction of an attitude influence upon one's behaviour [10], the attitude being defined as the unity of relatively enduring, persisting, positive or negative evaluations, emotional experiences, predispositions or behavioural tendencies towards socially significant objects.
the *ideas of cognitive   psychology*   about the parallelism of stages of cognitive and moral development of a personality, about the importance of cognitive processes in the solution of moral dilemmas, about the cognitive abilities determining the logical characteristics of reasoning, abstract thinking, conceptualization, the power of moral imagination, on the basis of which arguments are constructed [13, 25];
insights of *constructivism theory* claiming that each person is a uniquely constructed individuality that cannot function separately, any intention of human behavior is collectivist in nature, social reality being determined by all the members of the group, therefore maintaining relations with others requires respect for others, decision making process should focus on the welfare of the community preserving each member's honour and fairness of pluralistic societies [6,19, 32];
*t*he views *of representatives of neocognitive theory* that moral judgment is the manifestation of one's moral attitudes, on the basis of which the evaluation process of present and anticipated possibilities is made; that moral judgment is evaluative in nature, that a person making a decision exresses his/her value attitudes [8, 17, 30];
the theory of *linguistic actitvity* encompassing a harmonious unity of the learner's language knowledge, abilities and skills as well as individual philological and cultural experience; determining the blend of specific internal and external features of linguistic activity, i.e. from rational, logical to emotional, intuitive cognition (thoughts, emotions, will, imagination) and finally to spiritual communication (values, goals) [34];
the *strategy of cognitive moral development* of a personality [13, 25], according to which students solving moral dilemmas can reach a higher level of moral development. It is acknowledged that values may be relative, context-related and maybe applicable depending on the level of individual moral development. According to this strategy moral principals (justice, integrity, respect) are taken into consideration. It also encourages students to provide arguments for the choice of values in this way helping students to reach a higher level of moral development.
criteria of moral judgments: empathy (a person should realise that his/her action has the impact on others); cause-consequence relation (this helps to strengthen moral motivaion); priority to moral principals and values but not to one's personal values [4]. It is assumed that these criteria help students to get accustomed to solve dilemmas paying attention to other people's interests, consequences of possible actions, value conflicts and comittments [3].

3. Results
The aim, impemenation and the reults of the educational project

The programme of the educational project was based on the results of diagnostic research, having revealed the levels of cognitive-notional, affective-evaluative and connotative (potential behavioural) components of foreign language students' value attitudes. The research data of the connotative (potential behavioural) component of value attitudes revealed that while making judgments students are not likely to focus on the requirements of moral values as the criteria of evaluation and they are not accustomed to anticipate the possible personal and social consequences of their judgments. Therefore, it has been considered valuable to provide the possibility for the participants of the educational project to solve moral dilemmas with a focus on moral values more often. The correlative analysis of the diagnostic research data showed close links between moral judgments and the acknowledgment of the importance of moral values. Therefore, the goal of educational project was set – to reveal and verify experimentally the educational prerequisites of the development of foreign language students ' value attitudes at contemporary universities. The tasks of the educational project were set with reference to the ideas of constructivism, humanistic psychology, cognitive psychology, the insights of neo-cognitivism, and linguistic activity theory, the strategy of cognivive moral development, the criteria of moral judgments, the thus including: 1) to help foreign language students realize the main functions of foreign language teaching; 2) to deepen foreign language students' insights into the substantiation of the notion of moral values; and, 3) to develop foreign language students' moral judgment competence. These tasks enabled the formulation of the prerequisites of the development of foreign language students' value attitudes related to: 1) realization of foreign language teaching as a multifunctional phenomenon; 2) deepening the insight into the substantiation of moral values' notion; and, 3) developing students' moral judgment competence.

The goals and tasks of the educational project determined the choice of teaching / learning methods [24, 26, 33], which focus on learners' autonomy, creativity, and active participation in teaching/learning process. Besides content-based learning strategy [23, 31] promoting a (meta) cognitive, social, cultural, linguistic competence and a positive impact on students' moral attitude development was also applied in the educational project. The method of Konstanz moral dilemma discussion developed by G. Lind [16], i.e. the method of discussions of educative dilemmas aimed at fostering personal moral competence was also applied. Thus a number of various (classical and modern) teaching/learning methods were blended: reading, listening, discussion, scenario, dilemma discussion and solution, simulation, analysis, reflection, and creative writing.

The teaching content of the educational project was grounded on the concept of content-based foreign language teaching theory according to which language learning process is understood as a meaningful communication that builds on meaningful content development, learner-centeredness, individual learning style, and learners' previous experience and knowledge to further promote not only the underlying language skills (speaking, reading, writing, listening) but also meta-cognitive, cognitive, and emotional expression, as well as learners' critical thinking skills. Scientists of education [14,15] point out the need to relate higher education teaching / learning process with values; therefore, the content of the educational project was value-laden focusing on different themes according to particular tasks of the project.

In accordance with the aim of the article, below an overview of the third stage of the educational project that aimed at fostering students'ability to make moral judgemnts is made. The aim of this stage of the educational project was specified by the following objectives: 1) to help project participants to realize the relevance of moral values while solving different interpersonal problems; 2) to encourage students to search for different options in the process of decision making; 3) to try to accustome students to make optimal moral judgments. To implement these tasks of the educational project the following topics were analysed: "*The search for the solution of interpersonal problems*" and "*Making moral judgments – the condition of improvement of interpersonal relations*". By the analysis of the first topic an attempt was made not only to develop students' linguistic abilities but to raise students' awareness of the importance of values in interpersonal relations. As the author of the plethora of English language texbooks D. Cotton claims, the best way to learn a foreign language is to provide students with real-life situations, where students could apply their linguistic repertoire and their real-life experience, the participants of the project were introduced to different scenarios that focused on practical solution of various everyday life dilemmas. It has also been emphasized that it is impossible to get ready for all the decisions to be mde in one's life, however, skills necessary for decision making

should and could be nurtured alongside the acquisition of the principles of making judgements.The second topic of the educational project "*Making moral judgments – the condition of improvement of interpersonal relations*" aimed at accustoming students to solving moral dilemmas, as well as developing their critical thinking abilities, paying attention to the moral quality of the arguments and critical evaluation of contradictory arguments, focusing on moral values as the criteria of moral judgments.

The development of students' ability to make moral judgments requires a long intensive study and appropriate methods [22]. The main methods used in this stage of the educational project were: discussions, role play, moral dilemma discusions that were aslo suitable for the development of students' linguistic competence. In this way students' motivation to learn was increased, their critical thinking ability was fostered, emotions aroused, moral imagination strengthened. During the project the students were presented with case analyses, they were encouraged to anticipate and evaluate the problems that the protagonists of case analyses encountered. Each situation was discussed following the logical sequence: firstly, the students were provided wih the necessary vocabulary to describe the problem and to express particular linguistic intentions (certainty, uncertainty, etc.). Secondly, the participants of the project were given particular roles to perform and they were asked to observe the requiremens of moral values (respect, self-respect, sensitivity, empathy, etc.) while projecting the possible actions of the protagonists. Thirdly, the students had to make decisions in groups and finally, discuss altogether chosing the best decision to be made, focusing on the possible consequences, avoidance of violation of stakeholders' interests and value conflicts.

The results of the educational project made it possible to **conclude**:

In order to develop students' value attitudes as an important component of competence, it is necessary to pay more atention and effort to the elucidation of the meaning of values as the necessary precondition and the criteria of moral jdgments. In the process of decision making it is necessary to get students accustomed to focus on the requirements of moral values, to think critically and evaluate the possible personal and social consequences. While practicing moral judgment making, it is useful to exploit real-life situations, causing students' interest that would help strengthen students'empathy and moral imagination, that would help students develop not only linguistic, but also critical thinking skills as one of the necessary preconditions of moral judgment making.

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