

# Developing the Pedagogical Skills of Prospective Teachers for Teaching Languages in an Intercultural Kindergarten Environment

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**Abstract.** *Language learning is a prerequisite for successful intercultural communication. Learning the official language of a country is of significant importance for this process as well as for learning English, which is a globally accepted language in the international community. The training of students, prospective teachers, to work in an intercultural environment includes a complex development of linguistic, pedagogical and intercultural competence.*

*This article is dedicated to developing student teachers' pedagogical skills in teaching the official language of a country (Bulgarian language in this case) as part of their overall training in intercultural education.*

*The theoretical part contains a brief analysis of specialized linguistic, pedagogical and methodological literature as well as an analysis of preschool education programs in the Republic of Bulgaria.*

**Keywords:** *pedagogical skills, language teaching, intercultural environment.*

## Introduction

The theme of this study was provoked by some current processes in the field of education: the increasing ethnic diversity in the educational environment and the demand for an adequate education policy to serve the educational needs of all learners. The issue of equal access to education for different ethnic groups is widely debated. Before answering the question of whether equal access to education for the representatives of various ethnic groups is missing in Europe, we need to think about what place education takes in the value

system of different ethnicities. If education is not a value in the psychological profile of a certain minority community, then we should seek for mechanisms to encourage and motivate the desire for learning.

Ines Marquez Chisholm defines multicultural education as a necessity. "It is not a matter of individual preference, curricular appendage, or pedagogical whim. Neither should it be merely an added-on course after providing for the necessary knowledge and skills. Multicultural education is not simply an ethnic issue; it is everyone's issue, for teaching is a multicultural experience" (1994, p. 65).

Traditionally, when commenting on education in intercultural environment, the stress is on the education of the representatives of other ethnic groups. Our belief, however, is that the functioning of multicultural educational environment is successful only when it is successful for all learners. A balanced policy in education is what is needed. We believe that attention should not only be paid to the integration of other ethnic groups, but also to assessing how ethnic diversity could enrich the educational process with respect to different languages and cultures and tolerance build, all for that education could be useful for everyone.

The inability to speak the official language of a country is a serious problem for any resident. Ivan Ivanov stated that with good reason: “Ethnic minorities are considered to be composed of people with specific needs that are different from those of the majority, including education and professional qualification. Their problems start with poor knowledge of language, i.e. it is basically a linguistic problem” (Ivanov 1999, p. 39). Therefore, this author puts the linguistic aspect in the first place among the different aspects of intercultural education (Ivanov 1999, p. 42).

The preparation of teacher-education students (prospective teachers) to work in an intercultural environment is an extremely important part of general pedagogical, psychological and methodological training. Language teaching preparation of student teachers plays a central part in this process. Arguments in support of this statement are:

1. Teaching is done through language, in a verbal way;

2. Language acquisition/teaching/learning is a condition for intercultural communication, because language is the carrier of culture.

The aim of this study is to specify the content of the pedagogical skills that future teachers should possess when teaching language in an intercultural environment.

The main method of research is the theoretical analysis and synthesis. The theoretical analysis allows research of the structure of the pedagogical skills. It differentiates the components of the studied pedagogical object – cognitive and practical skills. The following synthesis then allows the highlighting of the most essential relations in it through the restoration of the studied object.

The given topic is interdisciplinary. Its meaning goes down to an analysis of the pedagogical skills, which are acquired by students in different school disciplines – their development, mutual complementarity and formation of a complex structure.

This paper presents a part of a study done within a research project that was conducted in the Pedagogical College in the town of Pleven under Decree No. 3 of St. Cyril and St. Methodius University of Veliko Turnovo (treaty ФЦД-31-813-09, 06.28.2016).

## **Theoretical background**

### ***Pedagogical Skills in the Context of Legal Documents***

The training of prospective teachers in the Republic of Bulgaria is carried out in the context of the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning (Feb-

ruary 2008) and the National Qualifications Framework (February 2012). In the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning, knowledge is defined as “the body of facts, principles, theories and practices that is related to a field of work or study” and is described as theoretical and/or factual; skills are defined as “the ability to apply knowledge and use know-how to complete tasks and solve problems” and are described as cognitive (involving the use of logical, intuitive and creative thinking) or practical (involving manual dexterity and use of methods, materials, tools and instruments); competence means “proven ability to use knowledge, skills and personal, social and/or methodological abilities, in work or study situations and in professional and personal development.”<sup>1</sup>

The National Qualifications Framework contains a summarized formulation of the knowledge, skills and competences required for students. Level 6, subsection 6B corresponds to the higher, bachelor education degree. In view of the subject of our study, we will quote cognitive and practical skills for the regulated bachelor sublevel 6B:

- Knows proficient methods and tools that allow solving complex problems;
- Applies logical thinking and demonstrates an innovative and creative approach to solve unusual problems.<sup>2</sup>

These cognitive and practical skills are generally defined and they are specified for each academic degree.

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<sup>1</sup> European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning (2008)

<sup>2</sup> The National Bulgarian Qualification Framework (2012).

## ***Language Skills in Intercultural Education***

Among the eight key competences that are widely recognized in Europe, which are of crucial importance for personal fulfillment and development, active citizenship, social inclusion and employment, half are related to language learning in an intercultural environment:

- Communication in the mother tongue;
- Communication in foreign languages;
- Social and civic competences;
- Cultural awareness and expression.<sup>3</sup>

Language learning is a means to explore another culture. Dimitrios Thanasoulas states that the teaching of culture should become an integral part of foreign language instruction. (Thanasoulas 2001). Despite the fact that linguistic and intercultural competences are associated in this process, they are not identical. According to Renni Radkova (2016), linguistic and intercultural competences are not interchangeable:

In some cases there is a high level of foreign language communicative competence, but not particularly well developed intercultural competence. However, in order to make intercultural communication possible and to use intercultural competence, it is an almost obligatory condition that a linguistic competence should exist. This holds true especially in cases when there are problematic situations of intercultural interaction. It is then that linguistic competence turns out to be of essential significance. Knowledge of foreign culture is not to be neglected, although it could hardly be sufficient without proper linguistic knowledge. In conclusion, it can be argued that *linguistic*

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<sup>3</sup> Key competences for lifelong learning – a European reference framework.

*competence in a sense should be well ahead of intercultural or be acquired in parallel with it* (Radkova 2016).

A similar opinion is shared by Inma Álvarez and Cecilia Garrido: “Even though intercultural competence appears in many programmes, in practice, the integration of intercultural skills remains behind the teaching of the language. This integration hasn’t proved easy” (Álvarez and Garrido 2005).

In the field of education, linguistic diversity can be traced in three areas: communication in the mother tongue, learning the official language of a country and learning of foreign languages. Maya Sotirova (2011) states that in terms of pedagogics, preserving bilingual features is of great importance, i.e., a child needs not only to have a good command of the official language of a country as a means of social communication, but also to preserve and develop the level of proficiency in their mother tongue. She further argues her point:

Language is an important ethno-cultural marker and as such it is an indispensable element of personal identity. It is due to this feature, that the mother tongue is the language in which one thinks best, most profoundly and creatively. That is the reason why recent researches are increasingly emphasizing the importance of bilingual education for the general mental development of the child since in well-balanced social conditions and proper training not only there is nothing negative about it, but it can even contribute to the development of intellectual properties such as flexibility and creativity. It creates certain conditions to sharpen a child’s power of attention, to form a better reactivity of the nervous system, to train memory, will and thinking, as well as to stimulate creativity (Sotirova 2011).

In analyzing the pros and cons of bilingualism, F. Daskalova (2003) writes that unfortunately, very often there is a lack of proper social and pedagogical conditions, a fact which puts bilingual children in a disadvantaged social position: “In such cases (as with Roma children) the deficits in general intellectual and language development, as well as low school results are wrongly attributed only to bilingual environment. So the theory of language development deficit of bilingual children makes it difficult to uncover the true causes of the deficit, which in most cases are due to social basis” (Daskalova 2003, p. 263).

The need to learn *the official language* of a country is determined by the fact that this is the language in which instruction of children is done:

Learning the official language is at the same time a process of adoption of national culture and adherence to its values, which determines the crucial importance of official language learning for social adaptation and educational integration of children and pupils from minority ethnic groups. This explains the fact that most multicultural educational programs usually focus on language as a determining cultural factor (Sotirova 2011).

Communication in foreign languages is a competence required by the contemporary intercultural environment. All learners must study foreign languages at school. In this way, the expectations of society are associated not only with developing young people’s communicative skills, but also with having positive attitude toward other cultures, intercultural understanding and formation of intercultural competence.

### ***Intercultural communicative competence and communication speaking skills***

The development of intercultural communicative competence of children is a continuous process that requires targeted educational impact. According to Yanka Totseva (Totzeva 2012), a pedagogical approach to intercultural communicative competence involves understanding of it as *a system of knowledge as well as experience in communicating with culturally diverse interlocutors, skills in manifestation of cultural relativism, tolerance and transfer of values*. Y. Totseva (2012) stated that educational work should include activities that lead to a mastery of the three components of intercultural communicative competence:

- The *cognitive* component, which includes *knowledge* that largely predetermines attitudes and behavior; *self-knowledge* (cultural self-identification) and *knowledge of cultural differences*.
- The *attitudinal* component – at its core are the abilities to overcome stereotypes and prejudices, to refrain from discrimination, to have a positive attitude to accepting difference and to achieve high levels of tolerance.
- The *behavioral* component – the ability to work with people belonging to other cultures, which is associated with the operationalization of knowledge and the formation of readiness to apply it in practical activities in the course of intercultural communication (Totseva 2012).

In specialized literature, apart from the term *intercultural communicative compe-*

*tence*, there exists the term *sociolinguistic competence*. In M. Sotirova's (2015) point of view, sociolinguistic competence is an element of communicative competence. "Communication speaking skills are the makeup of sociolinguistic competence structure without being its only constituent. At the same time they can be generally regarded as skills to exert socio-communicative influence which also includes strategies to achieve communicative aims, which in their turn, are associated with strategic communicative competence." Reasonably, the author states that there is a difference between the communication speaking skills that are formed in teacher-education students and students from other academic areas, as well as between the communication speaking skills of teacher-education students and teachers practicing their profession. In this context, M. Sotirova (2015) points the following communication speaking skills of future teachers that are built within their practical training:

#### **1. Reading and Writing Skills**

- Taking notes during field observations;
- Reading and analyzing rules, regulations, government documents regarding the content of education etc.;
- Searching, reading and understanding of scientific and methodological literature;
- Searching for and selecting additional information for the purposes of practical work;
- Reading and editing the written texts of learners;
- Compliance with the graphic requirements for writing letters and words (for practical work in primary school classes);

- Compliance with the structural, content and format requirements for making field observations recordings, lesson plans etc.

## 2. **Listening and Watching Skills**

- Understanding verbalized instructions from tutors and cooperating teachers;
- A simultaneous perception of verbal and visual codes from a larger number of participants in communicative acts;
- An adequate perception of speech when working with children with speech disorders or with development difficulties;
- Pedagogical observations during a practical training course;
- Observation of behavior and verbal expression of learners and others.

## 3. **Speaking and Presentation Skills**

- Asking questions and sharing impressions, observations, comments in the process of discussing field observations at school or kindergarten;
- Justifying the choice of one or another pedagogical strategy when planning practical work;
- A convincing verbal motivation of learner activities;
- An understandable and clear presentation of educational content to learners;
- Formulating and asking didactically well-constructed questions;
- Giving and justifying assessment marks on learner activities;
- Preparing and presenting multimedia presentations for the purposes of classroom activities (Sotirova 2015) etc.

While the basic training of university students is related to the formation of fundamental cognitive and practical skills at

language teaching in intercultural environment, teacher qualification through practice further develops these skills. Y. Totseva (2009) proposes technology for training teachers to work in a multicultural environment. The technological model consists of the following components:

- Studying of the needs of training on diversity management in schools;
- Diagnosis of personal motivation to participate in training activities;
- Exploration of attitudes toward various forms of qualification;
- Examination of interest in various andragogic methods;
- Studying of the attitude toward a proposed training (qualification) program;
- Adjustment and optimization of a program (if needed);
- Conduct of training;
- Diagnosis of the level of satisfaction from the qualification program and readiness for inclusion in subsequent training;
- Deferred diagnostic application of newly acquired knowledge and skills in the methods and techniques of diversity management in the classroom;
- In-depth interviews with school principals and pedagogical counselors on the sustainability of the new pedagogical models for work under diversity conditions (Totseva 2009, p. 275).

### ***Pedagogical Skills at Teaching Language in Kindergarten***

Student teacher preparation for teaching language in kindergarten further builds up the acquired training in linguistics, general and preschool pedagogy, general and



child psychology. The pedagogical skills that comprise this preparation, according V. I. Yashina and M. M. Alekseeva, can be conditionally arranged into five groups (2013, p. 9-10).

The first group of pedagogical skills is targeted at studying child speech and orientation in the process of communication. It includes three groups:

- Skills in selecting the diagnostic methods for studying child speech;
- Skills in writing an assessment of speech development;
- Skills in determining the environment necessary for future communication with the child.

The second group of pedagogical skills is focused on the design and construction of didactic speech communication. It includes:

- Skills in making long-term (year) plans;
- Skills in lesson planning of compulsory or additional forms of education;
- Skills in planning an individual communicative act.

The third group of pedagogical skills includes the abilities to organize and manage the process of didactic communication:

- Skills in attracting children's attention and creating emotional contact;
- Skills in motivating speech activity;

The fourth group of pedagogical skills is aimed at socioperceptual skills:

- Skills in having a good mastery of speech and the use of non-verbal means of communication;
- Skills in building a creative environment when communicating with children.

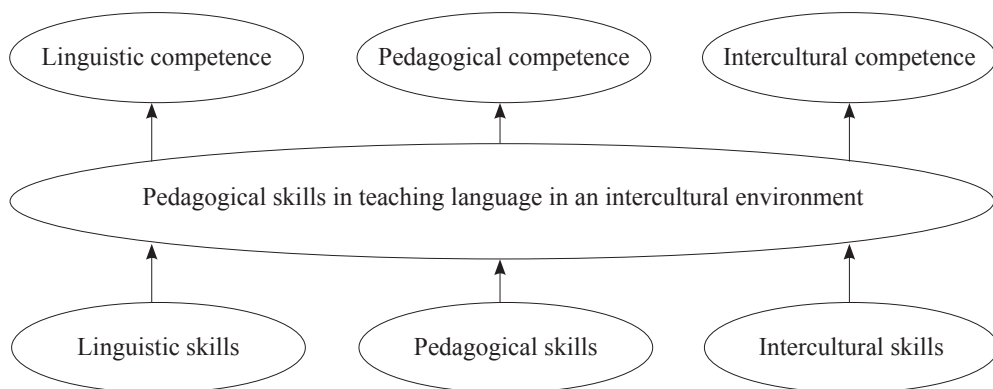
The fifth group of pedagogical skills consists of skills in analyzing communica-

tion in terms of its effectiveness for child speech development as well as in summarizing the gathered results (Yashina and Alekseeva 2013, p. 9-10).

The above-mentioned pedagogical skills to teach language in kindergarten are applied by a teacher in classrooms of different ethnic composition. The program for a preparatory group/preparatory class in Bulgaria provides differentiated learning content in Bulgarian language so that it can ensure adequate pedagogical language learning support for children of different ethnicity. The educational field of Bulgarian language is structured in five educational nuclei: the process of speaking and listening – formal and contents aspect, grammar, phonetics, preparation for reading and writing. With respect to the contents aspect, state educational requirements are developed in accordance with psycholinguistic principles and laws. The formal aspect of the program focuses on the acquisition of Bulgarian language by children at different language levels – monolingual (one whose family language is Bulgarian) and bilingual children (one whose family language is not Bulgarian). The program contains three modules: two modules for children whose family language is Bulgarian (who have not attended kindergarten before and those who have) and one module for children whose family language is not Bulgarian (who have not attended kindergarten before a preparatory group).

### **Practical aspects**

The brief theoretical review of specialized literature reveals that the pedagogical skills in teaching languages in an inter-



*Figure No. 1. The development of pedagogical skills in teaching language in an intercultural environment and turning them into competences*

cultural environment in kindergarten are heterogeneous. They are formed based on linguistic skills, pedagogical skills and intercultural skills. This set of diverse skills builds linguistic competence, pedagogical competence and intercultural competence. In order to turn these skills into proven ability, i.e., competence, student teachers' theoretical training is further supplemented by field observations and student teaching.

The theoretical analysis of the pedagogical skills of prospective teachers of children in teaching a language in an intercultural environment gives merit to the proposal of the following scheme, which illustrates the skill-competences relationships.

In accordance with the above-mentioned European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning, skills can be cognitive and practical. Therefore, pedagogical skills in teaching languages in kindergarten intercultural environment are regarded as cognitive and practical. Our opinion is that their content can be specified in the following manner.

Cognitive pedagogical skills necessary for teaching language in kindergarten in intercultural environment are as follows:

- Analyzing language and speech units;
- Assessing language phenomena in accordance with a communicative task and communicative situation;
- Analyzing child speech, age and individual characteristics of child speech development;
- Selecting the appropriate diagnostic tools for the investigation of child speech;
- Analyzing communication in terms of its affectivity for child speech development and summarizing the results gathered;
- Planning the teaching process so as to stimulate children's speech activity (yearly plan, lesson planning of compulsory or additional forms of education, an individual communicative act);
- Analyzing cultural differences;
- Adapting to learning content and teaching resources for language teaching in accordance with cultural differences.



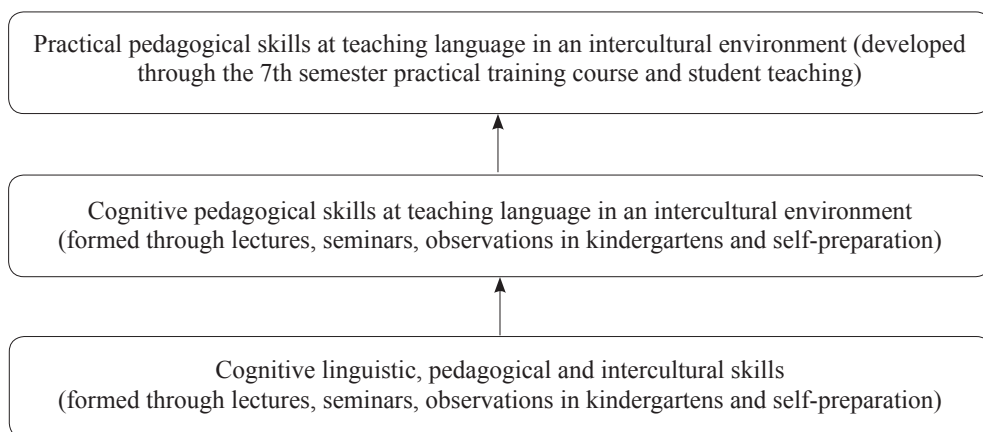


Figure No. 2. *The development of pedagogical skills in the university education*

Practical pedagogical skills necessary for teaching language in kindergarten in an intercultural environment are as follows:

- Having a good mastery of speech and the usage of non-verbal means of communication;
- Using language in various forms of pedagogical communication;
- Attracting children’s attention and creating emotional attitude to speech activities;
- Motivating children for speech activities;
- Building a creative environment when communicating with children;
- Applying adequate diagnostic methods for studying child speech;
- Writing an assessment of child speech;
- The making of didactic materials, games and other pedagogical means for developing child speech;
- Overcoming stereotypes and prejudice in an intercultural environment;
- Being tolerant to cultural differences;
- Using intercultural environment resources for the purposes of language teaching.

Student teachers’ pedagogical skills for language teaching in a kindergarten intercultural environment are gradually developed within the whole undergraduate program. In accordance with the curricula of master degree programs of Preschool and Primary School Education and Preschool Education and Foreign Language at St. Cyril and St. Methodius University of Veliko Turnovo – Vratsa Branch, first year students study the following academic disciplines: Language Culture and Contemporary Bulgarian Language, Theory of Education, Didactics, Preschool Pedagogy, Intercultural Education. During their second year, undergraduate students study the pedagogy of teaching Bulgarian language in kindergarten. Within a single semester, students attend lectures, seminars and on-site observations in Bulgarian language in kindergarten. During the last but one (7<sup>th</sup>) semester, they attend a practical training course under the supervision of a cooperating teacher and university instructor and, within the last (8<sup>th</sup>) semester, pre-graduation student teaching. During these field-based experiences, prospective

teachers carry out compulsory or additional forms of pedagogical interaction in Bulgarian language at kindergarten. In this way, practical skills at teaching language in a kindergarten intercultural environment are formed consequently, based on cognitive skills. The technological model for building the pedagogical skills of prospective teachers at teaching language in an intercultural environment can be presented through Figure No. 2.

The above figure refers to the preparation of prospective teachers in the bachelor degree programs of Preschool and Primary School Education and Preschool Education and Foreign Language at St. Cyril and

St. Methodius University of Veliko Turnovo – Vratsa Branch, Bulgaria.

## Conclusion

The development of the pedagogical skills that future teachers of children should possess in teaching a language in an intercultural environment is a long process. In this study, we have categorized the content of these skills in two groups: cognitive and practical. The analyzed pedagogical object has a heterogeneous structure, because it is built from different basic skills: linguistic skills, pedagogical skills and intercultural skills. The practical education of students upgrades the developed cognitive skills.

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## BŪSIMŪ DARŽELIO AUKLĖTOJŲ PEDAGOGINIŲ KALBOS MOKYMO ĮGŪDŽIŲ TOBULINIMAS TARPKULTŪRINĖJE DARŽELIO APLINKOJE

**Evgenia Minkova Topolska**

S a n t r a u k a

Kalbų mokymasis yra būtina sėkmingo tarpkultūrinio bendravimo sąlyga. Svarbi šio proceso dalis yra valstybinės kalbos mokymasis, tačiau taip pat svarbu mokytis anglų kaip visame pasaulyje vartojamos tarptautinės bendruomenės kalbos. Rengiant auklėtojus darbui tarpkultūrinėje aplinkoje reikėtų visapusiškai gilinti jų kalbines, pedagogines ir tarpkultūrinės kompetencijas.

*Iteikta 2016 09 18*

*Priimta 2017 03 06*

Šis straipsnis skiriamas darželio auklėtojų vaisingos (šiuo atveju bulgarų) kalbos pedagoginiams įgūdžiams tobulinti kaip vienam iš auklėtojų rengimo tarpkultūrinio ugdymo srityje programos dėmenų.

Teorinėje dalyje pateikiama trumpa specializuotos lingvistinės, pedagoginės ir metodologinės literatūros ir ikimokyklinio ugdymo programų Bulgarijos Respublikoje analizė.