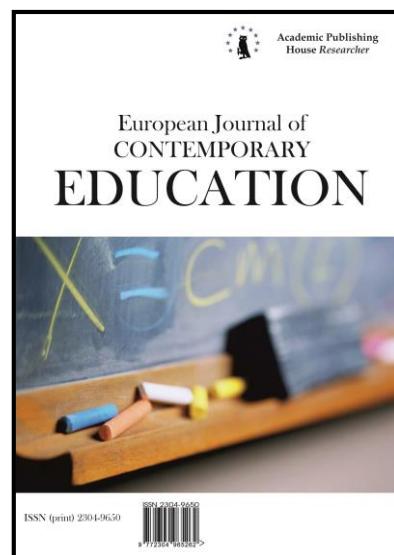




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Pedagogical Experience on Formation of Tolerant and Multicultural Consciousness of Students

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Abstract

This article is based on the data cultivated from a teaching experiment carried out in one of the institutions in the city of Tyumen. The purpose of the experiment was to determine the necessity for education of religious and national tolerance through the study of special disciplines of the confessional and ethno-cultural content, for removing psychological barriers to religious and formation of a multicultural consciousness in the future. The authors emphasizes that the increase in tolerance level involves the use of teaching methods rooted into the structure of the educational process, the result of which would be the change of personal characteristics within an individual. Such personality changes included the system of relations, values and general outlook.

This article deals with the impact of forms and methodical possibilities on the correction of inter-ethnic and inter-religious interaction of students, their normal behavior in different social situations. To appreciate the realization of this purpose, the authors developed a course on «Religions of the region under study». He emphasized the requirements of the educational standard which determines the necessity to study history, culture and religion of the region under study for the specialty «Regional studies» in the sphere of religious and interfaith relations. Historical and cultural aspects of the course content are harmoniously integrated into the context of religious relations.

The experiment had been running for over four years and had shown positive benefits in the dynamics of formation confessional tolerance for students and elements of a multicultural consciousness.

Keywords: multiculturalism, tolerance, teaching experiment; multi-religious education, Christianity, Islam.

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1. Introduction

The problem of Islamic extremism in the modern world has determined the necessity to find ways to counteract this phenomenon. In our opinion, the most productive mechanism of counteraction to ethno-cultural and religious extremism can be considered as preventive measures, aimed to establish a multinational, but a single nation with common cultural and historical roots. Fostering of religious and national tolerance is the first step of this process, the basis to strengthen interfaith relations and create common world-view.

Modern confessional education in schools and universities is focused on the formation of the youth's system of moral values reflected in its «own» religion, but it does not involve deep knowledge of the aliens' culture and outlook. Such disciplines as «Fundamentals of Orthodox Culture» and «Fundamentals of Islamic culture» are optionally taught in secondary schools. Attending both disciplines is impractical. Thus, the course strengthens the students' sense of exclusivity, belonging to only one culture. This practice does not unite children or integrate and harmonize their ethno-cultural community, but only puts emphasis on the confessional differences and enhances the form of relations «your / someone's else». The formation of a sense of civic unity is necessary to overcome this barrier. This problem can be solved if the «alien's» religion and culture will be integrated into the cultural space of the today's youth personality and will be well known and understood by members of other faiths.

The object of the study is students; the subject of the study is confessional tolerance and elements of multiculturalism. Tolerance has been diagnosed in the contents of personal qualities, attitudes, values, behaviour and outlook.

2. Materials and Methods

The methodological research has been focused on the principle of molding of the personality in society as a part of personal and cultural approaches. The research included the use of such methods as: observation, survey, teaching modelling, analysis of documents and expert assessment.

The experimental sample included students, male and female, 17–20 years of age; the total number is 73 people. In addition to the experimental group, the tolerance parameters had been studied in the control group, where the work on the formation of tolerance was not carried out. The structure of the experimental and control groups included Muslims and Orthodox Christians. The study consisted of various manifestations of ethno-cultural and religious characteristics within an individual. The structure of the experimental group is presented in [Table 1](#).

Table 1. Experimental group members

Academic year	The number of students in the group (persons)	The number of students who consider themselves as Muslims (persons, %)	The number of students who consider themselves as Orthodox Christians (persons, %)
2009–2010	26	7 (27 %)	19 (73 %)
2010–2011	21	6 (28,5 %)	15 (71,5 %)
2011–2012	15	5 (30 %)	10 (70 %)
2012–2013	11	4 (36 %)	7 (64 %)

In the control groups students of other specialty there was no course «Religions of the region under Study». The groups consisted of students with identical age, sex, educational characteristics. As the first year of the experiment was a period of technical, content, organizational revision of the course and was in the process of regulation, there was no control group. It appeared only in the second year.

Table 2. Control group members

Academic year	The number of students in the group (persons)	The number of students who consider themselves as Muslims (persons, %)	The number of students who consider themselves as Orthodox Christians (persons, %)
2010-2011	30	10 (33, 3 %)	20 (66, 6 %)
2011-2012	31	12 (37, 2 %)	19 (62, 8 %)
2012-2013	29	11 (31, 9 %)	18 (68, 1 %)

The level of tolerant and multicultural orientation of students in the experimental and control groups was defined at the beginning and the end of the pedagogical experiment. The means of such assessment was special, individual-oriented questionnaire with data interesting for a researcher. There were 50 both open and close questions, reflected personal students' attitudes towards the problems of confessional and social interaction, multicultural tolerance. Among them, there were, for example, such questions which dealt with students' complete readiness to cross marriages, visits of cultic institutions of «alien» religion, preferences in friend relations, knowledge of basic religious holidays in different confessional groups, etc.

It is necessary to outline the conditions of the experiment.

It is necessary to outline the conditions of the experiment. The South of Tyumen Region is a unique region where multicultural phenomena are historically formed. The level of national and religious tolerance and «friendly feelings» here is exceeds 90 % in some years, according to the information of the Committee on nationalities of the Tyumen region. Sociologists from other regions of Russia confirm the high level of tolerance in Tyumen (Yashin, 2011: 206). In the youth community the tolerance level is lower (Table 3, 4) because of psychologic-age features, of an individual, and the fact that in the groups there were students from other regions that are not characterized by interconfessional concord (for example, Ugra and Yamal). Basically the experimental and control groups consisted (80–90 %) of local students who were brought up in auspicious multicultural environment. Thus, the students expressed appropriate readiness, and *the experiment was to finish the process of formation of their tolerant and multicultural consciousness with help of purposeful influence*.

Expert assessment was carried out on the informative certain procedure that reflected peculiarities of social behaviour and mentality of a student. There were created two expert groups (independent of one another) for estimates of characteristics of tolerance. Professors who know students for a long period of time, give classes and have an opportunity to compare their personal attitude, values, outlook and behavior have become members of expert groups. They evaluated displays of personal qualities of students on the proposed scale (on a 10 point-based system).

3. Discussion

This topic as experimental experience is not discussed in the pedagogical science. The authors have considered the theoretical aspects of education religious tolerance (Zenovich, 2013; Lesite, 2011; Parshakov, et al., 2014), multiculturalism (Evleshina, 2010; Zhukova et al., 2016; Fedyunina, 2007) and new teaching technologies (Tyunnikov, 2016). Some authors describe the experience of raising religious tolerance, but without multi-religious learning (Gorbunov, 2013; Vilkhovskaya et al., 2014; Kiselyova et al., 2013). The previous author's articles consider the historical experience of formation of Muslim tolerance (Bortnikova et al., 2015), as well as mistakes in the formation of the modern confessional Germany (Naumenko, 2015). Analysis of the Russian experience of confessional tolerance education through a special training discipline has not yet become a scientific research subject. Experimental research on the formation of multiculturalism is currently no.

4. Results

As part of the experiment, at the premises of the Tyumen State Academy of International Economics, Management and Law, there was introduced a specialized course on «Religions of the region under study» for students enrolled in Regional studies. The duration of the discipline was 292 hours, 144 of which were class hours. The form of assessment was final test and exam. Thus, student was immersed in the content of the course for quite a long time.

The teacher offered the subject of compulsory implementation. The students had to examine primary religious sources, visit different religious places. Unsubscribing from this course was impossible due to the obligatory nature of the discipline. In addition, the necessity for studying the subject was determined with the bond «fail the test – fail the exam – expulsion». In case of disagreement with the content of the discipline the student were able to exchange into a different specialty. Thus, the students of «Regional Studies» were actually imposed to study this course.

Perhaps, from a legal point of view, this approach meant a restriction of religious students' rights and their academic and religious freedom. As a compensatory measure, teacher and the Academy administration did not interfere in the commission of some cult, ritual actions. Students were allowed, for example, to wear religious clothes elements (such as a headscarf), to pray, to use specialized library, an exhibition of confessional religious values. Moreover, such a religious demonstration was used to achieve the purpose of the experiment: the students were given the opportunity to freely talk about their prayers and rituals, their history, purpose, values, and most importantly, their emotions and religious feelings (for example, between life before and after the emergence of confessional self-consciousness).

This pedagogical approach contributed to a better understanding for the Orthodox part of the group values of Islam. It also emphasized respect for Islam and at the same time it urged Muslims to treat Orthodox Christians in the same way. Muslims had to search for analogues in Christianity (e.g. the role of women's headscarf in Orthodox culture).

The program involved the studying not only the history of religions, their features in the Tyumen region and current status, but also a deeper exploration: the direct study of the Quran, the Torah and the Bible in various interpretations of theologians. The most important methodological element can be considered a reference to the following mandatory accents:

- To the common historical roots of different religions, protagonist in the Torah, the Bible, the Quran, as well as the similarity of the spiritual and moral values system;

- To discrepancies in religious primary sources: the students had to understand the historical, political, cultural, linguistic and other reasons for the differences in the interpretation of texts.

Thus, there was an assignment, as part of experiment, to form students' creative approach to understanding the religious sources and distrust of pseudo-missionaries thinking.

Students had to visit places of religious purpose: the mosque, an Orthodox church, a Catholic church, a synagogue, as well as the study of museum collections with exhibits of religious cultures. The teacher encouraged students, who wanted to acquaint the group with family ceremonial objects: icons, Shamail (wall panels with prayers from the Quran), amulets, charms, and others. Besides that all students made multimedia presentations on ethno-confessional trend which were the foundation for further discussions.

In the educational process the teacher, as mandatory didactic components, had used the following points:

1. Putting emphasis on the evaluation categories and concepts, such as «totalitarian sect is bad and orthodoxy is good», «Islamic fundamentalism is bad and traditional Islam is good», etc. However, at the same time, each class started with a positive assessment for world religions, for example: «Islam is one of the greatest and most tolerant of religions, and the Quran is also one the world's oldest holy books». This assurance made Muslim student trust their teacher and the provided assignments, which at the same time helped the students of other faiths foster appreciation for Islam.

In Germany, the practice of the confessional education was not valued and usually waived evaluation categories for studied religions ([Shcherbanov, 2009](#)), believing that the religion is of any self-worth. This approach left the learning process unfinished and prone to confuse its students instead of providing basis for the formation of their minds.

2. Not putting stress on any version of Islam (Christianity). Postulations of the largest schools of thought were studied in a comparative context with their mandatory assessment and identifying

the causes of deformation of the original dogmas. There was proposed the idea that all religions have common roots and they originated from the same conceptual background.

The analysis of evaluations of two independent expert groups and testing data has shown that educational and methodical and upbringing process in the studying of subject has caused change in the terms of confessional tolerance. This change has affected the scope of scientific, practical, social and cultural knowledge of religious issues. In the next three years, the formation of confessional tolerance consistently confirmed.

Table 3. The level of tolerance and multicultural consciousness of students in the experimental control group

Academic year	Before the experiment	After the experiment
2009–2010	75, 6 %	89, 0 %
2010–2011	76, 3 %	98, 2 %
2011–2012	79, 0 %	99, 1 %
2012–2013	80, 1 %	99, 6 %
Average data	78,0%	96,5%

Table 4. The level of tolerance and multicultural consciousness of students in the control group

Academic year	Beginning of the academic year	End of the academic year
2010–2011	75, 6 %	72, 9 %
2011–2012	68, 9 %	70, 3 %
2012–2013	76, 0 %	78, 2 %
Average data	73,5	73,8

Expert evaluations testified the positive dynamics of the process also.

The estimate of students' tolerance degree was made from measurements of average tolerance ranking of a student before the experiment and after it. For this purpose the method of expert survey was used. Statistical data manipulation was made to verify the results. To verify the results the concordance coefficient of expert commentary was calculated (concordance coefficient W) and was tested its statistical significance on the base of X* Pearson (Table 5, Table 6).

Table 5. Summarized results of formation measures of tolerant and multicultural consciousness of students in the experimental groups

Academic year	The average grade of tolerance of student before the experiment		The average grade of tolerance of student after the experiment		The concordance coefficient W	
	The expert group № 1	The expert group № 2	The expert group № 1	The expert group № 2	The expert group № 1 before / after	The expert group № 2 before / after
2009–2010	7,1	7,3	8,7	7,9	0,54/0,61	0,71/0,68
2010–2011	6,8	7,4	9,2	9,1	0,66/0,65	0,61/0,74
2011–2012	7,4	8,9	9,0	9,4	0,88/0,72	0,68/0,63
2012–2013	7,5	7,1	9,7	9,3	0,70/0,78	0,69/0,85

Table 6. Summarized results of indicators of a tolerant and multicultural consciousness of students in the control groups

Academic year	The average grade of tolerance of student at the beginning of the academic year		The average grade of tolerance of student at the end of the academic year		The concordance coefficient W	
	The expert group № 1	The expert group № 2	The expert group № 1	The expert group № 2	The expert group № 1 before / after	The expert group № 2 before / after
2010–2011	7,2	7,4	7,0	7,6	0,50/0,58	0,73/0,61
2011–2012	7,7	7,1	7,0	7,8	0,65/0,55	0,68/0,61
2012–2013	7,9	7,3	7,8	7,1	0,73/0,74	0,59/080

Quantitative analysis of the data in the tables 5 and 6 clearly shows increase in the level of tolerant consciousness of students who took part in the experiment of the method of tolerant and multicultural consciousness formation. An average change in the development of tolerant component in consciousness in the academic year was defined by quantitative measures – 18, 5 %. The measures of changing tolerance and multicultural components in consciousness of the control group students changed within a statistical margin of error – 0, 3 %.

The results of surveys of students of different confessions and cultures indicate that they have begun to understand each other better. «... If I had known then what I know now, I would not say this to him [Muslim] ...», «...now I know why he [Muslim] did that ...», «I had despised the Russian, but now understand that they have such a religion» – the most characteristic statements of the students.

This approach can be used as a preventive measure to the majority of students. But, unfortunately, it is not very effective in teaching students with a high level of religious addiction. There is an interesting example to illustrate this statement. There were two people who accepted a radical version of Islam in the groups: a college boy of Russian nationality and college girl of Kazakh nationality. Religious consciousness of the college boy was managed to overcome only in two years, with the support of the mullahs and devout Muslim who offered help. At the same time he rejected any conversations with teachers, and the impact on him had to be carried out by the aide-Muslim under a false name, through contacts on the Internet. As a result, the student has agreed to meet with Mullah, who had previously been acquainted with the problem. The authority of the mullahs allowed for a positive ethno-confessional correctional work. The religious consciousness of the college girl managed to mitigate only partially in terms of attitude to her neighbors in the dormitory (for example, not to put a loud alarm clock at 5 am to perform the namaz, etc.), however, it failed to change her views and to overcome religious aggressiveness of behavior.

In 2013 the Institute was closed as financially inefficient, and the experiment was stopped.

The problem of tolerant and multicultural consciousness formation of students is much broader than its solving within the specialized course. With the purpose of diversification of major didactical methods of formation such characteristics of consciousness the attempts of using elements of confessional education and multicultural analysis of the contents of other disciplines were made. We studied the effectiveness of the methods in the group of students at other higher institution while studying human sciences in which there were no confessional and ethno-cultural aspects.

In 2014–2015, an example is the experience of tolerance education in the subject «Fundamentals of law» in the third year of «Economy» specialization. There was selected a mixed ethno-confessional group, where Muslims number reached up to 50%, while the group in general consisted of 30 people. The methodology was used during the study of the content of the subject.

The study of law took place in the comparative aspect of law doctrines in the various confessional systems (For example, Sharia and the Russian system of law). The methodology proved to be insufficiently effective. There was no quality improvement of knowledge of law, let alone confessional and ethno-cultural preparedness. The private space of Muslim students (aged from 20 years) was dominated by the grouping effect that increased their ethno-cultural domination greatly and information had been rejected. They were sure that «they know more about Islam and Sharia than the Russian professor», although experimental work in the group was carried out by the same specialist. Also there was a significant rejection of knowledge and negativism in the confessional and ethno-cultural sphere of interaction of students under incidental study of bases ethnic and confessional issues.

5. Conclusion

Results can be achieved under certain pedagogical conditions and particularly using the effect of immersion of students in the content of a special «Religions of the region under study» course. Besides, it is necessary:

1. The number of Muslim students in the group should be significantly less than 50 % of its composition (preferably up to 25–30 %). When there are more there works out the social and psychological setting of dominance in conditions of which there is a certain non-individuation of the consciousness of the majority of students. The material under discussion is reinforced by the collective archetypal value of the confessional image. This effect produces a strong group opposition to the logic of tolerant comparison of dogmatic, ritual and other confessional constructions. In addition to the effect of dominance, there are other social and psychological effects of the group in the practice of the educational process which realize cleanly in the numerical superiority of the Muslim students.

The effect of «infection» defines the dominant influence on the minds of group of most orthodox confessional and associated with them behavioral positions of individual students, whose views and actions are beginning to uncritically be supported by all members of the group. In addition, the group effect of social settings of being «oneness and chosenness» is very noticeable and it can be changed by the professor, harmonizing ethnic and confessional relations between students in their social, professional and everyday reality.

An extremely important effect of group dynamics should not go unnoticed. It is important in the effective confessional harmonization of students and is achieved by means of specialized training – confessional conformity. The greater the numerical superiority of the representatives of Islam in the same study group, the greater the effect of conformal reactions would be observed in it. Therefore, the vast number of students of the confessional orientation will support manifestation of extreme types of their confessions dogmas. Overcoming social and psychological effect by pedagogical influence is extremely difficult. It is especially difficult to correct Islamic confessional dogmatism.

Methodically correct, psychologically adjusted formation of academic study group is a fundamental principle of productive and, ultimately, an effective measure of the success of the confessional education and the harmonization of social relations of undergraduates.

2. Data of a questionnaire survey of students, which are held at the beginning and at the end of the course, indicate a significant shift of indicators confessional tolerance in the direction of increasing its capacity. Students begin to perceive the problems of ethnic and confessional disputes and situations, leading to conflicts, more tolerant, and subjectively less critical.

3. The most susceptible age of students for the formation of confessional tolerance in our experiment proved to be the age of 17–19 years. Therefore, subjects of ethno-confessional cycle are advisable to plan for 1–2 year of college or senior year of vocational or secondary school.

4. The number of members of the academic groups, studying the subject of ethno-confessional cycle is very important. A group of 8–15 people is seen the best possible (which in the social and psychological dimension corresponds to the characteristics of a small group)

5. The amount of curricular and extracurricular classes must conform to the configuration of ethnic and confessional harmonization, be sufficiently informative in terms of cognitive interest of students. Classes should cover quite a long period of time (annual cycle) be regular and obligatory. Teaching process should be carried out in an active form by using didactically activating and educational elements.

6. There are requirements for professors of confessional subjects which are obligatory: they must be of high qualification and a certain authority. The teacher should not be a deeply religious man - this fact would not allow him to not give preference to any religion. That is why it should not be allowed to invite a clergyman of any confessional orientation for teaching subjects of confessional cycle.

7. Inclusion in the curriculum of subjects of confessional cycle in the extent and form that was present in the experiment seems to be cost-consuming. However, the necessity for such practices in higher education is dictated by the necessity for building reliable confessional peace, prosperity and harmonization, so the cost of such work has a reasonable basis.

The experiment on the formation of religious tolerance among students through the teaching work in the study of a specialized course has been effective. As a result of its realization there were identified positive developments in the process of formation of confessional tolerance among students. Further observation of the students showed that they have weakened the barriers to entry into an interfaith marriage. They feel equally comfortable in a Mosque, Church and Synagogue, and sometimes visit its together friends of other nationalities and religions.

Positive developments appeared in substantive characteristics of personality of students. First of all, these changes have affected the sphere of social relations, expanding the limits of its legal relationships, by changing sequence of actions in situations of conflict related to the influence of ethno-confessional conflictogenics. These changes in the personality determined in the content of personal values, ideology and behavioral assessments. This experience of formation of confessional tolerance can be regarded as a positive. The results presented in this article are based on expert judgment of specialists. Further research in this sphere will enable to build statistically significant evaluation of their results and draw conclusions on the level of the quantitative data analysis.

This experience can be used in the process of developing of state programs of preventive resolution of ethnic and confessional contradictions. It can be used in the development of measures focused on preventing conflict and manifestations of extremism in combination with other measures of law, political and educational nature.

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