CROSS-CULTURAL TEACHERS’ TRAINING TO WORK WITH MIGRANT STUDENTS

Abstract. Today more people are forced to leave their homes. Their growing number puts a considerable pressure on host countries. The latter try to help migrants adapt and integrate into new communities. One of the effective means to do that is education and training. Teachers who are working with migrant students become key actors in this process. As migrants’ classes are ethnically and culturally diverse, teachers have to be well aware of cultural diversity and possess cross-cultural knowledge and skills. Practical experience proves that teachers are faced with the problem of lack of cross-cultural knowledge and skills. Investigating the best world practices how to provide teachers with necessary cross-cultural training to work with migrant students and learners can help outline the progressive ideas and introduce them in other countries.

The article reveals the analysis of the best world practices for developing the teachers’ ability to work with ethnically and culturally diverse groups of migrant students and learners. The theoretical grounds for the research were prepared by carrying out a review of scientific and pedagogical literature on teacher training to work in culturally diverse classes of migrant students and learners. To avoid misunderstanding of the research terms we defined the basic term “diversity” in relation to the nationality of students and learners and in the context of education.

It was found out that to work efficiently with culturally diverse migrant students, teachers have to possess both general and specific pedagogical skills.
General skills include communication and listening, creativity and the ability to solve problems, curiosity, openness, tolerance and have high expectations of students. The group of specific skills includes knowledge of cultural anthropology, social psychology, cognitive development of students and learners, content and language integrated teaching, learning a second language. Specific knowledge and skills for working in culturally diverse classes should be developed during the initial training of teachers, that is, in educational institutions that train teachers.

The experience of the following countries in teachers’ cross-cultural training was analyzed: Finland, the USA, Canada, Australia, Austria, Cyprus, Greece, Italy, Romania, Slovakia and United Kingdom, Germany. The focus was put on the analysis of educational programs for training teachers to work with migrant students through “cross-cultural immersion” in a culturally diverse environment. To characterize such programs, the following criteria were applied: program goal, target audience, educational service providers. On the basis of the received results a set of recommendations was formulated for improving the teachers’ training and their readiness to work in a culturally diverse environment.

**Keywords:** teachers, migrants, cross-cultural training, experience, analysis.

**Statement of the problem.** Today, more people than at any time since World War II are forced to leave their homes: refugees, asylum seekers, internally displaced persons, immigrants, and others. According to the report published by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the number of migrants worldwide has exceeded 110 million people and continues to grow. At the end of 2022, there were approximately 108.4 million people, rising to 110 million in the first few months of 2023 alone [1]. According to forecasts, their number will continue to grow due to global instability in the world among them: the war in Ukraine, insidiously unleashed by the Russian Federation, hostilities in the Gaza Strip, Israel, the long-term conflict in Syria, climate shocks and economic crises in East Africa and Latin America.

The growing number of migrants and their diverse needs put a considerable pressure on host countries. In addition, the education systems of the receiving countries face significant challenges, because migrants have special educational needs. The attention to meeting migrants’ educational needs is important due to the fact that education itself serves as an effective means of their integration into the new society. Logically, under such conditions, teachers become key actors who help migrants adapt and then integrate into the society and realize their full potential. Their role in meeting the educational needs of migrants of different ages cannot be overestimated. After all, teachers can contribute to the cognitive and social-emotional development of migrants, support children and adults who do not speak the language of their training and learning, and play an important role as a mediator.
between schools and parents, the local community and society in a broader sense [2]. However, the ethnic and cultural diversity of classes and groups requires teachers to have special knowledge and skills to work in a culturally diverse environment. Knowing the importance of providing support to migrant students, teachers are faced with the problem: they lack of cross-cultural knowledge and skills.

Therefore, the issues of training teachers to work with migrant students, professional development and systematic support of teachers to adapt their teaching practice to culturally diverse classes are extremely topical nowadays and require a solution.

**Literature Review.** The literature review shows that education of migrants of school or adult age to provide their better adaptation and further integration into the host society draws researchers’ attention. On the one hand, nowadays, when the level of migration has increased significantly, there are numerous publications devoted to this topic. On the other hand, the issue of teacher training to work in ethnically and culturally diverse classes, unfortunately, remains outside the attention of both domestic and foreign researchers. However, among scarce publications on this topic the following research fields can be singled out: investigation of the peculiarities of teaching students of different nationalities in the same class [3]; analysis of the challenges and problems teachers face with when working with students of different nationalities and cultures [4; 5; 6; 7]; consideration of changes in teacher training, development of their readiness and ability to work with ethnically heterogeneous groups of students, but not necessarily migrants [8; 9; 10; 11].

It should be stated that the issue of training teachers to work with culturally diverse class is on the agenda of international and European organizations, in particular UNESCO [12], the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees [1]; Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development [13]; European Commission [14]. Therefore, it is anticipated that in the near future researchers will pay more attention to this issue.

**The Purpose of the Article.** In view of the above-said, the purpose of the research is to analyze the best world practices for developing the teachers’ ability to work with ethnically and culturally diverse groups of migrant students and learners.

To achieve the established purpose, the following tasks were outlined:
- to carry out a review of scientific and pedagogical literature on teacher training to work in culturally diverse classes of migrant students and learners;
- to define the basic term “diversity” in relation to the nationality of students and learners and in the context of education;
- to analyze the teacher’s key competencies for working in a culturally diverse classroom environment;
- to characterize teacher training programs to work with migrant students and learners;
to formulate a set of recommendations for improving the teachers’ training and their readiness to work in a culturally diverse environment.

**Main Results.** In order to effectively manage culturally diverse classrooms, teachers need to have the appropriate knowledge, abilities, values and skills related to cultural diversity. In scientific literature, the researchers use different terms to denote these competences: cultural diversity, multiculturalism, cultural pluralism, polyculture, multi-ethnicity, etc.

In this research, we will use the terms “diversity” and “cultural diversity” as they are widely used in international documents. Thus, according to the definition of UNESCO, cultural diversity is as necessary for humanity as biodiversity is for living nature. In this sense, it is the common property of humanity and should be recognized and secured in the interests of the present and future generations. It manifests itself in different forms in time and space, embodied in the uniqueness and multiplicity of identities of the groups and societies that make up humanity [12].

In the context of education, cultural diversity is understood as the appropriate interaction of a teacher with students or learners regardless of their ethnicity, race, gender, sexual orientation, age, physical features, socio-economic status and mental abilities. In the case of migrant students, such interaction becomes especially significant, because teachers must know and understand the issue of cultural diversity, reflect on their students and learners’ nationality identity, see the perspective and have a certain practice of working with such students and learners.

As foreign researchers N. Forghani-Arani, L. Cerna and M. Bannon note, the willingness and desire of teachers to work in a culturally diverse environment is no less important. The teachers should be active and autonomous, have empathy, independent pedagogical judgment and tact [5].

In addition, it should be mentioned that for successful work in such a specific environment, general pedagogical skills are also important, including communication and listening, creativity and the ability to solve problems. In the materials of the Forum of the OECD countries on teachers’ training in multinational societies, it is said, in particular, that it would also be useful for teachers to develop their curiosity, openness, tolerance and have high expectations of students [13].

Therefore, both general pedagogical and specific knowledge and skills are crucial for teachers who are working in culturally diverse classes. The group of specific skills includes knowledge of cultural anthropology, social psychology, cognitive development of students/learners, content and language integrated teaching, learning a second language. Therefore, cross-cultural knowledge, sensitivity and awareness of different cultures should contribute to more effective intercultural and professional communication. Moreover, pedagogical approaches should take into account cultural characteristics and various psychological aspects. After all, migrant students/learners face a number of challenges, including language
and cultural barriers, social exclusion, and inequality in access to education. In addition, such students/learners have certain psychological traumas as a result of displacement or migration, gaps in knowledge, interruptions in education. It often happens that acquired in their homeland knowledge does not meet the level of requirements in the new school. All of these factors make migrant students and learners vulnerable and more likely to drop out [3]. Thus, specific knowledge and skills for working with such students and learners are in high demand, in particular in those countries that welcome and host migrants.

According to most researchers, specific knowledge and skills for working in culturally diverse classes should be developed during the initial training of teachers, that is, in educational institutions that train teachers.

One of the effective approaches to cross-cultural training of teachers can be the inclusion of topic on diversity in the curriculum of teachers’ training, the combination of theory and practice, the creation of space for action, reflection, study and analysis of behavior with national diversity. Besides, cross-cultural preparation should be taken as an asset of the teacher. Special attention should also be paid to the inclusion of innovative technologies in cross-cultural teacher training [5].

As the analysis of world experience showed, the issues of teacher training for work in a culturally diverse environment are mostly included directly in the curriculum, and are not offered as special separate courses. However, some higher educational institutions in Europe do offer separate teacher training programs for culturally diverse classrooms. For example, the University of Latvia, Charles University in Prague, Ludwigsburg Pedagogical University, National University of Distance Education offer Master of Educational Treatment of Diversity training programs; Marino Institute of Education in Ireland offers Master of Intercultural Education training program; Colleges of Applied Sciences of the Universities of Oslo and Akershus in Norway have Master in Multicultural and International Education training program [14]. There are similar programs in Europe for the first (Bachelor) level of higher education, in particular: Intercultural Teacher Education program at University of Oulu, Finland; “Erasmus+” program for European countries to exchange experience between students and teachers, etc.

In such programs, teaching methods that combine theory and practice and provide the opportunity for future teachers to immerse themselves in a culturally diverse environment are effective and efficient. Through cross-cultural immersion, future teachers have the opportunity to step outside their cultural “comfort zone” and change their understanding of others [11].

In our analysis of best world practices, we will focus on the analysis of educational programs for training teachers to work with migrant students through “cross-cultural immersion” in a culturally diverse environment. To characterize such programs, the following criteria will be applied: program goal, target audience, educational service providers.
Finland. The University of Oulu (Finland) offers Intercultural Teacher Education training program designed for training primary school teachers. Its strategic task is to develop the skills of the future teachers to respond to the challenges posed by multiculturalism and globalization to the teaching profession.

Intercultural training is aimed at developing the teachers’ pedagogical competences of cross-cultural communication. The program includes lectures, seminars and practical classes conducted by guest lecturers from other countries. In addition, the program foresees a period of study abroad and internships in governmental and non-governmental organizations. The undergraduate program focuses on education, globalization, diversity and ethics. It is student-centered, covering various cross-cultural topics such as: learning in a culturally diverse classroom, teaching practice abroad, working at international schools. Other courses cover topics such as early childhood education, human development and learning, teaching and educational interaction, educational philosophy and ethics, inclusiveness, and special needs education. Common to different levels of education is the task of teaching reflection aimed at developing cultural diversity skills, sensitivity and cross-cultural and foreign language awareness.

Students take courses in History, Social Studies and Religion/Ethics, Nordic Education, Education Abroad, Global Issues and International Relations Studies, Global Education Studies (Peace and Conflict Studies, Justice and Human Rights, Environment), and conduct research abroad. The main language of education is English. While studying in this program, students must obtain 15 credits in the field of language studies, communication and orientation, a professional course in English, Swedish (written and spoken skills) and Finnish. The Master’s program for the training of preschool and elementary school teachers offers courses in global education and development, educational leadership and management, educational and methodological practicums [8].

The USA. It is worth investigating the experience of cultural immersion used at Bloomington University School of Education (Indiana, USA). It was introduced thanks to the Global Gateway for Teachers program. The program was launched back in 1970. According to the program, students spend a whole semester practicing in another country or another continent and gain real experience of teaching in another cultural environment. Student-practitioners who will become future elementary school teachers get the opportunity to prepare for teaching in culturally diverse classrooms through internships in various schools: in the Navajo American Indian reservation, in urban schools in Indianapolis and Chicago, in many schools in South America, Europe, Asia and Africa [15].

Researchers of this experience state that the program had a positive impact on the professional and personal development of future teachers. Positive outcomes included a more sensitive understanding of the world and people of different
nationalities, learning about other cultures, and awareness of both global and domestic diversity [6].

**Canada.** It is also worth studying the program “Knowledge of French and Openness to Linguistic Diversity” that is offered at the University of Montreal (Canada). Its purpose is to help current and future teachers develop a positive attitude towards linguistic and cultural diversity; language thinking skills, that is development of metalinguistic abilities; recognizing the right of migrant students/learners to speak their native language; raising knowledge of French as a common language for communication [16].

To achieve this goal, current teachers are offered a professional development program that is implemented in partnership with the school community. The program enables teachers to learn the best practices of working in a cultural diversity environment, helps recognize the migrant student’s linguistic and cultural background as a resource and not as an obstacle in the educational process [4]. As a result, teachers are not afraid to experiment with different teaching methods and help their migrant students and learners to positively perceive linguistic and cultural diversity in the classroom. Through language learning, teachers develop students’ metalinguistic abilities and help them realize the social significance of French as one of the official languages of communication in Canada [4]. At the Faculty of Pedagogical Sciences of the University of Montreal, this program is also offered for the training of future teachers, in particular pre-school and elementary education teachers, as well as special education teachers. It includes mandatory courses in French as a second language and multilingualism.

**Australia.** Innovative technologies are widely used in teacher education programs to work with migrant students to facilitate the study of diversity and help increase the cultural awareness of future teachers [9].

For example, the eTutor program in Australia helps primary school teachers to better understand other cultures. The School of Education at the Royal Institute of Technology in Melbourne (Victoria state), has created an online environment where future primary school teachers can interact with students and learners from different countries on a virtual learning platform through blog posts, comments and videos. The program aims to increase the cross-cultural and technological potential of future teachers, allowing them to explore different cultures using safe, supportive, inclusive, challenging and exciting ways [10].

The implementation of this program resulted in positive changes in the attitude of most participants towards cultural diversity. Thus, the Australian researcher N. Carr notes that elementary school teachers, many of whom started with an ethnocentric view, changed their views after the eTutor program, showing empathy and concern for children of different cultures [10].

**Austria, Cyprus, Greece, Italy, Romania, Slovakia and United Kingdom.** The universities of the seven above-mentioned European countries offer the ongoing
INSETRom training program. Its purpose is to increase teachers’ intercultural, socio-psychological and educational skills, as well as teachers’ awareness of Roma culture. According to the program teachers receive in-service training aimed at raising their awareness of Roma communities and their culture. It is anticipated that such training will help teachers bridge the gap between Roma and non-Roma communities, help Roma children integrate into a culturally diverse classroom. In this way, it will improve the academic success of Roma children. Hence, in broader sense, the program is aimed at improving the relationship between schools and the Roma communities through engagement of Roma parents as active agents in their children’s education.

The training program for in-service teachers was designed on the empirical research results performed by European researchers who analyzed the opinions and attitudes of teachers, parents and students to define the problem and outline their needs. The course includes modules on culture diversity, stereotypes and prejudice related to Romas, Roma history, Roma Culture, cross-cultural classroom management and methodology; curriculum design and development; and teacher-parent communication.

The results of implementing INSETRom teacher training program showed that it could be considered as an excellent example of transnational educational program and one of the best practices of teachers’ cross-cultural training in Europe. The researchers noted that “such training schemes might be used as tools for dissemination of inclusive practices for teaching ethnic minority groups of students like the Roma” [17, p. 53].

Germany. Theoretical and practical training program “Workshops about teaching to traumatized refugee children and young people” deserves special attention as it is provided by Gewerkschaft Erziehung und Wissenschaft (GEW). It is not an educational institution but it has a close relation to teachers. This is Trade Union of Teachers and it has worked out a professional development training program for teachers. Its key objective is to offer a theoretical introduction to the life situation of refugees and traumatized people and deal with the psychological effects of migration and displacement.

This specific knowledge is urgently required by the teachers who work with migrant students and learners since the majority of migrants face significant emotional pressures. They lack social support, have a poor psychosocial resource base or have experienced abuse. As a result, they are likely to be exposed to depression, fear, anxiety, guilt, mental health issues, and post-traumatic stress disorders.

To support teachers who are currently working with this category of students and learners, GEW organized a series of practice-oriented workshops that are carried out by psychologists. These workshops offer a theoretical introduction to the life
situation of migrants and deal with the psychological effects of migration and displacement. The workshops help teachers find answers to the following questions: what do trauma, traumatization and trauma disorder mean? How to recognize trauma? What are the life problems or events that contribute to trauma? What are the problem-solving skills needed? What are the key practices to deal with traumatization in everyday life? When is psychotherapeutic help required?

The main asset of such workshops is that teachers can raise their awareness about the topic of cross-cultural pedagogical approaches, particularly psychological aspects allowing to achieve greater inclusion. The dissemination of the obtained empirical practices results among other teachers and educators gives them confidence in their specific knowledge and skills to work with migrant students and learners.

Conclusions. The research of teacher training to work in a culturally diverse classroom environment with migrant students and learners demonstrated the importance of taking into account cultural diversity in the educational process in modern conditions. Currently, there are approximately 6 million internally displaced people in Ukraine, that is, those who were forced to leave their homes and seek shelter due to the war. These citizens have different ethnic origins, so their children can find themselves in culturally diverse classes. Therefore, current and future teachers need special cross-cultural training to be able to work effectively. The investigation of foreign experience points to the following ways of improving the teachers’ training for cultural diversity:
- to include cross-cultural training in existing educational programs and courses;
- to develop special educational programs for training teachers to work in a culturally diverse classroom environment;
- to work out appropriate educational and methodological support for cross-cultural training;
- to optimize the combination of theory and practical training of teachers;
- to actively use innovative methods and digital technologies in the educational process.

Prospects for further research on this topic can be comparative pedagogical studies of the educational policies of different countries that provide asylum and support to migrants, as well as studies of professional development programs for teachers who work with school-age or adult migrant students and learners.

References:


