



The Role of Native and Russian Languages in the Formation of Ethnocultural Identity

Etnokültürel Kimliklerin Oluşumunda Ana Dil ve Rus Dillerinin Rolü

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Abstract

This article explores pedagogical approaches to the interaction of native and Russian languages in shaping the ethnocultural identity of students in Russia. The research draws on surveys conducted with undergraduate and graduate students, who explored associations with the phrase "native language." The results highlight the central role of the native language in personal and national self-identification, connecting individuals to their families, traditions, and cultural values. In contrast, the Russian language functions integratively, fostering intercultural communication and ensuring linguistic unity within the educational environment. The practical significance of this study lies in developing pedagogical strategies to preserve the native language while enhancing students' language competence. It also emphasizes optimizing the educational process to equip future educators with the skills necessary to thrive in a multicultural space in Russia.

Keywords: Native Language, Russian Language, Ethnocultural Identity, Associative Experiment, National Culture, Intercultural Communication, Education, Prospective Pedagogues

Öz

Bu makale, Rusya'daki öğrencilerin etnik ve kültürel kimliklerini şekillendiren yerel ve Rus dillerinin etkileşimine yönelik pedagojik yaklaşımları incelemektedir. Araştırma, "yerel dil" ifadesiyle yapılan çağrışımlar üzerine gerçekleştirilen lisans ve yüksek lisans öğrencileriyle yapılan anketlere dayanmaktadır. Sonuçlar; yerel dilin kişisel ve ulusal kimlikteki merkezi rolünü vurgulamaktadır; bu dil, bireyleri aileleri, gelenekleri ve kültürel değerlere bağlamaktadır. Aksine, Rus dili, kültürlerarası iletişimi teşvik eden ve eğitim ortamında dilsel birliği sağlayan birleştirici bir işlev görmektedir. Bu çalışmanın pratik önemi, yerel dilin korunmasını sağlarken öğrencilerin dilsel yeterliliklerini geliştirmek için pedagojik stratejiler geliştirmektedir. Ayrıca, Rusya'daki çok kültürlü bir ortamda başarılı olabilmek için gelecekteki eğitimciler için gerekli becerileri kazandırmak adına eğitim sürecinin optimize edilmesine vurgu yapmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Yerel Dil, Rus Dili, Etnik Kültürel Kimlik, Çağrışım Deneyi, Ulusal Kültür, Kültürlerarası İletişim, Eğitim, Gelecekteki Pedagojikler.

1. Introduction

Relevance of the Study. The Russian Federation is a multinational state, home to diverse peoples and ethnic groups, each with its own distinct culture, traditions, and language. Article 19 of the Constitution of the Russian Federation guarantees equality of rights and freedoms for all citizens, irrespective of nationality, language, or origin. In this context, understanding and appreciating the ethnocultural features of the peoples of Russia become essential for fostering interethnic harmony, cooperation, and mutual respect.

The education system plays a pivotal role in preserving and transmitting cultural heritage, with educators serving as key guides to national values and traditions. In forming the ethnocultural identity of future educators, it is vital not only to instill a deep understanding of their own cultural and historical heritage but also to emphasize its relevance in the contemporary societal context. Ethnocultural identity entails an awareness of one's ethnic affiliation and an emotional connection to it. For future educators, it is crucial not only to recognize their ethnocultural identity but also to transmit knowledge about Russia's cultural diversity to their students, fostering a respectful attitude towards various peoples and traditions.

The integration of ethnocultural elements into the educational process is relevant not only because it helps adapt students to diverse educational and cultural settings but also because it aligns with the broader goal of cultivating a multicultural personality, capable of thriving in interethnic interactions.

In this light, the interaction between native and Russian languages in education holds particular significance. The native language forms the core of national identity, while the Russian language plays an integrative role, facilitating intercultural communication and unity within the educational framework. However, one of the major challenges remains the lack of educators with the necessary ethnocultural competence to work effectively in multicultural settings, nurture respect for ethnic diversity, and promote civic responsibility. Consequently, preparing future educators to seamlessly integrate native and Russian languages in shaping ethnocultural identity has become a priority within teacher education programs.

The goal of this study is to identify the relationship between native and Russian languages in the formation of ethnocultural identity in students – prospective pedagogues, to reveal the peculiarities of this process, and to develop pedagogical approaches for integrating ethnocultural components into the professional training of educators to work in a multicultural educational environment.

2. Methodology

The study applies civilizational, cultural, and axiological approaches. The civilizational approach allows us to view the process of forming ethnocultural identity as a complex phenomenon, which includes cognitive (knowledge of cultural traditions and values), emotional (emotional acceptance and pride in one's culture), and behavioral (willingness to transmit ethnocultural values in pedagogical activities) components. The cultural approach emphasizes the role of cultural heritage and traditions in the formation of the future educator's personality, while the axiological approach highlights the significance of a value-oriented attitude toward ethnocultural diversity in the pedagogical process.

To examine the relationship between one's native language and ethnic identity, faculty members from the Department of Pedagogy and Educational Technologies at Kherson State Pedagogical University, a Russian pedagogical institution, conducted a survey in December 2024. The participants included students from the first to the fourth years of the Bachelor's program and the first and second years of the Master's program across various institutes (ages 18–35). A total of 56 students participated in the survey.

The researchers formulated the task as follows: they asked students to record 10 associations with the phrase “native language,” preferably in the form of nouns. The study was anonymous and did not have a time limit. Participants also indicated their native language without specifying their level of proficiency. The results revealed that the respondents were speakers of three national languages, ranked by frequency: Russian, Ukrainian, and Tatar.

The study employs methods of theoretical analysis (including the study of scientific literature, normative documents, and pedagogical experience), as well as empirical methods (such as surveys, observation, and analysis of student activity products).

Theoretical analysis enabled the formation of a conceptual framework for research and the identification of key aspects of language influence on ethnocultural self-awareness: connection with family, ethnic belonging, knowledge of traditions, cultural memory, and linguistic identity. Particular attention was given to the interaction between the native and Russian languages, where the Russian language fulfills an integrative function – facilitating interethnic communication and unity within a multicultural educational environment, while simultaneously creating conditions for the conscious acquisition and preservation of the native language.

Empirical methods provided the collection of primary data: student surveys helped identify associations with the concept of “native language,” attitudes toward Russian as a state and integrative means of communication, and perceptions of the value of bilingualism in the professional sphere.

3. Studies on the formation of ethnocultural identity

Ethnocultural identity is a complex, multi-component process where linguistic consciousness, value orientations, and sociocultural practices intersect. Its transformation depends not only on historical and social conditions but also on the individual’s cognitive characteristics. The process of appropriation of ethnocultural knowledge by each individual is an inseparable part of consciousness formation, existing both in ideal forms (mental images) and in object form (cultural artifacts). This process occurs through socialization mechanisms, which include mastering cultural norms, symbols, and values passed on through language, education, and traditions. According to Tarasov’s study (2012), the analysis of the content of universal human values shows that cultural norms and values play a key role in the formation of ethnocultural identity, influencing the individual’s awareness of their ethnic affiliation. It is these value orientations, rooted in cultural traditions, that ensure intergenerational continuity and the stability of ethnocultural systems. Consciousness languages are formed in the interaction of the individual with the surrounding cultural environment, and ethnocultural identity is a dynamic phenomenon that depends on the degree of an individual’s involvement in the cultural space (Tarasov, 2015). In the context of globalization, multicultural interactions complicate this process, leading individuals to reassess their ethnocultural affiliation and potentially modify their ethnic identity.

Studies of regional linguistic identity confirm that the value orientations of a subethnos are expressed through linguistic features, forming a unique system of signs, symbols, and concepts that reflect the mentality of the ethnic group. Specifically, an analysis of the Donetsk regiolect revealed linguistic units carrying a pronounced axiological load, which supports the hypothesis of a close interconnection between the value system and the linguistic worldview. In this context, language serves not only as a means of communication but also as a powerful tool for preserving the cultural code, transmitting historical experience, and forming collective identity. Language consolidates social stereotypes, behavioral norms, and ways of categorizing

the surrounding reality. This is especially evident in conflict situations, where linguistic identity becomes a factor in the consolidation of an ethnic group (Kurmakayeva, 2024).

In the process of forming ethnocultural identity, intercultural communication plays an important role, as it addresses issues of perception, understanding, and acceptance of cultural differences. In the context of intense interaction between different ethnic groups, both positive and negative emotional states may arise, including aggression, frustration, and depression, as confirmed by contemporary research. The formation of a positive ethnocultural identity requires the development of effective mechanisms for managing interethnic contacts, based on methodological approaches such as personality-driven, contextual, and competence-based approaches. These approaches not only reduce the level of ethnocultural tension but also promote the development of empathy, tolerance, and intercultural competence. The inclusion of ethnic and cultural knowledge into the educational process, as well as the development of skills to view situations from different perspectives, allows students to realize the relativity of cultural differences and avoid stereotypical thinking (Novikova, Vasilkova, Akatieva, 2021).

Contemporary research confirms that the correlation of value-semantic priorities among students from different ethnic groups influences their professional socialization, worldview positions, and the level of ethnocultural reflection. This is particularly significant for the development of individual and group programs for correcting radical ethnic identity, as it allows for the identification of factors that contribute to its transformation in either a constructive or destructive direction. Thus, the educational environment must ensure a balance between the preservation of students' ethnocultural identity and the formation of their readiness for productive intercultural interaction (Gasanova, 2021).

Professional linguistic consciousness plays a key role in interethnic interaction, as language is the primary tool for expressing cultural norms, values, and social attitudes. According to Markovina's research (2010), the professional worldview is shaped by the specifics of professional activity and is culturally conditioned. In the educational process, this manifests in the need to consider not only linguistic but also sociocultural aspects of language, which is particularly important when preparing specialists in the field of intercultural communication.

The application of filling and compensating strategies in foreign language learning promotes a deeper understanding of ethnocultural aspects and the development of tolerant perceptions of other cultures. Markovina, Matyushin, and Lenart (2024) discuss a comprehensive methodology for studying mutual perceptions of different peoples through language and culture. They emphasize that the filling strategy involves searching for equivalents in the native language, which allows students to understand the universality and variability of cultural phenomena, while the compensating strategy focuses on adapting language material to the perception of another ethnic group. The application of these strategies in the educational process not only aids in language acquisition but also helps students develop intercultural adaptation skills, which are especially relevant in the context of growing globalization and increasing interethnic contact.

Foreign language learning can strengthen the ethnocultural self-identification of future educators, as it inherently involves a comparative analysis of cultural norms and values. Including an ethnocultural component in foreign language training, reading texts on ethnic themes in English, and organizing educational activities based on ethnic constants enable students to consciously reflect on their own cultural identity, understand its dynamic nature, and consider the specifics of ethnocultural interaction in their future professional activities (Ratoskaya, 2018a). Additionally, Ratoskaya (2018b) emphasizes that the process of learning a foreign language fosters deeper intercultural awareness by encouraging students to compare

their native linguistic and cultural frameworks with those of other nations. This comparative perspective not only enhances their linguistic competence but also aids in the formation of a more holistic ethnocultural self-identification, which is crucial for educators working in a multicultural environment.

The study by Çınar and Bülbül (2024) highlights the crucial role of family in character education, demonstrating that cultural values are transmitted through close familial interactions. Similarly, in the formation of ethnocultural identity, the native and Russian languages serve as key instruments for preserving and transmitting cultural heritage, reinforcing moral values, and fostering social adaptation within a multicultural society.

A retrospective analysis of the formation of ethnocultural identity among youth shows that folk traditions, customs, and rituals remain an essential mechanism for transmitting cultural values. Incorporating these elements into educational programs not only contributes to the preservation of ethnocultural heritage but also forms a conscious attitude toward one's ethnic affiliation, developing a sense of belonging to one's native culture. At the same time, modern conditions require not just the mechanical reproduction of traditions but also their adaptation to new social and educational realities, which necessitates a well-thought-out pedagogical approach and the implementation of innovative teaching methods (Zakiryanova, Redkina, 2023a).

Zakiryanova, Redkina (2023b) emphasize the importance of developing teachers' professional competence in a multicultural education environment. The application of these principles in the context of language education enables future educators to consider the cultural characteristics and ethnic identity of learners, as well as to effectively interact with children from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. In this regard, proficiency in both the native and Russian languages becomes a crucial tool in shaping students' ethnocultural identity, fostering tolerance, and promoting respect for cultural diversity. Furthermore, the integration of native and Russian languages into educational programs enhances cognitive and communicative skills, allowing students to navigate between different cultural codes and develop intercultural competence. A well-balanced bilingual approach not only strengthens ethnic self-awareness but also facilitates social integration, preparing future professionals to work in a diverse educational environment while maintaining a connection to their cultural roots.

The formation of ethnic identity in students of pedagogical universities takes place at different levels and depends on numerous factors, including personal characteristics, family upbringing, educational environment, and sociocultural context. At early stages of development, family surroundings, traditions, and societal norms shape ethnocultural identity. Later, it transforms through interaction with broader social groups, an awareness of one's ethnic affiliation, and comparison with the identities of other cultural groups.

Research analysis shows that ethnocultural identity is a complex and dynamic process influenced by many factors, including language, traditions, values, intercultural interaction, and educational strategies. Including an ethnocultural component in the professional training system for educators becomes an essential tool for forming tolerance, fostering intercultural dialogue, and strengthening the positive ethnic identity of future specialists.

4. Survey analysis of native language associations and ethnic identity among pedagogical students

The following section presents the results of a survey analysis focused on native language associations and their connection to ethnocultural identity among students.

Analysis of Associations. The associations were grouped according to semantic criteria. The most frequent responses to the stimulus “native language” included: parents (n= 50, 89%), family (n= 48, 85%), homeland (n= 45, 80%), home (n= 43, 77%), literature (n= 41, 74%), Russia (n= 34, 60%), communication (n=33, 59%), friends (n= 21, 38%), national cuisine (n= 39, 69%), national culture (n= 28, 50%), and school (n= 7, 12%). These associations allowed the identification of the following thematic groups: Homeland, native country, home – homeland, Russia, fatherland, home, safety. Parents, family, relatives – family, mother, father, parents, children, grandchildren, ancestors, grandmother, grandfather, childhood, joy, warmth, kindness, peace. Friends, communication – friends, work, speech, thought, understanding, interaction, café, society, games, fun, non-standard language, V Kontakte, blog. Literature, reading – fairy tales, language, reading books, poetry, Pushkin, Lermontov, Dostoevsky, Shevchenko, Tolstoy, “War and Peace,” Cyril and Methodius. National culture, traditions – people, ethnic group, soul, nationality, song, dance, pancakes, red caviar, dumplings, samovar, icon, temple, mosque, Maslennitsa, New Year, birch, bear, nature, mentality, matryoshka, humor.

Interpretation of the Results. The results revealed that the most common associative group was “Homeland, native country, home,” emphasizing the importance of territorial and national belonging in the perception of the native language. Participants’ place of residence influenced the differences in associations: students from cities more frequently mentioned “city” and “home,” while those living in rural areas mentioned “work” and “my land.” Those who moved to other regions of Russia or remained in the Kherson region noted “Kherson” and “Kherson region.” The “National culture, traditions” group reveals the connection between the native language and ethnic-cultural identity. Associations with national dishes, traditional holidays, and symbols indicate the perception of language as a carrier of cultural heritage. In the “Literature, reading” category, names of classic Russian writers predominated, confirming the importance of literary works in shaping linguistic consciousness and demonstrating the significance of the Russian language in forming worldviews and attitudes toward the greater homeland—Russia. The analysis also revealed that respondents perceive the native language as a means of transmitting family and cultural traditions. The predominance of terms associated with family and home indicates the language’s importance in personal socialization and the preservation of historical memory. The presence of elements of oral and written culture, such as fairy tales, literature, and poetry, demonstrates the influence of language on the aesthetic perception of the world. After the survey, the faculty presented the results to students in the form of a presentation. During the discussion, they used heuristic, discussion-based methods, and the method of conversation.

The students’ responses revealed that the native language is an integral part of a person’s identity. It connects an individual with familial ties and ethnic-cultural belonging. Through national culture, language preserves the continuity of generations. Respondents connect the Russian language not only with ethnic and cultural characteristics but also with the necessity of interacting in educational and professional environments. The Russian language performs an integrative function in the social space, promoting integration and mutual understanding among representatives of various ethnic groups. These insights reflect students’ awareness of the importance of studying national culture, the impact of language on intercultural understanding, and its role in the development of the Russian language as the state language.

5. Conclusion

Thus, the processes of globalization and information exchange necessitate increased attention to issues of ethnic-cultural identity. The native language is a fundamental element of an individual's self-awareness and ethnic-cultural identity, linking a person to history, family, traditions, and national culture. It passes down from generation to generation, ensuring the continuity of values and norms of the ethnic community.

In a multiethnic society, the Russian language performs a unifying role, facilitating intercultural interaction and the formation of a common educational and communicative space. Its status as the state language makes it a crucial tool for social adaptation, professional activity, and academic communication. In a multiethnic society, the Russian language also performs an integration function, contributing to intercultural communication and the formation of a shared communicative space.

The analysis of the data revealed that, despite the dominance of the native language in shaping ethnic identity, students recognize the importance of the Russian language in educational, professional, and social spheres. The Russian language serves as a language of interethnic communication, uniting speakers of various ethnic languages within Russia and beyond; as the language of science and education, providing access to a broad range of knowledge and fostering successful learning; and as the language of professional interaction, essential for building a successful career in various fields.

The data obtained can help improve educational programs by considering ethnic-cultural factors, develop activities for the ethnic-cultural adaptation of students in a multicultural society, and enhance the competencies of future educators in intercultural interaction and tolerance.

In the future, it is advisable to conduct an in-depth analysis of the influence of social, territorial, and educational factors on the formation of students' linguistic identity. Moreover, an important area of research would be the impact of digital technologies and social networks on the perception of the native and Russian languages in youth culture, especially in the context of a Russian pedagogical university environment.

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Etik Kurul Kararları / Ethics Committee Decisions

Bu çalışma için etik kurul belgesi gerekmemektedir.

Ethics committee approval is not required for this study.

Çatışma Beyanı / Conflict Statement

Bu makalenin araştırması, yazarlığı ve yayınlanmasında yazarlar eşit düzeyde katkıda bulduklarını beyan etmiştir.

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Yayın Etiği Beyanı / Publication Ethics Statement

Bu makalenin planlanmasından, uygulanmasına, verilerin toplanmasından verilerin analizine kadar olan tüm süreçte “Yükseköğretim Kurumları Bilimsel Araştırma ve Yayın Etiği Yönergesi” kapsamında uyulması belirtilen tüm kurallara uyulmuştur. Yönergenin ikinci bölümü olan “Bilimsel Araştırma ve Yayın Etiğine Aykırı Eylemler” başlığı altında belirtilen eylemlerden hiçbiri gerçekleştirilmemiştir. Bu araştırmanın yazım sürecinde bilimsel, etik ve alıntı kurallarına uyulmuş; toplanan veriler üzerinde herhangi bir tahrifat yapılmamıştır. Bu çalışma herhangi başka bir akademik yayın ortamına değerlendirme için gönderilmemiştir.

All the rules specified in the “Higher Education Institutions Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Directive” have been complied with in the whole process from the planning of this article to its implementation, from data collection to data analysis. None of the actions specified under the title of “Actions Contrary to Scientific Research and Publication Ethics”, which is the second part of the directive, was carried out. During the writing process of this research, scientific, ethical, and citation rules were followed; No falsification was made on the collected data. This work has not been submitted for evaluation to any other academic publication medium.