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STUDENT AS A RESEARCHER IN HUMANITIES: CULTURAL LIMITATIONS FOR OBJECTIVITY

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Cultural paradigm forms scientific objectivity. The goal of this article is to discuss the role of the culture in students` scientific practice. The present paper concentrates on analysis of the sociocultural factors that influence scientific inquiry. Within existing theoretical framework the author defines cultural competence which is necessary for student as a researcher. The conclusions are based on interviews of the students of Interdisciplinary Studies in Humanities. The study shows the students' understanding of the concept of «objectivity» and awareness of social and cultural influences on the research. Thelevel of development of students' cultural competence is also presented.

Key words: Humanities, objectivity, culture, researcher, student, cultural competence, sociocultural factors

Introduction.

Humanities are in crisis at the beginning of the third millennium. It is caused by several factors. The most important of them is the rapid development of the natural and fundamental knowledge most important. It contributes to scientific and technical progress, improves the environment and even human lifespan, expands possibilities for people's activities. Humanities are often out of sight, though their issues remain equally important. One of the most controversial issues in Humanities is researcher's objectivity. Scholars have regarded objectivity as a scientific category, procedural component of the research and scientific criteria for over a century. Nevertheless, there is no any definite conclusion on this matter.

The subject of the Humanities is human as a social, cultural and moral being. Therefore, research in the field of humanities is characterized by the diversity of interpretational models of some phenomena. It can be assumed that the differences are caused by the cultural background of a researcher. Undoubtedly, culture has an influence on the way individuals react to the world around them. Every person has different intellectual preferences. One makes different inferences because they view the same situation from different angles. One sees the data differently. In other words, people make different assumptions about what they see. Thus, it can be argued that such sociocultural factors as attitudes, language, values, etc. can affect the objectivity of a researcher. According to S. Harding, cultural beliefs exist at every stage of scientific inquiry: from the choice of topic, to formulating hypotheses, to collecting and interpreting data, and to representing results of the investigation [5].

Researcher`s objectivity in Humanities was the focus of many studies (Rudolf Carnap, Thomas Kuhn, Helen Longino, Kathleen Okruhlik, Carl Ratner, Julian Reiss, Jan Sprenger and many others). Despite the considerable amount of studies concerning this matter, there are many aspects that are still not fully revealed. The attention should be also paid the impact of culture on students' objectivity in the research process.

In this article, the author will lookat the following questions. Firstly, is student`s objectivity as a researcher in Humanities possible? How do student s' cultural backgrounds influence their objectivity? Secondly, what is the impact of students' culture on their perception of other cultures phenomena? There is a great difference indeed between the study of one's home country where the whole culture is taken for granted, and the study of another one, for which one has to cross a cultural barrier. Thus, it is necessary that the students should possess intercultural competences, which are essential for research.

So, the aim of the article is to reveal cultural limitations for the objectivity of students as the researchers in humanities.

A good starting point for thinking about the first research question is to give an explanation of what is objectivity in the context of investigations in Humanities. The terms «objectivity» and «objective» are defined as something belonging to an object and independent of the subject, or used to characterize factors or processes that are independent of one's will or desire. In other words, when applied to the real objects these notions mean that objects exist outside and are independent of the subject. As to the concepts, ideas and judgments, which are the reflection of material reality, their content does not depend on an individual. Objectivity is often characterized by means of contrast to subjectivity [12].

Regarding scientific inquiry, objectivity is understood as an ideal characterristic. The research is objective when it is free of scientist's values, prejudgments, desires, capabilities or experience [11]. Therefore, the researcher should be completely detached from the object of study without displaying judgments of intuitive or emotional nature in the investigation. Consequently, the objectivity of methodology implies that the results of research give the last word about matters of reality [3].

W. Dilthey stated that objectivity presupposes an independent reality that can be grasped. If there is no independent reality, or if reality cannot be apprehended, or if reality is merely the concoction of the observer, then the notion of objectivity is moot. Objectivity of the scientific inquiry results is the key problem in Humanities. Common in science perspective on objectivity as on independence from consciousness is not correlated with the subjective specificity of the Humanities. In them's objectivity is presented as impartiality, comprehensive understanding of the object, the neutrality of the object in relation to the researcher, his independence from personal desires, tastes and preferences, knowledge about causes of another subject existential state [15].

For all that, the results of humanitarian research are not in the same degree of objectivity as in natural sciences, and largely depend on the responsibility of the researcher and his internal culture. Objectivity in humanities is based on the

following principles:

- an internal necessity of the existential state and the degree of its reflection;
- correlation between the traditions of cognition, well-established scientific schools and the prevailing worldview;
- comparability with universally valid ideals of cognition;
- stability and ability to resist scientific criticism;
- description of the subject from the multiple viewpoints, «voluminously», when it does not depend on individual opinion;
- dialogical correlation to another, different views on the same objectivity, which are acceptable in science. Ability to trace the expressed ideas through as many cultural explanations as possible;

The formality of analysis and description of the subject area and independence from personal preferences in this regard [9].

Thus, it should be noted that subjectivity of humanitarian research is caused by the researcher`s reflexivity, creativity, estimative nature and morality. Personal experience of the researcher also determines some subjective value. Therefore, researcher has to overcome his subjectivity in order to reach the objectivity [1].

The most important distinguishing feature of the scientific activity is its social and cultural determination. Each researcher, including students, has been engaged in a particular study, and act in a certain environment. Every activity – according to Max Weber`s statement – is encoded by cultural systems and motivated by individuality [13]. Community's social and cultural values have unique and definite influence on the scientific outlook formation. In this case, it is worth noting the definition of objectivity proposed by Helen Longino. She defines this notion as «a characteristic of a community's practice of science rather than of an individual's» [8]. She is convinced that only through a critical dialogue with scientific community the objectivity can be achieved and it is the only way to prevent from individual bias in scientific inquiry.

It is hard to access objectivity in Humanities. Despite this, it is imperative that scientists and students also aim to aspire to objectivity and try to be true to ideals on which scientific inquiry is based.

It is possible to define many factors that have a direct impact on the objectivity of the researcher. In particular, influences of society and culture are quite clearly shown in the research. According to E. Mamchur, we can speak about three levels of sociocultural impact on science, which affect a scientific research in different ways. The mentioned levels are the following:

1) socio-cultural nature of knowledge;
2) socio-cultural conditionality;
3) socio-cultural determination[10].

The sociocultural nature of knowledge determines the nature of the research subject's scientific activity, that is the researcher. Science, as such, is the combined product of the research community. Moreover, the community is guided by social conditions such as cognitive activity, speech, communication structures, source knowledge accumulated by the society, etc. In simple words, scientific knowledge is based on social grounds. The sociocultural conditionality of science indicates that

socio-cultural facts do not only serve as the foundation for the scientific research, but also penetrate into their content. This fact explains the formulation and choice of the scientific problems, hypotheses, methods of study, understanding and standards, etc. Finally, speaking about social determinism, we consider the thesis that the research results are derived from common sociocultural structures. That is, scientific research can be filled with individual cognitive content or separate from the conventional sociocultural concepts, ideas and prejudgments [10].

Taking the above mentioned into consideration, we can conclude that the cultural paradigm has formed a different version of scientific objectivity in each nation. In the formation of scientific views, an important role was played by the scientific schools that received special authority and prevalence among the carriers of different cultures. Thus, the objectivity of the student as a researcher in Humanities is possible as student's awareness of social and cultural influences. Scientific views of young researchers are formed through education. Hence there is a growing need to equip students with the necessary skills to achieve as more objective research results as possible.

Recently, the attention is focused on the research activities of students, which is an integral part of higher education. These activities take different forms: educational research, essays, research practices and projects, writing projects and dissertations. The formation of cultural competencies in students during preparation for the implementation of the research is one of the key competences. If student's cultural competence is not adequate, it would be hard to conduct a research and reach even relative objectivity. In this study, the term „cultural competence» refers to the ability to easily understand, use and interpret the full amount of the existential and specialized knowledge, which form the social standard of general person's erudition in this environment, the amount of rules, standards of laws, customs, prohibitions, etc. [4]. The presence of these competences will enable students to conduct high-quality research and come much closer to objectivity.

Some scientists define four components of cultural competence:

- ❖ cultural sensitivity;
- ❖ cultural awareness;
- ❖ cultural knowledge;
- ❖ cultural proficiency [7].

Cultural sensitivity is understanding of cultural differences and similarities, making no conclusions about whether it is good or worse, right or wrong. Cultural awareness means awareness of their attitudes towards other cultures, providing transparency and flexibility. Cultural knowledge presupposes the presence of ideas and knowledge about specific cultural characteristics, history, beliefs, values and behaviour of other cultural groups. The highest level of cultural competence is cultural proficiency, including the ability of researchers to interact with another culture and requires the development of cross-cultural skills. Personality, as in this case the student researcher, can be considered as culturally proficient, when all the available components of cultural competence are combined with linguistic knowledge (that is not less important) [7].

It is clear that a person can not acquire cultural competence at once by reading a book or visiting a few classes or training. This competence is formed gradually, and sometimes even can be limited at one of the levels. Thus, the development of this competence is a long process.

Through our survey, we will find out the level of formation of cultural competence of MISH students and the culture impact on their research, which will be discussed further in the practical part.

The target group of the research is students of Interdisciplinary Individual Studies in Humanities of Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznan (Poland). The study had been lasting for six months from October to March 2017 and was conducted in terms of «Introduction to interdisciplinary Research» course (lecturers: Prof. A. Mikolajczak and Dr R. Dymczyk). The course provided theoretical training to implement students' research and practical implementation of this research during a scientific practice abroad.

The direct participation in this course enabled the author to use a comprehensive approach to achieve the set aim. Namely, the attendance of classes on a theoretical part made it possible not only to get closer to the object of the study but also to observe how to form the skills of the objective interdisciplinary research. Within the theoretical unit, students learned about the main stages of research (choice of themes, forming hypotheses, describing the theoretical and methodological background, academic reading for literature review, summarizing the results, etc.) and the characteristics of scientific research (reliability, objectivity, innovation, etc.).

The practical part of the course served as a basis for achieving the ultimate goal of the course «Introduction to Interdisciplinary Research», namely conducting the research abroad. Balkan countries had been chosen to implement the scientific practice. The issues of students' scientific projects concerned various branches of humanities, history, religion, art, culture, language and literature. Student projects had been implementing in the period from March 30 to April 10, 2017. The research results will be presented during the reporting scientific conference which will take place on July 1, 2017.

It should be noted that the students' involvement into this kind of research practices has a significant influence on their formation as the researchers. The feature of this type of scientific activity is the fact that the inclusion in the cultural environment of the research object makes it possible to conduct additional monitoring. Student projects had been implementing in a real cultural environment, the exact place where certain events, processes or phenomena occurred. Thus, a student as a researcher studied the culture, being an active participant, being immersed in the experience in participating in culture during their scientific practice in the Balkan countries.

In order to determine the influence of culture on students as researchers in the humanities, their awareness of the concept of objectivity and determination of the level of their cultural competence forming, the author used the empirical method of a semi-structural interview to collect data and theoretical analysis method used to provide context to the interviews.

At this stage, it would be useful to give a short explanation of the research method. As stated by Kitchin and Tate semi-structural interview is the most usual technique adopted for qualitative research [6]. Semi-structural interviews are designed to have a number of interviewer questions prepared in advance, but the questions are designed to be sufficiently open so that the subsequent questions of the interviewer cannot be planned in advance but must be improvised in a careful and theorized way [14].

The author chose this method for its flexibility. As a result, the lack of a fixed structure and sequence of questions allows participants to be more open and express their views and experience more deeply.

The survey was conducted during the students' scientific practice abroad (March 30 – April 10, 2017). 16 students participated in it. An individual approach was used to each participant. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study and the author received their concent to participate in the survey, recording and processing of their answers. The chosen method of research allowed to modify the questions. But each interview covered all the key points necessary for this study. Here are some examples of the formulations for different interview:

«What do you think culture promotes or more an obstacle in the scientific research conducting?»

«What do you think is the role of culture in scientific activity?»

«Does the culture of a researcher reflect on the results of his activity?»

The participants gave answers to all the questions, even sometimes added their own opinions to the answers that led to the emergence of new questions. Responses were based on personal experience of the students and showed their attitude to the problem. The process of interviewing was quite active and characterized by good interaction with the participants.

Student scientific papers must meet all methodological and semantic requirements. Therefore, conducting scientific research, students should adhere to the procedures and strive for the realization of tasks according to demands. Objective perception and the studied reality reflection is one of the main characteristics of any research. Students answers to the interview questions related to the definition of the term «objectivity» showed that 20% of respondents have no clear idea about the nature of the concept, while 80% gave clear definition. Students stressed on their own objectivity (as everyone understands the meaning of the term differently) during the research conducting as the thing that had occurred (100%). To illustrate it there are some examples of the students' responses:

«As for me, objectivity is a sign of the study, characterised by presenting the problem from different perspectives, not limited to one-way (subjective) view.»

«Under the objectivity of the researcher, I understand its ability to separate the proven facts (data, events, results) from the subjective opinions.»

«Objectivity is the acceptance of the results as they are.»

«Being objective means to preserve the impartiality of the studied issue, try to do in a way their own beliefs do not reflect the research results.»

Among the factors that cause the loss of objectivity by the researcher students identified the following: the impact of political and religious beliefs, the impact of environmental, emotional engagement, subjective believes, attempts to prove the correctness of their judgments in the research results, financial dependence.

For the question «What is the role of culture and whether it affects the objectivity of the researcher?», students answered by straightforward «Yes». There are some arguments which had been used by students to prove the influence of culture on scientific research:

«Culture is the common language, traditions, history, collective experience. It defines our perception of the world, thinking, functioning in society. Different results will be presented by the research results of a scientist, who is formed, for example, in the Soviet Union than a scientist from Spain, Egypt or South Africa.»

«Culture may restrict the researcher. Then he looks at the problem from their own cultural perspective, unilaterally, giving an incomplete picture of the problem.»

«Each of us has the so-called cultural bias. We originate from a specific cultural environment or live in a particular social environment (family). It is naturally to perceive facts, objects, etc. in the light of our experience and knowledge, including culture.»

We can state that students are pretty well aware of the sociocultural influences on scientific research. However, some of them did notice that it might be difficult not to rely on their own experiences, emotions, values and beliefs in the course of research.

«My research topics are related to religion in the Balkans. I subconsciously was looking for research materials related to my religion and my religious beliefs, because I was wondering whether there was something similar in another culture.»

«This can not be avoided. In my case, values system certainly affects the way I interpret the subject of the study. On the other hand, my experiences in the Mediterranean countries, Russia, Belarus and Ukraine have given me many opportunities for comparisons between countries visited during the academic practice. I think the experiences, emotions, values, certainly, even inadvertently, will be reflected in the study.»

We can speak on the objectivity in students' research only after reviewing the results. However, based on the results of interviews where students had expressed their opinions on the subject of the study, we could argue that culture has a considerable influence on the researcher and his research.

Cultural competence of the researcher is extremely important during the research conducting especially when the research is conducted in a different cultural environment. According to the above mentioned levels, the author asked students to assess their level of cultural competence. The students were asked to identify where they are on a cultural competence continuum after their scientific activities in the framework of another cultures. Figure 1 shows the stage they are now.

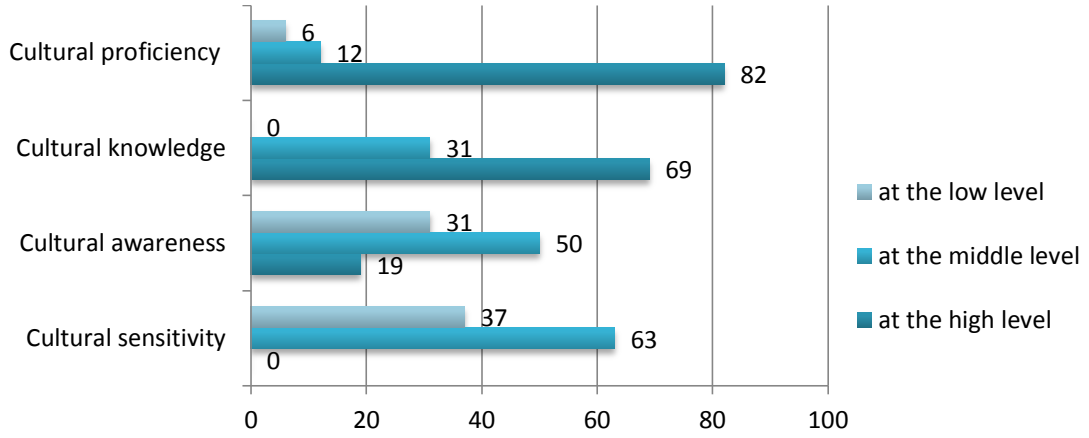

Figure 1. Student's level of cultural competence

For the time, none have achieved the highest level of proficiency. It indicates that there is always room for continued growth. Despite this, most students (82%) noted progress in the development of cultural competence, namely through participation in projects abroad.

Conclusions

Thus, the results of the study show the students understanding of the concept of «objectivity» and the desire to achieve it during their scientific activity and their awareness of social and cultural influences on the study. It is worth noting a rather high level of development of students' cultural competence. So, back to the main question of our research, whether culture restricts student's objectivity as a researcher in humanities, we can confidently say «yes». But we can state the level of its influence on the student's research and how it is displayed, only after additional studies related to the cultural influences.

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