

DEVELOPING INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE THROUGH A PROJECT APPROACH

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Abstract

In today's globalized world where every sphere is developing rapidly, education, specifically language teaching and learning are also facing changes. The Common European Framework (CEF) as a common basis document helped not only to standardize language levels, but appreciated and protected plurilingualism and pluriculturalism (2020) to promote international communication. It is clearly stated to be successful in communication, linguistic competence such as knowledge of grammar, vocabulary, phonology, orthography is not enough. Understanding cultural information appearing in different types of discourse as part of pragmatic competence can facilitate effective international communication and intercultural competent students. This article reviews the theoretical foundations of intercultural competence and outlines the key components of the project approach. It also investigates how a project approach may foster the development of intercultural competence in foreign language classrooms in Uzbekistan, and the advantages of application of this approach in the classroom is explored by using a questionnaire survey. Analysis of the study suggests that the project approach can be effective in teaching culture in foreign language classrooms, motivating students to study target culture in a meaningful context. Besides, this paper argues that although there is enough evidence proving the project approach can be effective with the use of real context in the target country, it is effective and has a potential to teach culture by implementing the project approach even in a home country. Overall, this paper

contributes to the growing body of research on intercultural proficiency development and offers insights for individuals seeking to enhance their knowledge and abilities on project approach.

Key words: Intercultural communicative competence, cultural project, target culture, culturally diverse settings.

Introduction

Nowadays, teaching culture and developing intercultural competence in foreign language classrooms are of great importance because language and culture are considered as interdependent variables in the field of teaching foreign languages. Language is a carrier of culture, the existence of which gives a way to understand and explore various cultures easily. As teaching culture in foreign language classrooms helps language learners to get a clear depiction of the country, nation, and the language taught, so it makes communication possible between different cultures' representatives. Attention to teaching culture as a part of developing the communicative competence of language learners started in Uzbekistan in 2012 when the presidential decree "On measures to further improve foreign language teaching system" was adopted, the main aim of which was teaching foreign languages to international standards to meet the commercial, industrial, scientific and academic needs of Uzbekistan. As a result, a communicative language teaching (CLT) approach was adopted. Accordingly, utilization of Project-Based Language teaching (PBL) is regarded as the most facilitative way of teaching culture because it aims at developing language skills, cognitive skills, communicative competence and intercultural communication competence (ICC). There is now a great deal of evidence that implementing a project approach is a relatively effective tool for developing ICC.

More specific evidence shows that it is generally true for project work. In addition to training language skills, this method also helps students develop problem-solving skills, organizational skills, creativity, imagination, research skills, and the ability to work effectively in teams (Euler, 2017). Second, the team-learning approach was

successful (Julia & Gerlinde, 2015). Students learned how to deal with a team composed of members from their own country and from abroad (Julia & Gerlinde, 2015). This intercultural team-learning was a learning experience in itself because it represented the lived reality of the students (Julia & Gerlinde, 2015). The third-generation projects, on the other hand, include both aims, but go beyond them, systematically contributing to personality development using enhancing awareness and initiating attitudinal changes - aspects highly crucial to develop intercultural competence (Euler, 2017). To address the validity of these concerns, we carried out a questionnaire among school English teachers and graduate Pre-Service English teacher training (PRESETT) students of Foreign Languages Faculty in Bukhara State University (Uzbekistan), in which students respond to the questions depending on their experiences gained by Culture classes. The results we present here indicate that it is an effective way to teach culture and develop intercultural competence through the project approach that allows studying by experiencing. As a consequence, more interactive teaching will lead to increased intercultural competence, and it is very comfortable to apply the project approach in large classrooms. At the end of the paper, the discussion is summarized with the Conclusion part that is followed by the References.

Literature Review

The growth of the multicultural education environment is a widespread phenomenon in the tertiary education system in the 21st century. The modernization process in the field of language education requires a person who has not only a good command of a foreign language but a person who is also able to adapt quickly to the cultural peculiarities of the native speakers. As Martyn Barrett & Michael Byram (2013) state that mutual understanding and intercultural competence are more important than ever today, because by them, we can address some of the most virulent problems of contemporary societies. According to Elena Tareva & Baris Tarev (2018), Intercultural communicative competence should be actualized not only in favorable conditions of interaction, but it also implies to readiness to get out of a

difficult situation caused by misunderstanding, disagreement, rejection of attitudes, different intentions of the participants in the dialogue. Oksana Keshtova & Olga Marnat (2019) confirmed that specific phases of training correspond to each stage of a particular cultural learning. As Oksana Keshtova & Olga Marnat clarified, such approaches, stages and phases of teaching intercultural communication define types of exercise used in class: receptive-productive, reproductive –productive, productive – creative. Euler S.S. (2017) claims that utilization of project work in a country where the target language is spoken provides language learners with the opportunity to experience aspects of the target culture firsthand instead of learning about it rather theoretically in their home country. Moreover, Euler S.S. (2017) identifies detailed background information about 3 generations of the project approach, stating that by their definition, the first generation projects are predominantly aimed at developing language skills, while second-generation projects are predominantly aimed at developing cognitive skills, whereas cultural projects provide learners with a variety of sources for linguistic and cultural information, including newspapers, magazines, internet, television, reports and others. According to Suvorova S.L & Khilchenko T.V. (2019), the training method combines the clarity of planning with a large degree of freedom, the flexibility of approach, and the ability to meet the specific objectives of each interaction act. Finally, Suvorova S.L & Khilchenko T.V. (2019) confirm that the main purpose of the intercultural training is the formation of students' internal attitudes regarding peculiarities of the foreign culture, expanding linguistic and cultural knowledge where discourse creates a positive attitude for communicating with partners.

Methodology

The target population for this study consisted of bachelor graduate students of Bukhara State University. The unit of analysis was the individual student. The sampling frame was a list of undergraduate students of Foreign Languages Faculty studied from 2019 to 2023 and English teachers. A mail survey was sent to the complete list of 109 graduate students in 2023, and this questionnaire aimed to

identify participants' opinion on the use of the project approach to develop intercultural competence in foreign language teaching. 30 students out of 109 replied to the questionnaire completely, giving a supportive response rate of maximum 85,4% for a positive impact of the Project-Based Approach in developing intercultural competence. Only 5 of the 30 respondents were not sure to answer the question about whether the project approach aids to improve language skills or cultural skills. All 30 usable questionnaires were analyzed.

Table 1 provides a socio-demographic profile of the respondents who participated in the current study. The sample was slightly dominated by female respondents (85.4%), and the majority of respondents fell in the 22-24 age group.

Table 1: A socio-demographic profile of respondents

	N_e	%
Gender:		
Female	50	86,6
Male	5	13,3
Total	55	99,9
Age:		
22 – 23	17	
23 – 24	13	
25-30	10	
30-40	15	
Total	55	99,9
Education:		
PRESETT students	30	
In service teachers	25	

The respondents provided a reasonably representative profile of all undergraduate students of the Foreign Languages Faculty. Replies were obtained from the participants between March and April 2020. Moreover, the respondents provided a picture of information that the project approach is emerging as an important method to teach culture in foreign language classrooms. 30 students and 25 teachers replied, giving a satisfactory response rate of 83.3%. However, of the 55 respondents, 16.6% saw no need for a project approach to build competence in teaching culture. Indeed, as many as 66.6% had implementation and use of project approach in teaching culture in their "Cross-Cultural Competence" classes.

Data Collection

The questionnaire was pre-tested using a convenient sample of nearly 10 female students and 3 teachers at Bukhara State University, Uzbekistan. Cooper and Schindler's (2003) collaborative participants pre-testing method was used. Data for the main study was collected over several months from March to September 2023 via a mail questionnaire survey for students and google forms for teachers to obtain information directly from the individual participant. Before conducting the survey, each recipient's permission was obtained. Questionnaire surveys were conducted at various times of the day, two days of the week.

Questionnaire

Project approach is a widely used method in teaching culture and intercultural competence. To what extent would the project approach (project work) on studying culture aids the growth of your intercultural competence? Please answer the questions below. Circle or highlight the answers.

- | | |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------|
| a. “Intercultural communicative competence” should be an essential part of second language teaching. | Yes/No/Not sure |
| b. Cultural projects are predominantly aimed at developing language skills rather than improving intercultural competence. | Yes/No/Not sure |
| c. Cultural projects provide learners with a various sources for linguistic and cultural information | Yes/No/Not sure |
| d. Cultural projects provide learners with the opportunity to experience some aspects of culture(interviewing people of target culture, observing ,comparing and differentiating various cultures) rather than teaching them theoretically. | Yes/No/Not sure |
| e. Cultural project should address to authentic insight and transferrable skills. | Yes/No/Not sure |
| f. Authentic insight can be best achieved through cooperation(with team members), and confrontation(with values of another culture). | Yes/No/Not sure |
| g. Cultural projects allow for language use in real cultural contexts supporting learners with a maximum of authentic listening comprehension training. | Yes/No/Not sure |
| h. To interview people of the target culture is an enormously helpful source (that gives an opportunity to have a good amount of contact with locals). | Yes/No/Not sure |
| i. To observe lifestyle, habits(clothing and eating), social interaction, trade,transportation,holidays,festivals, flora and fauna via Internet or television aids to realize cultural differences. | Yes/No/Not sure |
| j. To make presentation on given topics encourage learners to make surveys and explore some aspects of target culture. | Yes/No/Not sure |

Results

An independent sample was conducted to test the hypothesis that a project approach is an effective way to build intercultural communicative competence in teaching foreign languages. Regarding what was expected, a project approach is claimed as a very potential approach to developing cross-cultural competences in teaching culture in foreign language classrooms.

Table 2 shows that implementing a project work in teaching culture in foreign language classes is an effective way of developing intercultural competence. A more detailed report of the results is included below.

47 of 55 respondents give a satisfactory answer at the rate of 85.4% to the question of approving of teaching "Intercultural Communicative Competence" as an essential part of second language teaching. "Addressing culture in such a systematic manner is necessary because, as has been argued, communication in a foreign language always happens in a larger sociocultural context, so that developing intercultural communicative competence" (ICC) (Alptekin, 2002). Getting a 60% rate, question B remains debatable together with question F that shares a slightly higher rate than question B. Questions C and I rate high percent 92.7% to 85.45%, collecting almost the same number of positive answers (51/47) emphasize the importance of utilizing the project approach in teaching culture and make it clear that cultural projects are the source of linguistic and cultural information. Practical studying or experiencing some aspects of culture gives its actual results rather than teaching culture theoretically, as clarified 44 positive answers (80%) of question D. However, a higher rate was earned by question H and I which show exactly the same proportion of 85.45% that focuses on the benefits of communicating and sharing ideas with people of the target culture, as well as, to observe lifestyle, habits and social interaction through internet or TV programs. Question G (81.8%) stresses the authenticity of teaching materials which owe a valuable place in teaching culture and language. Despite the 63.6% rate, question E shares a similar context with

question G. At the rate of 78.18%, question J has a reality that doing surveys and exploring some topics support a positive experience for language learners.

	Yes/%	No/%	Not sure/%	Total answers
a. "Intercultural communicative competence" should be an essential part of second language teaching.	47/85,4%	4/7,27	4/7,27	55
b. Cultural projects are predominantly aimed at developing language skills rather than improving intercultural competence.	28/60%	11/20	16/29	55
c. Cultural projects provide learners with various sources for linguistic and cultural information.	51/92,7	1/1,8	3/5,45	55
d. Cultural projects provide learners with the opportunity to experience some aspects of culture (interviewing people of the target culture, observing, comparing, and differentiating various cultures) rather than teaching them theoretically.	44/80	5/9,09	6/10,9	55
e. Cultural projects should address to authentic insight and transferrable skills.	35/63,6	9/16,36	6/10,9	55
f. Authentic insight can be best achieved through cooperation (with team members), and confrontation (with values of another culture).	37/67,2	3/5,45	15/27,2	55
g. Cultural projects allow for language use in real cultural contexts supporting learners with a maximum of authentic listening comprehension training.	45/81,8	2/3,63	8/14,54	55
h. To interview people of the target culture is an enormously helpful source (that allows having a good amount of contact with locals).	47/85,45	----	8/14,54	55
i. To observe lifestyle, habits (clothing and eating), social interaction, trade, transportation, holidays, festivals, flora and fauna via Internet or television aids to realize cultural differences.	47/85,45	1/1,8	7/12,72	55
j. To make a presentation on given topics encourage learners to make surveys and explore some aspects of the target culture	43/78,18	4/7,27	8/14,54	55

These findings indicate that utilizing a project approach in teaching culture provides learners not only with linguistic information but with cultural information, as well as allowing learners to feel free to communicate in culturally diverse communities.

Conclusion

Firstly, the main outcome of intercultural learning is to build contact and collaboration with students from another country. This criterion has already been mentioned in the theoretical part of the article and would be part of the intercultural individual competence. Based on the results, one can argue that implementing the project approach to teach culture in foreign language classrooms develops not only students' cultural information, but improves their integrated skills (listening, speaking, reading, writing) as well. As a consequence, cultural projects, as defined in detail above, in addition to training language skills, this method also helps students develop problem – solving skills, organizational skills, creativity, imagination, research skills and the ability to work effectively in teams.

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