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Aziza Yunusova
Teacher, Department of
English, Linguistics, Bukhara
State University, Bukhara,
Uzbekistan

Nafisa Bobomurodova
Undergraduate student,
Foreign, Languages Faculty,
Bukhara State University,
Bukhara, Uzbekistan

Corresponding Author:
Aziza Yunusova
Teacher, Department of
English, Linguistics, Bukhara
State University, Bukhara,
Uzbekistan

Developing intercultural competence through a project approach

Aziza Yunusova and Nafisa Bobomurodova

Abstract

The present study investigates how a project approach may facilitate the development of intercultural competence in foreign language classrooms and how teachers can apply to the approach in the classroom is explored by using a questionnaire survey. Analysis of the study makes it clear that the project approach can be best to teach culture in foreign language classrooms motivating students to study target culture in an interesting context. Besides, this article 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 potential to teach culture implementing the project approach even in a home country.

Keywords: 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 in an easy manner. As well as teaching culture in foreign language classroom helps language learners to get a clear depiction of the country, nation, and the language taught. Developing intercultural competence is achieved by knowing well how to teach culture, applying the most effective approaches and methods. To utilize the project approach is regarded as the most facilitative way of teaching culture because of aiming at developing language skills, cognitive skills and intercultural competence. There is now a great deal of evidence that implementing a project approach is a relatively effective tool for developing intercultural competence. 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) [7]. Second, the team-learning approach was successful. Students learned how to deal with a team composed of members from their own country and from abroad. This intercultural team-learning was a learning experience in itself because it represented the lived reality of the students. 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) [7]. To address the validity of these concerns, we carried out a questionnaire in an upper-level course of Foreign Languages Faculty, in which students respond to the questions relied on their experiences gained by culture classes. The results we present here indicate that it is the best 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 applying the project approach in large classrooms. At the end of the paper discussion is summarized with the Conclusion part that is followed by References.

The growth of the multicultural education environment is a widespread phenomenon in the higher education system in the 21st century. 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) states 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 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) ^[7] claims that to utilize project work in a country where the target language is spoken, provides language learners with the opportunity to experience aspects of target culture firsthand instead of learning about it rather theoretically in their home country. Moreover, Euler S.S (2017) ^[7] identifies a detailed background information about 3 generations of 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, cultural projects provide learners with a variety of sources for linguistic and cultural information, including newspapers, magazines, the 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 acts. 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 creating, gaining positive attitude towards yourself and communication partners.

Methodology

The target population for this study consisted of bachelor degree fourth-year 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 2016 till 2020. There is no alternative sampling available because there is no required registration. A mail survey was sent to the complete list of 109 graduate students in 2020, a mail survey questionnaire was sent to realize a large enough sample for the use of the project approach to develop intercultural competence in foreign language teaching. Fully 30 students replied, giving a satisfactory response rate of

maximum 86,6%. 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 analysed.

Table 1 provides a socio-demographic profile of the respondents who participated in the study. The sample was slightly dominated by female respondents (86,6%), and the majority of respondents fell in the 22-24 age group. All respondents had some college education; all of them have earned a college degree.

Table 1: A socio-demographic profile of respondents

	№	%
Gender:		
Female	26	86,6
Male	4	13,3
Total	30	99,9
Age:		
22 – 23	17	56,6
23 – 24	13	43,3
Total	30	99,9
Education:		
College	30	99,9
Graduate	30	99,9

The respondents provided a reasonably representative profile of all undergraduate students of Foreign Languages Faculty. Replies were obtained from all students 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. Fully 30 students replied, giving a satisfactory response rate of 83,3%, however, of the 30 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 on teaching culture in their " Cross-Cultural Competence" classes.

Data Collection

The questionnaire was pre-tested using a convenience sample of nearly 10 female students in Bukhara State University, Uzbekistan. Cooper and Schindler's collaborative participants pre-testing method was used. Data for the main study was collected over two months during March and April 2020 via a mail questionnaire survey to obtain information directly from the individual student. Before conducting the survey, each student's permission was obtained. Questionnaire surveys were conducted at various times of the day, two days of the week. The questionnaire was sent via mail and asked students to complete a questionnaire.

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 |

Done by: Bobomurodova Nafisa

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. The test was significant, but the results were counter to the research hypothesis. 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. More detailed reports of the results are included below.

26 of 30 respondents give a satisfactory answer at the rate of 86,6% 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) ^[1]. Getting a 60% rate, the question B remains debatable together with the question F that shares the same rate with the question B. Questions C and I rate 96,6% collecting 29 positive answers 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 24 positive answers (80%) of the question D. Also, the same rate was earned by the question H that focuses on the benefits of communicating and sharing ideas with people of the target

culture. Question E (66,6%) stresses the authenticity of teaching materials which owes a valuable place in teaching culture and language. Despite the 90% rate, question G shares a similar context with the question E. At the rate of 83,3%, question J has a reality that making surveys and exploring some topics support a positive experience to the language learners.

	Yes/%	No/%	Not sure/%	Total answers
"Intercultural communicative competence" should be an essential part of second language teaching.	26/86,6	2/0,6	2/0,6	30
Cultural projects are predominantly aimed at developing language skills rather than improving intercultural competence.	18/60	6/20	6/20	30
Cultural projects provide learners with various sources for linguistic and cultural information.	29/96,6	1/0,3	---	30
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.	24/80	4/13,3	2/0,6	30
Cultural projects should address to authentic insight and transferrable skills.	20/66,6	6/20	4/13,3	30
Authentic insight can be best achieved through cooperation (with team members), and confrontation (with values of another culture).	18/60	2/0,6	10/33,3	30
Cultural projects allow for language use in real cultural contexts supporting learners with a maximum of authentic listening comprehension training.	27/90	2/0,6	1/0,3	30
To interview people of the target culture is an enormously helpful source (that allows having a good amount of contact with locals).	24/80	----	6/20	30
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.	29/96,6	---	1/0,3	30
To make a presentation on given topics encourage learners to make surveys and explore some aspects of the target culture	25/83,3	2/0,6	4/13,3	30

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 locations.

Conclusion

First of all, the main outcome of intercultural learning is to build the 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 result evaluation, one can argue that implementing the project approach to teach culture in foreign language classroom 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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