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Intercultural Approaches in Language Teaching

Міжкультурний підхід у викладанні мов

Abstract. The intercultural approach in language teaching is aimed at developing students' understanding and appreciation of different cultures, their ability to communicate effectively across cultural barriers. This approach recognizes that language and culture are closely related and that students need to develop not only linguistic competence but also intercultural competence. An intercultural approach in language teaching includes a number of actions and strategies. Cultural immersion: engaging students in authentic cultural experiences, such as visiting cultural sites, participating in cultural events, or interacting with native speakers. Intercultural communication is becoming increasingly important in our globalized world. This article explores the principles of questioning, listening, and empathy as essential skills for successful intercultural communication. It suggests various activities that language teachers can use to promote these skills, such as reading literature, watching films, and participating in cultural exchange programs. By incorporating intercultural approaches into language teaching, educators can help prepare their students for a diverse and interconnected world. This article discusses the importance

of intercultural approaches in language teaching. It highlights the need for learners to question their own assumptions and biases, and to develop the skills of active listening and empathy. The article suggests various activities that can help learners understand and appreciate different cultures, including watching videos, participating in role-playing activities, and engaging in cultural exchange programs. Overall, the article emphasizes the importance of preparing learners for a globalized world where intercultural communication is essential.

Key words: *education, culture, cultural approach, intercultural communication.*

Анотація. *Міжкультурний підхід у викладанні мов спрямований на розвиток у студентів розуміння та оцінки різних культур, їх здатність ефективно спілкуватися через культурні бар'єри. Цей підхід визнає, що мова та культура тісно пов'язані, і що студенти повинні розвивати не тільки лінгвістичну компетентність, але й міжкультурну компетентність. Міжкультурний підхід у викладанні мов містить низку дій та стратегій. Культурна іммерсія: привчання студентів до автентичних культурних досвідів, таких як відвідування культурних пам'яток, участь у культурних заходах або спілкування з носіями мови. Міжкультурний діалог: сприяння комунікації між студентами з різних культурних середовищ, підтримка взаємодії та обміну думками. Критичне мислення: спонукання студентів до критичного аналізу своїх власних культурних припущень та уявлень, розвитку більш витонченого розуміння інших культур.*

Багатокультурні матеріали: використання матеріалів, які відображають різноманітність культур та поглядів, таких як література, фільми, музика та мистецтво. Вивчення мови через культуру: використання культурних тем та тематики як основи для вивчення мови, наприклад, вивчення їжі, свят або звичаїв у цільовій мові. В цілому, міжкультурний підхід у викладанні мов має на меті розвиток міжкультурної компетентності студентів, яка передбачає здатність ефективно спілкуватися через культурні бар'єри, цінувати та поважати різні культурні погляди та адаптуватися до різних культурних контекстів. У статті представлена модель освітнього підходу, що поєднує синтезовані знання, мудрість, культуру, інтелект і творчість. З'ясовано тенденцію загальних обговорень проблем сучасних стратегій і програм, їх академічні та практичні аспекти.

Ключові слова: *освіта, культура, міжкультурний підхід, викладання мов.*

Introduction. At the base of foreign language teaching and learning the insight into and deeper understanding of the target languages cultures has been a prominent aim with mobility growing and business becoming more and more global, international language pedagogues and business people alike have come to call for "intercultural skills", "practical cultural knowledge" or "international competence". Especially, if "communication" is synonymous for "genuine mutual understanding".

Methods. Considering English teaching-learning strategies analysis, it is necessary to emphasize, that the most valuable achievement of the experience, consists in English learners' promotion of creative use

of the English language, a broaden vision of the English language, as a rich developing language code system, and of learning the English language as a creative unlimited process which serves for cu1tivation of communicative perfection, culture, intelligence, knowledge – the chief constituents of modern civilization cultura1 paradigm [4: p. 8].

Results and Discussions. We can reveal three major methods of teaching intercultural skills from textbooks:

I. Teachers presenting information directly.

II. Students gathering information from different sources.

III. Exposure to authenticity or near-authenticity.

From a language learning point of view, the three methods involve a range of communicative learner language activities, more limited and one-sided in the first case, with a concentration on comprehension and note taking, leaving the learners mostly in the passive role of "consumers" of facts and figures.

The information on the target cultures is usually referred to as "representative" The information on the target cultures is usually delivered by teachers or is presented in booklets or brochures. They are often of an official character, published by ministries or publicly funded institutions. Most European countries offer similar materials.

The second and the third of the above mentioned approaches involve the learners more actively and in a more diversified range of activities. Information gathering could mean: different groups of learners are engaged working with different materials (texts, statistics, interviews, audio, video and print materials, literary and journalistic texts etc.), consulting each other, exchanging and comparing their insights, sometimes coming close to an ideal communicative classroom, in which everybody is willing, able and not just "told" to make some contributions, language and culture learning as a process, involving all students, with teacher-facilitators and teacher-organizers rather than traditional leaders.

Similar principles are applied when it comes to exposing learners to authenticity [1-8]. This way of dealing with and learning from foreign cultures is initiated in both environments: the former is frequently the case when foreign students attend the same classes, or when forcing language assistants are sent all over Europe, representing a given language, country and culture "in person", or when other (native speaker) guests are invited into the foreign language classroom. Exposure also happens, when learners deal with current authentic materials, or when problems of a foreign culture are "transferred" through simulations or role plays.

Growing European mobility in general, exchange programmes and study trips, internships and short university excursions to foreign countries expose an ever growing number of learners directly and "authentically"

to foreign life and "real" facts. Such practice was rather common before. But russian war made it impossible.

Different as they may be, the above mentioned approaches have one thing in common: they are applied in order to gain, pool, exchange and eventually use information, they activate language skills, and in the best of cases, they integrate these activities into an interactive foreign language classroom.

The question of intercultural approaches in language teaching is based on the following three principles:

1. "The Art of Questioning"

To see cultural phenomena within *their* own cutural contexts is not always an easy task, partly due to a lack of exposure, partly due to deficits in the availability and relevance of materials. It is suggested therefore that one sensitizes oneself by training the *"art of asking the right questions'* in one's own cultural environment. Not just because one's own cultural environment is always "abundantly" at hand, but because we start from the assumption that cultural (i.e. intercultural, interpretational) skills are not linked to a specific geographical region, country or area. They rather resemble metaskills and transferable mental attitudes.

a) "Own and Foreign"

The example below makes use of both knowledge about own and hypotheses about forcing cultures. In the following sequence of activities the techniques of *asking – verifying – questioning* are used.

Topic: "Foreigners"

Why do foreigners come to, or stay in a country?

The learners are involved in a constant mutual process of finding questions, looking for an answers, verifying hypotheses about own and target country phenomena. The search for sources of information is part of the learning process as well as sensitizing oneself, asking whether the kind of questions asked with regard to one's own country would also apply to target culture problems.

2. Doing Puzzles

The strategies suited, to gain deeper insight into the characteristics of a foreign culture mentioned so far, do not aim at any kind of "completeness". On the contrary: it is reminiscent of doing a puzzle: there are always some part missing, only gradually is the whole picture put together, parts of the whole are completed earlier, some, as it were, will never be completed at all.

Intercultural competence is partial competence, allowing illustrative insights. It means equipping learners with techniques and strategies that might be of some help in unexpected, unforeseeable situations. In this context it is not a weakness but a characteristic feature.

Deficit awareness, which in such a scenario will develop simultaneously with growing insight and increasing knowledge, will prevent learners from jumping to hasty conclusions, or passing quick comments just after quick superficial, first sight contacts.

"Doing puzzles" implies *a second principle* as well: working in groups, dividing labour cooperating, seeking group consensus, trying to get a maximum out of the expertise, skills and approaches of their members. The idea is networking, using a variety of sources and materials, delegating and putting single parts together. Emerging information gaps function as incentives for getting more, and more detailed and varied or specialised information, a starting point for trying to find yet another angle from which to evaluate a certain cultural problem.

Take as an example, a tree, which some see as a symbol for a clean and healthy environment, others just take it as "raw material" for carpenters or librarians, to yet others it is just an obstruction to street traffic, in barren countries it might be taken as an almost exotic object of desire, a symbol for life, no matter how damaged it might be by acid rain. Interculturally aware learners would have to develop some routine in ascertaining *who* sees *what, and* in *which* way.

Doing puzzles requires social and interpersonal skills as well as logical thinking, cognitive skills as well as empirical ones, all of which resemble skills upon which intercultural competence is built, and which fit very well with a communicative, learner centred approach to language teaching.

3. Taking photographs and painting pictures

A learner of intercultural competence should be able and trained to do both: take snap shots, reflecting describing and *documenting* reality on the one hand, and taking a painter's approach, on the other hand, *interpreting* reality, dealing with feelings and atmosphere, moods and sentiments.

Again, the "photographer - painter approach" is not only confined to interpreting otherness. One's own surrounding supplies a "training ground' to sensitize and to develop awareness for these aspects of a certain society as well.

A training tool might be supplied by so-called "emotional affective filters". When exploring a foreign or one's own culture, the following puzzle stones, i.e. the following questions might be used to develop and include a range of views:

I. What is it that causes frustration to people, individuals or groups, what upsets them and why?

II. Can the feelings be transferred to other cultural settings?

III. Are there any visions or dreams expressed in letters to the editors of daily papers or weekly magazines?

IV. Are the people's hopes specific for a certain culture or area, or do people share feelings regardless of their passports or residences?

Information search is expanded by search for feelings and emotions.

The "painter - photographer awareness" is required when it comes to interpreting objects of modern art, paintings, sculptures, in such abstract areas, independent of specific linguistic or cultural contexts, the specific required skills under discussion are made transparent most effectively. Elements of creativity and of interpretation of artifacts therefore ought to be taken into the standards of language tuition.

Conclusion. We think that using suggested intercultural approaches in foreign language teaching would help to develop students understanding and respect of different cultures. In such a manner an intercultural mentality should be educated.

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