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THE USE OF PROJECT-BASED LEARNING TO IMPROVE INTERCULTURAL-COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE

Abstract. Apart from linguistic competence, today's globalized world demands Intercultural communicative competence (ICC), hence, integration of ICC in EFL classes has become one of the vital issues. Ten steps of Stoller (1997) is considered to be an effective tool of PBL which can create opportunities to improve ICC. In order to maximize the benefit of PBL in the classroom, the author suggests creating tasks by relying on Stoller's (1997) ten steps of PBL. Tasks should be based on PBL essentials, at the same time tasks are closely interconnected with ICC main elements as: respect, tolerance, curiosity and authenticity. This article attempts to present the role of ICC in our society and how it can be culminated through project-based learning.

Keywords: intercultural communicative competence, project-based learning, project.

Андатпа. Тілдік құзыреттіліктен басқа, бүгінгі жаһанданған әлем мәдениетаралық коммуникативті құзыреттілікті (МҚБ) талап етеді, сондықтан ОФИ сабақтарында ICC интеграциясы өмірлік маңызды мәселелердің біріне айналды. Столлердің он қадамы (1997) мәдениетаралық коммуникация құзыреттілігін арттыруға мүмкіндіктер туғызатын PBL тиімді құралы болып саналады. Сыныпта PBL пайдасын барынша арттыру үшін зерттеуші Столлердің (1997) PBL он қадамына сүйене отырып тапсырмалар жасады. Нұсқаулықтың әрбір тапсырмасы PBL негіздеріне негізделген, сонымен бірге тапсырмалар ICC негізгі элементтерімен тығыз байланысты: құрмет, төзімділік, қызығушылық және шынайылық. Бұл мақалада жобалық оқыту арқылы мәдениетаралық коммуникативті құзыреттілікті қалай шыңдауға және дамытуға болатынын көрсетуге тырысады.

Түйінді сөздер: мәдениетаралық коммуникативтік құзыреттілік, жобалық оқыту, жоба.

Аннотация. Межкультурная коммуникативная компетенция стала широко известна в обучении языку, поэтому в настоящее время

приоритетными являются способы улучшения ICC в классе английского языка. Десять шагов Столлера (1997) считаются эффективным инструментом обучения на основе проекта, который может создать возможности для улучшения межкультурной коммуникативной компетенции. Чтобы максимизировать пользу обучения на основе проекта в классе, исследователь предлагает создать задачи, опираясь на десять шагов обучения на основе проекта Столлера (1997). Задания должны быть созданы на основе главных аспектах проектной работы, в то же время задания тесно взаимосвязаны с основными элементами межкультурной коммуникативной компетенции, такими как уважение, терпимость, любознательность и аутентичность. В этой статье делается попытка представить, как межкультурная коммуникативная компетентность может быть достигнута и развита посредством обучения на основе проектов.

Ключевые слова: межкультурная коммуникативная компетенция, проектное обучение, проект.

Intercultural Communicative Competence in today's society

In connection with the expansion of ties in the multicultural world, it is essential to effectively interact with a representative of another culture and participate in intercultural communication. The importance of knowledge of a foreign language as a language of formal communication is increasing, therefore, along with linguistic knowledge, communication competence also should be improved. Recognition and implementation of ICC in language teaching classrooms can prompt influential positive changes in the learning process [14].

According to Spitzberg and Changnon [19], intercultural competence means "the appropriate interaction between individuals who have diverse cognitive and behavioral orientations towards the situations". This means that the process of improving intercultural competence starts from creating beliefs and values, which leads to internal outcomes (flexibility, empathy, adaptability). Hence, shifts in internal outcomes facilitate the formulation of external outcomes of appropriate behavior and effective interaction with surroundings [6]. Similarly, Byram [5] claimed that cooperation of attitudes, beliefs, knowledge and skills are the major components of Intercultural competence.

As has been reported by Baker [1], intercultural competence has been considered as "one approach to systematically conceptualizing and investigating the knowledge, attitudes and behavior associated with successful intercultural communication"

Someone's desire to encourage intercultural communication in both intrinsic or extrinsic level embodies the term of motivation in ICC [19]. If a person does not have motivation to communicate with other cultures and be open minded then other components of ICC do not make sense. Another main element

of ICC – knowledge, elaborates motivation and includes self and other awareness, being flexible in cognitive level and mindful state. The effective procedure to develop other-knowledge is to have thoughtful communication with new cultures.

An individual's frame of mind about and comfort level in uncertain moments present the next element of ICC – tolerance for uncertainty. The process of communication with people of a different race, mentality, gender and etc. makes people analyze what should be said or not. Though, there are ways of culminating intercultural communicative competence. They include experiential learning and practices of reflection [2].

Jumpakate and Hieu [12] supposed that, even though educators understand the significance of ICC in the language acquisition process, many of them lack appropriate knowledge and training to integrate. Lazar (2006) also concluded that culture-related issues have not been properly incorporated in EFL classrooms. Similarly, according to Smakova & Paulsrud [18] study on Kazakhstani EFL teachers' perception and awareness of ICC, educators emphasize such challenges as lack of an authentic environment and coursebooks. Despite the common belief that studying abroad is considered an effective way of culminating in ICC, there also occur opportunities to gain experiences on campus. Deardorff [9] stated that internationalization at home with the idea of creating intercultural learning chances and competent students is one of the productive ways of maximizing classes' curricula and learning opportunities. Diversity of types of learning that usually incorporate students' activity are needed in order to achieve optimal goals in developing ICC, for instance, experimental, cooperative learning or project-based learning approaches.

Project-based learning as a tool of developing ICC

Thomas [23] defined Project-Based Learning (PBL) as “a model that organizes learning around projects” (p.1). “Projects” that include challenging questions and tasks, thus, require and practice decision making and problem-solving skills. Implementation of PBL strategies is considered to be one of the most effective forms of organizing the educational process [24]. PBL is an effective tool to develop ICC, as a process model of Intercultural Competence [6] has the main elements of PBL: constructive, self-direction, contextual and collaborative learning [8]. Similarly Hietbrink and Geitz [11] also concluded that Project-based learning, which has such principles as constructivist and contextual learning, offer a lot of advantages to develop skills and knowledge in Deardorff's pyramid. Students' responsibility is not only to overcome a given problem but also to enhance their perspectives by thinking about various options of problem solving. This means that PBL is a workable approach to increase both internal and external outcomes of ICC - flexibility, adaptability, ethnorelative perspective empathy and appropriate behavior [11]. When students work together on particular projects, they will have an opportunity to “recycle

knowledge” in a natural context [9]. Similarly Brown et al. [3] asserts that authentic learning helps to design critical thinking and problem-solving skills, which are essential in out-of-school contexts. Hedge [10] also specifies projects as extended tasks which usually integrate language skills by using different activities: planning, interviewing, and observing; group discussion of information; problem-solving; oral and written reporting. Successful accomplishment of a project demands such attitudes as respect, curiosity, openness and diversity, which are the main aspects of the Pyramid Model of Intercultural Competence [6]. During the PBL session, students have to share responsibilities, reach a common goal, negotiate their own opinions, hence, develop communication skills.

Another major component of Intercultural communication competence is Cultural Intelligence. Cultural Intelligence is defined as a system of interacting knowledge and skills linked with cultural metacognition, which allows individuals to adapt in diverse cultural environments [22]. This is based on the metacognition general ideas, which is primarily related to analytical skills. Sternberg [20] argues that there are several core mental processes that facilitate adaptation to certain environments: recognition of existence problems, constructing a strategy to solve the problem, monitoring and evaluating one's solution as well as their own. These core mental processes almost completely match with PBL principles: constructivist and self-directed learning. The idea of constructivist learning (creating personal interpretations of the world) can be related to cultural metacognitive processes: being aware of one's own and other's assumptions, being attentive to others' perspectives. The PBL's principle of self-directed learning focuses on monitoring and evaluating skill, therefore, contributes to the improvement of communication intelligence. For instance, students learn how to give constructive feedback without judging their group mates, consider intercultural aspects of the situation and be open to comments as well [11].

There is a tendency to associate the term “project” more with business in comparison with education. Nonetheless, foreign language teachers started to give more and more attention to the incorporation of projects into their daily teaching routines as its resulting benefits had been recognized so far. According to its temporary nature, the project has a clear-cut beginning and end. A study by Scrivener [17] concluded that projects usually are conducted according to “follow the plan”. Both groups for completing the project and educators should have enough sources to give feedback and have a beneficial reflection. Since the project will have a structured plan, students cannot just only follow their thinking flow, but learn to be more flexible in all of the contexts. When the conditions such as a shared responsibility, open interaction and a common goal are met, then intercultural collaborative learning will be achieved. Here the ability to turn differences into opportunities becomes the most crucial part of working in a

group. Thus, before starting working on a project, students should already have developed a specific level of awareness of diversity, respect and curiosity. Collaborative learning of students on culture related projects can be a reason to know more about group mates' interests, moreover to discover new fields of personal hobbies and interests, which are often culture related and oriented, for instance, traditions and customs, traveling, learning languages etc. Both for teachers and students the projects may play a role in embracing a break from the routine, classwork and traditional coursebooks. Chances of coming across new and unfamiliar culture related issues occur. Hence, as there is no direct guidance of teachers, there is a reason to develop higher cultural sensitivity and awareness to avoid cultural conflicts or misunderstandings while organizing the final outcome of their project. And project-based learning gives students a great opportunity to develop those attitudes in the authentic context [7]. A study by Byram and Morgan [4] concluded that there is a need for students to be autonomous by engaging in the real world's interpretations and seeing the differences between native and target languages' cultures. In order to have a precise analysis of important values of the target language's culture, learners also should pay attention and learn the distinct aspects of the foreign language culture.

Tseng [24] clarified the crucial part - confrontation with cultural differences is an integral part of the language learning process. Completion of the project with intercultural communicative context may lead to the development of new cultural perspectives, empathy and up the level of ambiguity tolerance. Although, if learners discover differences between cultures beyond their understanding and views, the accomplishment of tasks and the creation of new perspectives may still be the reason for learners' dissatisfaction or frustration, uncertainty or ambiguity [7]. Whereas, according to Nguyen, H. T. T. [16] project-based learning reinforces cultural knowledge, master soft skills and encourages students to study with fun.

Also, in the process of completing a certain project students face the diversity of intercultural situations which makes them use linguistic knowledge they have already acquired beforehand. In situations where learners are able to use the target language can be a more effective and enjoyable way of learning. On the other hand, intercultural communication during the completion of a project will definitely come up with a culture-oriented lexicon of students. Thus, this kind of change of atmosphere will not only upgrade existing knowledge and vocabulary but will make students more aware of the connection between target language and culture [7].

As for implementation, the 10 steps of Stoller [21] can be applied as a tool of increasing the perception of ICC, so that students with various cultural backgrounds can present active independent creative activities to solve a problem. These steps include tasks which actively engage students to gather,

process and report the information along with group members during the given period:

Step 1: Students and instructors agree on a theme for the project.

Step 2: Students and instructors determine the final outcome of the project.

Step 3: Students and instructors structure the project.

Step 4: Instructor prepares students for the demands of information gathering.

Step 5: Students gather information.

Step 6: Instructor prepares students to compile and analyze the data.

Step 7: Students compile and analyze the information.

Step 8: Instructor prepares students for the language demands of the final activity.

Step 9: Students present the final product

Step 10: Students evaluate the project

By elaborating sets of tasks establish the process for completing the project and span an entire instructional unit; in settings like these, the benefits of project work are maximized because students are actively engaged in information gathering, processing, and reporting over a period of time. Hence, the outcome is an increased content knowledge and developed interaction skills. Local students can focus their projects on issues related to other countries' regions, studies, traditions and culture. For instance, EFL students in Tunisian high school made a poster and video tour, which introduced the city's construction for travelers [15].

Conclusion

Intercultural communication competence is considered to be one of the key features of modern society citizens, hence, its role in EFL should not be underestimated. However, as ICC is an up to date concept of teaching, our educational system mainly concentrates on language acquisition only and has challenges of integrating ICC.

Even though Kazakhstan is not an English-speaking country and borders non-English speaking nations, approaches to culminate students' ICC along with second language acquisition are available to use in the classroom. Therefore, the aim of this article is to attempt to conduct an overview of ICC and PBL tools in order to apply ICC in foreign language classrooms and provide students with an authentic learning environment. By theoretically analyzing the concept of ICC main aspects and its compliance with PBL essentials, it can be concluded that PBL is one of the most effective approaches to improve Intercultural communication competence.

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