



Pedagogical Objectives Of Teaching Intercultural Communication Competence

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Abstract

In the contemporary educational system we can remark a change of paradigm towards active learning and competence-based education. However, we should not understand that this is a radical change and that education has abandoned teaching knowledge in favour of competences. This is impossible, since competences include knowledge in their structure, and teaching has different functions, among which one remains that of transmitting knowledge. The cultural diversity found at educational level is an extraordinary source of progress and innovation regarding the teaching methodology and the academic communication. This diversity should be valued and used as a resource, so that academic results could appear and, along with them, the student's/teacher's satisfaction.

This article explores the foreign students' perceptions regarding what makes effective communication in an intercultural academic environment. The findings show differences according to the culture of origin, which lead us to the conclusion that intercultural communication competence could be built in a multicultural classroom by setting specific objectives related to comparing cultures and raising students' awareness about the importance of differences as enriching experience.

Keywords: teaching objectives, intercultural communication, foreign students

Zusammenfassung

Man bemerkt in dem zeitgenössischen Erziehungssystem eine Paradigmaveränderung zum Aktivlernen und Konzentrierung auf Kompetenzen. Man soll trotzdem nicht verstehen, dass es um eine radikale Veränderung geht und der Unterricht die Kenntnisseauslieferung zugunsten von den Kompetenzen verlassen hat. Das ist unmöglich, da die Kompetenzen Kenntnis in ihre Struktur beinhalten, und Unterrichten verschiedene Funktionen, darunter auch der Kenntnissevermittlung hat. Was die didaktische Methodologie und die pädagogische Kommunikation und Relation anbetrifft, ist die kulturelle Verschiedenheit in der erzieherischen Umgebung eine außerordentliche Fortschritt- und Innovationsquelle. Das sollte dementsprechend verwertet werden, so dass die akademischen Ergebnissen und zur gleichen Zeit die Studenten- und Professorenzufriedenstellung auftauchen.

Dieser Artikel untersucht die Wahrnehmungen der Auslandsstudenten betreffend die wirksame Kommunikation in einer interkulturellen akademischen Umgebung. Die Forschungsergebnisse stellen die Verschiedenheiten im Zusammenhang mit der originellen Kultur dar. Daraus ergibt sich die Schlussfolgerung, dass für die Bildung einer interkulturellen Kommunikationskompetenz in einer Klasse mit kulturellen Verschiedenheiten musste man solche Ziele festsetzen werden, die das Vergleichen verschiedener Kulturen und die Studentenbewusstsein betreffend der Bedeutung der kulturellen Verschiedenheiten als erhebende Erfahrung hinweisen.

Schlüsselworte: pädagogische Ziele, interkulturelle Kommunikation, Auslandsstudenten

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1. Introduction

The introduction of the intercultural element in training could be noticed especially in informal and non-formal educational settings. Still, on the one hand, the simple interaction between international students in the campus or at school does not implicitly lead to acquiring and developing intercultural communication competence. On the other hand, this competence cannot be taught in a formal educational setting without the direct contact/interaction with the otherness.

Effective communication is always dependent on context and, since culture is part of the context, communication is rarely separate from the cultural element. Thus, we agree that learning a foreign language cannot be separate from learning the target culture. It is important that international students should become aware of their own culture and of the other cultures as well; otherwise, the messages in the foreign language shall be interpreted according to their own cultural framework and this fact could lead to misinterpretations and ineffective communication.

The concept of *intercultural communication competence*, present in the works of the Council of Europe, is largely used in teaching modern languages, especially the international ones. The author Michael Byram (1997), designs a structural model of this competence, made of five cultural elements - „savoirs” - and three linguistic ones. The five cultural „savoirs” refer to: attitudes (curiosity, openness, trust in one’s own culture), knowledge, skills of interpreting and relating (skills of interpreting a document/event from another culture, of explaining it and relating it to other documents/events from one’s own culture), skills of discovering and interacting (ability to acquire new knowledge regarding a foreign culture and to operate with them), cultural critical awareness (ability to evaluate critically, and based on explicit criteria one’s own culture and other cultures).

We believe that the development of the intercultural communication competence of foreign students leads to the improvement of the communication with the teacher and with the intercultural group of students, to an increased capacity of communicating in the target language and to better adaptation to new cultures, by coping with culture shock.

There are various theoretical models of intercultural communication competence in the literature – linear, dynamic, structural, adaptational, psychological or holistic. We believe that due to the complexity of this competence which can be developed during the whole life, by formal, non-formal and informal education in a complementary way, it can only be view but holistically. That is why, when we talked about the intercultural speakers’ competences, we opted for a holistic view which comprises linguistic, cultural, psycho-attitudinal elements, based on the theoretical models of M. Byram, W. Gudykunst, K. Deardoff, but also on the concepts of „intermediary space”/„the third space”/”intercultural space” (Kramsch 1993, Clanet, 1990), or „ cultural implicit” (Clanet, 1990, Colles 1998, Louis, 2009, Zarate 2003).

In Romania, the field of intercultural education/communication was researched by authors, for example: Constantin Cucus, Teodor Cozma, Anca Nedelcu, Liviu Antonesei, Simona Butnaru, Călin Rus. They approach intercultural education as a strategy at the level of different educational dimensions, for example, the curriculum, the values promoted by education, the educational climate and the teacher-student relation, the teaching objectives and the methodology. The recent works of the Council of Europe, which dedicated numerous pages to teaching and assessing intercultural competence see it as an integral part of the study of modern languages, since dealing with otherness is one of the most important teaching objectives in this field.

2. Research methodology

The aim of our research is to adapt the teaching curricula of foreign languages including Romanian for foreigners to learners' needs and interests by finding out the foreign students' perceptions regarding the factors which promote effective intercultural communication in an academic environment according to their culture of origin.

Thus, the teacher could prioritize a set of teaching objectives which better reflects the students' views and perceptions. Our research hypothesis is the following:

Hypothesis : The students' culture of origin, that is the Western (Europe and America) and the Non-Western (the rest of the respondents' cultures of origin) influences their choices regarding various factors which promote effective intercultural communication.

Our research population consists of foreign students enrolled at Romanian universities in different study programmes (Bachelor, Master, PhD) who attend a preparatory year to learn the Romanian language. The study program of the preparatory year is regulated by the Romanian Law and it stipulates that the students must attend an intensive language and culture course which should teach them the language from a communicative perspective, including specialized vocabulary and should familiarize them with the Romanian culture and civilization.

In order to maximize learning the target language and the culture at the same time and to facilitate cultural and social adaptation during this course, we propose an intercultural approach to teaching and learning a foreign language, which is briefly defined as a focus on teaching communication skills in an intercultural environment. This involves immersion in the everyday culture and exposure to authentic teaching materials and experience.

The research population was established starting from a list of homogeneous groups - foreign students enrolled in the preparatory year and Romanian language teachers - and the qualitative selection was made so that it could cover several research variables, required for further interpretation of the research data: sex, age, culture of origin, language spoken and age for students and intercultural experiences.

The criteria for inclusion in the study were:

- foreign students who study Romanian as a foreign language
- willingness to participate in the study

3. Findings

As we mentioned above, we are interested in finding out the foreign students' perceptions regarding the factors which promote effective intercultural communication in an academic environment and to see if there are any differences according to their culture of origin.

The respondents' views regarding the following factors which promote effective communication in an academic environment differ significantly from a statistical point of view according to their cultural origin:

- to be able to understand my interlocutor's messages from his/her own cultural frame of reference (f)
- to be able to reflect critically on my own experience with persons of different cultural backgrounds (i)
- to be open to other cultures and tolerant before diversity (n)
- to be sincere in communication (p)
- to be fair with my interlocutor (r)

In order to measure how the students' culture of origin may influence their perceptions regarding the factors which promote effective intercultural academic communication we calculated the Pearson coefficients, as it results from the table below:

Table 1. Pearson values. Correlations cultural origin – factors which promote intercultural communication

		Orig_stud
Q3_f	Pearson Correlation	0,147*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0,043
	N	190
Q3_i	Pearson Correlation	-0,011
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,877
	N	189
Q3_n	Pearson Correlation	0,054
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,459
	N	189
Q3_p	Pearson Correlation	0,216**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,003
	N	189

Q3_r	Pearson Correlation	0,210**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,004
	N	189

The table above presents the existing intermediate level correlations between the items f, p, r from the list above and the cultural origin of the foreign students. It's interesting how the more importance is attached to the factors which promote effective intercultural communication: "to be sincere in communication" and „to be fair with my interlocutor" the farther to the West is the foreign students' cultural origin. Thus, the importance given to sincerity and fairness is more significant for the non-Western respondents than for the Western ones. Furthermore, a Pearson coefficient of 0.14 in the case of the item „f" leads us to believe that the importance given to the capacity to understand my interlocutor's messages from his/her own cultural frame of reference is a more important factor for non-Westerners. In this situation, we would have expected a reverse situation because multiculturalism appeared in the Western societies and is still on the wave.

In order to analyse more clearly how the cultural origin influences various factors which promote effective intercultural communication according to the respondents' views, we ordered the averaged we obtained for each item on groups of respondents coming from different cultural backgrounds.

Table 2. Factors which promote effective intercultural communication according to the cultural origin

Origin	Option 1	Option 2	Option 3
Europe	To know one or more international languages	To be friendly	To be positive, flexible and open to other cultures
North America	To be positive, flexible and open to other cultures	To know one or more international languages	To be able to manage stress, frustration, change and ambiguous situations
The Near East	To have knowledge about my own culture	To be friendly	To know one or more international languages
The Far East	To have knowledge about my own culture	To be positive, flexible and open to other cultures	To speak my interlocutor's language To be able to understand my interlocutor's messages from his/her own cultural frame of reference To be friendly
Africa	To be positive, flexible and open to	To know one or more international	To be able to understand my interlocutor's

	other cultures. To have high self-esteem To be friendly	languages	messages from his/her own cultural frame of reference
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As we can notice in the table above, the European respondents favoured firstly speaking more foreign languages, which is in line with the plurilingualism policies promoted by The Council of Europe and the European Commission. The respondents who come from North America choose the items “positive attitudes ...” and the Far – Eastern respondents value, in the first place the item „knowledge about their own culture”. The African respondents give importance to three items, which are: „positive attitude”, „increased self-esteem” and the personality trait of being friendly. Only the respondents who come from North America choose as their first three choices the “ability to deal with stress and ambiguous situations”. In general, almost all the respondents selected as their first choices the importance of “speaking more international languages” and „positive attitudes before cultural diversity”.

The research hypothesis can be verified by the Pearson correlational analysis, which showed that the students’ culture of origin, that is the Western (Europe and America) and the Non-Western (the rest of the cultures of origin) influences their choices regarding various factors which promote effective intercultural communication. Thus, the more important the factors “ability to understand my interlocutor’s message from his/her cultural frame of reference”, “to be sincere in communication”, “to be fair with my interlocutor” are, the farther from the West the students’ cultural origin is.

4. Conclusions

In teaching intercultural competence it is very important to set effective objectives which could help students’ build positive attitudes before cultural diversity. Therefore, we recommend to raise students’ awareness by introducing both elements regarding their own cultures and the target culture(s). Activities which allow the comparison between cultures, or invite to reflection on cultural incidents may lead to understanding one’s own reactions and interpretations and the other people’s cultural frames of reference. Since our respondents’ interest was also in personality traits or human values, we believe that the awareness should also be directed towards the existence of different meanings and degrees of importance of various values such as empathy, sincerity, fairness, honesty, respect, truth etc., which may contribute to the overall understanding of the causes of ineffective communication and difficulties of cultural adaptation.

Communication should not be perceived as a simple issue related to speaking a language; it inevitably means interaction in a given socio-cultural context, and the language is part of it. Effective communication does not mean to apply a set of rules. On the contrary, it is a process of negotiation and interpretation of meanings. That is why, conflicts and misunderstandings are always a part of it and should not be avoided, but effectively dealt with. In this respect, the intercultural approach to teaching foreign languages also has a very significant behavioural component, which involves a constant adjustment of one’s own views, interpretations and attitudes.

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