CLUSTER APPROACH IN ENHANCING INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE OF STUDENTS IN TEACHING FOREIGN LANGUAGES

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ABSTRACT

The article is concerned with the contribution and integration of the teaching culture into the foreign language classroom with the use of cluster approach. More specially, some consideration will be given to the why and how of teaching culture. It will be demonstrated that teaching a foreign language is not indistinguishable to give a sermon on syntactic structures or learning new vocabulary and expressions but mainly integrates or should incorporate some cultural elements, which are tangled with language itself. Furthermore, an attempt will be made to incorporate culture into the classroom by means of considering some methods currently used. The main principle of the paper is exploring the role of culture in language teaching and the importance of the integration of culture into the teaching of language. Survey data are often used to map cultural diversity by aggregating scores of attitude and value items across countries. However, this procedure only makes sense if the same concept is measured in all countries. In this study we argue that when (co)variances among sets of items are similar across countries, these countries share a common way of assigning meaning to the items. Clusters of cultures can then be observed by doing a cluster analysis on the (co)variance matrices of sets of related items. This study focuses on family values and gender role attitudes. We find four clusters of cultures that assign a distinct meaning to these items, especially in the case of gender roles. Some of these differences reflect response style behavior in the form of acquiescence. Adjusting for this style effect impacts on country comparisons hence demonstrating the usefulness of investigating the patterns of meaning given to sets of items prior to aggregating scores into cultural characteristics.