

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.

Keywords: Cluster, culture, intercultural competence, grammar-translation method, direct method, suggestopedia method, Cross-cultural comparative research, Cultural diversity.

INTRODUCTION

The process of globalization has influenced clusters and other local production systems to open up their borders and to increase their linkages with actors outside their regions. In modern global economy, the notion of a cluster as a self-contained knowledge hub, incorporating strong internal knowledge exchange and little interaction with the outside world, is under pressure. Scholars increasingly recognize the division of knowledge work and specialization across clusters, where openness to external knowledge is increasingly important following from globalization [5].

Today, it is a broadly known fact that teaching and learning a foreign language can not be abridged to the direct teaching of linguistic skills like phonology, morphology, vocabulary, and syntax. The modern models of communicative competence show that there is much more to learning a language, and they comprise the dynamic element of cultural knowledge and awareness [3]. In other words, to learn a language well usually entails knowing something about the culture of that language. Communication that lacks applicable cultural content often

results in hilarious incidents, or worse, is the source of solemn miscommunication and misunderstanding. According to Kramsch (1993), culture is always in the background, right from day one, ready to unsettle the good language learners when they expect it least, making evident the restrictions of their hard-won communicative competence, perplexing their ability to make sense of the world around them [7].

To develop measurements of national cultures, scholars often use cross-national surveys and aggregate individual-level responses to Likert-type items from these surveys to the national level [5, 6, 8]. For example, Inglehart (1997) positions countries on a survival versus self-expression dimension and a traditional versus rational-secular dimension by aggregating factor scores derived from individual-level measurements of personal values and attitudes. Other experts on human values systems, such as Schwartz (1992) or Hofstede (2001) also investigate cultural differences using aggregate scores derived from individual-level variables. However, the approach of using aggregated scores is prone to two complications that may confound findings in cross-cultural research: firstly, cultural diversity in the interpretation of the content of items and secondly, cultural differences in how people respond to survey questions regardless of the content of the questions.

However, when writing or talking about “teaching culture,” theoreticians and practitioners often limit themselves to the particular culture of the target language. In English as a Second Language (ESL) contexts, where students live and are engrossed in the culture of the English speakers, this may be a satisfactory approach. But in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) settings, this is a very constricted view. In an EFL class, students are usually monolingual and they learn English while living in their own country [8]. They have little access to the target culture and therefore a partial ability to become culturally competent. Prominently, their aim for learning English is not only to communicate with native speakers of English but also with non-native speakers of English, which is why EFL learners are typically learners of English as an International Language (EIL). By learning English, EFL students are empowering themselves to become users of international or rather intercultural communication. Thus, the target language becomes a tool to be used in communication with people from all over the world, where interaction in English takes place in fields such as science, technology, business, art, entertainment, and tourism. It is observable then, that in order to successfully function in a culturally miscellaneous environment, our learners need to progress intercultural communicative competence [1]. This article will discuss the intercultural approach and present methods for English language teachers who wish to broaden their students’ multicultural awareness via cluster approach.

Culture is demarcated in terms of intercultural communication (Reimann, 2006), the capability and ability to enter other cultures and communicate efficiently and applicably, inaugurate and maintain relationships, and carry out tasks with people of these cultures. With the rapid increase in foreign language learning/teaching recently, the concept of ‘intercultural competence’ has expanded much more importance in relation to the role of culture in EFL learning/teaching. The significance of teaching culture in and through language teaching has been renowned and widely deliberated over the last two centuries. As research and practice have proceeded over these years, the definition of culture and the connection between language teaching and culture have been demarcated and redefined [9].

The article illustrates the importance of cultural competence through several methods (grammar-translation method, direct method, suggestopaedia method) that used in teaching language. That is to say, in this work it is aimed to develop some peculiarities of cultural

competence in teaching English language and In this paper we investigate whether, and to what extent, cultural variations exist in the meaning assigned to items linked to family values and gender role attitudes across Europe. In a European Union context in which egalitarian policies are developed, an increased understanding on what causes cultural variations in these items is of utmost importance. The novelty of our study involves following a stepwise approach aimed at discovering the principal cultural differences. First, we use cluster analysis to group countries in such a way that the largest differences in (co)variances among both sets of items are identified in clusters of cultures. These clusters are internally more measurement invariant than the pooled group of European countries, thus increasing within cluster comparability. Then we estimate separate measurement models for all clusters. Each measurement model is then adjusted for acquiescent response behavior and compared to models that do not adjust for this type of response style. The final purpose then is to demonstrate how within ‘clusters of cultures’ differences between countries shift, depending on whether the measurement model has been defined on the pooled versus cluster specific measurement models. Whether accounting for acquiescence contributes to our understanding of differences is demonstrated as well. This study will show that particular family values and gender role items truly have different and sometimes opposite meanings in different countries, even to the extent that what is regarded as egalitarian in one culture might have an opposite meaning in another culture.

Objects and methods of investigations

The following educational establishments were chosen as objects during the investigations:

1. Gulistan State University;
2. Uzbekistan State World Languages University.

In the progression of investigations, we analyzed and learnt the improvement of cultural competence of learners. In this, we used some certain methods of scientists that used to increase cultural competence of the learners in English teaching by themselves are grammar-translation method which was developed by Stephens (2001), direct method that advocated by such educators as Berlitz and Jespersen, suggestopaedia method that established by a Bulgarian psychotherapist, Georgi Lozanov (1979).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Culture is deeply embedded part of the very grit of our being but language the means for communication among members of a culture is the most observable and accessible expression of that culture. So a person’s world view, self-identity, and systems of thinking, acting, feeling and communicating can be disrupted by a change from one culture to another. In a word, culture is a way of life. It is the framework within which we exist, think, feel and relate others. It is the “glue” that binds a group of people together. It directs our behavior in groups, makes us sensitive to matters of status. Thus, culture helps us to know how far we can go as individuals and what our responsibility is to the group. Reimann (2004) maintains that a language is a part of a culture and a culture is a part of a language. Our investigations rely on Reimann claims that the two are intricately interwoven so that one can not isolate the two without losing the importance of either language or culture. As a result, cultural competence is an integral part of language learning, especially in foreign language learning. We reached such results in investigations that relationship between culture and teaching foreign languages is appeared in using certain methods.

The results of the usage of grammar-translation method

Grammar-translation method was constantly involved in the comparison of the two languages through translation, hence forced into implicitly recognizing that language is closely interwoven with every aspect of culture, and in fact language is also culture.

In the process of learning language, it is important to prolongate the translation of words, sentences and texts. Whilst the extation of researches, we had analyzed apprentices' language skills and levels. The same as, it is focused attention on development of cultural competence through the translation ability.

During the progression of translating, the ability of imagination was taken into consideration. For example, the word "Theatre" was translated, brainstormed by the learners and they tried to make sentences, texts. While doing this, students imagination about theatres was widen. That is to say, learners' were aware of the attitude of people's towards theatre, history and regime of theatre. It appeals students to know more words in order occupy in depth about theatre. This motion aids learners to improve enthusiasm for learning language and arose respect to the target language's culture. Sequentially, students compare their attitude to the national theatres with international theatres. The appeared imagination helps apprentices to put an aim of development their national theatres.

These kind of translation of words, sentences, texts can cause altering world outlook better to the surrounding and lifestyle.

The culture involved in Grammar-translation method refers only to the high arts of a country, which may not contribute significantly to the students' ability to function linguistically and socially while facing a foreign realty in a daily social interaction, nor to a full understanding of the foreign people.

It can be concluded that, in order to improve cultural competence, the role of translation is significant

The results of the usage of direct method

People now had to deal with real-life situations because they wanted to travel to other countries and do business there. Therefore, their attitude toward learning/teaching a foreign language changed. This method received its name from the fact that meaning is to be conveyed directly in the target language through the use of demonstration and visual aids with no recourse to the students' native language.

The main characteristics of this method are that the use of culturally oriented pictures that makes students aware of some of the everyday situations they might encounter in the foreign culture and teach in accordance to their special interests and professions. On the basis of the particularities, in our investigations, we used newspapers, magazines, textbooks that match up to apprentices' specialty. It makes improve students' interest to the target language and culture.

In the progression of teaching language, we focused on the specialty and interests of students. According to this, it is aimed to teach English language that corresponds to their specialty for occupying their career deeply. We subdivided students of the group into mini groups according to their interests (art, education, technique, agriculture and others). In this, students are directed to learn terms, gather information that correspond to their interests to compare the national with international. For instance, the students of Gulistan Art College were busy with the task about a "Theatre" with their intentions as their direction tallies to the method. This kind of direction served as development cultural competence in English language teaching. The students whose interests were techniques were aware of info about the construction of buildings, advanced technology of target language.

The results of the usage of suggestopaedia method

Suggestopaedia is another humanistic teaching method developed by a Bulgarian psychotherapist, Georgi Lozanov. Lozanov (1979) claims that, by this method, a language can be learned three to five times faster than by the above teaching methods. This method is based on the modern understanding of how the brain works and how we learn most effectively. Much of the learning relies on music, games, puzzles etc. The culture which students learn in this method concerns the everyday life of people who speak the target language.

Ongoing of our occupations, the grouping activities that implemented to improve language proficiency gave favourable results. The activities conformed to the interests and professions of learners had been organized according to the terms they learnt. For example, in the one of the groups, namely, “Teachers” students acted out as teachers and arranged mini lessons. Activities that belong to musical acting stimulated students to catch knowledge of target language in depth and improved cultural competence.

In the other group, namely, “Artists” students played roles out as if actors and actress. Their acts for musical activities made them raise the feeling of encouragement for learning language and its culture.

These kind of activities can cause not only increase their interests and improve their knowledge but help to develop their world outlook. The method of grouping and playing roles in English by students conduct them occupy cultural knowledge and act culturally.

Whilst utilizing acting activities, we supported some puzzles devoted to the directed groups. The puzzles aligned some problems of their chosen directions and improved the ability of contrasting their choice with the target language’s professions.

All these methods and activities were directed and approached to get knowledge culturally, deeply their professions and improve their cultural, intercultural competence.

CONCLUSION

Research has shown that there is a close relationship between language and culture, foreign language learning is often second culture learning and cultural competence is an integral part of language competence. Lack of cultural knowledge is frequently the majority poor abilities of people in educating, translating and intercultural communicating and is also the most neglected factor in English language teaching. Therefore, culture teaching should be what teachers are increasingly concerned about. By using above mentioned methods grammar-translation method, direct method, suggestopaedia method, as teachers introduce and differences between the target culture and the native one, always greatly contribute cultural competence.

Implications and Recommendations

The implications and recommendations for the education cluster implementation are the following:

- The cluster approach use leads to the increased concentration of economic entities in the country (region), contributes to the innovative orientation of production, facilitates the achievement of a qualitatively new technology level and production management in all economic activity spheres. Education cluster is intended to unite the efforts of interrelated

professional education institutions with the industry in the united area.

- The establishment and operation of educational clusters has a direct impact on improving the educational institutions competitiveness and promotes integration between education authorities, financial, research, educational institutions and industries.

- Further identification of the prerequisites and conditions for educational clusters successful development, the program analysis for the implementation of a cluster policy to improve the educational clusters efficiency in different countries and formation of the important success factors is going to become a basis to create educational clusters in the Republic of Uzbekistan, which will significantly increase the competitiveness of its educational system.

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