

INTERNATIONAL TURKIC WORLD CONGRESS
ON SOCIAL, HUMANITIES, ADMINISTRATIVE
AND EDUCATIONAL SCIENCES
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JANUARY 11-13 2024 | BAKU, AZERBAIJAN

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**ASSOC. PROF. DR. ELİF
ÖZLEM ÖZÇATAL**

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INTERCULTURAL LESSONS: REALITY OR MYTH

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Abstract

Culture is inevitably learned and discussed during the English language lessons and is the confluence of language, values, beliefs, and behaviors that pervade every aspect of a person's life which is continually undergoing changes. No matter which strategies the teachers are going to use, they are by no doubt mediated by different cultural influences. Every teacher has their own style of teaching, and all good teaching in the world consists of one important goal, making connections with the students. Very often English language teachers have students from a culture different than theirs. Some lesson observations will be presented in this short theoretical and empirical study. The aim of it will be to show that the communication with students from different ethnic backgrounds can be difficult because teachers sometimes are not interculturally trained and lack understanding of the student's culture and their lifestyles.

Key words: language, culture, teaching, lesson observations, reality, myth.

Introduction

There are different approaches to intercultural learning. In some, language is represented as an essential part which is the reality and in others it is not real and is a myth i.e. it is neglected. Linguistic and intercultural competences do not exist in parallel and are not interchangeable. In some cases, there is a high level of foreign language communicative competence, but not very well-developed intercultural competence. However, in order to achieve successful intercultural communication and to use intercultural competence, it is very important that linguistic competence exists. This is especially true when there are problematic situations in intercultural interaction. It is then when linguistic competence becomes essential. Knowledge in the foreign culture is not negligible, though it will hardly be enough without the necessary linguistic knowledge. Of course, it can be argued that the linguistic competence is good to overtake the intercultural competence in a way or acquire it in parallel with it.

In this short study, lesson observations will be discussed and commented in terms of intercultural communication. It is a way for teachers to discover what works best in their own classroom situation, occupying a midpoint on a continuum from teacher reflection on one end to traditional appraisal lesson observation on the other. Observations are chosen as a research instrument in this study in order to explain the cultural component of teaching English as a foreign language. These lessons lasted 45 minutes and

were observed in the state municipal schools in Strumica – the Republic of North Macedonia. The protocol can be found in the appendix No1 bellow and the following comments are based on the protocol itself.

Lesson observation 1(September 2022) - Lighting the spark of learning (Focus 4, student's book for IV year) p. 16

A very interesting lesson that caught my attention was the reading lesson which involved a text which was to be read by the students about an educational experiment in India and was the inspiration for the movie *Slumdog Millionaire*. The teacher gave some additional information about the experiment and mentioned the movie which was familiar to the students and this created a relaxed working atmosphere. The aims of the lesson were to read and understand the structure of the text through a gapped text activity. The pre-reading activity was a discussion of technology and how technology helps the students at school and out of school. Here the students discussed that they use computers mainly for entertainment and rarely for school. The while-reading activity was to find some basic information in the text in order to familiarize with the content of the text itself. What followed was a gap filling exercise with sentences in the text. This was a longer and a more difficult activity for the students and lasted 15 minutes.

What followed was a word formation exercise with sentences taken from the text. For homework, students had to do some research about the education in India with a purpose to compare it with the education of Macedonia. Most of the students were active and understood the tasks given by the teacher. For the gap filling exercise, the students used evidence from the text to support their answers. The materials used were the student's book and using some sources from the Internet. According to Gomez (2011), if real intercultural communicative competence is the main goal to be achieved in second language learning, it is essential to consider the inclusion of well-selected texts, if possible. Students at any age are exposed to read or listen to different literary pieces such as folk tales, fairy tales, legends, fables, and other selections from children's literature, reflecting the important heritage of every own culture. But it is very important to select appropriate texts that will be interesting for the students and will teach them how to become aware of diverse cultural expressions. This can be a good example of a real intercultural lesson with authentic materials and something that is close to the students as a topic to be discussed which is at the same time interesting to the students and covers the intercultural content through specifically chosen materials.

Lesson observation 2 (September, 2022) - One Woman's Choice (Close-up, student's book for I year) p.16

The aim of this lesson is to watch a video, learn a new vocabulary and use the vocabulary in context. The lesson was observed at the state municipal school "Jane Sandanski" at the beginning of the school year. Before the teacher played the video, the students discussed family ties. Here they answered the questions with their partners and the teacher monitored their work. The lesson was mainly a communicative one.

In the next phase the students watched the video with an aim to fill in a task with true or false after they have seen the video. When the video stopped the teacher asked some questions about their behavior and expressions while watching the video. Students could see some details of the life of Flora Salonik who studied to become a teacher but that did not happen because she got married to a person who lived in a faraway village with difficult life conditions. After checking the exercise students had to fill in gaps with words in a summary of the video. Here they could read and recall some information from the video and learn a new vocabulary. After they filled in the exercise, the teacher asked if someone wants to translate the text where the grammar-translation approach was used. The text contained phrases mainly in past tenses which was a good opportunity for revision of the rules.

The ending of the lesson consisted of a discussion about living in a village or a city. The teacher made a table on the board and students were writing their opinions in the table. Thus, stereotypes of village and city people came out with the second question about where it is better to live (the village or the city). Here the teacher had the chance to give them some definitions of stereotypes and explained the students that stereotypes should be avoided and every family has to make their own choice whether to live in the city or in the village because as written on the board there are advantages in living both in the city or in the village. But throughout this lesson, some negative comments could be heard, some students offended other students and the reason for that was the lack of knowledge in cultures and stereotypes. In a paper on the topic of stereotypes and prejudice (Nisa, Kholil, & Zulkarnain) state: "Differences in the values, norms and perceptions of each ethnicity in the form of stereotypes and prejudices often lead to misunderstandings in communicating. Factors associated with the emergence of prejudice are personality, the level of intelligence and environmental factors. The higher the level of one's intelligence, the more critical and therefore more difficult to prejudge. While the lower the level of one's intelligence, it has an easier tendency to prejudice. Environmental factors that are not well established are likely to prejudice" (2017).

Finally, it must be noted that knowledge in intercultural communication is essential if we want to achieve good communication and good relationship in the classroom. Without knowledge in intercultural communication and lack of intercultural competence is impossible to come up with a successful lesson and this is the example of the intercultural lesson as a myth. In order to achieve that students and teachers need more knowledge in these social issues in order to overcome the barriers of communication which are very often caused by stereotypes and prejudice.

Conclusion

Accomplishing multicultural understanding in the schools in Strumica is something which is achievable but still the systematic development of intercultural communicative competence teaching objectives, lesson plans, and assessment methods are limited to some extent or seen as a myth. Maybe, the needed lesson plans for fulfilling the intercultural communication goal is not being addressed in a profound way. What teachers need is more training and curricula in which inclusion of intercultural communication aims are found. However, if teachers want to be successful in fulfilling the intercultural aim, they should have developed their own cultural identity first before being able to facilitate the development of intercultural communicative competence in their learners (Bennett, 1998; Knutson, 2006) and intercultural lessons will become reality. Bennett's (1993) DMIS model is a useful way to make teachers become aware of their own culture recognition having in mind the stages that move from ethnocentrism to ethnorelativism. A very practical way to make students feel free to discuss cultural matters is to teach them how to avoid stereotypes, be sympathetic and be able to put themselves in the shoes of the other. Students' books are not well equipped with cultural topics, but the teachers can always develop the students' intercultural communication competence by making the students share their own knowledge, views, experiences, literature about their culture and find some interesting authentic materials for the lessons. Cultural differences should not be taken as an issue in the English language classroom but totally the opposite they should create a relaxing atmosphere by letting the students address different cultures as something normal i.e. something real. Finally, even though intercultural competence is something achievable, to some extent it is still a myth in the English language teaching methodology due to lack of intercultural training of the teachers.

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Appendix No 1. Classroom Observation Protocol

Faculty of Foreign Languages

The English Teaching Practicum and Practice

1. PRE OBSERVATION DATA

Teacher _____ Date _____

School _____ Grade/Level _____

Observer _____

Amount of Time Observed: _____

(Fill this out prior to observing classes.)

Class period or time of class: _____

Topic or topics: _____

Placement of class or lesson within the unit of study:

Purpose (objectives):

Intended outcomes:

Materials Used (teacher-made, manufactured, district or department-developed;
characterization of materials):

How students will be assessed (for this lesson):

2. CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

(Fill this out as you are observing classes.)

Introduction to Lesson: provides introduction/motivation/"invitation"; explains activity and how it relates to previous lessons; assesses students' prior knowledge

Student Grouping _____ Duration _____

First Activity/Task: Content; nature of activity, what students doing, what teacher doing; interactions.

Student Grouping _____ Duration _____

Second Activity/Task: Content; nature of activity, what students doing, what teacher doing; interactions.

Student Grouping _____ Duration _____

Third Activity/Task: Content; nature of activity, what students doing, what teacher doing; interactions.

Student Grouping _____ Duration _____

State whether activities are sequential or are different activities/tasks done at the same time:

3. OTHER OBSERVATIONAL DATA

(Fill this out as you are observing classes.)

1 -Description of the classroom:

2 -Teaching aids/materials (per activity/task if appropriate):

3 -Assessment strategies used (per activity/task if appropriate):

4 - Time not devoted to teaching and nature of non-academic or procedural activity (e.g., management, announcements, discipline); description of non-instructional event :

4. REFLECTIONS AND INTERPRETATIONS

(Fill this out as soon as possible after the classroom visit and use more space/ pages for interpretation)

1 - Overall, what happened during the classroom observation (e.g., which method was the teacher using and how effective was its implementation)?

2 - What didn't happen (e.g., students didn't grasp the idea of the lesson)?

3 - Alternative ways instructor might have handled the lesson/question/ situation:

4 - Characterize students and their attitudes toward the subject matter and the teacher:

5 - Notable non-verbal behavior:

6 - Surprises/ concerns, especially related to the program goals (e.g., the teacher didn't appear to be using a particular method):