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DEVELOPING STUDENTS' INTERCULTURAL

COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE. APPLICATIONS

IN THE PRE-SERVICE TEACHER TRAINING

PRACTICE FOR THE ENGLISH SPECIALIZATION

SUMMARY

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Keywords and concepts: intercultural communicative competence, authentic teaching resources, intercultural speaker, the non-native teacher's identity in the foreign language classroom, intercultural perspective, intercultural knowledge, skills and attitudes, infusional approach, mother tongue, foreign language.

The doctoral thesis entitled ''Developing students' intercultural communicative competence. Applications in the pre-service teacher training practice for the English specialization'' is comprised of two parts. In the first part entitled *Theoretical background* are indicated several analysis of relevant literature that sustain the necessity of developing students' intercultural communicative competence within the pre-service teacher training practice. In addition, in this first part, the arguments that are presented are based on several current studies that have been conducted both in Romania and abroad.

The second part entitled *The research project. The development of students' intercultural communicative competence (English majors) by using a system of instructional design practice focused on the integration of authentic teaching resources* is comprised of five chapters and provides details about the several stages of the research project: pre-experimental stage, the stage of the formative experiment, the post-experimental stage and the conclusions.

Chapter I - Current stakes in teaching foreign languages with the purpose of developing students' intercultural communicative competence provides arguments that sustain the adequacy of this research project by contrasting the details of our research to other research projects that have taken place either in our country or abroad. A key point in this research constitutes the way in which language and communication are context bound. Namely, in order to decipher a message sent by interlocutor one negotiates the message by taking into consideration the characteristics of the socio-cultural context. Therefore, when learning or teaching a foreign language one should keep in mind the fact that language represents both a linguistic and a social phenomenon.

Through education in formal contexts, students are often encouraged to discover and relate to the culture of that specific culture. Without a doubt, education intends to keep pace with the constant social, political or economic changes that characterize today's society. Because intercultural communication have become a norm in various fields of activity (business, politics, economy etc.) it is only fair to take into consideration its impact in education. Relating this matter to the field of teaching foreign languages, we encourage a new approach to teaching English and training students within their pre-service teacher training practice. Therefore, in order to be able to handle in an appropriate manner the intercultural contact, some changes are needed both as regards the methodology of teaching students and the teachers' professional development stages. Likewise, both teachers and students should be trained in order to become intercultural competent speakers who have acquired a certain

degree of intercultural communicative competence (i.e. intercultural knowledge, skills and attitudes).

Romiță Iucu (2007, p. 29) states that teachers' professional development represents a fundamental component in redefining Europe's cultural identity. The European Union and the European Commission, emphasize through various directives and educational policies (such are the White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue (2008), recommendation 2006/962/EC on key competences for lifelong learning (2006), The Aims of Language Teaching and Learning (2010), Developing the Intercultural Dimension in Language Teaching. A Practical Introduction for Teachers (2002)) that nowadays it is a necessity to understand and accept cultural differences that one could encounter in diverse contexts, professional, social or educational ones.

The personal and professional development of a teacher inevitably takes place in a socio-cultural context. Therefore, teachers of foreign languages need to be able to understand and foresee the interference of the socio-cultural aspects within the classroom environment. So, one could claim that the teacher has both a personal and a professional relationship to the culture whose language they are teaching.

Cucoş, C. (2000, p. 265) suggests an **infusional teaching approach** in order to integrate the intercultural perspective in the curriculum. Likewise, the curriculum does not undergo major changes and the intercultural perspective is added where necessary.

A broad analysis on Romanian literature indicates that there is a definitely great interest in using the infusional approach when tackling an intercultural perspective for teaching foreign languages. Various studies constitute a proof of this constant interest for integrating an intercultural perspective within pre-service teacher training practice and developing students' intercultural communicative competence (Bârlogeanu, L., 2005; Nedelcu, A., 2008; Cozma, T., Butnaru, S., Cucoş, C., 2001; Pricope, M., 2013; Bâzgan, M., Norel, M., 2013; Cozma, T., 2001; Cosma, M., Cosma, B., 2006; Savu, E., 2014;).

The novelty of our research resides in the use of authentic teaching resources within the English Didactics seminar in order to develop in students intercultural knowledge, skills and attitudes. Romanian literature does not mention any other research study that has targeted, as we do, the authentic teaching resources. These authentic resources present in fact written or audio-video content that can be explored in a classroom environment, even if they have not been created to be used explicitly in educational settings. Our own definition of authentic documents is the following: *resources that incorporate a rather good amount of cultural*

information and which can be integrated in a formal educational setting in order to develop students' intercultural knowledge, skills and attitudes.

The first chapter tackles also the theoretical background of the research as regards the legislative and the curricular contexts. Much interest is also granted to the concept of **competence** and its components. As regards the conceptual approaches, we have identified in the literature several perspective and we have grouped these into three paradigms:

- competence understood as *performance* (Perrenoud, P., 2005; Tradif, J., 2003; Herling 2000; Spencer L.M. şi Spencer S.M. 1993;)
- competence understood as process (Parry, S., 1996; Chiş, V., 2005; Bocoş, M., 2008; Delory C., 2002; Gnahs, D., 2007; Potolea D., Toma S., 2010; Ionescu, M., 2007;)
- competence understood from a constructivist perspective (Stoof, A., 2005;)

In this paper the view adopted was that of competence understood from a constructivist perspective. Because the concept of competence relates in a different manner to the various domains of activity in which it is encountered, we provided our own working definition. In our opinion, **intercultural communicative competence** comprises *a set of skills, attitudes and knowledge that undergo constant changes that involve both the individual's personal and professional dimension as a consequence of facing a formal context bound intercultural contact.*

Intercultural communicative competence represents a complex concept and that is the reason why one can find in the literature so many terms for this concept: *cross-cultural competence* (Berry et al. 1992 apud. Gupta, A.S., 2003, p. 159), *intercultural sensitivity*, *transcultural communication*, *cross-cultural adaptation*, *international competence*, cross-cultural awareness, cultural competence, cultural sensitivity, *global competence* (Fantini, A., 2006 apud. Sinicrope, C., Norris, J., Watanabe, Y., 2007, p. 1), *metacultural competence* (Sharifian, F., 2011, p. 98) or *intercultural awareness* (The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, 2001, p. 103). The term that is used throughout this research paper is *intercultural communicative competence.*

A quick scan of the literature indicates that there are several models of developing intercultural communicative competence. The model proposed by Deardorff (2006) is the one chosen as a framework for this study. Many arguments can support our choice. One strong point that can be identified in this model is the fact that Deardorff (2006) puts an emphasis on

attitudes, considering the fact that these represent the prerequisites for being aware of culture and of the rules of the intercultural dialogue when interacting in different cultural contexts.

Furthermore, we consider that the development of intercultural communicative is based on and influenced by three different components:

- principles in foreign language teaching
- principles of intercultural education
- representations and characteristics of culture

This first chapter also indicates various intercultural skills, attitudes and knowledge that a teacher should demonstrate when teaching a foreign language.

This research paper is consistent with the existing benchmarks in training teachers both in international and national settings and bring a new element i.e. the use of authentic teaching resources in order to develop intercultural communicative competence in a formal educational context.

The second chapter - **Exploring the development of intercultural communicative competence within the English didactics seminar** intended to indicate some constructivist perspectives in the pre-service teacher training practice field and introduces new concepts such as: native vs. non-native speaker, intercultural speaker, non-native teachers of foreign languages.

Byram (2008) explains that three decades ago linguists, researchers and teachers have understood that the native speaker can no longer be the model for assessing knowledge in a foreign language since non-native cannot attain that level of language proficiency in a lifetime. Therefore, a new paradigm shift took place that generated a new model: **the intercultural speaker model.**

Taking into consideration the relevant literature and the context of our research project we created the following definition for the intercultural speaker: *a person who is aware of the identity he/she projects in the language and the culture he/she encounters, an individual who is able to anticipate intercultural knowledge, skills and attitudes that one must put in practice in formal educational contexts and has a reflective attitude on his/her own personal and professional development.*

This chapter also provides details about the need to restructure teacher roles when teaching foreign languages from an intercultural perspective. In current educational contexts, the teacher has the role to ''shape interpersonal and intercultural relations'' (Cozma, T., 2011,

p. 212). Moreover, teaching a foreign language is a lot different than teaching another subject matter (Gardner, H. (1985, p. 146 apud. Regan, T., Osborn, T.A., 2002, p. 64) since a foreign language enables one to interact with a new culture, to show respect towards what is different and manage various communicative contexts. Therefore, knowledge of the linguistic component is not sufficient when learning a foreign language.

This chapter also indicates some strong points in making use of authentic teaching resources in order to develop the students' intercultural communicative competence. In addition, different teaching activities can explore these authentic teaching resources. Below are indicated by Lazar et al. (2007, p. 16-17) various examples of such activities that can favour the development of the intercultural communicative competence:

- brainstorming – requests students to state their personal opinions about different concepts and keywords;
- presentation – students are encouraged to share their personal experiences;
- case studies – students become more aware of cultural differences;
- role-plays – to create a context in which students can apply the knowledge they have acquired;
- group work – in order to develop interpersonal communication skills;
- ethnographic studies – students learn the foreign language by conducting studies and interviews, by doing research;
- questionnaires – in order to provide structured data to the students.

It is important to note that the intercultural perspective suggests a new direction, namely the recognition of the contribution of the cultural dimension within the foreign language acquisition process. The intercultural perspective intends to bring to the forefront the need to understand self and others through language, whether native speakers or foreign language learners. The complex relationship between language and culture is exploited and used as a way to promote understanding and acceptance of cultural diversity.

Chapter III - The assessment of intercultural communicative competence presents some general and contextual challenges for evaluating the intercultural communicative competence.

A review of the literature helped us to provide examples of models of assessment. Two perspectives have been considered: a) a quantitative and a qualitative perspective, and b) a formative and a summative perspective. In the present research paper the formative

assessment perspective was considered based on the strengths and opportunities provided by this type of evaluation.

Chapter IV - The general guidelines of the research provides details regarding the design of the research (purpose and objectives, research hypotheses and variables, research methods and research instruments, the sample of participants and the sample content).

The purpose of the research project is to investigate students' perception towards the relevance of integrating an intercultural perspective in teaching foreign languages, as well as the student's development of intercultural communicative competence during pre-service teacher training practice.

Having in mind the knowledge, skills and attitudes a teacher needs to prove due to a paradigm shift in foreign language teaching, we formulated the following **research hypothesis**:

The use by the students in the second year of study (English specialization) of authentic teaching resources when designing teaching activities would contribute significantly to the development of their intercultural communicative competence in a formal context.

The independent variable of the research:

- *The use by the students in the second year of study (English specialization) of authentic teaching resources (proverbs, elements of children's literature, video clips) when designing teaching activities during the English didactics seminar*

In order to investigate the level of the development of intercultural communicative competence we have considered as an operational indicator the degree in which cognitive, behavioural and attitudinal contents are operational in:

The main dependent variable of the research:

- *the level of operating cognitive content*
- *the level of operating behavioural content*
- *the level of operating attitudinal content*

The sample of participants for this research project consisted of the students who participated in the 2012-2013 academic year, second semester, at the English didactics seminar. The sample of participants consisting of 76 students was actually the entire number of the students enrolled in the pre-service teacher training practice in the second semester. Therefore there were used no selection criteria for this sample of participants. Students have two different specializations: philology and applied modern languages.

As regards the experimental method used in this research project we have used the **single sample technique**. This technique corresponds to an **intergroup experimental design**, which involves investigating the group in all the stages of the experiment and analysing its evolution (Bocoş, M., 2003, p. 66).

Chapter V – The pre-experimental stage targeted several objectives:

- to identify the students' level of knowledge as regards the concept of intercultural learning
- to identify the students' level of knowledge as regards the cultural components (visible and invisible) of the target language
- to identify students' opinions regarding the knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary to become an intercultural speaker
- to identify students' opinion regarding the adequateness of teaching a foreign language by using cultural components

The research instrument used at this stage was the questionnaire. A number of three questionnaires were administered. The first questionnaire consisted of several items and gave students the opportunity to reflect on the adequateness of integrating cultural components in foreign language teaching. The results obtained were evaluated qualitatively. The second questionnaire consisted of items that were interpreted statistically. The third questionnaire – a self-assessment questionnaire for students - consisted of items that were interpreted statistically. This questionnaire was administered also in the post-experimental stage.

Based on the interpretation of data obtained in the pre-experimental stage, we conclude that it is necessary for participants to be involved in formative pre-service teacher training activities that would enable them acquire appropriate, inclusive and complex cultural components in order to develop their intercultural knowledge, skills and attitudes.

In chapter VI – The stage of the formative experiment five formative teaching activities have been integrated in the English didactics seminar. The purpose of these teaching activities was twofold:

- they had the role to inform the participants regarding the inclusion of the intercultural perspective in teaching English
- they had the role to develop intercultural communicative competence.

The planning of these formative teaching activities during the second semester of the 2012-2013 academic year is indicated in table no. 1 below:

Name	Period
Formative teaching activity no. 1 – Integrating different cultural components in teaching activities that target different learning styles	11 - 15 March 2013
Formative teaching activity no. 2 – Using sayings and proverbs in order to develop students' intercultural communicative competence	18 - 29 March 2013
Formative teaching activity no. 3 – Native vs. non-native teacher of English	1 – 5 April 2013
Formative teaching activity no. 4 – Using stories in order to develop students' intercultural communicative competence	8 – 19 April 2013
Formative teaching activity no. 5 – *Native speaker model vs. intercultural speaker model*	20 - 31 May 2013

Table no. 1. The planning of formative teaching activities during the second semester of 2012-2013 academic year

Specific details about the cognitive, behavioural and attitudinal contents are indicated for each teaching activity.

Chapter VII – The post-experimental stage presents the impact of the formative teaching activities on the development level of the three components of intercultural communicative competence: knowledge, skills and attitudes. In this chapter we have analysed and interpreted the data collected during the five formative teaching activities, the data from the case study, the focus group and other three questionnaires.

The case study method has been chosen because it was appropriate for our research and it allowed us to 'identify attitudes, feelings and experiences that are difficult to investigate by using other methods or techniques (2004 Agabrian apud. Popa, NL, Antonesei, L ., Labar AV, 2009, p. 60). Since the development of intercultural communicative competence involves a cognitive, a behavioural and an attitudinal component, we considered to be relevant the exemplification of such formative experiences in order to capture the evolution of an investigated subject. Data were analysed qualitatively.

The *Self-assessment questionnaire for students* was administered initially in the pre-experimental stage and then in post-experimental one in the end of the English didactics seminar. IBM SPSS Statistics software, version 21 was used for the statistical analysis of the answers given in the pre-experimental and post-experimental stage.

A first analysis resides in the average for each item in the pre-experimental and post-experimental stage. These data are shown in Table no. 2:

Pre-experimental				Post-experimental		
Item	N	Mean	Std. deviation	N	Mean	Std. deviation
Item nr. 1		2,52381	,772		2,26190	,828
Item nr. 2		2,50000	,803		2,28571	,805
Item nr. 3		3,97619	,643		4,33333	,477
Item nr. 4		3,57143	,830		4,00000	,662
Item nr. 5	42	3,26190	,700	42	3,78571	,645
Item nr. 6		3,80952	,671		4,26190	,543
Item nr. 7		4,02381	,562		4,23810	,576
Item nr. 8		3,95238	,622		4,28570	,553
Item nr. 9		3,90476	,617		4,33330	,570
Item nr. 10		4,76190	,431		4,88100	,327

Table no. 2. The average for the Self-assessment questionnaire for students for each item in the pre-experimental and post-experimental stage

T test for independent samples represents a statistical method to investigate whether there are significant differences between the data obtained in the pre-experimental and the post-experimental stage in order to validate the research hypothesis.

The average level of development by comparing the pre-experimental and the post-experimental stage is indicated in table no. 3:

Paired Samples Statistics				
	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
pre-test	3,628	10	,699	,221
post-test	3,866	10	,884	,279

Table no. 3. The average level of development by comparing the pre-experimental and the post-experimental stage for the Self-assessment questionnaire for the students

In table no. 4 is indicated the correlation between the two results:

Paired Samples Correlations			
	N	Correlation	Sig.
pre-experimental & post-experimental	10	,965	,000

Table no. 4. Correlation between the pre-experimental and post-experimental for the Self-assessment questionnaire for the students

One can observe a strong correlation (0.965) and significance (p <0.001) between the data from the pre-experimental and post-experimental stage.

The value of *t*: is indicated in table no. 5:

Paired Samples Test

	Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
				Lower	Upper			
Pre-test – Post-test	-,238	,277	,877	-,436	-,396	-2,714	9	,024

Table no. 5. The value of t for the Self-assessment questionnaire for the students

Table no. 5 indicates the value of *t* (-2,714) which is significant at 0, 00. Therefore, as the level of significance is less than <0,005, the scores obtained by the participants in the post-experimental stage are higher than the scores obtained in the pre-experimental stage.

Taking into consideration the data presented in tables no. 2, 3, 4 and 5, we conclude that the average level of development of intercultural communicative competence in the post-experimental stage (m = 3.86) is significantly higher (*t* = -2.714, df = 9, *p* bidirectional <0.005) compared to the average level of development of intercultural communicative competence in the pre-experimental stage (m = 3.62). This highly significant correlation, with the other data analysed in a qualitative manner, demonstrate the efficiency of the formative teaching activities.

Chapter VIII – Conclusions presents the impact of the formative teaching activities that were focused on developing intercultural cognitive, behavioural and attitudinal content. Also, this chapter indicates some conclusions regarding the theoretical contributions made in this doctoral thesis. First of all, the theoretical contribution consists in personalizing the developmental process of intercultural communicative competence by creating activities using the infusional approach, i.e. adding intercultural elements for the students who were enrolled in the English didactics seminar. Since intercultural communicative competence represents a dynamic and complex concept, we attempted to emphasize the challenges of developing intercultural communicative competence in a formal context.

Another contribution resides in providing different personal definitions to concepts (intercultural communicative competence, authentic documents, intercultural speaker) encountered in the literature. Another contribution related to theoretical research refers to

creating a theoretical framework for developing intercultural communicative competence through integrating of the two dimensions: the linguistic and the cultural component.

A third contribution regards the research methods and research instruments used, most of them being created by us. It should be noted here that we did not find in the literature research instruments that focused on developing intercultural communicative competence by using authentic teaching resources.

The research project intended to develop the cognitive, behavioural and attitudinal components in a simultaneous manner and not sequentially. Because the different components of the intercultural communicative competence are interconnected, one cannot ensure a comprehensive development of one component and later to focus on the development of another one.

The last section of this chapter presents a series of educational recommendations that constitute possible solutions for anchoring the pre-service teacher training programs in the current trends of teaching foreign languages and developing the intercultural communicative competence.

The recommendations relate to:

➢ including in the curriculum for pre-service teacher training program for the English specialization optional courses that target foreign language teaching from an intercultural perspective;

➢ using an instructional design system that focuses on integrating authentic teaching resources in the pre-service teacher training program that targets foreign language teaching from an intercultural perspective;

➢ create simulation activities within which intercultural interactions are promoted, often through role play*;*

➢ provide students with the opportunity to engage in some exchange training sessions abroad in order to take a direct contact with the foreign language in the context of formal education;

➢ design and conduct some projects in which students have the opportunity to actively engage either in formal and informal contexts in order to develop their intercultural communicative competence;

➢ to explicitly track the development of intercultural communicative competence of all students from the Faculty of Letters, Cluj-Napoca, regardless of their specialization.

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