



IMPROVING THE TRANSNATIONAL COMPETENCE OF STUDENTS VIA LANGUAGE LEARNING

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Abstract: The aim of this study is to determine effective methods for incorporating intercultural education into the curriculum of various academic subjects. The focus of the research is on English Teacher Education, targeting both pre-service (BA) and in-service (MA) students, as well as postgraduate students in Economics. Participants include BA students in English Philology, MA students in English, French, and Romanian Philology, and MA students in Business Administration in Tourism and Services. By the end of the semester, students and teacher trainees had successfully developed an understanding of multiple intercultural aspects.

Keywords: Intercultural education, Teacher trainees, Cross-curricular approach, Language education.

Introduction

University students, particularly those in teacher training programs, often receive limited formal education in intercultural studies. This exposure is usually limited to exchange programs like Erasmus+, which provide practical experience with different cultures. Given globalization and evolving job market demands, it is essential for students, especially future teachers, to have a foundational understanding of intercultural education alongside linguistic education. As the workforce becomes more global, future teachers must be prepared to adapt to diverse cultural contexts. Successful integration into professional environments requires a thorough understanding of different cultures. Additionally, fostering diversity awareness, ethnic tolerance, anti-racism, and inclusiveness is crucial for a successful international career. University curricula should, therefore, integrate intercultural education components throughout, despite institutional constraints. Language educators, in particular, play a vital role in enhancing students' intercultural competence by adopting a culturally-informed educational approach.

Literature Review

Over the past thirty years, discussions among practitioners and researchers in linguistic and intercultural education have promoted an 'intercultural approach'





to language teaching. This has led to a reevaluation of the purposes of language education. Modern communicative methods view language as a tool for bridging information gaps, aiming to improve learners' linguistic competence through interactive learning. This approach emphasizes developing intercultural communicative competence, which involves understanding and explaining cultural behaviors and perspectives. The goal is to train learners to act as 'diplomats,' fostering informed cultural understanding rather than solely achieving native speaker proficiency. Thus, while language development remains important, it is closely linked with the equally critical aim of intercultural understanding.

Research Methodology

This study focused on English Teacher Education for pre-service (BA) and in-service (MA) students, and postgraduate Economics students. Participants included 28 BA students in English Philology, 21 MA students in English, French, and Romanian Philology, and 17 MA students in Business Administration in Tourism and Services. The research utilized contrastive lexical analysis to highlight cultural and social nuances between Romanian and British English. During a semester-long pedagogical experiment, students were tested on metaphorical language and surveyed on intercultural knowledge and attitudes. Following explicit training in linguistic and intercultural aspects, a follow-up test and survey were administered. The intercultural questionnaire included questions on stereotypes and attitudes toward challenges, curiosity, risk-taking, self-confidence, self-awareness, foreign languages, and international careers. The metaphorical vocabulary test assessed knowledge of business metaphors, distinguishing between culture-bound and universal expressions. Teaching methods included debates, case studies, role-plays, poster/advertisement design, and story/script writing, with an emphasis on group work and assignments.

Findings and Interpretation

Initial data showed that students had limited knowledge of cultural differences and teaching methodologies for culture, yet they displayed a willingness to learn. By the semester's end, students and teacher trainees demonstrated an improved understanding of intercultural aspects and enhanced linguistic knowledge. Teacher trainees expressed enthusiasm for incorporating intercultural perspectives in their teaching. Students initially had basic knowledge about cultural significance but improved significantly after the experiment, particularly in recognizing cultural peculiarities. The vocabulary





tests showed notable knowledge gains over the semester. Attitudinal surveys revealed that explicit training improved students' attitudes toward interculturality, with MA students in Business Administration showing increased interest in foreign languages. Students' readiness to face challenges was evident, but initial interest in other cultures was limited. There was also a lack of self-awareness and non-judgmental acceptance of other cultures, with a surprising disinterest in international careers among Business Administration students. Philology students showed varied interests, with some less enthusiastic about foreign languages.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The experiment highlighted students' willingness to integrate intercultural education into their courses, especially in English language courses. English teacher trainees were particularly open to incorporating cultural aspects into their teaching. The study recommends that teachers across all subjects identify pedagogical methods to integrate intercultural education, preparing students for a globalized world. Early integration of intercultural education in primary and secondary schools is essential, with English teachers playing a key role in fostering global citizenship.

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