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## 7.

### **THE INTERCULTURALITY IN THE TEACHING-LEARNING OF THE FOREIGN LANGUAGES IN THE MID-TIME COURSES**

### **LA INTERCULTURALIDAD EN LA ENSEÑANZA-APRENDIZAJE DE LAS LENGUAS EXTRANJERAS EN LOS CURSOS DE MEDIO TIEMPO.**

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#### ABSTRACT

The teaching-learning of the different disciplines and subject's matters that conform the study curriculum of every university major are closely related to the social, political, economic and cultural context in which they take place. There is no doubt about that the new stage of the Cuban universities in which the interculturality is the result of the economic trail and academic interchanges and of worldwide cooperation has influenced, there are having consequences in the way the teaching-learning of the foreign languages in the Mid-time Courses is broad. In consequence, the following article offers a brief revision of the multicultural aspects that influence the writing process and the fundamental

characteristics of the intercultural approach in the teaching of the foreign languages; from the problems existing in the students to achieve the multicultural competitions. Therefore, the following article is intended to base the reasons that make the interculturality in the Mid-time Courses a particular rationale of the teaching-learning of the foreign languages from the existing problems and its challenges.

Key words: culture, teaching-learning, foreign languages.

## RESUMEN

La enseñanza-aprendizaje de las distintas disciplinas y materias que conforman el currículo de estudio de toda carrera universitaria están íntimamente relacionadas con el contexto social, político, económico y cultural en el que se desarrollan. No cabe duda de que ha influido la nueva etapa de las universidades cubanas en la que la interculturalidad es el resultado de la marcha económica y de los intercambios académicos y de la cooperación mundial, está teniendo consecuencias en la forma de enseñanza-aprendizaje de las lenguas extranjeras en los cursos intermedios es amplio. En consecuencia, el siguiente artículo ofrece una breve revisión de los aspectos multiculturales que influyen en el proceso de escritura y las características fundamentales del enfoque intercultural en la enseñanza de las lenguas extranjeras; a partir de los problemas existentes en los estudiantes para lograr las competencias multiculturales. Por tanto, el siguiente artículo pretende fundamentar las razones que hacen de la interculturalidad en los Cursos de Medio Tiempo una lógica particular de la enseñanza-aprendizaje de las lenguas extranjeras a partir de la problemática existente y sus desafíos.

Palabras clave: cultura, enseñanza-aprendizaje, lenguas extranjeras

### Introduction

Language has always been a communication vehicle to humanity. Peace Nobel Prize winner, Nelson Mandela referring to language once said, "Without language, one cannot talk to people and understand them; one cannot share their hopes and aspirations, grasp their history, appreciate their poetry, or savor their songs" (extracted from the app "Quotes" version 2.0).

Among the large variety of languages that nowadays helps connecting with others, "English has been acting as a global lingua franca in the world for decades, especially after War World II" (Rojas & Hernández, 2018).

Recognized as the third most spoken language, only surpassed by Mandarin and Spanish, has gained relevance in vital sectors, such as: international business, science, technology, diplomacy, entertainment, among others. Logically in order to reach such worldwide recognition, the English Language Teaching (ELT) has undergone the influence of diverse theories, approaches, and methods in order to adapt itself to its different roles as first (L1), second (L2) and foreign language (FL), among which the author quotes : The Grammar-Translation Method (from the 1840s to the 1940s); The Direct Method (late 19thcentury and early 20thcentury), The Oral or Situational Approach (from the1930s to the 1960s), The Audiolingual Method (from the late 1950s to the 1960s),The Total Physical Response Method (1960) and The Communicative Approach (late 1960s), whose context based teaching, and student-centered teaching style soon were widely assumed towards achieving the "communicative competence", coined by the American linguist Dell Hathaway

Hymes in 1966 in contrast to Chomsky's linguistic theory mainly focus on the speakers grammatical knowledge, as cited by Richards & Rogers,(1986).

Such expansion and diverse methodologies also reached Latin American countries where in spite of their implementation, ELT has had to overcome cultural differences, language varieties and economic inequality over the years in order to be adapted within each social context. According to the English Proficiency Index, (2018), Latin America is the only region in the world to have experienced a decline in English skills in average adults since 2017.

In the particular case of Cuba, English teaching as FL, strengthened after 1959 when several structural changes were applied to our National System of Education (NSE). According to Ministerio de Educación Superior, (2016) the continuous demands for highly-qualified professionals imposed by the technical - scientific development of the time led to the improvement of study plans and syllabuses in order to achieve a gradual inclusion of foreign language teaching in classrooms. Improvement process from which emerged over the years the Plans A, B, C, D and the currently in force Plan E. Consequently, writing skill is broad in all these study plans.

So, when teaching a foreign language one of the key components is the culture it carries out. So that, culture helps guiding an individual how to use the language. However, culture varies from one country to another, and from one community within that country to another. Due to the diversity of culture, it is imperative for teachers to know which culture to teach in the language learning classroom. This is especially important for teachers who have the responsibility of helping to prepare students of foreign languages EFL to be English teachers at different levels. Taking into account the last, the following paper is intended to base the reasons that make the interculturality in the Mid-time Courses a particular rationale of the teaching-learning of the foreign languages from the existing problems and its challenges.

#### Development

The English Teaching Training Major is taught in the Cuban universities through out the Full-time course and the Mid-time course, so the students have to face the learning of a foreign language and its culture and history. In the University Municipal Center in Jagüey Grande, the English Teaching Training Major takes place through the Mid-time course, so, the students receive the lesson once a week, so that they should dedicate most time to study by their own. This carries out that the students have to use of either: home-language's culture (i.e., students' first language's culture) or target-language culture (i.e., the culture of the target language) by their own mostly the time.

However, some authors suggest that using neither home-language culture nor target-language culture is sufficient to teach a foreign language. Instead, the use of both home-language as well as target-language cultures is encouraged as it does not only address the limitations of both home-language and target-language culture teaching, but more importantly, it is the best way to help prepare EFL students who are going to become ESL students. About the last, the authoress considers that a comparison between both culture is a better solution.

On the other hand, the use of home-language culture, such as using culturally friendly reading materials and topics, is advantageous to non-English speaking students, especially EFL students, because it helps them to apply their background knowledge in reading comprehension, express their feelings and

ideas when writing essays, and overcome the problem of students having to write in a genre that is absent from their culture. In reading textbooks, storybooks, or comprehension passages that are heavily laced with strong American or other English speaking country culture and values, EFL students are unable to use their background knowledge.

In the authoress opinion this may happen because in the Cuban university classrooms there are students of different parts of Cuba, which carry out its own culture and also there are students from different countries which may get also confused with the mixture of cultures.

Therefore, in reading the passages to answer the study guides, the students not only have to overcome unfamiliar words, but they would also have to figure out the context of the culture that the passage is referring to. This could lead to a serious impediment in their understanding of the passage, because American literature (which is the most used in the classrooms) presents predominantly America culture and values— positive and negative—and does not take into consideration learners' backgrounds; but it of good rate because it allows the professors to make a comparison between different cultures.

As a result, it may be difficult for non-native English-speaking students to comprehend the reading passage, as they have to battle not only with the vocabulary or syntactic patterns, but also devote time to decipher the cultural context expressed in it. Apart from using the non-English speaking students' background knowledge, the use of home-culture can also help non-English speaking students to express feelings and ideas. For instance, when students are given topics to write related to their native language and culture non-English speaking students tend to find it easier to write and also produce better quality writing (Alptekin, 1993) than writing about other cultures and contexts.

Similarly, while evaluating the writing, students write more easily when they are writing about topics based on where they come from, so they can describe better their culture than many others. This is because students are able to use their cultural background to generate ideas (Ball, 1999).

The authoress considers that taking the knowledge of the native language (Spanish) as the base upon which a foreign language is to be built; it can be assumed that the failure to the fulfillment of the previous objective is the inundate or the lack of quality in the use of the didactic materials in the schools of our country.

In like manner, it can be said that the subject in the didactic materials into the TLP contributes to “the scientific formation of the world in the students, when taking as point of departure the language as a social phenomenon and the relationship among thought-language-culture” (...) (Enríquez O’Farrill, et-al, 2001, p.28). In the Curricula Study Plan of the secondary education, the teaching of the English language, is manifested by its wide international diffusion and has as main goal the development of the communicative competition.

So that, the TLP is a system of acts between the professor and the students, the student and the students and the last one with the class for reaching specific outcomes, it is necessary to take into consideration the activities that the students and the teacher will do as part of the communication. On the other hand, learning “is an adequate and stable modification in the student’s activity as the result of previous actions; there is always modification in learning. Learning is a change in performance that occurs under the conditions of

practice. A child changes his activity, and he learns how to read, write, etc. This adequate modification lasts long and yields important results for the future adaptation of his organism. For all this, the need of a preceding activity is determinant the child establishes sound-grapheme correspondence before he learns how to read.

As a result, many teachers allow students to choose home culture topics. When non-native English speaking students are able to come up with relevant content that is related to their native language and culture, the teachers can then help them to better organize their ideas into the target language pattern. Another reason that supports the use of home-culture content is that certain cultures lack the genre that is present in the target-culture's language. Kachru (1999) pointed out that some essay writing genres are not predominant in certain cultures.

For example, since argumentative essays are not frequently in some other languages students tend to have difficulties producing this genre. Therefore, asking these students to write an argumentative essay without any support from the teacher and teaching materials would frustrate the students because they lack the knowledge about this type of essay.

However, Kachru (1999) also pointed out that students from many other cultures are familiar with several other essay genres present in their native languages, including descriptive, narrative, imaginative, deliberative, and explanatory. Since argumentative essays are similar to the deliberative as well as explanatory essays, ESL teachers can gradually introduce how to write argumentative essays to these ESL students by building on the type of writing that they are culturally familiar with already.

So, it may happen in the English Teaching Training class nowadays, due to this class is characterized by a variety of cultures, because their students from different parts of Cuba in which the culture is expressed in different ways.

Despite the advantages that using the home-culture content brings, it does have its problems in implementation. One problem that Alptekin (1993) noted in the study of the culture in the students was the lack of books featuring and focusing on home-language culture readily available because not many publishers are willing to undertake such a costly job when the market is limited to a single country.

Therefore, instead of writing superficially about a culture or a language that they are not familiar with, these authors prefer writing about a language and its culture that they are completely comfortable with and know a great deal about, that is, their own culture, or the students' target culture. Further, some EFL students may have already formed opinions about the target-language's culture they are studying, which in most cases are not accurate, and it is therefore the teachers' responsibility to broaden these EFL students' minds to be more accepting of other people's culture.

Due to these problems, many researchers have advocated the use of target-language culture in foreign language teaching. Target-language Culture Teaching To avoid the issues that EFL teachers face when using home-language culture, several researchers believe that using target-language culture would be an excellent solution.

Reading about the target-language's culture could help these students come to terms with what they experience in the target-language country, and therefore, be better prepared for it. In addition to just reading, Kramsch suggested that

teachers make use of pre-reading as well as post-reading activities to help these soon-to-be ESL students to come to terms with cultural differences (Thanasoulas, 2001). Another reason why authors are strongly advocating the teaching of target-language culture is so that teachers can create a sense of awareness for soon-to-be ESL students when they write their papers.

Therefore, when writing in English, these students have a tendency to copy texts without giving credits to the authors. On the other hand, for those students who are still feel that their culture is somewhat superior to the target-language culture; teachers can pen comments to persuade them to think outside the box. In the case of the students from the University Municipal Center in Jagüey Grande, there are students from different parts of the Cuban Western area in which the culture is expressed in different ways, also they use different Spanish terms to identify the objects or things which alike to the students in Eastern, so, the discussion and analysis about the culture is presented as a variety of elements and terms that permit the students to write more easily. In contrast to write about some specific element about the English-speaking countries culture overcome a difficulty because not all the students tend to understand or interpret the context in the same way, also the comparison between both culture is quite complicated for them.

Plus, in the Mid-time course the professor do no have the opportunity to interchange with the students more than once a week, which carries out that the students have to face the writing process by their own and need to understand the issues of the culture of the language they are studying by answering the study guides, even if the professors give them a background about the content to be studied, that's why the professor have to focus their attention in the first stage of the writing process to make the students investigate about the cultural elements that are expressed in each study guide. In consequence, home and target-language culture is the best option the students have to learn about a foreign culture, also to make comparisons between them.

#### Conclusion

From this review, the authoress concludes that it is best to use both home and target-language culture. This is especially true for the foreign languages students who are studying to be English teachers because the use of both cultures helps to provide a broader view of the differences between their culture and the target-language culture. With students understanding the differences, their transitions, both in academics as well as daily life, would not be as difficult since they have already been exposed to the target-language culture.

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