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DEVELOPMENT

OF INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE THROUGH CLIL

DESARROLLO DE LA COMPETENCIA COMUNICATIVA INTERCULTURAL A TRAVÉS DEL CLIL

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ABSTRACT

Current university education aims to develop foreign language skills that will enable students to excel in international contexts while performing their profession. Therefore, over the years, and after in-depth research in the field of teaching foreign languages such as English, various theoretical contributions have emerged to address this major challenge. Each proposal has had different objectives regarding the student's use of the language, adapted, of course, to the needs of the society in question. Some of the first methods considered in the history of foreign language teaching include the "direct method," the "grammar-translation method," the "audio-lingual," the "structural approach," the "total physical response," the "communicative language teaching," and the "task-based" approach, among others. Regardless of the method, it can be noted that language and culture are interrelated concepts, so current higher education aims to integrate intercultural communicative competence through the use of academic texts as a cultural source that allows students to understand and interact with the world.

Keywords:

Teaching, English, intercultural communicative competence.

RESUMEN

La formación universitaria actual pretende el desarrollo de competencias lingüísticas de una lengua extranjera que le permitan al estudiante destacar en contextos internacionales durante la ejecución de su profesión, por lo que a lo largo de los años y tras investigación profunda en el campo de la enseñanza de lenguas extranjeras como lo es el inglés, han surgido variadas aportaciones teóricas para enfrentar este gran reto. Cada propuesta ha tenido diferentes objetivos en cuanto al uso del idioma por parte del estudiante, adaptados por su puesto, a las necesidades de la sociedad en cuestión. Algunos de los primeros métodos contemplados en la historia de la enseñanza de lenguas extranjeras son "direct method", "grammar-translation method", "audio-lingual", "structural approach" "total physical response", "communicative language teaching", "task-based", entre otros. Cualquiera que sea el método, se puede señalar que la lengua y la cultura son conceptos interrelacionados, por lo que la formación superior actual apunta a la integración de la Competencia Comunicativa Intercultural mediante el uso de textos académicos como fuente cultural que le permita al estudiante conocer e interactuar con el mundo.

Palabras clave:

Enseñanza, inglés, competencia comunicativa intercultural.

INTRODUCTION

In an increasingly globalized and multicultural world, Intercultural Communication Competence (ICC) has become essential in higher education. Moreover, in the academic context, proficiency in English is essential for communication and access to information. On the other hand, the CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) teaching approach has gained popularity in recent years as an effective way to improve students' linguistic and disciplinary competence. This research aims to analyze the perspectives of teachers and students of BA in Communication at UAEH on the use of academic texts in English for the development of CCI through CLIL.

Teaching content in a foreign language can be an effective tool to foster the development of CCI. According to Baker & Wright (2017), the CLIL teaching approach can provide an opportunity for intercultural communication, as students can work on group projects and discuss different cultural viewpoints. In addition, by using authentic texts in a foreign language, students can learn about different cultures and forms of communication in a more realistic way, which allows CCI to be developed.

CCI and the CLIL teaching approach are closely related. The CLIL approach fosters intercultural understanding and effective communication in a multicultural context, while teaching content in a foreign language can be an effective tool to promote the development of ICC. Therefore, the use of this teaching approach can contribute to the development of intercultural and linguistic communication skills necessary for the comprehension of academic texts in English, the culture and the language itself.

Academic texts in English are an important source of knowledge in many disciplines and access to them is required for research and academic development. They reflect the daily life of English-speaking countries, which to a certain extent contextualize the student and enable him/her to understand the world around him/her in the professional field.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This research was carried out at the Universidad Autónoma del Estado de Hidalgo, one of the top one thousand public educational institutions in Mexico according to the QS World University Rankings 2022 in categories such as employability, infrastructure, academic development, inclusion, etc. It offers higher and middle school education in multiple academic areas and is present in several institutes and colleges located in the state of Hidalgo. Among them is the Institute of Social Sciences and Humanities in Pachuca where the Bachelor's Degree in Communication is offered. This educational program is taught in classroom mode and consists of nine semesters that include subjects divided into four training cores: 1. basic, 2. professional,

3. terminal and integration, and 4. complementary. In the third field there are three subjects that are relevant to this study since they are disciplinary content taught in English, the names are Products for Communicative Expression in the sixth semester, Analysis of Advertising Texts in the seventh semester and Visual Products through Technology in the eighth semester. These are considered as electives; they are chosen by students from a catalog of twelve subjects and the three are taught by two teachers respectively. Given the nature of the context and the requirements for the application of social research techniques, the participation of one teacher and 13 students in two of the aforementioned subjects was requested.

In compliance with the phases suggested by Kemmis & McTaggart (1992), within action research (diagnosis, planning, action-observation and reflection), several processes have been carried out so far that contribute to the achievement of the general and specific objectives of this work.

First, a teacher characterization questionnaire was developed in Google Forms with 33 closed and open items classified into 4 topics (identification data, work experience, professional training and teacher training) in order to know a little about the teachers in front of the group in the four areas mentioned.

Two semi-structured interviews were also conducted, one with the coordinator of the educational program and the other with one of the teachers. Eight two-hour classes and two focus groups with 7 and 6 students were observed and field notes were taken in order to generate some conclusions about CCI, the CLIL teaching approach and the use of academic texts in English.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

ICC refers to the ability to communicate effectively in an intercultural context, understanding cultural and linguistic differences. According to Byram (1997), ICC involves knowledge of the cultures of the interlocutors and the ability to interpret and understand cultural differences. On the other hand, the CLIL teaching approach involves teaching content in a foreign language, combining the development of language skills with the learning of disciplinary knowledge. The relationship between CLIL and CCI lies in the fact that the CLIL teaching approach fosters intercultural understanding and effective communication in a multicultural context. According to Coyle et al. (2010), the CLIL approach can provide an authentic context for foreign language teaching and improve students' language proficiency as well as their ability to communicate effectively in different cultural contexts. In addition, teaching content in a foreign language involves exposure to different cultures and forms of communication, which helps develop CLIL.

In such a relationship, academic texts in English can be a valuable source of information about different cultures and forms of communication, and students who can understand these texts can improve their ability to communicate effectively with native speakers of English. That is, they can learn about different forms of communication, such as academic writing, oral presentation, and group discussion, and how these forms of communication vary in different cultural contexts (Baker & Wright, 2017).

Once the theoretical perspective was contextualized, the following results were found through data processing established by Huberman & Miles (2000), which consists of data reduction, data presentation, and the development and verification of conclusions. One of the first actions prior to the delimitation of information was to transcribe and read the semi-structured interviews, the questionnaire, the direct observations and the field notes to become familiar with the data obtained, which, aligned with the research objectives and conceptual scaffolding, were categorized by generating codes in Atlas.ti.

Thus, recurrent patterns could be found through open coding, which involved immersing oneself in the data on several occasions to discover categories and concepts. According to these authors, open coding involves “*the identification of concepts and categories from the data*” (Strauss & Corbin, 2002, p. 101). In this approach, researchers dive into the data in an open and systematic way to identify patterns and emerging themes, and to develop a deeper understanding of the phenomenon they are studying.

Strauss & Corbin (2002), also describe several specific steps in the open coding process, which include chunking the data into meaningful units, identifying initial concepts and categories, constantly comparing the data, and developing a category system. The open coding process is iterative and can be repeated several times during data analysis to further refine and develop the emerging categories and concepts. In this way and after following the steps described above, the following findings were found and in turn emerging concepts and categories were developed from the data.

Intercultural Communication Competence

The fact that a student receives English classes in higher education does not guarantee that he/she will be able to communicate and interact with people from diverse cultures around the world. This also implies understanding and respecting norms, values and beliefs and being able to adjust one's own form of communication according to the context in which he/she operates. ICC is important in today's globalized world, where people from different cultural backgrounds interact with each other on a daily

basis. It helps promote understanding and cooperation between people from different cultures, and can prevent misunderstandings and conflicts. CCI is essential for individuals working in fields such as business, education and diplomacy, where effective communication with people from different cultures is crucial. From the perspectives and practices of the teacher and the coordinator, some specific concepts such as “field of work”, “field of work topics”, “English from out there”, “specialized terms” were grouped within the interviews and field notes. In which certain CCI skills were evidenced (Byram, 1997) such as:

- Language proficiency: the ability to communicate effectively in different languages.
- Cultural awareness: an understanding of different cultural norms, values, and beliefs.
- Intercultural communication skills: the ability to communicate effectively with people from different cultural backgrounds.
- Cultural adaptation: the ability to adapt to different cultural environments and situations.
- Empathy: the ability to understand and share the feelings of others.
- Open-mindedness: a willingness to learn and accept new ideas and perspectives.
- Tolerance: the ability to accept and respect differences in others.

During the classes I promote the learning of English and the topics from their functionality in the labor field in that eagerness to achieve that students succeed in the performance of their professions even in English-speaking countries.

I also try to show them useful content for life out there, when they face the work field, the English out there. That's why I give them notes on vocabulary that can be useful to them like “binge watching” and the words you saw that I wrote down on the board. (E2, 2023)

In summary, Byram (1997), emphasizes that CCI is a complex skill that involves not only knowledge of cultural differences, but also the ability to adapt and use them effectively in cross-cultural communication situations. Furthermore, he stresses that CCI is not only important from a technical perspective, but also from an ethical one, as it requires a commitment to tolerance, respect and justice. CCI implies not only a set of cognitive skills but also affective skills to interact appropriately with other people, so that the teaching and learning of English would be limited if only the simple fact of knowing the language were resorted to, leaving aside the cultural part and in this, authentic materials play a considerable role.

Materials

At the beginning of this research work, it was proposed to analyze the use of academic texts in English as a considerable source of cultural and authentic material that can be presented to students in the development of the ICC. However, during the direct observations it was noticed that the teacher resorts to other types of materials such as videos, applications, specialized books and web pages for the fulfillment of their class objectives and only resorts to academic texts as bibliographic references to present theoretical elements of what students should learn such as the basic elements of a podcast, an advertisement on the web, among others.

In this sense, the cultural elements and the interaction with others to achieve the ICC are taken from the use of applications such as Padlet, Arloopa and other intelligence applications. His classes are taught in workshop mode so that the theory is explained by him and sometimes researched by students prior to the sessions in such a way that in class only products such as podcasts, advertisements, photomontages, dubbing and music covers are developed (O1 and O2, 2023).

I use texts like the one you saw today from courses I have taken on marketing in this case. That allows me to give them updated material because the program is very limited, they only ask for three products, if I am not mistaken, a newsletter, a poster and I do not remember the other. (E2, 2023)

Understanding how academic texts are being used in the subjects generated an area of opportunity in the development of the CCI in terms of the design of the workshop proposed in the research.

Teaching methodology

To acquire CLIL, active engagement in the learning process and a willingness to critically reflect on one's own cultural beliefs and practices are necessary (Kramsch, 2014). CLIL is a pedagogical approach that involves teaching content in a foreign language, with the aim of developing both language skills and disciplinary knowledge. CLIL teaching is considered a context conducive to the development of CCI, as students are exposed to the language and culture of the subject matter, as well as to the foreign language and culture.

In the analysis of this section, several concrete concepts were found that were grouped into elements related to the teaching methodology that the teacher uses in the classroom, and these were taken from theoretical aspects of CCI and CLIL. Some studies highlight the following:

Exposure to different cultures and perspectives: *“Content and foreign language integrated learning is a pedagogical*

approach that offers students the opportunity to learn about the culture and language of the subjects of study and the foreign language, which can contribute to the development of intercultural communicative competence” (Coyle et al., 2010, p. 15). In this section, it was observed that the teacher incorporates updated material that is of interest to students, retakes current commercials of popular brands that appear on social networks and platforms such as YouTube, these are analyzed from the theory reviewed previously and considering the target audience, aspects such as the type of clothing and places where they were recorded and what is intended to be achieved with such commercials are listed. (O1, 2023)

Development of language skills and intercultural competencies: *“CLIL teaching not only improves language skills, but also develops intercultural skills, such as the ability to adapt to different styles of communication and to understand and respect different cultural perspectives”* (Barnett, 2007, p. 15). For this section, data from the teacher characterization questionnaire and the interview with himself are used to understand that his profile as a teacher not only of a disciplinary subject in communication but also as an English teacher, implements activities that allow students to develop competencies in both senses, linguistic and content.

Yes, as I also teach English at another institution, that helps me here to align the content to the CEFR, since I evaluate their written and oral products with B1 or B2 rubrics. The idea is that they present, for example, a poster but also explain it in English and that makes it more complex because it is not just a matter of handing it in for the sake of handing it in. (E2, 2023)

Critical reflection on one's own culture and communicative practices: *“CLIL teaching can also contribute to the development of Intercultural Communicative Competence by encouraging critical reflection on one's own culture and communicative practices, which is essential for effective communication in intercultural contexts”* (Marsh & Wolff, 2007, p. 72). In the teaching practice, it was observed that the teacher promotes the reflection of his own culture with respect to that of others, he addresses examples not only from the Mexican context but also from countries such as the United States and in the same way he expresses it in the interview when he mentions “we return to what I told you about the Socratic questions, they have to reflect on issues of the labor field such as the Pepsi logo that we remember today” (E2, 2023). (E2, 2023)

From this last section emerge some emerging concepts such as the Socratic method from which the Socratic questions to which he alludes emerge and the use of technological materials as a cultural resource in the classroom.

CONCLUSIONS

Content and foreign language integrated learning offers students the opportunity to learn about the culture and language of the subject matter and foreign language, which can contribute to the development of a CCI (Coyle et al., 2010).

By teaching content in a foreign language, students are exposed to different ways of thinking and cultural perspectives, which helps them understand and adapt to different cultures and ways of communicating.

In the interviews and observations conducted, there are some elements of these two areas that provide a general perspective of the work being done in the Bachelor's Degree in Communication. However, in the diagnosis of the use of academic texts in English there are still gaps without understanding that will have to be addressed in the rest of the research.

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