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Алмейда-Мендес М.П.

ORCID: 0000-0002-2889-2253, ассистент, Университет иностранных языков Хангук

ПРОЕКТНОЕ ОБУЧЕНИЕ НА ЗАНЯТИЯХ ПО ИЗУЧЕНИЮ ИНОСТРАННЫХ ЯЗЫКОВ ДЛЯ КОРЕЙСКИХ СТУДЕНТОВ*Аннотация*

Корейские студенты и бразильские учителя в процессе изучения иностранных языков переживают множество культурных потрясений, поскольку культура обучения и изучения в каждой стране отличаются по своей сути. Учитель ожидает, что ученик возьмет на себя роль главного героя в процессе обучения, а ученик ожидает, что учитель станет основным источником знаний, которые они надеются получить. Оба участника учебно-педагогической ситуации считают, что виноват другой, когда он не хочет брать на себя основную роль, поэтому неудовлетворенные ожидания порождают разочарование. Чтобы не допустить ухудшения взаимоотношений учеников с учителями, необходимо разработать определенную стратегию. В данном исследовании установлено, что применение хорошо спланированных и описанных проектов с использованием структуры «подготовка-презентация-дебата» помогает привести иностранных учителей и корейских учеников к единой точке, где оправдываются ожидания обеих сторон.

Ключевые слова: корейские студенты, культура обучения, культура изучения, проектное обучение.

Almeida-Mendes M.P.

ORCID: 0000-0002-2889-2253, Assistant Professor, Hankuk University of Foreign Studies

PROJECT-BASED LEARNING IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE CLASSES FOR KOREAN STUDENTS*Abstract*

Korean students and Brazilian professors in a foreign language classroom are bound for many culture shocks as the learning cultures and teaching cultures of each country differ in their cores. Teachers expect students to assume a protagonist role in their learning process and students expect teachers to be the primary source of the knowledge they hope to obtain. As both agents of the teaching-learning situation believe their counterpart is at fault when not assuming a primary role, unmet expectations give room to frustration. To avoid students from drifting further apart in the necessary relationship with teachers, some strategies need to be developed. In this study, I found that assigning well planned and clarified projects with a preparation-presentation-debate structure helps bringing foreign teachers and Korean students classroom cultures to a gathering point where expectations can finally meet.

Keywords: Korean students, learning culture, teaching culture, project-based learning.

Почта авторов / Author Email: almeidaunb@gmail.com

Introduction

Previous researchers have stated that Korean students have a tendency to be quiet and passive in the classroom [1, 2], and this is considered to be a positive trait for many East Asian students [2]. In Korea, students are accustomed to teacher-centered classes and assume a passive recipient role during lessons [3]. For foreign language teachers, this is often a challenge, especially when it comes to speaking activities and oral proficiency assessment.

That is the case for Brazilian language teachers working in South Korea. From language institute training workshops to university courses in Brazil, and other South American countries, teachers are often encouraged to conduct student-centered classes, as Baghin-Spinelli [4] and Torres [5] stated. Avoiding unnecessary interventions is also important, as excessive teacher interference during classroom activities undermines students' protagonism in their learning process.

The Brazilian language teachers usually expect students to engage and assume a primary role in their learning process. On the other hand, Korean students expect teachers to provide knowledge and tell them what they are supposed to memorize for the exams because they are used to learning by listening, reading, observing and imitating [3]. When two different agents of the teaching-learning situation expect their counterpart to take the primary role, frustration can build up very easily on both sides.

Since the Brazilian teaching culture and the Korean learning culture differ in a profound manner, this work aims to demonstrate how projects can be a tool for teachers and students to meet their expectations.

Project-based learning

Project-based learning (PBL), according to Moss and Van Duzen [6], is an instructional approach in which students

are given problems to solve or products to develop. A panoramic work on PBL was done by Krajcik and Blumenfeld [7], and the authors cite Dewey's work as one of the most important for the development of PBL approach. Dewey studied action, interaction and experiences in the classroom [8] and found that students benefit from activities that emulate real-world situations.

In this study, projects are classroom activities based on PBL approach with the objective of emulating a Portuguese language immersion context for Korean students. While projects in this study are based on the principles of the PBL approach, PBL was not the predominant approach for the language course. That means projects were not the only work students were graded for, other assessment methods were also used, such as oral exams and written exams, for instance.

In well-planned projects, students are given a clear objective to achieve, a standard structure to develop and clear criteria based on which they will be assessed. Projects have proven, in this study, to meet both teachers' and students' expectations.

On the teacher's side, projects like selling a travel package, enrolling in political elections or interviewing someone for a talk-show, lead the student to engage in the learning process. Additionally, there is spontaneity and real-world emulation, so the teacher can assess more accurately if the students are indeed acquiring the desired level of proficiency.

On the students' side, they will be given an opportunity to express themselves in the target-language without focusing solely on given grammar structures and yet they have a comfortable amount of instructions to follow. In this study, it was found that the instructions I gave and the structure I

provided allowed them to proceed more confidently in the activity.

Discussion

This study was conducted with eleven students in an Intermediate Portuguese conversation class in a South Korean university. Students were assigned two projects: Project 1 followed a preparation-presentation-voting structure with a rigid template and Project 2 followed a preparation-presentation-debate structure, without any template, only topic suggestions.

Before both projects, I clarified the assessment criteria and the activity purpose to them. I also assured them that I was not grading them exclusively based on grammar accuracy, but I was also grading their preparation process and their performance when answering questions.

A fundamental requirement for their presentation was that it had to be easy for the class to understand what they were saying. That is because many students in previous experiences either wrote or copied a speech with unnecessarily complex structures and misused vocabulary in hopes they would score higher. However, they did not master these structures and words, so their scores were in fact lower than those of students who preferred structures they were better acquainted with.

Project 1 was assigned shortly after the class studied tourism and travel vocabulary, so they were given a group task of putting together a travel package to any Brazilian city and trying to sell it to their classmates. They had a template to rely on and extensive instructions to follow. They were required to look for roundtrip plane tickets, hotel rooms based on customer reviews and at least three touristic sites. They also had to explain why these specific touristic sites were worth visiting.

All the research for the preparation process had to be done in the target language using websites in Portuguese. Therefore, screenshots had to be included in the presentation as proof that they did their research in the target language instead of using their mother tongue and then translating it into Portuguese. This was important because translation is a tool that Korean students extensively rely on and, as Florea [1] notes, this is a great impairment to fluent oral communication. In the end of the presentations, everyone voted for the travel package they thought was the most interesting and that they would want to buy.

Project 2 was assigned as a general review exercise and I asked them to choose any topic about Korean culture and society that they would like to show and explain to a Brazilian audience. I wrote five topics as examples on the board. Then, I asked them to choose whether they wanted to do the project individually or in groups, and they decided to do it individually. This choice is related to Torres's [5] findings that Korean students tend to be reluctant when asked to work in pairs or groups.

Korean culture and society was the theme for Project 2 for primarily two reasons. First, I wanted them to feel confident accomplishing the task even when they had no strict template to follow and a very flexible presentation structure to work with. Second, it is something they realistically may need to do if they work for a Korean company in Brazil – and that is what their university degree is supposed to prepare them for.

In Project 2, presentations had to be short to avoid excessive memorization of written text on the preparation stage and allow for more debate time at the end. Time given to presentation was 2 to 5 minutes, whereas for the debate it was 5 to 7 minutes.

These projects were developed based on Dewey's views on experiences and actions in the classroom and its applications to foreign language teaching [8]. Thus, memorization was kept to a minimum in these exercises, since it contradicts the very point of a conversation class. Also, it creates an over-simulated environment that would be too far from a real-world emulation idealized by Dewey [7].

Results

In both projects, during students' presentations, their focus was on providing their peers with the information in a clear manner to achieve the task objective. That significantly diminished excessive attention to grammar structures and allowed the teacher to better diagnose students' mistakes and prepare a review lesson to help them overcome these mistakes. It also gave them the opportunity to practice many structures they had learned but not often found the chance to use in a conversation.

At the end of each presentation, there was a debate in which all students were required to ask questions to the presenter about the topic they had just been exposed to. That helped engage the whole group in the activity.

Asking questions was part of the project's requirements and students were graded for asking questions to their peers. For this reason, the debate was not seen so much as a disrespectful behavior as it normally would among Korean classmates. Cho and Torres expose how Korean students may see questions in the classroom as disrespect [3], [5]. So, at the debate stage, repeated clarification was needed for students not to feel offended. That is because, despite being knowingly very respectful, Korean students are normally highly competitive and could possibly misinterpret each other's questions. Because students who presented the project had already done considerable research on their topic, they were usually keen to show that they knew the answer to the questions asked by other students, so they replied confidently.

In the final exam, the first questions were inquiries about the project. I asked them what they thought was positive and negative about the experience and which project they felt more engaged with and why. From their responses, I found that giving them choices (date of presentation, topic, group) before the projects showed them that I respected their opinions. Consequently, they stated that they felt more comfortable to express themselves to me and to others whenever I asked them questions during lessons, debates and even the final oral exam.

Specifically about which project they believed was more successful, eight out of ten students replied that they preferred the Project 2. Some of them said it was because they enjoyed doing research about something they were more intimate with and were interested in, which was Korean society and culture.

One of the students said he preferred Project 2 because he did not have to work with a peer, and his answer concurred with Torres's findings [5]. Another student said she did not like Project 1 because she did not want to travel to Brazil, so "there was no point in doing it", which shows that students need to relate and interact with what they are learning [7].

A Korean student who had studied abroad most of his life said he preferred Project 2 because he could "do whatever I wanted" and that he appreciated having autonomy to study in the university environment. Knowing that he studied in different South American countries during most of his primary school education, his response shows an interesting contrast between his mindset and his classmates'.

The three students who preferred Project 1 demonstrate that teachers need to take the diversity of students' learning cultures and styles into account when planning activities for an apparently homogeneous group.

Conclusion

Developing projects was a bridge between my Korean students and me, their Brazilian professor, because we could explore aspects of both my teaching culture and students' learning culture. During preparation, students had the opportunity of writing and memorizing some information, which in part kept them in their comfort zone regarding their learning culture. It also helped minimize their fear of making mistakes, which is a known issue to Torres and Cho [3, 5].

Projects were found on this study to be an effective way for students to be empowered by the opportunity of making choices and to perceive their progress in the language more genuinely. That is because they need to use various structures and vocabulary, often in an unplanned manner. Students are given an objective which is not purely language related and, by thinking about how to accomplish their task, their attention is shifted from drilling and memorizing a specific structure or a vocabulary list to the context in which they need these language resources for.

There are a few key aspects for a teacher to keep in mind when assigning and conducting a project in the classroom.

Choosing a comfortable and familiar topic to students' reality helps motivate students to complete the given task and engage in the debate. It is also a powerful tool to promote critical thinking.

Furthermore, minimizing teacher intervention during presentation and debate also helps empowering students at the latter stage of the activity, however mediation is necessary to avoid conflict and animosity. In addition, teacher's provocative short questions, when carefully formulated to not make students uncomfortable, are very effective in upholding the discussion during the debate.

As a language teacher for ten years now, I believe the debate is the high point of this project due to its necessary spontaneity. Students need to produce unplanned sentences when answering unpredicted questions about the work they developed.

This study also concluded that literature review of work done by other foreign [1], [5] and Korean professors [3] about Korean students' behavior is very helpful for teachers to prepare themselves to develop projects in their classrooms. Nevertheless, attention should always be paid to the fast and constant changes in Korean society and Korean students' diversity of experiences.

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