The promotion of the intercultural competence via the English teacher

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Title: The promotion of the intercultural competence via the English teacher.
Abstract
A key provider of the intercultural competence in the educative setting are the English teachers. This article is mainly devoted to the description of their role, focusing on what should be expected from them, according to the theoretical development of this competence nowadays. Nevertheless, certain researchers have also focused on comparing the theory with the reality. Concerning this divergence, various analysts have listed certain drawbacks which English teachers usually find when trying to promote the intercultural content and dimension during their English lessons.
Keywords: teaching, intercultural competence, English

Título: El fomento de la competencia intercultural a través del profesor de inglés.
Resumen
Una figura educativa esencial para el fomento de la competencia intercultural es la del profesor de inglés. Este artículo tiene como objetivo la descripción de su papel, centrándose en las expectativas de su rol en la enseñanza intercultural siguiendo el actual desarrollo teórico de esta competencia. Sin embargo, ciertas investigaciones se han centrado en comparar la teoría con la realidad. Se reflejará dicha discrepancia describiendo así las dificultades con las que se encuentra el profesor de inglés en su intento de fomentar la competencia intercultural en sus clases.
Palabras clave: enseñanza, competencia intercultural, inglés.

Martin Luther King, Jr. once said 'we must learn to live together as brothers or perish together as fools' (1965). Together with the family setting, education could be considered a key context for the encouragement of the sense of coexistence, unity and respect for cultural diversity. Nowadays, in academic circles, this aspiration is known as intercultural competence or 'cultural awareness and expression' in the Spanish Law LOMCE (8/2013).

Hence, concerning the teaching of languages, it is important to remark first how important the connection between language and culture is when learning a foreign language and when one goal is to provide learners with knowledge of the identity aspects of diverse cultures in order to communicate satisfactorily. The intercultural competence should mean the promotion of all the cultural aspects which would help students understand the diversity among countries as a way of growing culturally instead of having to face a series of problems that complicate the communication and understanding between them due to the deficiency of cultural knowledge.

To do it, intercultural competence and communicative competence should not be considered opposite, but complementary in order to create a real competence which comprises linguistic, communicative and cultural contents. Indeed, the intercultural competence should be part of the annual programming instead of taking it into account as an extra point to deal with. That is, students should work and be assessed when dealing with cultural topics; in the same way it is usually done with the linguistic competence.

So, language teachers are now expected to teach intercultural competence. However, its promotion is still a feeble point for certain teachers, despite both the great development of theories and practices regarding the intercultural concept and the support of certain institutions or national legislation, such as the Council of Europe (2001) or the Spanish Law LOMCE (8/2013).

In this respect, numerous researchers have identified certain difficulties which justify the limited extent of teachers' willingness to interculturalise foreign language education. 'The attempts to make students reach the appropriate cultural knowledge have not the expected results mainly due to the treatment of culture, regarding to quantity, quality and

importance' (Sánchez-Torrez, 2014, p.67, translation). This could support the idea that there is still much to do concerning the promotion of the intercultural competence as it is insufficient, inadequate and lacks importance.

To begin with, a difficulty can be the lack of language teachers' preparation regarding the introduction of the intercultural competence into the English lesson (Sánchez-Torrez, 2014; Spencer-Oatey & Franklin, 2009). Furthermore, in accordance with them, García Benito (2009) considered that teachers should increase their knowledge of other countries and their cultures in order to promote an intercultural perspective during lessons. They should present themselves as mediators between cultural approaches, the interaction and exposition to the real diversity. This idea was also supported by Paricio Tato, 'there is still a lack of "good practice" and an insufficient attention to the cultural/intercultural dimension regarding teachers' training' (2014, p.217, translation).

As a consequence, it is really complicated for teachers to integrate culture and language without having received the training or instructions to do it. The integration is really important as the learning of culture in isolation, without a connection with the language, could imply the superficial treatment of this dimension. To do it, it would be required to be trained to know how to establish a sphere of interculturality and how to enable speakers to share their ideas and culture with others, at the same time that they are learning linguistic and communicative competence.

The second problem could be related to the lack of useful didactic materials and resources, including the limitations that English books usually present regarding intercultural topics and tasks. A clear example of this fact could be seen in the point of this research concerned with the observation of an English lesson in which the only resource used was the English textbook. As Romero Reyes proposed, 'in order to transmit the intercultural dimension, teachers should have the capacity of adapting the classroom to the necessities of the context […] taking into account the importance that using a variety and appropriate material has' (2013, p.14, translation).

In this respect, Prodromou, who is a specialist in teacher training, had also a critical attitude toward the teaching of culture in certain English as a Language Teaching textbooks, who stated that 'globally designed textbooks have continued to be stubbornly Anglo-centric' (as cited in Lee Mckay, 2002, p. 87). As a consequence, certain researchers have offered a list of authentic materials or strategies that could be used in order to promote this dimension and to appeal students' attention regarding this dimension, as Romero Reyes proposed (2013, p.12). Other proposals were the creation of blogs or the creation of a map where English is spoken officially and co-officially (Sánchez Palencia, 2016, p.423), 'video and audio recording, photos, graphs, drawings, tourist leaflets, newspapers, films' (Paricio Tato, 2014, p. 224) or even online resources, such as Aula intercultural, Meteco, Observatorio Atrium Linguarum and Centro Virtual Cervantes, as García Benito voiced (2009, p. 500).

Surprisingly, despite the resources dedicated exclusively for the development of intercultural competence, teachers usually continue to give priority to the use of textbook, which are mostly considered to place culture secondly without relating it to the linguistic content. In fact, this was also echoed by my tutor during the interview when he recognized using exclusively the English book during lessons. As a consequence, the cultural content offered in English lessons was dependent on what the textbook could include since the teacher did not provide with extra material or resources.

This leads to another problem which may complicate the promotion of the intercultural competence. It is concerned with the superficial treatment which is given to culture. As Pretceille criticized, 'dealing with culture in practical terms […] concerns to how culture, concretely the cultural features, are used and manipulated when communicating or interacting in daily lives' (2001, p. 16). As I mentioned when defining the concept of intercultural competence, promoting this dimension should imply the planning of tasks and projects which really make students work on cultural knowledge and practice.

This may be linked to the survival of traditional methodologies, such as the Direct Method, the Grammar Translation Method or the Audio-Lingual Method, which stressed the priority of linguistic skills, as has been stated previously. Vez (n.d., p. 41) contemplated that only considering language as a social and communicative tool, a commitment to the intercultural action and integration could be achieved. Therefore, English lessons cannot be mainly focused on teaching linguistic issues by emphasizing the use of memory, imitation and repetition; and, consequently, placing culture and communicative knowledge secondly.

Firstly, to my knowledge, certain teachers consider that they are not really preparing students for national examinations if they focus on competences that are not going to be taken into account there. In addition, 'the first [challenge] comes from the educational system itself, in which large classes, grammar-based examinations, insufficient

funding undermine the implementation of this approach' (Lee Mckay, 2002, p.113). So, teachers usually may prefer devoting the majority of the time to focus on grammar and language instead of cultural topics.

It could be said that the lack of preparation, importance, time and resources clearly influences on the development of intercultural competence during English lessons. Finally, supporting this idea, a study carried out by the European Commission in 2007 regarding language and culture 'reveals that the national curriculum emphasizes more the communicative and linguist skills than the (inter)cultural ones' (as cited in Sánchez-Torrez, 2014, p. 73). The drawbacks reflected in this section reinforces the superficiality, non-essential and discontinuous treatment that it is mostly given to the intercultural competence.

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