INTERCULTURAL FORMATIVE METHODS IN THE ROMANIAN UNIVERSITY

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Abstract: While the predictions on future are always difficult, one can be certainly made. People will be in the middle of a great number of interactions in which intercultural communication abilities are essential. In the last 50th years were brought many dates about the types of intercultural contacts, so that individuals to become now much more efficient and curious in their interactions with strangers. As the knowledge about improving ways of intercultural contact grew up, a lot of people felt the need for formative programs.
The present research goals are to emphasis new relevant topics in understanding and agreeing cultural diversity perspective, to consider intercultural approach a source of behaviour changing, and to study intercultural training as an efficient strategy in encourage and develop intercultural skills. This empirical study has designed and applied an intercultural formative program which finality was the participant's adaptation at a new culture. The research has three experimental conditions depending on formative methods manipulation: in the first condition there is a combination of didactic and experiential methods, the second condition proposing only experiential method, and in the third there is use only didactic method. The positive effects on cultural awareness, knowledge, emotional challenges (inclusive attitudes), and intercultural abilities (involving specific behaviours) are obtained from this hybrid model of intercultural formative methods.

Keywords: formative methods, intercultural training, intercultural attitudes, mutual perception changes.

1. Theoretical background

Intercultural training refers to efforts made in a formal setting to prepare people to relate more efficiently with members of other cultures (Paige, 1993). These efforts are often seen as part of intercultural training programs or formal programs, well-planned, financed with a design intended to develop people's ability to adapt to a new culture (Brislin, 1994). Studies on intercultural training have shown that such a program can produce changes in the cognitive, affective and behavioral level.

We can argue strongly that intercultural training involves a inherent transformation in intention and potential of individuals and groups. At the individual level, the training is designed to promote several traits and skills oriented towards an effective personal transformation. Training for these qualities (eg. tolerance of ambiguity, ethno-relativism, cognitive and behavioral flexibility) requires the educational actors taking new ways of thinking, values and behavior.

The study of intercultural training has grown in the last decade. There is a varied audience targeted by the programs: students seeking educational opportunities in other countries than in the home, adolescents who spend a significant period of time with family in another culture, volunteers engaged in various projects in other countries, medical staff, immigrants and refugees on the move, students having difficulty in interaction with other colleagues from different countries, teachers and support staff in multicultural schools, people

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looking for a job and have limited language skills in the host society, individuals seeking a careful management of gender and ethnicity differences, diplomats and other government officials in certain countries.

Brislin and Yoshida (1994) argues that intercultural training must lead to cultural awareness, provide knowledge about culture and highlight its influence on the behaviors necessary skills and emotional challenges that individuals experience in communicating with members of other cultures. On this basis, the present study proposes a hybrid model of intercultural formative strategies aimed at achieving positive effects on the following dimensions: a) awareness, b) knowledge, c) emotional challenges (including attitudes), d) intercultural skills (involving specific behaviors).

What distinguishes an intercultural training program for other types of training (such as for computer use or piloting airplanes) is that the need to develop skills is not so obvious. Since many students do not feel pressure to learn effective intercultural communication skills, it is often necessary to spend a significant period of time to increase awareness of the importance of these skills. If students skip the awareness stage their chances for success in intercultural training will be limited.

Once activated state of awareness of the culture, the next step is to give students appropriate cultural knowledge. Following awareness and simulation exercises, participants become more aware of how their past actions were ethnocentric and intensively cultured. This would lead to a degree of embarrassment and a desire to learn more about culture and cultural differences.

Based on influence of interpersonal interactions, another feature of intercultural training is the emotional challenge of participants, dimension which must occupy a sufficient space in the program.

Lastly, the final stage is that of acquisition skills. At this point, the students are, metaphorically speaking, similar to those who have admitted that they need swimming lessons; they have learned the elementary theoretical notions about swimming, have overcome the fear of water, but they have not practiced the movements of the arms and legs, not to mention the swimming pool entrance. Without practical swimming lessons, earlier steps have been shown to be a waste of time. Unfortunately, intercultural trainers are themselves in a triple problem: a) limited time and budget constrained, b) greater extent of processes in the preceding steps (eg. awareness and emotional challenges), c) stages are sequential and cannot be omitted.

2. Method

2.1. Research objectives

The present study has proposed two categories of objectives results, on the one hand, in the context of intercultural training reality of Romanian students and, on the other hand, the theoretical models mentioned.

Thus, the first objective is to form the Romanian students in the idea of a future intercultural contact, amid growing international mobility.

The second objective is the design and implementation of an intercultural training program with the following design: a) cultural awareness and the acquisition of knowledge and information about culture, cultural differences and cultural specificity; b) the

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development of intercultural sensitivity in dealing with cultural differences (Bennett, 1986); c) acquisition of new skills and behaviors that will increase the chances of effective communication with individuals with different cultural setting.

The third objective is to validate didactic and experiential (Kolb, 1984) intercultural formative methods.

2.2. Research hypotheses

This paper aims to examine some hypotheses, set out hereafter:

H1 In a homogeneous cultural context, an intercultural training program, combining didactic and experiential methods exercises a significant influence on the development of intercultural awareness, acquiring intercultural knowledge and skills.

H2 Formative experimental methods, in conditions of the lack of intercultural experience of students, significantly influence their intercultural skills. No effect is expected, in this regard, from the formative didactic methods.

H3 Intercultural training is a significant predictor of increasing intercultural sensitivity.

H4 The use of experiential methods in an intercultural training program under the conditions of a low level of ethnocentrism, lead to attitudinal changes of students towards strangers, compared to didactic methods that do not generate an attitudinal dynamics.

H5 Intercultural training and the ethnocentrism of students significantly influence intercultural adaptability.

2.3. Participants

The study was conducted on a sample of 242 Romanian students (33% male and 67% female gender) from the "Al. I. Cuza" Iasi University, with an average age of 21 years, five experimental groups, 3 of 30 subjects and 2 of 31 and 3 groups of 30 control subjects.

2.4. Instruments

The scale of Consciousness, knowledge, multicultural skills, developed and adapted after the inventory of M. d'Andrea, J. Daniels and R. Heck, (1991), was designed to measure the current level of intercultural competence of the participants. The instrument used in this study has 54 items divided into 3 subscale: 18 items for consciousness, 15 items for knowledge and 21 items for intercultural skills. For each subscale and for the entire questionnaire were calculated Cronbach alpha reliability coefficient and the data indicate good internal consistency of the instrument. Thus, for consciousness subscale $\alpha = .74$, for the Knowledge subscale $\alpha = .70$, for the skills subscale $\alpha = .77$ and for overall questionnaire $\alpha = .81$.

Intercultural Development Inventory used in this study was adapted from the original version proposed by M. Bennett and M. Hammer (1986, 2003), based on the theoretical background of Bennett's model of intercultural sensitivity (Bennett, 1986). Thus, after pre-testing the instrument on a sample of 100 Romanian subjects and calculation Cronbach alpha coefficient for internal consistency, from the 42 items in original inventory were removed 2 items to get a better coherence between items , $\alpha = .71$.

Attitude towards strangers was measured by prejudice scale of Pettigrew (1995) and adapted for the Romanian context. Scale is constructed of 19 items and measures both types

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of prejudice, nine items for the explicit and 10 for the subtle, with a Cronbach alpha reliability coefficient, $\alpha = 0.76$.

Intercultural adaptability was measured using a questionnaire built on the following dimensions: (a) emotional balance, (b) flexibility and openness, (c) perceptual acuity, (d) personal autonomy proposed by Kelley and Meyers (1992) in Intercultural adaptability inventory. Thus, resulted in an instrument consisting of 32 items, with a Cronbach alpha reliability coefficient, $\alpha = .74$.

Ethnocentrism scale was modeled by Neuliep, J.W. and McCroskey, J.C. (1997), consisting of 22 items, Cronbach alpha reliability coefficient obtained was $\alpha = .72$.

2.5. Procedure

The context in which intercultural training program was carried out was a formal, facilitated by academic activity with students of the first year and second year, at pedagogy seminars within the framework of psycho-pedagogical module, the "Al I. Cuza" University, in an intensive format, with daily meetings for three weeks.

The research design involves three experimental conditions represented by intercultural training program and three corresponding control groups. Experimental conditions were created by manipulating types and formative methods introduced in the program. Thus, in the experimental condition 1, made up of three groups of participants were project combined didactic and experiential methods. In the experimental condition 2, consisting of a group of participants, were exclusively developed experiential formative methods and in experimental condition 3, also formed from a group of participants were used exclusively on didactic formative methods.

Phase I - Exploratory study in experimental groups and the control group test

In the experimental groups, research began with a session exploring the culture of origin of participants to see cultural homogeneity or heterogeneity of students, being important in designing the training if it will work only the members of one culture or is there a multicultural group. Moreover, it was verified and intercultural experience of the subjects, specifically, the extent to which they had the opportunity to sit in a variable period of time in a different country. During these early discussions, each participant was asked to write down his cultural affiliation and degree of intercultural experience; subsequently, the descriptive statistical analysis of the data led us to the following results: groups that would intercultural training design were culturally homogeneous, while intercultural experience was present at few subjects. This conclusion was not entitled to use the independent variable, the intercultural experience, as a grouping variable for a research design between subjects, but allowed us to consider the lack of experience as a condition, as a ground on which we can intervene through an intercultural training for intercultural skills training. Distribution of intercultural experience to the students was: without intercultural experience-187, between 0-6 months-44, over 6 months 11.

In the control groups, students completed scales to assess consciousness, knowledge, sensitivity, skills, intercultural adaptability, intercultural attitudes and ethnocentrism provided by the researchers. We should note that these groups would not be subjected to the formative intervention; their results obtained from instruments used were to be compared with those of groups that will experience the activities proposed during the intercultural training.

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Phase II - Experimental intervention - intercultural training

It was mounted training program in experimental groups, 5 related to experimental conditions, in 3 of them were distributed 30 participants per group (experimental condition 1), and in 2 groups were distributed 31 participants per group (experimental condition 2 and 3). The training was conducted in sessions of 2 hours a day for three weeks, during which were used for didactic and experiential methods, such differentiated: in the three experimental groups were combined the two types of methods (experimental condition 1), in an experimental group worked only with experiential methods (experimental condition 2), and in another experimental group were introduced only teaching methods (experimental condition 3).

Phase III - Assessment of intercultural training

At the end of the training, it was measured the level of cultural awareness, knowledge, sensitivity, skills, intercultural attitudes, intercultural adaptability and level of ethnocentrism of subjects who attended for three weeks in the activities under the programme, complementing the inventories offered by researchers.

In graphics, design can be described as follows:

	Observation 1	Time 1	Observation 2
Group 1		X	O
Group 2	O		O

In this table, "X" refers to the training program, "O" to measure the effects of the programme, the "Time 1" at those 3 weeks of intercultural formative activities, and "1 and 2" observations represent moments in which are collected the information about the two groups. It should be mentioned that the experimental group is Group 1, and Group 2 is control group. At the time called "observation 2", there is complete information about both groups and under the conditions in which the training is effective, the experimental group members will get higher scores at the instruments proposed by researchers, compared to those in the control group.

2.6. Results

The present study examined the effects of an intercultural training programme, combining didactic and experiential educational methods in a culturally homogeneous, exploring interaction flexibility, intercultural experience, cultural centrism and culture of origin, has on the development of cultural awareness and intercultural sensitivity, the acquisition of intercultural knowledge and skills, attitudinal dynamics and intercultural adaptability of students.

The results of experimental manipulations have suggested differential presence of positive effects for predictors of dependent variables involved in the analysis model. Thus, intercultural training is essentially effective and it can achieve its objectives at the level of cultural awareness, intercultural knowledge and skills in a mixed design that incorporates the combined methods, didactic and experiential. Equally true is that a training program exclusively structured on experiential methods proved to be useful, emphasizing once again the deep involvement and exploring in detail the scope of the participants. How an effective training adapts to audience preferences, students participating in our study had validated,

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rather, experiential methods. Not the same thing we can say about a program designed exclusively didactic methods. He has not significant formative effects among students, but the option for didactic methods is motivated by familiar character of activities, lower risk of error, that of self-disclosure, lack of feelings of embarrassment.

Passing over the lack of intercultural experience of students, active methods such as simulations, role plays, intercultural games proved, once again, to be more effective than passive methods such readings, critical incidents, presentation videos, case studies in development of intercultural skills, in the acquisition of intercultural behavior concrete. The result suggests directions for teachers or specialists in intercultural contexts, who placed in the situation of working with mono-cultural audience and unprecedented relational with strangers, they will be able to focus in the design of the training program on activities that provide an opportunity to reflect on the experience, broadening the conceptual learning, active testing the ideas and skills and participation in a structured experience that allows a discussion of feelings, thoughts and ideas.

A differential approach to formative experiential or didactic methods in a training program, without denying the importance of each one separately, was considered inappropriate by some authors (Landis, D., Bennett, J., Bennett, M., 2004). Our research, through the third hypothesis, confirmed the author's thesis, intercultural training program has proven to be efficiency in the development of intercultural sensitivity only in the experimental condition were included combined didactic and experiential educational methods. Exclusive confidence in either one or the other, did not lead to the objective of training, moving from etnocentrice to the etnorelative stages and increase sensitivity towards cultural differences are difficult, if not impossible. Whereas the dynamics of intercultural sensitivity development process involves passing through several stages: denial → defense → minimization → acceptance → cognitive and behavioral adaptation → integration, the data suggests the complementarity of the two methods, forming a corpus of common activities that have helped students to relativize their own cultural references, causing them to become interested in cultural differences, to seek out interactions with individuals from different cultural point of view, to no longer be inclined to have polarised the cultures in "us" and "them," not to experience their own culture more positively than they experience other cultures, to recognize cultural differences between their culture and the other cultures and have the ability to change perspective and behavior depending on the cultural context, have no difficulty in identifying cultural or feel comfortable with a multicultural identity and to move between different cultural identities.

In terms of attitudinal dynamics of students on a background of low ethnocentrism, experiential methods proved again to have a positive effect in alleviating prejudice against people with different cultural backgrounds compared with didactic methods that do not had the power to produce attitudinal changes. Being active methods, experiential methods proposed unfamiliar and intense activities with a cognitive and affective content, as well. In this formative context, there is a risk of embarrassment that can help students experience how their culture of origin activates stereotypes and negative attitudes towards members of a different culture. How a negative attitude often is formed in the absence of target object, without understanding its genesis, placement within an abstract conceptualizations, involving lectures, written materials, analogies, theories, problem-solving, is not sufficient to relieve a

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prejudice. Attitudinal object must be made salient, have placed the consciousness through simulations and role plays, practical assimilation and demonstrations. Thus, the results come to confirm this.

Intercultural adaptability can be predicted by a good intercultural training program and the level of ethnocentrism of students. The statement is half true, since only intercultural training had the desired effect, while ethnocentrism does not seem to play a decisive role in this equation. Furthermore, there is no interaction between the two factors brought into discussion. In other words, intercultural adaptability is not influenced by high or low levels of ethnocentrism, but rather formative methods embedded in an intercultural training program. Our research has emphasized the need to combine the two types of methods for achieving intercultural adaptability, except that in a group of subjects they have proven inefficient. It was also highlighted significant effect of experiential methods and the need to supplement the didactic methods which used separately may not achieve the proposed objective. Instructional activities that support different learning components of the program illustrate the interrelation methods for adaptability. Thus, the "concrete experience" implies in the group of students the emergence of discussions, examples, autobiography, movies, exercises, and guided imagery. In the "reflexive observation" is used logs, discussion, brainstorming, questions, reflection worksheets, checklists pages work, and structured tasks. "Abstract conceptualization" involves reading, projects, analogies, references and construction theory and research. "Active experimentation" required projects, assignments, case studies, simulations and role plays, practical assimilation and demonstrations.

2.7. Discussions

We believe that only a formative program layered on several dimensions - consciousness, knowledge, sensitivity and intercultural skills - combining didactic and experiential methods, can achieve the objectives of the intercultural school as they were mentioned by Hannoun, (1987, ap Cucoş, 2000), the preservation and protection of cultural diversity of the school population and the fact that intercultural school declines to be closed in false alternatives, promulgating a joint culture, cultural interaction.

Even if cultural diversity in contemporary Romanian university is still low, in many regions, groups of students presenting common cultural memberships, intercultural contacts missing, the need for training in the direction of future encounters with alterity is undeniable, and only if we think about the higher mobility of education actors to study in other countries, or if we remember the school's mission to promote the socialization and integration of students with diverse cultural origins, causing them to become aware of the uniqueness of their enculturation. In addition to learning the group's diversity, emphasizes, in this way, learning tolerance and ability to live with cultural differences. Cognitive aspects are supplemented and reinforced by the social and affective education ones. In designing a training in this way, teachers or specialists in intercultural settings should propose a fund of theoretical models, well argued, to prepare the students in streamlining interactions with others different from them under the cultural aspect, and for not remaining at the stage of abstract conceptualizations. Thus, in order to achieve the objectives of the formative program it is necessary to use active learning methods, experential type. Intercultural training in order to be considered a relevant approach and to generate positive effects, more than any other

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type of training, calls the methods with a high level of involvement of participants in the activities. Even more in the contexts in which the audience is culturally homogeneous, the students must internalize through simulations and role-play different cultural perspectives and to relativize their own cultural reference.

Being an intercultural training programme addressed to an audience cultural homogeneous, our study, through experimental manipulations and control variables, put the light on a series of positive effects of formative methods on multiple dimensions, in designing of a future contact with cultural differences. The construction of the experimental conditions of the study supported, on the one hand, the idea that exclusive use or didactic methods, or experiential ones may not be the most appropriate for an effective intercultural training, looking for a hybrid, holistic approach, but one the other hand, the study has sought to isolate each type of formative method for better validation and to highlight the power to achieve the proposed objectives. Thus, it could see a good efficacy of experimental condition in which they were incorporated both methods on specific dimensions, awareness, knowledge, skills, sensitivity, intercultural adaptability, and and significant positive effects of experiential methods compared to the didactic methods in forming skills amid the lack of intercultural experience in alleviating negative attitudes towards cultural differences in the conditions of a low ethnocentrism.

The prevalence of experiential methods in interculturalism, their effectiveness, can be substantiated also by the specifics of the intercultural learning, which is a practical learning, focused on a specific theme and centered on the education actor, which means that learning takes place with a special concern for those involved in the process. The students respond to a situation, which is familiar or not, in a certain way, and assess specific effects to determine future actions in the same situations or in similar situations. There is not enough reading books about a culture, listening to lectures about another culture or working with such a topic at a purely cognitive, intellectual level. It is necessary to dealing with new and unknown situations, experiencing insecurity, fear, rejection, as well as security, trust, sympathy and to aproach the intercultural issues at emotional level. Through a set of simulations, role plays and intercultural exercises proposed students involved in intercultural training program, we followed the relativism of own culture and developing intercultural competence, the guarantee of the success of interaction in intercultural encounters.

In a culturally homogenous environment, reporting to their own culture is natural, normal, default and only prolonged and positive interaction with strangers makes us aware of cultural differences.

Searching intercultural interactions and affirming cultural memberships come to support Dasen's assertion (1999), according to which the teacher who applies the principles of intercultural education will actually benefit from the presence of students from different cultural backgrounds to (re) evaluate their culture of origin and, at the same time, will raise awareness to others about cultural diversity, but it will avoid having to impose a certain identity, it will avoid stereotypes, presenting a static cultures. The University offers an appropriate framework for intercultural meetings on the background of affirmation, recognition and mutual respect between students.

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