

Teaching Local Lore in EFL Class: New Approaches

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This paper is dedicated to the up-to-date educational problem, that is, the role of local lore in teaching EFL to University students. Although many educators admit that local lore knowledge plays a great role in the development of a well-bred and well-educated personality and meets students' needs, the problem has not been thoroughly studied. Local lore can also serve as a unique source for implementing various teaching techniques, in particular a project method. In this study a project-based teaching technique was exploited, which allowed to implement the individual approach to the education of students. The materials used in this research are taken from the copyright methodical textbook "Local Lore in EFL Class". Drawing on literature of teaching and learning EFL as well as personal teaching and learning experience, the authors present the authentic model of teaching local lore in EFL class on the basis of the project-based teaching technique. The paper discusses issues and practices of the studied topic and offers general recommendations for University faculty. These materials can also be used in teaching practice of pre-service teachers.

Keywords: cognitive creative joint activity, independent thinking, individual approach, local lore, project-based teaching technique, teaching practice of pre-service teachers

INTRODUCTION

At present, both educational researchers and practicing teachers (Kurnova & Kelina, 1989; Trubaneva, 1992; Tambovkina, 1995; Vagidullin, 1996; Mansurov, 1998; T. Pisarenko & V. Pisarenko, 1998; Sysoyev, 2001; Godunova, 2006; Ivanova, Chudilova & Vilкова, 2006; Sorokovykh & Davydova, 2007; Toplenkina, 2007; Burlakova, 2008; Praded, 2008; Karpovich, 2010; Kartashova & Isaev, 2011; Kolkova, 2011; Yarmakeev & Pimenova, 2014; Canli & Canli, 2013; Safonova, 2014; Kalimullin & Masalimova, 2016; Valeeva, Aitov & Bulatbayeva, 2016; Masalimova, Porchesku & Liakhnovitch, 2016) share an opinion on including local lore into the EFL syllabus. The problem is to find attracting and motivating teaching techniques to introduce local lore. In our understanding, project-based learning is a most effective means in teaching local lore in EFL class. The fact that they by themselves learn something new about the area they were born and live in makes students get interested and motivated both in the process and the result.

In this study the authors show that the systematic use of the project-based teaching technique when working with local lore in EFL class provides a high level of assimilation of the realities and national-specific information. Teaching practice also gives evidence to the fact that students assimilate local lore materials more

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effectively through active forms of work and that these forms of work ensure the cognitive perception of cultural values of the people of the country of the target language (Kamalova & Raykova, 2016; Hosgorur & Gecer, 2012; Khairova & Bechurina, 2016). The authors are certain that project-based teaching technique stimulates independent work of students, develops the ability to concisely present the basic encyclopedic information given in the texts and to search for extra data, and appeals to students.

Local lore knowledge breeds a good sense of patriotism and love for the homeland and helps to understand the peculiarities of the national character and specific features of national thinking. This research proves that the study of local lore fosters a highly educated person.

The authors conclude that teaching local lore in EFL class on the base of the project method is effective and efficient.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Today, with the autonomy of all regions of the Russian Federation being increased, teaching local lore in FFL class is becoming considerably important for a number of reasons. First, local lore knowledge allows students to operate on factual material and information they encounter in everyday life. Second, getting acquainted with a foreign culture, students constantly compare it with the native culture. Therefore, the more extensive their local lore knowledge is which students operate on, the more productive their work on familiarizing with other cultures becomes. Third, students learn to love their homeland for local lore knowledge significantly contributes to the formation of their national pride.

Teaching local lore has been considered by numerous Russian researchers to be an integral part of the process of teaching foreign languages. All scholars agree on the point that teaching local lore in EFL class reaches, at least, two goals: first, local lore serves as a key to understanding a foreign culture, for the study of a foreign culture is possible only on the base of the national culture; second, learning local lore leads to meaningful understanding of the national culture, which is essential in the process of a personality formation. Local lore includes traditions (stable elements of culture) and customs, consumer culture which is closely associated with traditions, the “national picture of the world” reflecting the specific perception of the surrounding world, artistic culture describing the cultural traditions of one or another ethnic group, and specific national features of the carrier of culture (emotional mindset, specific way of thinking). Therefore local lore knowledge allows the person to fit into a system of relationships in cultural, social and other spheres of public life.

In Vereshchagin and Kostomarov’s view (1990), two national cultures never fully coincide, it follows from the fact that each consists of national and international elements. Matching (international) and diverging (national) units of compared cultures are different. Students have to learn concepts about new objects and phenomena, which have no analogy either in their national culture, or in their native language. The integration of teaching EFL and local lore in EFL class can help to meet this challenge.

Education is the process by which society through educational institutions transmits its cultural heritage from one generation to another (Kneller, 1971). The fundamental concept of this process is the concept of *culture*.

To introduce students to the world of culture of the country of the target language, correlating it with the native culture, is the most important task of the English teacher (Safonova, 2014). This task can be successfully solved if new and/ or original approaches to teaching EFL are applied. One of such approaches has proved to be project-based learning. Both Russian and foreign researchers in education (Kilpatrick, 1918; Dewey & Kilpatrick, 1935; Knoll, 1992, 1989; Guzeev, 1995;

Leontjev, 2002; Serdyuk, 2002; Pakhomova, 2003; Sternberg, 2003; Rogacheva, 2006; Torosyan, 2006; Savinkov, 2007; Ignatova & Sushkova, 2011; Gorobets, 2012; Lomakin, 2012) and in teaching EFL (Zimnyaya & Sakharova, 1991; Martyanova, 1999; Polat, 2000; Nehorosheva, 2002; Bukharkina, 2005; Rathert, 2012; Halskova & Gez, 2005; Shchukin, 2006; Koptuyug, 2008; Sokol, 2008; Sankina & Sivochalova, 2009; Shelavina, 2009; Satco, 2010; Alekseeva, 2011; Zolotova, 2011; Abdrafikova, Akhmadullina & Singatullova, 2014) consider project-based learning to be an effective means of the development of creative abilities of students which allows to teach them to apply their knowledge in solving practical problems.

According to Kilpatrick (1918), "... the purpose ... supplies the motive power, makes available inner resources, guides the process to its preconceived end ...". Thus, having a meaningful problem while doing a project students get involved into work. Students enthusiastically and purposefully do a project if they see the practical and/ or theoretical significance of the anticipated results. In this study students were offered to do a project: to make a video-clip "The Most Interesting Street of My City" with the prospect of participation in the project of the Ministry of education and science of the Republic of Tatarstan to create videos for the educational portal "Kazan Portrayed in Its Names".

Literature review on Pedagogy and Methodology allowed the authors to realize that teaching local lore in EFL class has not been thoroughly studied; many educators recognize its importance though. In this paper the authors described an original way of exploring the problem of teaching local lore in EFL class on the basis of the project-based teaching technique.

METHODS AND TECHNIQUES

Research sites

The research site selected for this study was Kazan Federal University. Kazan Federal University is one of the oldest Universities in Russia. It was founded in 1804.

The University academic profile:

- 46, 500 students;
- 2, 106 international students from 74 countries;
- 3, 000 faculty members;
- 121 invited professors from world-renowned universities and research centers;
- 479 degree programs;
- 17 Institutes, 3 Higher Schools, 2 Regional Branches.

Participants' backgrounds

90 students volunteered to participate in this study. Participants were asked to indicate their gender, ethnicity and the languages spoken. The number of the participants comprised 80 (89 %) females and 10 (11 %) males. 40 (44, 4 %) indicated that they were Russians, 45 (50 %) indicated that they were Tatars, 5 (5, 6 %) indicated that they were the representatives of minority ethnic groups. All students' FL1 is English. For 60 students FL2 is German and for 30 students FL2 is French.

These data were needed to choose the appropriate materials for conducting this study.

Studied materials

In this research an original approach to teaching local lore in EFL class on the base of the copyright methodical textbook "Local Lore in EFL Class" is presented.

The methodical textbook "Local Lore in EFL Class" consists of three parts. The first part offers excerpts from the original works in English selected from the works of famous historians and contains information about the history of the Republic of Tatarstan. All texts are provided with tasks and detailed comments of the authors. The second part presents brief biographical articles about prominent people of the Republic of Tatarstan. Most of the biographical texts are in two languages – Russian and English. These texts are supposed to be translated from one language into another in the form of independent work of students under the guidance of an instructor. The third part of the methodical textbook "Local Lore in EFL Class" contains model lessons. Sample assignments encouraging the development of students' communicative competence - speech, language and socio-cultural as a priority - are provided.

The training technique that was implemented in this study was a project-based teaching technique. According to the founders of the project-method J. Dewey and William H. Kilpatrick (1935) project-based learning addresses the ways of the development of active and independent thinking of a student and makes it possible to teach him not just to memorize and reproduce given to him knowledge but to apply this knowledge in practice.

Study instrument and data collection procedures

In this study the authors turned to the active cognitive and creative joint activity of students in the solution of the general problem, namely, making a video-clip about their city on the topic "The Most Interesting Street of My City". The solution of this problem required knowledge from different fields, particularly, knowledge of local lore.

The study went through several stages:

- At the 1-st stage, the students were offered a questionnaire which related to the participants' personal data, including their gender, ethnicity and the languages spoken.

- At the 2-nd stage, they were given a quiz to check the initial level of local lore knowledge of students. It made a starting point of the experiment.

- At the 3-d stage, the students studied the reading materials from the methodical textbook "Local Lore in EFL Class" (Part 2).

- At the 4-th stage, the students started collecting information for their project: making a video-clip "The Most Interesting Street of My City" named after one of the famous personalities.

- At the 5-th stage, they made groups of 8-10 students and designed the plot of the video-clip under the guidance of the instructor.

- At the 6-th stage, the students distributed their 'roles': a producer, a script-writer, a cameraman, an actor, etc.

- At the 7-th stage, they had rehearsals.

- At the 8-th stage, the students made a video-clip and tested it.

- At the 9-th stage, the students presented their video-clips.

- At the 10-th stage, the students were given a quiz based on the materials they learnt from the videos to check their knowledge of local lore. Besides, students filled in the evaluation forms. That stage was considered to be control.

- At the final stage, the comparison of quantitative indices of the starting point of the experiment and the control stage was carried out.

RESULTS

The results revealed that the usage of the project-based technique in teaching local lore in EFL class made it possible to:

- let students acquire extensive local lore knowledge;
- develop students' skills in different fields (e.g. writing scripts, acting, etc);
- train students to work in a team;
- motivate students to learn new things;
- bring a sense of national pride for their homeland;

and taught students to:

- generate ideas;
- think aloud while supporting or refuting the hypotheses;
- express and summarize their thoughts;
- find a multi-variant solution;
- put the rules of speech etiquette in disputes with opponents into practice;
- apply their knowledge in practice (making and presenting a video-clip; solving a quiz).

The quantitative information in Diagram 1 gives the evidence to the progress of local lore acquisition by students in EFL class.

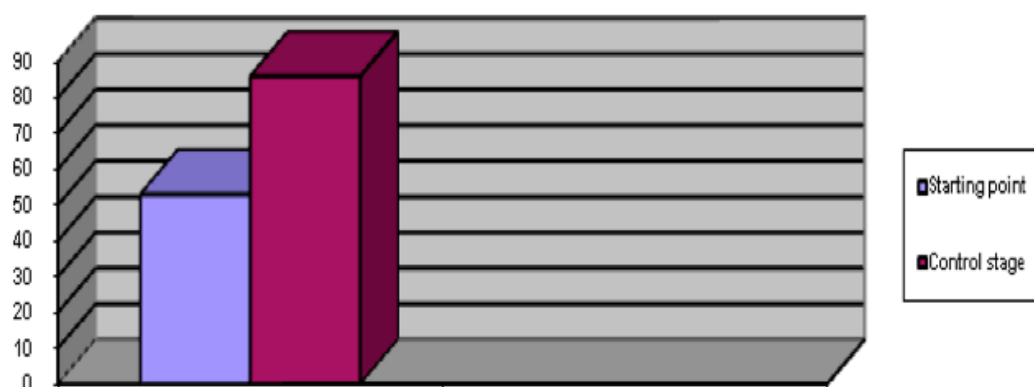


Figure 1. Evaluation of Progress of Local Lore Acquisition

The final quiz covered much more factual material if compared to the first quiz that was given at the second stage for checking the initial level of local lore knowledge of students.

According to these findings, the authors drew a conclusion that local lore can be a good resource for implementing a project-based teaching technique, which in its turn provides deep knowledge of local lore of students. Thus, the content and the teaching technique here perfectly fit each other.

DISCUSSION

According to the founders and followers of the project-based learning, everything a student learns in theory, he should apply practically to solve problems relating to his life. He should know where and how he will be able to apply his knowledge in practice, if not now, then in the future. In our outstanding, it stands for developing students' skills in different fields and learning to apply knowledge in practice while solving any practical problem they may face.

This study sheds some light on the effect of the project-based technique in teaching local lore in EFL class although the authors admit that the project should appeal to students. In this study the leading approach to choosing the name of the street for the project "The Most Interesting Street of My City" was the students'

residence location. It motivated students to learn something new about the name of the street they and/ or their friends live in. In the evaluation forms most EFLs wrote that they benefited from the project-based learning: "Yes. I tried new things like writing a script." "Yes. My involvement was 100%." That explains a high level of students' motivation in learning local lore in EFL class on the basis of the project-based learning.

The findings of the present study indicate that the project-based technique in teaching local lore in EFL class facilitated team-work. In accordance with the interests of all the participants of the project, students were engaged into joint activity while collecting information for their project; designing a plot of the video-clip; distributing 'roles'; having rehearsals; making a video-clip and testing it; and finally, presenting their video-clips.

The training material included texts about outstanding people of the Republic of Tatarstan - from the first educators of the X century to the greatest scientists, thinkers and talented artists of the twenty-first century who made an invaluable contribution to the development of their homeland.

The instrument the authors used to evaluate the progress of local lore acquisition by students was a quiz. A quiz is considered to be one of the most universal forms of work with local lore in EFL class. Quizzes are usually made on the base of multiple choice tests and can be applied at any stage of the teaching process. Practicing teachers speak in favor of this activity for with the systematic use of quizzes when working with local lore, a high level of acquisition of realities and national-specific information is achieved.

In this study the authors managed to prove that teaching local lore in EFL class on the basis of the project-based technique let to implement the individual approach to the education of students which implied certain independence of students in the learning process (e.g. students chose the information they needed and the methods to work with it independently) and to take into consideration the ethical and moral values of students.

Literature review showed that there had been made many attempts to use the project method in teaching local lore but none of the researchers applied making a video as a project-based technique of teaching local lore in EFL class although some authors described the use of ready-made films in teaching foreign languages (Myatova, 2006; Verisokin, 2003). In this study the authors presented the authentic model of teaching local lore in EFL class: students made their own videos.

CONCLUSION

We with confidence can say that the experiment has fully proved the hypothesis that the use of local lore in teaching EFL leads to a deep understanding of the specific phenomena of the language and contributes to the creation of sustainable motivation of students.

The use of authentic and/ or original materials plays a significant role in the teaching process. The subject area for students' "investigation" should sound attractive and meaningful (see Appendix A for complete proofs).

This study made it possible to show that acquainting with world culture and the culture of one's own country is efficient with the implementation of the project-based teaching technique provided students' systematic work.

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APPENDIX A (A Sample).

Project topics

National sports.

National music festivals.

The Winds of the Bulgar State.

Famous noble families of Kazan.

Memorial museums of prominent people of our Republic.

Folk games.

Tatar enlighteners.

Kazan: the place where east and west cultures interlace.