

Using Project-based Learning in Promoting Intercultural Competence among Students at a University in Vietnam

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Abstract: Exploring the potential of using Project-based Learning (PBL) in developing Intercultural Competence (IC) amongst the students necessitated this study. The study investigates the implementation of PBL in promoting IC among students at The University of Danang - University of Foreign Language Studies (UD-UFLS). The study was conducted in two phases. In the first phase, a survey questionnaire was administered among 130 students at UD-UFLS to examine the perceptions of UD-UFLS students towards employing PBL in developing IC. Eight students, who have experienced with PBL, were selected for the second phase of the study. The benefits and challenges perceived by the students in developing their IC via PBL were explored using structured interviews with a focus on their perspectives and experiences with PBL, allowing the researchers to gain a deeper understanding of their subjective experiences. This study clearly demonstrated that PBL has significant potential in developing IC among UD-UFLS students. The high levels of student participation, understanding, and confidence in PBL, coupled with the perceived benefits in areas like problem-solving, communication, and real-world application, indicate that PBL can be an effective approach to fostering IC. This study also introduces the Cultural Kaleidoscope Project, a comprehensive initiative aimed at improving students' language acquisition through a deeper understanding of cultural values. The findings have significant implications for educators in Vietnam and elsewhere, highlighting the potential benefits of adopting PBL as a powerful tool to foster IC amongst university students in the hope that they can become capable of thriving in an increasingly globalised world.

Keywords: Project-based Learning (PBL); intercultural competence (IC); language students; multicultural education; perception.

I. INTRODUCTION

Intercultural competence (IC) has become increasingly important in the era of globalization and integration, and it plays a vital role in achieving success in a globalized world. Higher education institutions around the world are seeking ways to provide students with opportunities to gain cross-cultural perspectives and develop the essential skills needed to navigate diverse cultural environments. The rising need for foreign language proficiency, especially in the field of languages, further emphasizes the significance of fostering intercultural knowledge and awareness among language students.

One of the most appealing aspects of pedagogical intercultural tasks (PITs) as an instructional tool in foreign language courses is that they provide learners with an avenue to cultivate not only linguistic skills but also IC (Snow, 2015; Tran, 2019). In addition, there is a worldwide push for universities to produce globally competent graduates capable of effective communication in diverse intercultural interactions (Meng, Zhu, and Cao 2018). A variety of labels have been applied to describe the competency involved (e.g., intercultural sensitivity, IC, global competence). In recent years, a number of studies have focused on classroom practices using PITs. Garcia and Biscu (2006), for instance, argue that the utilization of particular drama activities within a collaborative learning environment can be beneficial. Additionally, Lázár (2007) recommends intercultural games and classroom tasks like ethnographic tasks, association games, and role play. Awareness of diversity and openness towards ethnic tolerance, antiracism, and social and professional inclusiveness are all prerequisites for a successful international career. The university education should therefore include all these elements across the curriculum so that universities can achieve, through all possible pedagogical instruments, an education “for all” (Popescu et al., 2015).

Developing IC, in addition, is one of the learning outcomes of the language programs currently offered at UD-UFLS. More specifically, the third learning outcome of the English Language and the English Language Teaching Programme emphasizes the development and application of IC, which is the capacity to comprehend, value, and effectively interact with people from various cultural backgrounds. Graduates who exhibit IC are expected to be highly skilled in navigating and adapting to such various aspects as cultural norms, values, and communication styles, enabling them to engage successfully in social and professional interactions across cultures. Given this importance, there has been some body of research on IC and its implications across various domains. For example, Truong (2014) studied IC development among Vietnamese university students, revealing a gap between their basic intercultural knowledge and practical skills in intercultural communication. This highlighted the need for targeted interventions to enhance their IC. Tran (2018) examined the role of IC in Vietnamese workplaces, demonstrating its importance for navigating diverse environments and effective collaboration. Le (2019) compared teaching methodologies and found that experiential learning approaches were more effective in fostering IC among students. However, limited research exists on the implementation of PBL in

promoting IC, the challenges faced by students, and their perceptions of its impact. This study can thus provide better insight into the awareness of language students at UD-UFLS towards the implementation of PBL in promoting IC in the process of their language learning and in their preparation for integrating into the multi-lingual workplaces.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Intercultural competence

Intercultural competence (IC) has been extensively studied by scholars for the past fifty years, but a consensus on its precise definition remains elusive (Deardorff, 2009). In its simple definition, Meyer (1991, p. 137) refers IC to the capacity to behave appropriately and flexibly when encountering foreign cultures, while Byram (1997, p. 7) attaches IC to an individual's ability to communicate and interact across cultural boundaries, emphasizing the practical skills required for effective engagement with different cultures. Building upon Byram's definition, Sercu et al. (2005) expand the concept to include willingness to engage with foreign cultures and self-awareness. Phipps and Gonzalez (2004) argue that engaging with other cultures enriches one's own cultural identity, while Alred (2003) emphasizes the reciprocal nature of understanding oneself and others. Bennett (2009) suggests the importance of gaining an outsider's perspective to understand cultural differences. Put it more concisely, IC is the ability to engage in harmonious interactions with people from diverse cultures. This entails recognizing the relationships between different cultures and focusing not only on differences but also on commonalities. This comprehensive definition of IC lays the theoretical framework underpinning this study, acknowledging the cognitive understanding, effective communication, and respectful interaction necessary for navigating and engaging with diverse cultures.

Intercultural competence (IC) plays a crucial role in navigating multicultural environments and engaging effectively with individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds. Wiseman and Shuter (1994) underscore its practical benefits in cross-cultural experiences. Chen and Starosta (1997) highlight its role in managing cultural differences and promoting intercultural communication, while Deardorff (2006) argues that IC fosters mutual understanding and harmony. Additionally, Kim and Lee (2010) emphasize its importance in developing cultural intelligence, while Leung and Ang (2012) stress the significance of negotiating conflicts and building productive relationships. In the context of education, IC is vital for preparing students to thrive in a diverse world. As Pinto (2018) highlights, the importance of assessing IC in higher education is essential for students' development and universities' success since it helps produce graduates with global skills and addresses intercultural conflicts. Besides, developing IC, as many would argue, can align with internationalization goals, attracting students, enhancing brand recognition, and improving rankings (Griffith et al., 2016; OECD, 2021). In the position of Sabet and Chapman (2023), to stay competitive and equip students for diverse environments, universities should make long-term changes to embed intercultural development into their curricula.

Various models of IC offer insights into the developmental journey of acquiring and refining these competencies, revealing the complex processes involved in becoming interculturally competent. For example, Spitzberg and Changnon (2009) propose a systematic typology for classifying and reviewing IC models, using topical and sequential methods. The Intercultural Competence Model developed by Byram et al. (2001) emphasizes identity and language. The Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS) (Bennett, 1986) outlines six stages of increasing cultural awareness, moving from ethnocentric phases of denial, defense, and minimization to ethnorelative stages of acceptance, adaptation, and integration. Deardorff (2006), in contrast, presents the Process Model of Intercultural Competence which highlights internal changes leading to effective communication. The Cultural Intelligence Scale (Ang et al, 2007) measures IC through cognitive, metacognitive, motivational, and behavioral dimensions. Vromans et al. (2023) propose the Model of Intercultural Learning, which emphasizes the significance of dissonance in the learning process. Intercultural learning involves experiences, reflection, and experimentation, and affirmation and motivation play crucial roles in supporting learning. However, unresolved learning dilemmas can impede the learning process (Vromans et al., 2023).

Experts in the field of cross-cultural studies have so far made significant progress in identifying and categorizing various cross-cultural barriers. While many barriers are commonly acknowledged, such as understanding, communication, semantics, and personal factors (Barkov, 2015), they may not fully capture the unique challenges found in the education sector and the specific intercultural barriers that arise in the learning process. Akhmetshin et al. (2017) proposed a set of cross-cultural barriers that are particularly relevant to the educational environment and the implementation of intercultural interaction, such as motional, phonetic, stylistic, intellectual, semantic, motivational, and interpersonal barriers. To overcome these barriers, it is important to create a comfortable psychological atmosphere, promote diversity through group work, and foster an environment of benevolence, trust, and mutual support (Akhmetshin et al., 2017). It is necessary now to revisit the concepts of Project-based Learning to see how it could substantiate the development of IC for students in the tertiary sector.

2. Project-based Learning

In its broadest sense, a project according to Phillips et al. (1999, p. 6) is a cohesive unit of work that has a clear beginning, middle, and end. For Acar (2013, p.82), the term "project" originated from the Latin word "projicerre" and was first used in the 16th century. It is also used in other languages with different terms, i.e. "projet" in French, "proekt" in Russian, and "pregetto" in Italian. In terms of its connotation, it signifies the action of acting individually or as a group based on a prepared plan and design to achieve a specific objective (Acar, 2013, p.82). As evident from the aforementioned definitions, projects require time to complete and have clearly defined outcomes. According to Anderson et al. (2001), projects can be identified with six common types, categorized as research and present projects, writing projects, drama projects, design problem projects, business problem projects, research projects and "real product" projects. These projects are organized based on their levels of complexity, with the latter types emphasizing greater creativity, evaluation, synthesis, and application of ideas, thus developing higher order thinking skills.

Kilpatrick's project method (1918) laid the foundation for Project-based Learning, emphasizing student interest. Project-based Learning (or PBL) is rooted in constructivist learning theory and involves extended inquiry, complex questions, and authentic tasks (Krajcik et al., 1997; Linn et al., 2004). It requires students to design, plan, and execute projects with public outcomes (Patton, 2012). Project-based Language Learning prioritizes content over language targets, integrates skills, and involves extended tasks (Haines, 1989; Eyring, 1989; Hedge, 1993). Collaboration and target language "products" are crucial in Project-based Language Learning (Anderson, 2021). Project-based Learning and Project-based Language Learning emphasize student engagement, real-

world applications, and meaningful learning experiences (Kilpatrick, 1918; Krajcik et al., 1997; Patton, 2012; Anderson, 2021).

According to Boss and Krauss (2007), Project-Based Learning (or PBL) is an impactful teaching approach that cultivates students' interest and motivation through hands-on engagement with real-world problems. It fosters deep understanding, interdisciplinary integration, and critical thinking (Blumenfeld et al., 1991). Project-based Learning is also adaptable, empowering students to shape their learning journey based on their interests and abilities (Blumenfeld et al., 1991). It provides authentic learning experiences where students apply knowledge to solve problems and communicate effectively (Boss & Krauss, 2007). The integration of technology enhances PBL by facilitating collaboration, information gathering, and artifact creation (Boss & Krauss, 2007). In summary, PBL sparks enthusiasm, develops critical skills, integrates technology, and adapts to diverse student needs.

In language instruction, PBL has gained popularity due to its unique characteristics, as identified by Poonpon (2011) and the Ministry of Education and Culture (2013). More recently, Pieratt (2019) has provided a comprehensive and specific list of typical features of PBL, including teacher-designed learning experiences, real-world connections, hands-on activities, student engagement, 21st-century skills, integration of content areas, and ongoing assessments. Various frameworks and models of PBL have been proposed, outlining stages such as topic selection, planning, research, product creation, feedback, and reflection (Papandreou, 1994; Wrigley, 1998; Alan & Stoller, 2005; Stoller & Myers, 2019). However, there are challenges in implementing PBL. Chief amongst those are student perception of difficulty, time constraints, classroom management, designing authentic assessments, creating a collaborative classroom culture, and inadequate facilities (Ladewski et al., 1994; Marx et al., 1997; Ertmer & Simons, 2006; Petersen et al., 2016; Quint et al., 2018).

III. METHODOLOGY

The research design adopted for this study was a mixed-methods approach. The study was conducted at the University of Danang - University of Foreign Language Studies (UD-UFLS) in Danang, Vietnam. The participants comprised 130 students aged 18-22 from various faculties at UD-UFLS, selected through convenience sampling. Data collection involved utilizing Google Forms for the questionnaire, with participants given two weeks for completion. Structured interviews were conducted after obtaining participants' consent, with recordings transcribed for analysis. The data-collecting instruments included questionnaires adapted from the Intraclass Correlation Coefficients (ICC) and the Cultural Intelligence Scale (CQS). These questionnaires utilized a Likert scale for responses, while thematic content analysis was applied to interview transcripts.

Quantitative data analysis was performed using Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 26.0, reporting descriptive statistics. Thematic content analysis was employed for qualitative data, ensuring a comprehensive understanding through triangulation of themes with quantitative analysis. The mixed-method design ensured reliability and validity by gathering data from multiple perspectives. The study contributes to the literature on PBL and IC, emphasizing the significance of integrating IC into the language curriculum, using PBL as a designated tool for fostering IC amongst students in higher education contexts.

IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

1. Perception of UD-UFLS Students towards Developing Intercultural Competence

Descriptive Statistics					
	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Deviation
1. Do you understand the concept of intercultural competence?	130	1	5	3.17	1.119
Valid N (listwise)	130	1	5		

Table 1 Perception of UD-UFLS Students towards IC

Table 1 presents the mean and standard deviation of the research participants rating their understanding of the concept of IC. The respondents fell within the lower range of the scale, from "I don't know anything" to "I know a little bit." The data revealed a notable mean score of 3.17 (SD = 1.119), indicating that the majority of students have a limited understanding of the concept of IC. This suggests that there is a significant knowledge gap among the student population when it comes to the awareness and comprehension of IC. This is a matter of concern, considering the growing importance of IC in today's globalized world. Arguably, effective cross-cultural communication, adaptability, and the ability to bridge cultural differences are essential for success in both academic and professional settings (Byram, 1997). Without a strong grasp of these concepts, students may struggle to navigate diverse environments and effectively collaborate with individuals from varied cultural backgrounds.

Given the fact that IC is often an element integral of a learning process, not all students surveyed were aware of its presence in the statement of the learning outcomes. **Figure 1** shows that while a smaller portion of the surveyed population demonstrated limited understanding of IC, it is encouraging to note that a significant portion of respondents (51%) recognized its presence as a required learning outcome in their academic program.

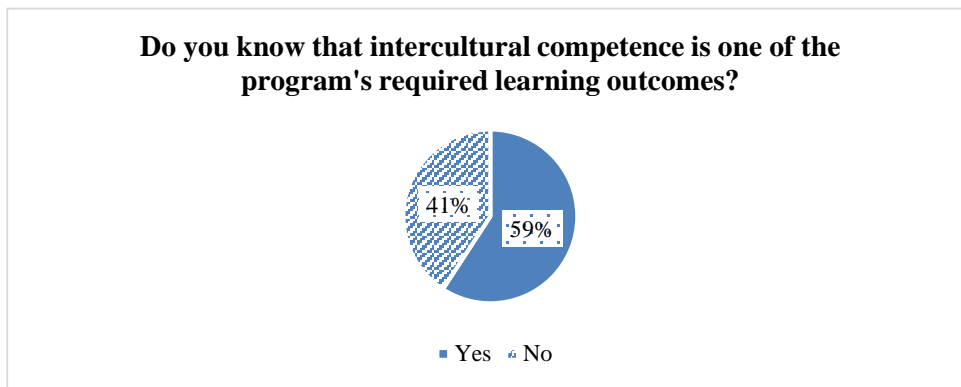


Figure 1 Intercultural Competence - one of required learning outcomes

This suggests that the institution has made progress in communicating the significance of IC to students. However, the fact that a considerable percentage of students were unaware of IC as a designated learning outcome highlights the need for more intensive integration of IC into academic discussions for a more visible presence in the curriculum. **Figure 2** as shown overleaf reveals, to a large extent, successful attempts by UD-UFLS towards integrating IC development into their academic programs. Literature, cultural studies, translation theory, and translation or interpretation courses were identified as areas where IC was extensively integrated. This alignment with disciplinary areas that inherently involve cross-cultural engagement and communication emphasizes the importance of incorporating cultural context and content into language instruction.

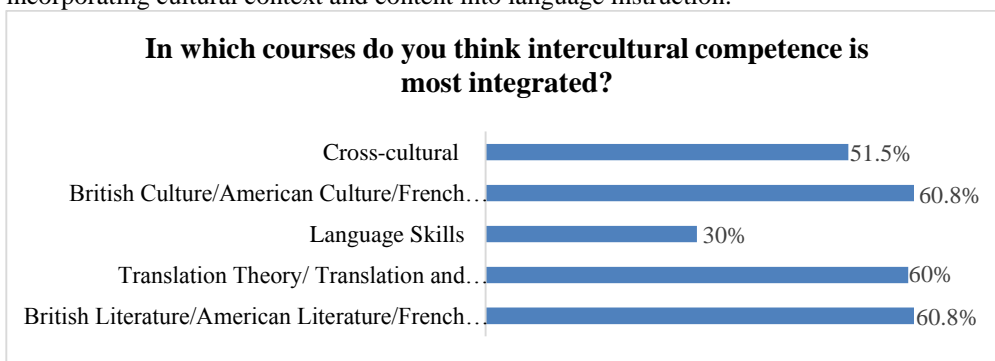


Figure 2I Courses that integrate cultural elements

Furthermore, a large percentage of sampled students recognized the significance of IC in enhancing language skills and expressed their willingness to engage with multi-cultural tasking and to work in multicultural environments. This underscores the value of IC as a vital asset for success in diverse cultural interactions as characterized by language students at UD-UFLS (**Table 2**)

Questions	Yes (=%)	No (=%)
5. Do you think intercultural competence helps you develop language skills?	97,7	2,3
6. Do you want to work in a multicultural environment in the future?	93,8	6,2
7. Do you believe intercultural competence can support your personal capabilities after graduation?	95,4	4,6

Table 2 Perception of the Significance of Intercultural Competence

The survey findings also reveal a wide range of intercultural development activities that the research participants have engaged in, which well indicates a multifaceted approach to cultivating intercultural competence. The high participation rates in travel experiences (45.8%) and cultural and literary exposure (57%) emphasized the value placed on immersive, experiential learning. These activities, along with the integration of intercultural content into the curriculum (52.3%) and extracurricular activities (44.9%) assisted in providing students with ample opportunities to deepen their intercultural understanding and thus social empathy. However, the low participation rate (0.9%) in student exchange programs suggests that educational institutions should strive to make these transformative opportunities more accessible and inclusive by addressing logistical and financial barriers.

Questions	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Deviatio
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	n				
I find it challenging to communicate with others when I am in different psychological states or moods.	130	1	5	3.58	.971
I struggle with listening or speaking due to the quality of pronunciation, speed, and intonation of teachers or fellow students.	130	1	5	3.53	1.072
I encounter barriers in language style due to violations of the rules and conventions of individual language styles.	130	1	5	3.47	1.013
I have difficulties understanding or reasoning from the statements or thought processes of teachers or students.	130	1	5	3.38	1.067
I feel challenged in comprehending information due to semantic barriers related to my own personal life experiences.	130	1	5	3.41	1.017
I find it difficult when my goals and motivations do not align with those of others.	130	1	5	3.20	1.162
I experience challenges in working and interacting due to the organizational structure of the team and the relationships between individuals.	130	1	5	3.39	1.045
Valid N (listwise)	130	1	5		

Table 3 Difficulties or challenges when experiencing in studies and work related to different cultures

Table 3 presents the difficulties and challenges encountered by UD-UFLS students in their studies and work related to different cultures. The findings indicate that the research participants struggled the most when maintaining effective communication in times of psychological or mood fluctuations (mean=3.58). This was followed by the difficulties experienced with listening and speaking due to linguistic and paralinguistic barriers and differences in personal communication styles and norms, as well as semantic barriers related to understanding information based on personal life experiences (mean=3.53 and =3.41 respectively). However, the surveyed students seemed relatively adept at aligning their goals with those of their peers or instructors with a lower mean (3.20). Overall, addressing these challenges through support services, training programs, and inclusive learning environments is deemed crucial for empowering students to develop their ICs. In what follows, the perceptions of UD-UFLS students towards IC will be presented.

Questions	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Deviation
I can easily adapt to the behaviors and expressions of different cultural backgrounds.	130	1	5	3.43	1.041
I feel confident when entering unfamiliar cultural environments and situations.	130	1	5	3.21	1.076
I possess the ability to manage and effectively resolve conflicts when interacting with diverse cultural backgrounds.	130	1	5	3.19	1.035
I can recognize and confront my own cultural biases and stereotypes.	130	1	5	3.30	1.054
I demonstrate empathy and respect towards individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds.	130	1	5	3.75	1.050
I have the capacity to identify and understand non-verbal messages and cultural nuances in interactions with people from various cultural backgrounds.	130	1	5	3.34	1.008
I am open to learning from and embracing multicultural experiences.	130	1	5	3.88	1.101

I actively engage in activities aimed at enhancing understanding and promoting intercultural collaboration.	130	1	5	3.65	1.063
Valid N (listwise)	130	1	5		

Table 4 Self-evaluation of intercultural competence on a scale

As data from Table 4 indicate, UD-UFLS students possess a moderate to strong level of IC based on their own perceptions and experiences. A key strength highlighted by the data is the students' openness and willingness to engage with diverse cultures and perspectives. The high mean score of 3.8 on the item assessing "willingness to learn and acquire experiences from diverse cultures" indicates that these students actively seek out opportunities to expand their intercultural understanding. This aligns with research demonstrating that openness and curiosity are essential components of IC development (Deardorff, 2006).

Additionally, the students report a strong desire to participate in activities aimed at enhancing their IC (mean=3.65). This proactive attitude suggests that the UD-UFLS programme may be successfully fostering an environment that encourages students to engage in intercultural learning and growth. Providing ample opportunities for students to collaborate, communicate, and immerse themselves in diverse cultural contexts can be instrumental in cultivating IC (Salisbury, 2015).

A particularly encouraging finding is that the students demonstrate a significant degree of empathy and respect towards individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds (mean=3.75). Empathy, which involves understanding and sharing the feelings of others is a vital interpersonal skill that enables effective intercultural communication and collaboration (Deardorff, 2006). By developing empathy, these students are better equipped to navigate and appreciate cultural differences.

Although the overall results indicate a generally positive level of self-perceived IC among UD-UFLS students, the mean scores ranging from 3.2 to 3.9 suggest that there is still room for growth and development. It is advisable for educational institutions to continue prioritizing the integration of intentional intercultural learning experiences within their curricula and co-curricular activities to further strengthen students' IC (Deardorff & Jones, 2012).

2. The Potential of Applying Project-based Learning in Developing Intercultural Competence among UD-UFLS Students

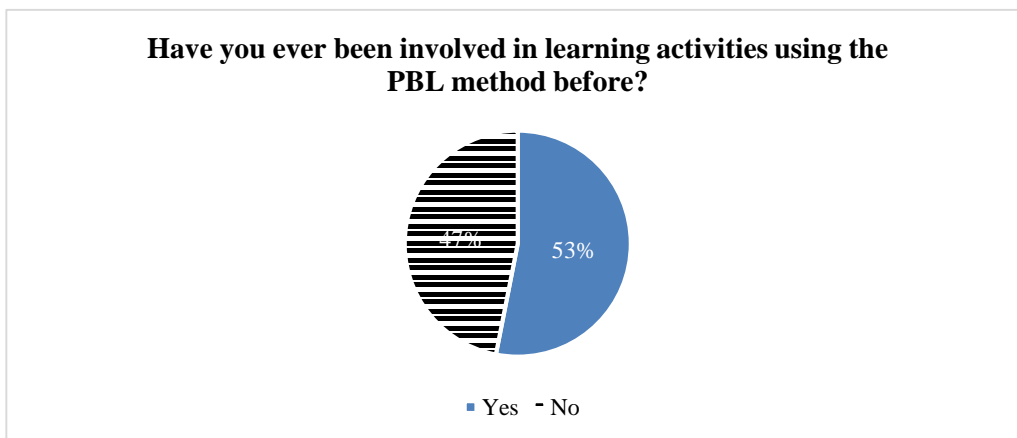


Figure 3 Students' Experience with PBL

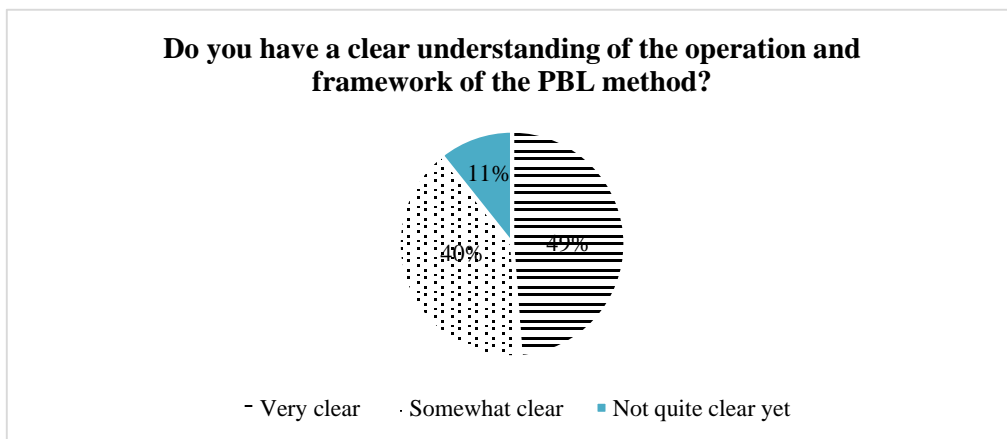


Figure 4II Students' Understanding of How PBL works and Its Structure

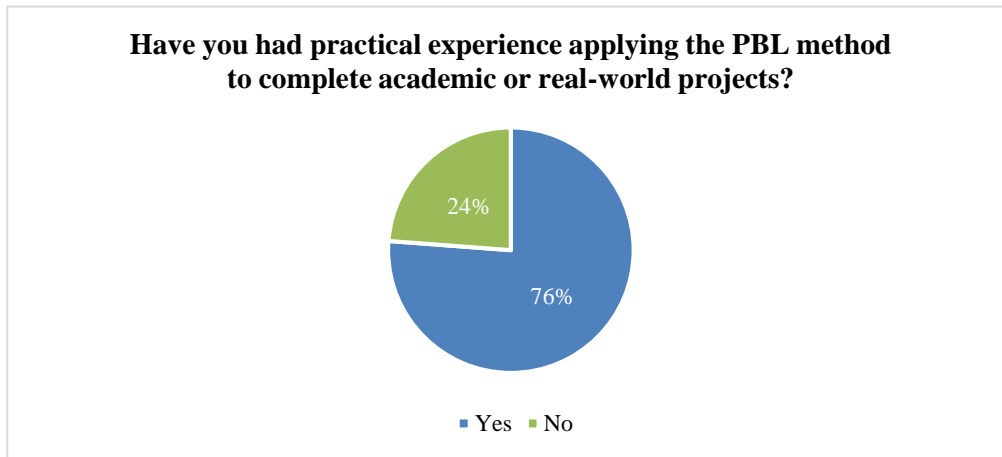


Figure 5 Practical Experience in Applying PBL in Academic or Real-World Projects

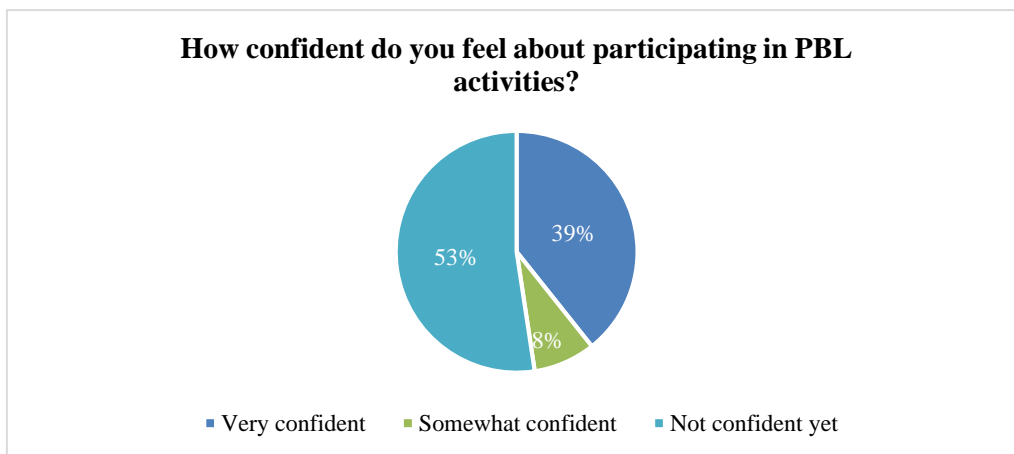


Figure 6III Students' Confidence in participating in PBL activities

The survey results (Figures 3 - 6) reveal that a significant percentage of research participants experienced prior engagement in Project-based Learning (PBL), demonstrating their recognition of its advantages and effectiveness. However, there were also those who had not experienced project-based activities, highlighting the need to address the lower participation rate among them. Among those who had engagement in PBL, the findings reveal a favorable trend in their understanding and practical experiences with this instructional approach. While a considerable portion of the surveyed students demonstrated comprehension of PBL, others had varying degrees of awareness, and a small percentage lacked a clear understanding of it. Most respondents also had practical experience in applying PBL to complete academic or real-world projects, emphasizing its practical benefits in developing language and intercultural communication skills. The participants under survey also expressed a reasonable level of confidence in participating in PBL activities, indicating their readiness to actively engage and succeed with their projects. However, a small percentage lacking confidence was noted, suggesting the need for further investigation and targeted support to ensure the active involvement and success of all participants in PBL attempts.

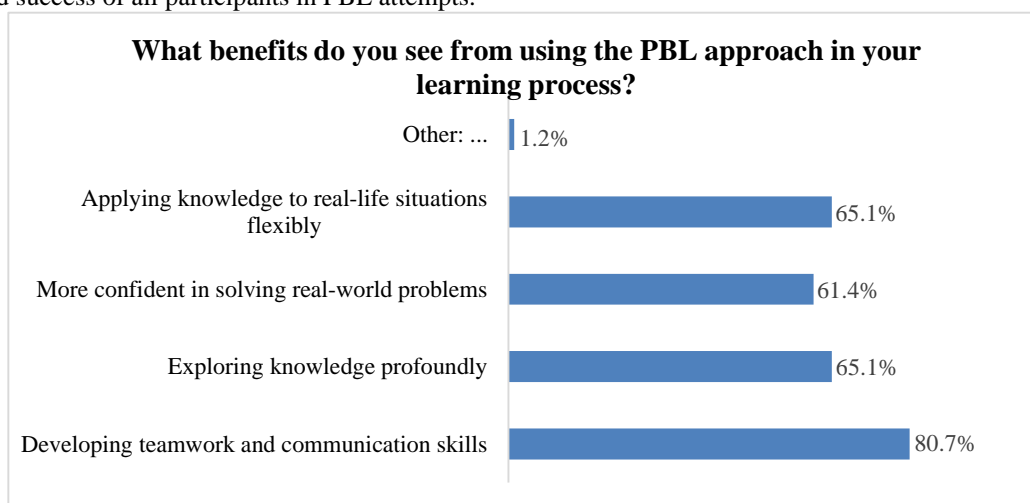


Figure 7 Advantages associated with utilizing the PBL approach in the learning process

Regarding the benefits perceived by UD-UFLS respondents, it can be seen from Figure 7 that several benefits associated with the PBL approach were recorded in the learning process. Approximately 80.7% of the participants advocated the use of PBL, claiming that PBL enabled teamwork and communication skills to be enhanced, emphasizing the collaborative nature of PBL.

Moreover, 65.1% stated that PBL could allow for the flexible application of knowledge to real-life situations, bridging the gap between theory and practice. Additionally, 61.4% commented that PBL fostered confidence in solving real-world problems, highlighting its positive impact on problem-solving skills. Furthermore, the remaining 1.2% acknowledged the role of PBL in bolstering the development of critical thinking, media literacy, joint problem-solving, collaboration, and public speaking skills, which well indicate its holistic approach to skill development. From the follow-up interviews, UD-UFLS students perceived PBL as an efficient way to enhance communication, teamwork, and problem-solving skills in an intercultural context. They also stressed that the project-based nature of PBL ensures that the intercultural knowledge and skills being developed are current and up-to-date.

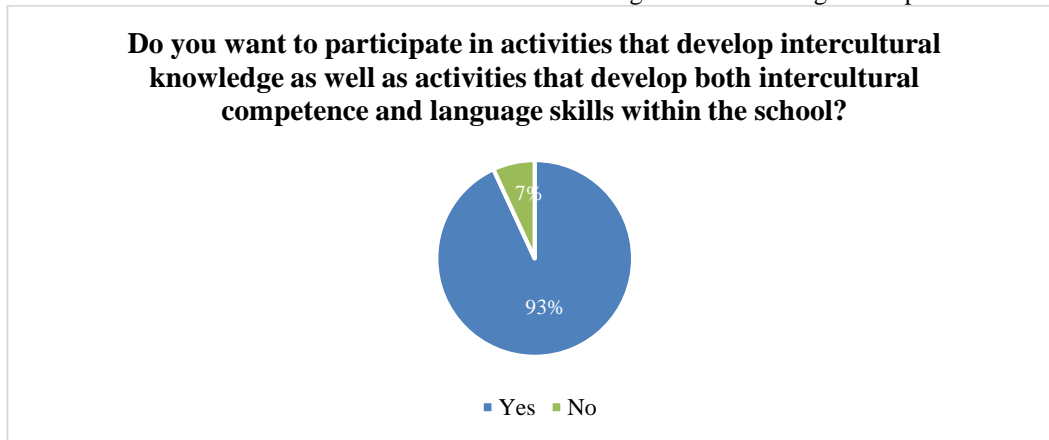


Figure 8 Demand among UD-UFLS Students for Participating in IC Activities

Concerning Figure 8, among the participants under surveyed, an overwhelming 93.1 percent expressed a strong inclination towards engaging in intercultural development activities. This enthusiastic response elucidates the high demand for engaging in activities that enrich learning experiences intertwined with deeper cross-cultural understanding. Notably, even the small percentage (6.9%) who indicated otherwise contributed valuable perspectives that could warrant further exploration, since being able to figure out the reasons behind their little involvement could provide insights into possible barriers or challenges to intercultural engagement.

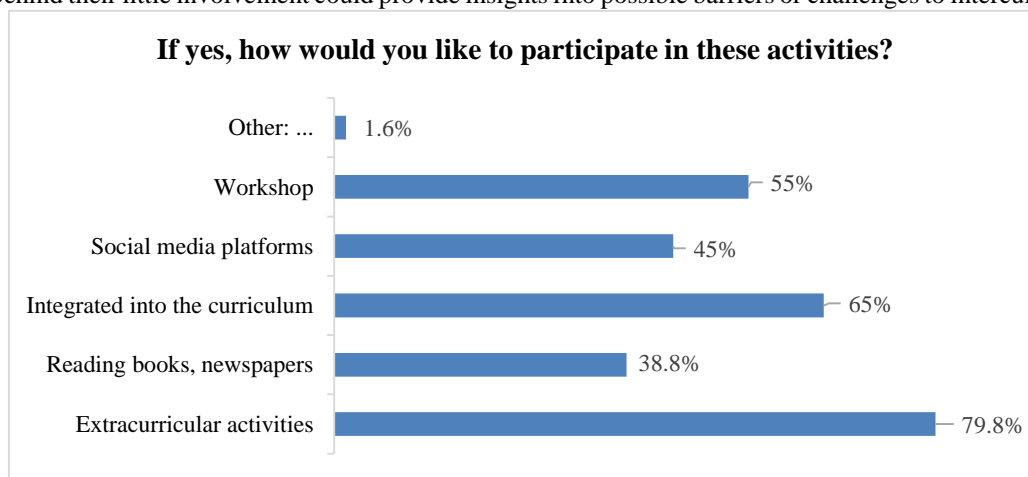


Figure 9 Types of Activities Suggested in Enhancing IC

With respect to types of PBL activities, as Figure 9 shows, most students (79.8%) preferred engaging in intercultural activities through extracurricular activities, indicating a strong interest in informal and interactive experiences. Up to 65.1% of the respondents expressed a desire for intercultural activities to be integrated into their academic curriculum, recognizing the value of structured intercultural education. Workshops were the preferred format for 55% of students, while 45% showed interest in engaging with intercultural content through social media platforms. Reading books and newspapers was chosen by 38.8% of participants, indicating a desire for self-directed exploration. Experiential learning and community activities were the least favored option, chosen by only 0.8% of the surveyed students.

This leads to the project "Cultural Kaleidoscope" to help these students explore in more depth and to examine different cultural aspects with an aim to improve their language acquisition through a deeper grasp of cultural values. The project "Cultural Kaleidoscope" serves as an example of how PBL can contribute to the development of intercultural competence. The project's nature, which involves working on relevant projects that stem from real needs and interests, ensures that students' intercultural knowledge and skills are constantly updated and expanded. The final product of this project comprises eight chapters. Each chapter includes three main parts: (i) Forgotten Traditions, (ii) Hidden Gems, (iii) Culinary Adventures. Alongside the three primary sections outlined in each chapter, an additional "Did You Know?" section has been incorporated to offer intriguing facts about these varied cultural landscapes (See the cover of the project output and the content section in electronic form via the QR code in **Figure 10**).



Figure 10 Final Products: E-version and Printed Version



Figure 11 Cultural Kaleidoscope Fanpage

By participating in a project like this, the students enjoyed enormous opportunities to enhance their communication, teamwork, and problem-solving skills in a multicultural context, as reported by UD-UFLS participants. The project-based approach of "Cultural Kaleidoscope" seemingly well aligns with the holistic development of skills, including critical thinking, media literacy, joint problem-solving, collaboration, and public speaking. After these eight chapters were published, a survey was conducted through an event on our Fanpage (Figure 11) to collect feedback and responses from UD-UFLS students about our project product. Most of them expressed positive feedback on this project. They stated that they enjoyed intriguingly exploring cultural values using excellent visual aids through the lens of a Cultural Kaleidoscope, which sharpens their cultural thinking and which expands their intercultural horizons.

The findings and discussions as mentioned above emphasize the potential of Project-based Learning, particularly through projects like "Cultural Kaleidoscope," in promoting IC among UD-UFLS students. Further research and targeted support are thus recommended to maximize the effectiveness of PBL and to ensure the active involvement of all participants towards their enrichment of cultural values, thus developing their intercultural competence.

3. Benefits and Challenges Experienced by Students in Integrating PBL in Developing IC at UD-UFLS

During the interviews, the participants shared various perspectives on the benefits and challenges of integrating PBL to foster IC at UD-UFLS. The data from the interviews revealed that PBL provides opportunities for students to delve into different cultures, thereby broadening their understanding of diverse cultures. They expressed that through PBL activities they could enhance their cultural knowledge while sharpening their intercultural awareness. By working on projects that require the investigation and study of various cultural contexts, these students stated that they could gain in-depth information about cultural practices, traditions, and beliefs, enabling them to become more knowledgeable about other cultures and better able to value and accept cultural diversity. Additionally, PBL helps develop critical thinking, problem-solving, cooperative group work, and effective communication skills. The interviewees said they were encouraged to discuss their opinions, overcome cultural differences, and find common ground when collaborating with peers from diverse cultural backgrounds. As a result, they all agreed that they could become more flexible in group work and see improvements in their collaboration skills, communication, critical thinking, and problem-solving.

One fundamental advantage of using PBL in developing IC which was noted is that PBL enhances language proficiency and cultural awareness simultaneously. The students expressed that exploring a new culture enabled them to spark their motivation to embrace its language and become more proficient in it. Through project-based cultural exploration, the students were inspired to advance their language skills for more effective communication. This mutual association between acquiring language skills and appreciating various cultures has a role in encouraging students to interact with these cultures and deepen their understanding. It can be said that PBL facilitates active knowledge-seeking and sharing about various cultures, as the participatory nature of the projects encourages curiosity and engagement. Furthermore, PBL necessitates the employment of various innovative presentation

forms to vividly communicate intercultural competence and ensure that it stays long on the students' minds.

However, implementing project-based cross-cultural learning also poses challenges. Some interviewees expressed that the main challenge in developing IC through PBL is the limitation of cultural understanding. The vast amount of cultural knowledge available on social media often confuses them, making it difficult to assess the authenticity of the information. Besides, students and even educators may lack the knowledge and skills necessary to recognize trustworthy and accurate information about various cultures as well as their diverse manifestations. Misconceptions, preconceptions, and biased information can hinder genuine investigation and understanding of diverse cultures.

Another challenge raised by interviewees is the inadequate learning environment and insufficient understanding of PBL among students. Without doubt, many educational establishments do not have adequate facilities to enable effective PBL implementation. Added to this may be insufficient understanding amongst educators of the principles and methodologies of PBL, which hinders their endeavours to create an effective framework for IC development. The time-consuming nature of PBL, including careful planning, coordination, and evaluation, can pose additional difficulties for educators and students. This brings to the fore the importance of proper time management and monitoring of the project plan. Additionally, evaluating intercultural competency is a complex task. Many interviewees documented that traditional assessment methods may not capture the multifaceted nature of intercultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes that have been developed through PBL. In this sense, innovative assessment strategies incorporating qualitative observations, introspection, and feedback from various perspectives are needed to better gauge the achievement of intercultural learning outcomes.

Given these challenges, the benefits of project-based cross-cultural learning in developing IC were considered substantial amongst all respondents, and these positive comments may fuel the urge to integrate practical and relevant projects tailored to meet students' diverse needs while facilitating continuous growth in cultural understanding and intercultural competence.

V. CONCLUSION

The study has shown attempts in using Project-based Learning or PBL as an activating tool to develop the intercultural competence (IC) amongst students at UD-UFLS. Through the quantitative and qualitative data collected via survey questionnaire, the perceptions of 130 students at UD-UFLS reveal a generally positive outlook towards the development of IC. Most students under survey expressed confidence in various IC domains, be they cultural awareness, communication, or openness to diversity, yet acknowledged areas for improvement, notably the desire for increased exposure to diverse cultures as well as more effective cultivation of IC within UD-UFLS programs. The study has also thrown some light into the efficacy of adopting PBL as an approach in fostering IC among UD-UFLS students with high levels of student engagement, comprehension, and confidence in implementing project-based activities, alongside perceived benefits in problem-solving, communication, and real-world application. This highlights the potential effectiveness of using PBL to nurture IC amongst students.

While integrating PBL to develop IC at UD-UFLS offers notable advantages, ranging from enhanced communication, teamwork, to better multicultural problem-solving, it also presents challenges. These include hurdles during implementation like time constraints, assessment complexities, and limited support persist. However, it can be concluded that the substantial benefits accrued from project-based intercultural learning outweigh these obstacles, making it a valuable strategy for honing essential intercultural competencies within a higher educational setting like UD-UFLS.

The findings from the study offer several implications for language teachers in particular and educators in general in enhancing intercultural competence for students. Firstly, by integrating PBL activities targeting IC development, educators can foster students' intercultural understanding, at the same time, enhancing their communication, critical thinking and problem-solving. Secondly, with projects requiring collaboration among students from diverse cultural backgrounds, the adoption of PBL can nurture a multicultural learning environment with multicultural collaboration and teamwork being sharpened and enhanced. Thirdly, addressing faculty training and support is imperative for effective PBL implementation. Clearly, with appropriate emphasis on intercultural components as well as PBL practices, support strategies are needed to be in place for handling language and cultural barriers when conducting multi-cultural projects. Adequate time allocation as well as robust assessment methods tailored to PBL objectives and IC are also essential, and so is creating a supportive learning environment through initiatives like intercultural clubs and cultural exchange programs which foster diversity appreciation. In other words, prioritizing IC development through PBL is ideal for UD-UFLS students to develop the knowledge and skills needed to thrive for success in diverse multicultural work settings.

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