

Management education: focusing on intercultural aspects

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Abstract

Problem of a current education is still relatively significant attention devoted to theoretical knowledge. Practice and students themselves call for more practical experience. Some subjects/courses provide more space for the use of creative teaching methods and experiential learning (enabling students to learn through experience/by doing). One of these courses is Intercultural management and Corporate Culture. This article presents current knowledge and researches in teaching intercultural respectively cross-cultural issues (e.g. management and communication) as well as personal experience (as a teacher/lecturer of three “intercultural” subjects/courses at the Faculty of Management, University of Prešov, namely: Intercultural Management and Corporate Culture, Intercultural Communication in Tourism, and Cross-cultural Management on the Erasmus program) with teaching this issues.

Key words Education, intercultural, cross-cultural, management, learning

1. Introduction

The effects of globalization are changing requirements for management education. The key question is whether the current education of managers is effective and appropriately adjusted. Since the globalized world put people from different culture background to a larger number of interactions and closer contact, the attention in this article is given to teaching of intercultural management (which should lead to the development of intercultural competence of students – future workforce and (perhaps) managers.

Very important in educational process is educational/learning experience and motivation. Understanding students' motivation is the key to enhancement of the students' experience, performance and success. It seems that grades are not the only motivator for students; there is a number of other factors, e.g. perceived value of assignment or points in relation to total course grade points that determine the extent of effort students expend for a particular subject/course (project or exam). Teachers should use methods and teaching practices that motivate students and encourage them to do well in a class. Very important for student motivation is also comfortable and safe classroom environment (Azriel et. al, 2005).

2. Traditional versus creative and experiential teaching/learning strategies

A very important issue in education is to motivate student to learn and actively participate in learning. In this context, facilitating effective experiential learning activities could be a very useful and

effective educational form. Through experiential learning the concepts are “formed and modified by experience” (Kolb, 1984, in Pillay&James, 2013). “Experiential learning is also referred to as learning through action, learning by doing, learning through experience, and learning through discovery and exploration” (http://www.niu.edu/facdev/resources/guide/strategies/experiential_learning.pdf).

Experiential learning emphasises the learner's perspective, which is crucial to the experiential learning concept. The word “experiential” means that learning and development are achieved through personally determined experience and involvement, rather than on received teaching or training, typically in group, by observation, listening, study of theory or some other transfer of skills or knowledge. The major advantage of experiential learning is that it represents a powerful way to address individual growth and potential, produces positive emotional effects - confidence, self-esteem, and a sense of personal value and purpose (www.businessballs.com). Experiential education is often contrasted with didactic education, in which the teacher's role is to “give” information/knowledge to student and to prescribe study/learning exercises which have “information/knowledge transmission” as the main goal (Neill, 2005). Achieving learning objectives through experiential methodologies equip students with abilities, knowledge and greater awareness of certain real-world phenomena (Kolb and Kolb, 2005; Kayes, 2002; Kolb, 1984; Yamazaki and Kayes, 2004, in Pillay&James, 2013, p. 9).

Experiential learning is also possible to use when creating or developing intercultural competence of students. This form of teaching/learning is – according Pillay and James (2013) – very effective in developing intercultural competence i.e. in making greater awareness of cross-cultural differences and better understanding of behaviour when working with people from different cultures. “The growing emphasis on experiential approaches may be attributed to the ever increasing mobility of people across borders” (Ng et al., 2009, in Pillay&James, 2013, p. 9). In relation to this topic, Szkudlarek et al. (2013) state that the teaching of cross-cultural competence seems to be especially demanding. In recognizing the need to help people develop cross-cultural skills we are also realizing that our pedagogies do not match the complexity of this task. “There is some evidence that a combination of lecture and experiential methods is particularly effective (Bhawuk, 1998; Gannon & Poon, 1997; Mendenhall et al., 2004, in Fischer, 2011, p. 798), as they balance the objective of training (involving cognition, affect and behaviour) and involvement of participants” (Brislin, 1989, in Fischer, 2011, p. 798). Mary Yoko Brannen in her interview (in Szkudlarek et al., 2013) also argues in favour of experiential teaching methods in teaching intercultural management. She claims that she always start with experiential exercises, because through them the students have an automatic reaction and expectations about how behaviour shifts.

“Traditional methods emphasize direct transmission of knowledge and maintain these processes through inflexible structures which limit the engagement of learners in innovation, discovery and mental growth. Problem-solving and inquiry oriented approaches on the other hand, offer opportunities for exploring and discovering complexities, involving learners with the process of learning, and enhancing internal motivation. It is through such processes that the practice of creative learning and teaching can be established and maintained” (Hosseini, 2011).

“Creative learning affects all dimensions of teaching and learning and supports the development of new ways thinking, acting and being”. For transformation of the traditional teaching procedures a comprehensive change is required, while the main principles of this change are as follows:

1. Providing the university students with the motivation;
2. Emphasizing learners' involvements in teaching;
3. Attending the practical and functional strategies in teaching;
4. Considering the collective learning in teaching;
5. Encouraging the research and attending the research in the education;
6. Providing the opportunity for thinking, analyzing, criticizing, and solving the problem;

7. Offering opportunity for creative thinking (Hosseini, 2011, p. 1810).

3. Intercultural/cross-cultural education as a part of management education

Globalization, internationalism and workforce diversity increases the contacts and interactions among people from different national, cultural or religious backgrounds. According Joy and Poonamallee (2013) cross-cultural aspects began to feature in management education more than three decades ago, while the original purpose of cross-cultural teaching was to sensitize managers of multinational corporations to foreign cultures, and equip them with skills to successfully interact with people from cultures other than their own. The world has changed drastically, now more people have frequent interactions with colleagues located in other countries and more people work culturally heterogeneous workplaces.

“Cross-cultural management has been one of the most practice-oriented areas in management. The curricula and pedagogy are usually aimed at imparting knowledge and skills that can be applied in practice”. The courses cover basic conceptualizations of culture and explore its impact on different interpersonal processes (such as communication, negotiation, conflict resolution, teamwork, etc.) or human resource management practices. “Self-assessment of cross-cultural skills and experiential exercises for skill development also often feature in pedagogy” (Joy & Poonamallee, 2013, p. 403). “In order the teaching of cross-cultural management to inexperienced students to be really effective, teachers can not rely entirely on textbook based lectures and a formal examination” (Orpen, 2003, p. 81). Teaching of cross-cultural management should move from a focus on the content to a focus on the learning process: from cognitive knowledge, toward cognitive experience and transformation (Szkudlarek et al., 2013).

“The goal of intercultural training is to prepare individuals to deal effectively with cultural differences” (Fischer, 2011, p. 768). There are various different training approaches. One distinction is based on the fact how great is participant involvement (high, medium or low), another classification focuses on the intervention and objectives (is to change cognitions, affect or behaviour) Brislin, 1989, in Fischer, 2011). One of the most common methods is the lecture (student “passive”) method, in which participants are lectured passively on some specific culture-related topic. This approach has some positives - cost-effectiveness of lectures, the non-threatening nature, the possibility to transmit large amounts of information in short time and the high acceptability by participants (Fowler & Blohm, 2004, in Fischer, 2011). On the other side, the passive nature and the lack of active engagement/involvement with the topic might hinder its effectiveness (Bhawuk & Brislin, 2000, in Fischer, 2011). And this is the main reason for the application of experiential and activating forms learning on the Intercultural Management and Corporate Culture (IM&CC) course.

Experience shows that cross-cultural management is easier to teach to undergraduate students, than to older managers (who have worked overseas and had received experience with people from different cultures). Their lack of foreign experience makes it more likely that such students will be open minded about other cultures (Orpen, 2003). My personal experience is that students are ethnocentric, have garbled information as well as many prejudice and stereotypes regarding other cultures. In this context, the indisputable importance of intercultural education lies in the fact that it helps to “break down” many cultural prejudices and stereotypes and develop intercultural competence (including intercultural communication competence).

Orpen (2003) based on several years of experience have found it useful to get his students to make presentations to the remainder of the class on selected countries. Author emphasizes that this strategy to work well, the presentations need to be carefully integrated into the rest of the course. Author's experience has been that students prefer to concentrate, in each presentation, on a particular country of

their choice (one that really interests them and which they feel has significance of some kind). Often is a country with which they have some familiarity, for example they have visited it or have contacts there.

This form of learning i.e. using presentation is (together with other forms) also applied on the courses Intercultural Management and Corporate Culture (on the Master's degree program), Intercultural Communication in Tourism (on the Bachelor's degree program), and Cross-cultural Management (on the Erasmus program). A different strategy is applied on the Erasmus program (due to the diversity of "cultures" in the group) where students present their own culture and are looking for similarities and differences with other cultures, which members (representatives) are in the study group. In the first two subjects - with respect to their mono-cultural composition - in becoming familiar with different cultures are used the presentation on the specifics of cultures of selected country (containing the general characteristics of the culture: customs, traditions, greetings, communication including taboo topics, religion, food (national as well as prohibited), business meetings - planning, execution, rituals such as business cards exchange, dressing etc.)

Part of the quality of education improvement is a feedback in the form of a questionnaire survey. With regard to the above-mentioned subjects, there are two feedback possibilities. The first one is the students' online survey (anonymous questionnaire feedback) through academic information system in which students express their opinion generally on the study programme (curriculum) and/or on the individual subject/course (more precisely, it is focused on the teacher/lecture and his/her abilities and characteristics). Another form of feedback is (own) questionnaire survey, which is conducted directly in lessons on the last week of the semester. This survey was conducted in the academic year 2014/2015. We will focus on two questions from the questionnaire concerning the methods and forms of teaching on IM&CC course, namely:

1. appropriateness of teaching methods used on IM&CC course,
2. appropriateness of learning about different countries and their cultures through presentations.

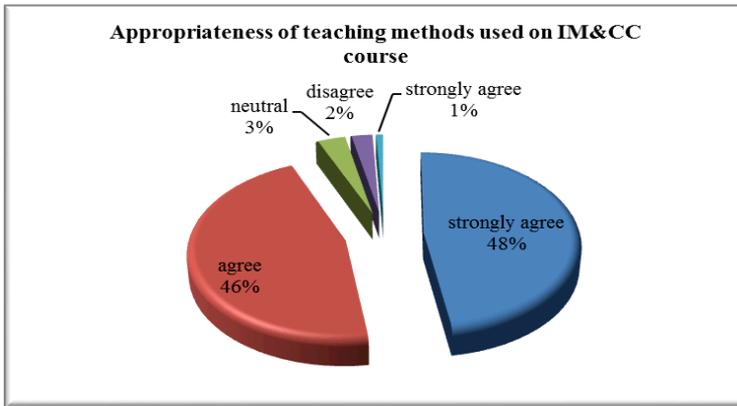
4. Methodology

The primary data were collected through survey in the form of self-coined and self-administered questionnaires. Research sample consists of students of Faculty of Management, University of Prešov enrolled in a two-year (full-time study) master's degree program and attending a IM&CC course (which is included in the first year of study). This course is designed for both full-time and part-time students, but only full-time students have seminars on which they prepared presentation on different cultures. That is why our attention was focused on the full-time students while the entire group of full-time students who attend the course were surveyed. From the total number of 127 students, 124 of them participated in the survey (98% of the population). The questionnaire items were scaled on five-point Likert scale (1 - strongly agree, 2 - agree, 3 - neutral, 4 - disagree, 5 - strongly disagree) on which respondents expressed agreement with the (positively formulated) statements/sentences.

5. Research findings and conclusions

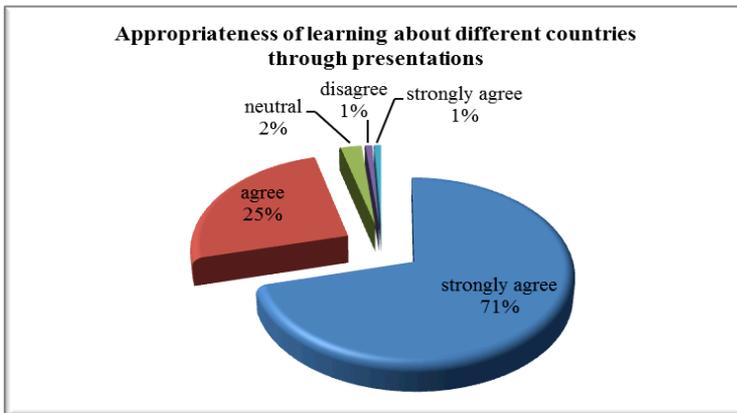
In the first statement: "Teaching methods used on the IM&CC course are appropriate" the average of responses of 1.63 and median of 2 indicate an agreement with the statement. Following chart illustrate relative frequency of answers to the question of the appropriateness of teaching methods used on IM&CC course.

Figure 1 Appropriateness of teaching methods



In the second statement: "I consider presentation an appropriate form of learning about different countries/culture" were the results even better, because the average of responses of 1.35 (a median of 1) indicate high agreement with the statement. Chart in Figure 2 illustrate relative size of answers to the question of the appropriateness of learning about different countries and their cultures through presentations.

Figure 2 Appropriateness of presentations in learning about different cultures



It can be concluded that the way of teaching (teaching and learning methods) on the IM&CC course - and within this framework the use of presentations for the purpose of familiarizing students with other cultures - is positively perceived by students themselves. My several year personal experience in teaching this subject shows that students in order to prepare perfect presentations are extremely creative and inventive. In study groups is often possible to see a sort of natural "contest" about who prepare better and more interesting presentation. I think that this form of "competition" is a form of motivation which activates students' potential.

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