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EFFECTIVE TOOLS TO INTEGRATE CHINESE STUDENTS INTO ESL LEARNING PROCESS

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Abstract

Due to the increasing number of Chinese students at RUDN University in Russia teachers of foreign languages face new challenges caused by specific educational background of students from China. Teaching English to students from China is based on the profound understanding of strong differences of their learning style and educational background. In this respect, interpersonal, intercultural, interactive climate of the ESL lesson helps to facilitate the process of integration and psychological adaptation. To make the process of teaching English more effective the method of projects is employed and it favours students with different educational cultures. The method of projects systemizes regular work with the variety of activities which are suitable for students with special strength in different intelligences. Each project is preceded by individual tasks, exercises and methodological recommendations developed by the authors to prepare students for pair and team work. The method of projects is an effective tool to integrate students from China into educational process in multicultural groups at RUDN University. Such topics as "Outstanding people of my country", "Generation gap" contribute to students' engagement in team building, develop their communicative skills and highlight their talents. The activities are designed to present their work orally or using computer-supplied facilities to develop a sense of integration and collaboration due to their personal input in this creative process.

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1. Introduction

RUDN University is one of the leading state higher educational institutions of Russia which admits students from more than 145 countries every year. One of the reasons why foreign students choose RUDN University is that along with a basic diploma they have an opportunity to get a qualification of a translator in the field of professional communication. Due to the increasing number of Chinese students at the University teachers of foreign languages face new challenges caused by specific educational background of students from China.

2. Problem Statement

In this respect, it is important to mention that teachers in China adhere to co-called traditional (old-fashioned from the Western point of view) tasks such as learning by heart, copying plenty of texts and other tasks lacking creative approaches.

Since good results in State Exams provide students with more opportunities to climb the social ladder, family enforce pressure on their children in any possible way. They buy expensive books, computers, tablets and pay for extra tuition. In other words, they do their best for their child to pass the exams successfully. It can be explained by cultural factors which reinforce this trend. "Zhishi touzi" ("investments into knowledge is the best investment"), "wang zi cheng long" (lit. to hope one's son becomes a dragon (idiom); fig. to long for one' s child to succeed in life, as a dragon is a symbol of success, wisdom and strength) are the mottoes of modern Chinese families whose values have roots in Confucianism which influences ways of thinking, behaviour, morals, and upbringing (Zhang, L., 2013; Schuman, 2015; Worrall, S., 2015; Voronchenko, & Korovina, 2017).

N.A. Speshnev in his research "Chinamen: Features of National Psychology" (2012) pinpoints that for centuries morals have been of great importance for the Chinese (p.229).

Along with that, modesty is one of the key values which is cultivated in family and highly appreciated and respected in the community.

"ShuJing" ("Book of History", the collection of ancient Chinese manuscripts dated from 2357 to 627 B.C.) says: "Man zhao sun, qian shouyi, shi nai tiandao" [The proud loses, the modest gains. It is eternal law] (On-line Dictionary of Chinese Idioms).

The essay "Modesty and hypocrisy" by Jin Xianlin (2013) is included in Chinese school programme and in the course of the state exam each student is supposed to demonstrate profound knowledge of concepts and morals of the book.

Moreover, more than 50 pupils is a norm for a traditional Chinese class, which proves lack of opportunities to demonstrate individual abilities and creativity. As a result, school-leavers have difficulty in interpersonal communication and sometimes poor speaking skills. Teachers in China are aware of this problem. Thus, prof. Deng Dafei (2010) in his article "Language and context-centered projects in teaching Business English" (p.178) provides an explanation as to how lack of cultural background and multicultural experiences negatively influences their presentation skills and speaking abilities despite their possibly good level of general English.

3.   Research Questions

Teaching English to students from China is based on the profound understanding of strong differences of their learning style and educational background. In this respect, interpersonal, intercultural, interactive climate of the ESL lesson as well as "novel" positiveness and "a hands-on practice environment for the development of diverse students" (Chunoo, & Osteen, 2016, p.17) helps to facilitate the process of integration and psychological adaptation.

Traditionally, Russian methodology underlines particularly close interrelation between methodology and psychology especially in teaching foreign languages, which implies that speech and thinking are inseparable. Thus, four approaches appear to be the key ones in educational process. They are:

1. Behaviouristic approach which supposes stimulus-reaction interconnection. This approach aims at skills formation by means of intensive training.

2. Induction-consciousness-based approach suggests regular analysis of numerous diverse examples and patterns which gradually facilitate language acquisition.

3. Cognitive approach is realized in acquiring basic elements of linguistics such as phonetics, grammar, etc.

4. So called integrated approach combines conscious and subconscious components of language teaching process.

For the last decades methodologists, psychologists, and teachers from English-speaking countries have highlighted differential approach in teaching foreign languages owing to variety of students' intelligences and types of personality. When forming a class only the level of language that matters, while psychological and other factors such as "channels of perception", "cognitive abilities" (Kurraeva, 2016, p.310) are ignored. But aforementioned factors prove to be crucial in the very process of teaching. In this case we deal with so called "mixed-ability classes" which means that each student has their own individual and specific type of personality. According to psychologist Howard Gardner (1993), there are eight types of intelligences: verbal-linguistic, logical-mathematical, visual-spatial, bodily-kinaesthetic, musical, interpersonal, intrapersonal, naturalistic. Thus, there is a certain evidence to suggest teaching different intelligences requires more interactivity which in its turn largely determines the outcome of a lesson. Rosie Tanner (2001) describes activities to form basic skills (listening, reading, writing, speaking, grammar, vocabulary, literature). A very popular website for teachers (www.teachervision.com) presents a chart which highlights activities which prove to be more productive and resultative for a particular type of intelligence. Table 01 laconically presents learning activities designed for multiple intelligences (see Table 01).

Table 01. Multiple intelligence and learning activities.

Intelligence	Learning activities
Verbal-Linguistic	storytelling, retelling, speaking, debating, presenting, reading aloud, dramatizing, nonfiction reading, researching, listening, writing, writing journals
Logical-Mathematical	problem solving, measuring, coding, sequencing, critical thinking, predicting, playing logic games, collecting data, experimenting, solving puzzles,

	classifying, learning scientific model, using geometry
Visual-Spatial	graphing, photographing, making visual metaphors, making visual analogues, mapping stories, making 3D projects, painting, illustrating, using charts, visualizing, sketching, patterning, visual puzzles
Bodily-Kinaesthetic	hands on experimenting, physical education activities, crafts, dramatizing, using cooperative groups, dancing
Musical	humming, rapping, playing background music, patterns, forms, playing instruments, tapping out poetic rhythms, rhyming, singing
Interpersonal	classroom parties, peer editing, sharing, group work, peer teaching, conflict mediation, discussing, brain storming
Intrapersonal	personal response, individual study, personal goal setting, individual projects, journal log keeping, personal choice in projects, independent reader
Naturalistic	reading outside, cloud watching, identifying insects/plants, using microscope, bird watching, going to the zoo

In this respect, we agree with Rose (1997) who compares the process of learning with the lift. It means that each student is in need to get into the lift. Some of them get inside easily while the others have to nudge. Some of them will get to the top, whereas the others will not get higher than the second/third floor. But each of them makes progress, whatever significant. So, it is important for a student to feel that their presence in class is not a waste of time. Unfortunately, teachers cannot resist "labelling" students as "gifted", "average", "poor", which leads to students' taking it for granted and makes the whole process of teaching and learning less productive and effective.

4. Purpose of the Study

To make the process of teaching English more effective special kinds of activities favour students with different educational cultures.

We believe that there are a number of reasons which influence foreign language acquisition and slow down the educational process in general, but these reasons are not as crucial as they might seem. They are: level of basic knowledge, negative experience of learning a foreign language, learning abilities, motivation, a "poor student" label which is demotivating, a "gifted student" label which is also demotivating as overconfidence does not contribute to further progress.

It is widely agreed that a professional teacher should always keep in mind psychological, physiological and intellectual differences and work with a group as a whole, but at the same time provide activities designed to help various types of learners to use their abilities to their advantage.

In this respect, we find the well-known method of project the most effective technology. It should be noted that according to the challenges we face when dealing with multicultural and mixed-abilities classes, on the one hand, and, in order to meet the educational standards, on the other hand, we try to be flexible in applying this very technology. Moreover, "contrary to traditional methods, projects focus on applying, not imparting, specific knowledge or skills, and more rigorously that lecture, demonstration, or recitation, they aim at the enhancement of intrinsic motivation, independent thinking, self-esteem, and social responsibility" (Michael Knoll "Project Method").

This method can't be called an innovative one. It is noteworthy that the idea of team-work was introduced and promoted in the 18-19th centuries. As for Russia, the method was acquired by progressive

Russian educators in 1920s. Gradually it lost its popularity but when the Soviet Union collapsed enthusiastic teachers turned to the method of project as an effective tool to boost creativity and motivation.

5.   Research Methods

The project method systemizes regular work with the variety of activities which are suitable for students with special strength in different intelligences. Besides, the rapid spread of computer-based technologies contributes to progressive mechanisms of educational process involving method of project.

Under a teacher's supervision and control students are able to choose tasks which has an important positive effect on their learning style. Thus, we offer tasks and activities which vary according to learner's type and intelligence, on the one hand, and the level of English, on the other.

Taking into consideration the fact that the target audience in multicultural mixed-abilities classes are Chinese students, and keeping in mind their specific educational background we encourage and motivate them to be involved in a project. The topics of each project is correlated mainly to the culture and history of their own country as well as the country they study that makes their training interesting and as a result helps them to overcome the shyness.

Teachers and methodologists offer different stages of project method. Knoll (1997) mentions Kilpatrick's (1920-30s) four-phase project method: purposing, planning, executing, and judging. According to Noémi Szállassy (2008), project method has several steps: preparation, the examination of the topic, the elaboration of the action plan, the fulfilment of the action plan, the presentation, evaluation, planning the future. Medvedeva (2015) offers a 3-stage but complex project method: planning (selecting the subject matter), preparation (revision of grammar and vocabulary acquired earlier; choosing proper methodology of presentation; doing library and internet research for a project), presentation (executing the project; judging). At the same time Samokhvalova & Spinu (2016) posit that doing a project requires nine steps: initiating a project; students' planning of project components; a student-teacher discussion of specific goals students are supposed to reach; students' step-by-step plan of presentation; handling problems while preparing a project; the presentation; evaluation of students' performance; evaluation of strengths and weaknesses of projects; including projects into students' portfolios.

While practicing this method we came to the conclusion that the number of steps depends on language skills: the lower the level of English the more detailed the structure of the project is. For example, at the beginner's level (Level 1) we stick to the six-step pattern:

1.Describing the problem of the topic.

2.Dividing the group into teams.

3.Giving out tasks and activities (under the teacher's supervision the tasks are distributed within the team according to the individual's preferences).

4.Mapping of the project (each team's discussion of the activity sequence).

5.Mock presentation (team's demonstration of what is done, what lacks, what goes wrong with the project; mistakes are corrected by the teacher, advice is given).

6.Final presentation which includes not only the presentation but sharing opinions.

Moreover, it is noteworthy that at Level 1 vocabulary scope which limits students' abilities to express ideas on a topic should be taken consideration. Thus, Table 02 illustrates the types of learning activities in the framework of project "Book in our life" (see Table 02):

Table 02. Multiple intelligence and learning activities. Level 1. Topic: Books in our life.

Intelligence	Learning activities
Verbal-Linguistic	Make up a story or write an article/essay about the importance of reading; focus on the fact that reading is a key element in developing human individuality.
Logical-Mathematical	Choose a problem (lack of reading skills, lack of interest in reading, etc.), give arguments and reasons for the problem; offer solutions to the problems.
Visual-Spatial	Carry out a questionnaire among your classmates, friends on the role of books in their life. Make diagrams/charts describing the results of the questionnaire (preferences, genres, favourite authors, the approximate number of books they have read). Present the results of your project.
Bodily-Kinaesthetic	Act out a dialogue in which 1) a student and a teacher, 2) a parent and a child, 3) friends discuss a book.
Musical	Watch or listen to operas, musicals based on a literary work. Or find songs in which a main character of a story/novel is mentioned. Explain the reason for choosing this or that material and the fact of using a literary character in the song.
Interpersonal	Work on your own plays or playscripts. Act out scenes from your plays or the ones of well-known British writers.
Intrapersonal	Talk about yourself or your family/friends. What would you like to change in your/your friends' attitude to reading? Prove that books may have either positive or negative influence on a reader as well as motivate or discourage people from reading.
Naturalistic	Visit 2-3 bookshops and 2-3 internet bookshops, study the genres of books which are available for sale; find out the proportion of the genres presented in both types of shops. While travelling by bus/underground pay attention to people's reading preferences according to their age.

At the pre-intermediate level (Level 2) the list of activities becomes more complex and requires higher skills. Furthermore, such step as mapping of the project is excluded because students are experienced enough and face no difficulty in mapping without the teacher's supervision and coordination. Regular and systematic work with projects sets off the so-called chain reaction which, firstly, results in extension of passive and active vocabulary and, secondly, motivates students to share cultural background with those from other countries. As a rule, students feel very enthusiastic to do projects on the topics related to their home countries (see Table 03):

Table 03. Multiple intelligence and learning activities. Level 2. Topic: Culture of my homeland.

Intelligence	Learning activities
Verbal-Linguistic	Talk about the history of a theatre/museum/art gallery/local TV/art school/art college, etc. Prove it is worth talking about.
Logical-Mathematical	Choose two or more types of art that are fully fledged in you homeland and the one(s) which need(s) governmental support. Think of what might cause the existing situation. Suggest possible solutions to the problem.
Visual-Spatial	Make a diagram, a chart showing aspects of cultural life in your homeland (art galleries, museums, open-air museums, theatres, etc.) using photos, or any

	visual metaphors. Present the results of your project
Bodily-Kinaesthetic	Present types of traditional crafts or dances and their history. Teach one of the crafts or dances to your classmates.
Musical	Collect or sing some traditional songs or rhythms. Explain the reason for choosing this or that material.
Interpersonal	Write a script of an interview with a prominent artist in your homeland (a painter, an actor, a writer, a journalist, a choreographer) and dramatize it.
Intrapersonal	Talk about your own preferences in terms of spending free time to your advantage. Think of how your way differ from the one of young people in your homeland.
Naturalistic	Visit an exhibition/performance/museum and make a report with photos of your own or hold a presentation of what you have visited.

Once students have worked through a set of projects the sense of self-esteem increases. When they reach Intermediate level (Level 3) they become more independent while preparing projects. Thus, steps as dividing the group into teams, mapping of the projects, and mock presentation are omitted. At the same time, the teacher's role is not so crucial now. There is no need to monitor the process but be ready to give advice and provide any information and consultation. Moreover, projects devoted to teens and youth's problems appeal to young people all over the world and they readily talk about them (see Table 04):

Table 04. Multiple intelligence and learning activities. Level 3. Topic: Teens and youth's problems.

Intelligence	Learning activities
Verbal-Linguistic	Interview your friends, peers and collect data or do a kind of research about teens and youth's problems. Make a story about each of them focusing on the causes of the problems. Or present a kind of statistical analysis concerning the increase of crime among young people.
Logical-Mathematical	Choose one of the problems (unemployment, smoking, drug-taking, commission of crimes, etc.), give reasons for such and such problem, classify them and propose the solution for the problems in question.
Visual-Spatial	Read articles, interviews and make a chart or a diagram of teens and youth's problems beginning with the most serious ones to your mind. Present the results of your project.
Bodily-Kinaesthetic	Dramatize the scene and persuade your classmates that the problems in question do real harm on physical and mental health of young people.
Musical	Collect some songs devoted to the youth's problems. Introduce the musicians/bands presenting the song and find out what induced them to choose such and such topic.
Interpersonal	Involve your classmates into discussion concerning the causes of the problems and then into brainstorming in order to try and find possible solution to these problems.
Intrapersonal	Make your personal choice in the project. Think to what extent you changed your attitude to teens and youth's problems after completing the project.
Naturalistic	Take a stroll around the city/town with your camera on and try to take as many pictures as possible concerning this or that problem. Present the results of your project.

Preparation for final performance (making photos, Power Point presentations, searching on the Web for relevant material or music, etc.) really sparks great interest and contributes to generating a lot of language.

6. Findings

The method of projects is an effective tool to integrate students from China into educational process in multicultural groups at RUDN University. Such topics as "Outstanding people/scientists/writers of my home country", "Generation gap", "Challenges of modern world" contribute to students' engagement in team building, develop their communicative skills and highlight their gifts and talents.

At the same time variety of tasks helps determine the ways in which each student is encouraged and motivated to learn foreign languages. The results point to an interesting trend. "Gifted" students share their knowledge and demonstrate their skills, and "poor" students have a brilliant opportunity to catch up with the group. We highlight that it is crucial not to mix and not to confuse such notions as a type of learner or a type of intelligence. The first type does not mean they are always active and enthusiastic, and the second type is shy and "speechless". A teacher should not stick to the stereotype. We witness from time to time that "poor" students are full of enthusiasm. Thus, a teacher's flexibility is significant in choosing ways and methods to encourage, monitor and coordinate learners' work on a project.

The key idea is that this method gives no chances for learning failure. As a result, a student experiences satisfaction and feels value of their personal impact in reaching a team goal.

7. Conclusion

To bring the paper to a close, we summarize the main points here:

- the method of projects ensures proper challenge for Chinese students and keeps them encouraged and motivated;

- a teacher's support provided and received by Chinese students is pleasurable and not just the result of the sense of duty;

- the activities for students in the framework of any project are designed to present their work orally or using computer-supplied facilities to develop a sense of integration and collaboration due to their personal input in this creative process;

- students' awareness of having made progress is undoubtedly a source of motivation, which comes not only from external sources such as wanting to pass the exam and to please their parents but from internal desire to become "a dragon".

Years of experience of working with students from China lead us to believe that they really enjoy being involved in team-work and feel motivated to do it on a regular basis.

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