

CULTURAL AWARENESS LEARNING ACTIVITY IN EFL CLASSES (TECHNICAL UNIVERSITY)

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At the present time the process of globalization has really and truly become a reality: it does not only affect the political, cultural, economic and environmental aspects within which we have to live and operate but also the engineering education aspect. The modern engineering profession needs challenging the nature of engineering practice, demanding far broader skills than simply the mastery of scientific and technological disciplines as the political and economic relations between nations have an impact on engineering practice to a greater extent than before.

Technical skills alone are no longer sufficient in the current climate of increasing globalization in new world of advancing engineering education: intercultural awareness becomes a prime component that facilitates the adaptation of future engineering graduates. Actually, a number of technical university graduates who work abroad or work with people with different cultural backgrounds have encountered difficulties in getting their work done, because the process of doing science and technology activity may not be the same. It is important that engineering students gain awareness of intercultural considerations and cultural dimensions, especially in relation to communication. Modern engineers need to work in teams to be effective and consideration of social issues is central to engineering.

Therefore, one needs to have a broad understanding of the target culture to facilitate cooperation. However, engineering education has not given full confidence in all the opportunities and benefits that may arise from the implementation of cultural awareness in the process of EFL learning and teaching within the university training. Cultural awareness is the basis of communication and it involves the ability of the consciousness of cultural values, beliefs and perceptions. Cultural awareness becomes central when we have to interact with people from other cultures.

The foreign language curriculum of Tomsk polytechnic university (TPU) has incorporated cultural topics and activities into EFL classes. Throughout the EFL course, science students have expressed strong interest in target culture information and have been choosing cultural themes for their projects over technical subjects.

The **purpose of this paper** is to consider examples of effective EFL classes activities within TPU environment that contribute to the development of future engineers' cultural awareness and knowledge.

Three activities can be used to implement the intercultural approach in an EFL classes are described below. These activities have been used with the students of Institute of Physics and Technology and Institute of Non-Destructive Testing at an intermediate level of English proficiency.

Activity 1.

No doubt it is impossible to imagine the English culture without Theatre and William Shakespear as a great part of the English and world culture. The main idea of the activity is to improve and extend students knowledge of the English culture with the help of Shakespear's play Hamlet staged by the second year students of the Faculty of Applied Physics & Engineering as a result of our international collaboration in English teaching with native speaker (*Picture 1*).

The mission of the project is to present visual and performing arts that are affordable and accessible to students – actors and students - viewers as both observers and participants to obtain information about Shakespeare's life, epoch and play Hamlet. This is a great way to enhance students' understanding of Shakespeare and to ensure a deeper level of appreciation for the nuances in the play", to practice listening skills, evaluate and analyze the complexity of Hamlet's situation, his motivations, and the choices and decisions he makes.

Activity 2.

The focus of the activity to holidays, festivals, and celebrations throughout the year can make great starting points for fun and effective EFL classes about language and culture. Holidays, festivals, and celebrations are an integral part of every world culture, and when and how they are celebrated varies greatly across countries and continents. Designing a particular programmer around a special day or tradition can get students excited about speaking, sharing, and learning English.

Holidays, festivals, and celebrations comprise a significant part of all world cultures, and learning about the traditions of other peoples should be a fun and educational part of learning a foreign language. EFL teachers can use special days throughout the year, which can inspire and entertain their students During the academic year the most important holidays in the English-speaking world are Halloween, Christmas, and New Year, Valentine's Day, St. Patrick's Day and Easter allow TPU students for more lighthearted conversations in the process of preparing and organizing special parties to improve their cultural awareness of English-speaking countries.

For example, on the April Fool's Day students decided to arrange celebration as a parody of the popular TV show "Field of Dreams." There was a lot of positivity and humor. Each of the participants (and involved all) came to play responsibly and creatively. Students sang songs, played guitar, recited poems, told amazing stories and legends about themselves (*Picture 2*). That kind of activity turned out not to be only positive emotions event for students, but also the motivated tool to learn English.

Activity 3.

The education method of the round table is used for the effective assimilation of the theoretical problems, as a means of considering them in different aspects of science, synthesis of ideas and opinions of participants on the discussed issues. Round table can consolidate students' prior knowledge, to remedy the lack of any information, develop problem-solving skills, reasoning skills, to teach the culture of debate, which is especially important in learning a foreign language.



Picture 1.



Picture 2.

For example, a round table "On the general trends of the process of learning English in Poland and Russia", with the participation first-year students of the Institute of NDT, teachers and graduate of the University of Wroclaw (Poland), contributed to enhance the interpretation of verbal intercultural communication. (*Picture 3*). The main part of the round table was active discussion and debate on a topic that is much more difficult to organize in the traditional classes. The results of the interview after a roundtable of participating students revealed that 98% of respondents praised the quality of the studies prepared in the form of a round table, 84% of respondents indicated that they were able to overcome the fear of speaking in a foreign language, 86% of the students noted the cognitive nature of the round table.



Picture 3.

Thereby ways to apply activities for the EFL classes described above really can help students to become more confident in 1) their knowledge of the target culture, 2) skills to locate needed information in the target language, 3) strategies to teach themselves English and 4) their ability to adapt in international environment of future.