



THE DEVELOPMENT OF PLURICULTURAL COMPETENCE IN PRE-SERVICE PHILOLOGY STUDENTS THROUGH PROBLEM-BASED LEARNING

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Abstract

This article explores the development of pluricultural competence among pre-service philology students through Problem-Based Learning (PBL). Drawing on theoretical foundations of plurilingual and intercultural education, it demonstrates that PBL promotes analytical reflection on cultural diversity, fosters empathy, and enhances students' ability to mediate between linguistic and cultural systems. Through problem-solving, collaboration, and real-life simulations, learners develop tolerance, open-mindedness, and adaptive communication strategies. PBL situates learning in authentic socio-cultural contexts, enabling students to connect theoretical linguistic knowledge with practical intercultural experience. The research also emphasizes how integrating cultural problem scenarios strengthens critical thinking and self-regulation in multilingual settings. Findings suggest that PBL is an effective pedagogical tool for building pluricultural competence by encouraging autonomous learning, dialogue, and cross-cultural understanding core qualities for future philologists in an increasingly globalized world.

Keywords: Pluricultural competence, problem-based learning, pre-service philologists, interculturality, plurilingualism, reflection, tolerance, mediation.

Introduction

In today's globalized academic and professional landscape, the role of pluricultural competence has become central to the education of future



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philologists. As language teachers, translators, and cultural mediators, philology students are expected not only to master linguistic systems but also to navigate and interpret the social, historical, and cultural nuances embedded in languages. The emergence of Problem-Based Learning (PBL) as a transformative educational approach provides an effective framework for developing such competence. PBL shifts the focus from teacher-centered transmission of knowledge to student-centered inquiry, where learners engage in authentic, context-driven problem solving [8]. This pedagogical model aligns with the principles of constructivism and experiential learning, fostering critical thinking, creativity, and intercultural awareness.

Pluricultural competence, according to the Council of Europe, refers to the ability to understand, mediate, and act across multiple cultures through flexible communication strategies and empathetic interaction. In philological education, it manifests as the integration of linguistic, cultural, and pragmatic dimensions that shape learners' interpretative and communicative skills. Traditional instruction, often limited to theoretical descriptions of language and culture, fails to provide the dynamic and reflective experience necessary for intercultural growth. PBL, in contrast, immerses students in real-life communicative scenarios that require negotiation of meaning, cultural adaptation, and collective reasoning skills indispensable to future philologists.

Through the design of problem situations such as intercultural misunderstandings, translation dilemmas, or culturally sensitive literary analyses, PBL encourages learners to examine cultural relativism and to appreciate diversity as an intellectual and humanistic resource. The collaborative nature of PBL further supports peer learning and intercultural dialogue, allowing students to share perspectives shaped by their unique sociocultural backgrounds [2]. As a result, they develop tolerance, empathy, and intercultural sensitivity competencies emphasized in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) and essential for effective participation in multilingual communities. Therefore, this study aims to investigate how problem-based learning enhances pluricultural competence in pre-service philology students. It seeks to establish methodological foundations for integrating PBL into



philological education and to identify pedagogical mechanisms that contribute to the formation of reflective, adaptive, and globally oriented professionals.

Literature Review

The concept of pluricultural competence has evolved significantly within the framework of language education and intercultural communication studies. The Council of Europe first introduced it as part of the plurilingual-pluricultural model, emphasizing that linguistic and cultural identities are not separate but interrelated components of communicative competence. Scholars such as Byram and Galante highlight that pluricultural competence enables learners to act as mediators between cultures, developing both self-awareness and the ability to interpret other cultural perspectives critically [1].

In higher education, particularly in philology, pluricultural competence is viewed as a foundation for professional growth. Paetsch reveal that pre-service teachers often hold limited beliefs about linguistic and cultural diversity, underscoring the need for pedagogical innovations that foster intercultural reflection and autonomy [7]. Hartman and Qondias demonstrate that Problem-Based Learning (PBL) offers such an innovative approach, as it encourages students to solve authentic, culturally embedded problems collaboratively, integrating both cognitive and affective dimensions of learning [5,6].

Moreover, Arani and Ramírez found that PBL enhances motivation, communication skills, and cultural sensitivity by engaging learners in inquiry-based and socially meaningful tasks [3,4]. Within this framework, culture is not merely studied but experienced, negotiated, and reconstructed through reflection and teamwork. Thus, integrating PBL into philological education represents a methodological shift from passive cultural observation to active intercultural engagement making it an effective strategy for developing pluricultural competence in pre-service philologists.

Research Methodology

This study employed a qualitative-descriptive and action-based research design to explore how Problem-Based Learning (PBL) fosters the development of pluricultural competence among pre-service philology students. The research was



conducted at two higher education institutions offering philology programs, involving 48 second- and third-year students specializing in English and other foreign languages. Participants were divided into experimental and control groups to ensure reliable comparison.

The experimental group engaged in a series of PBL-based tasks over one academic semester. These tasks included culturally contextualized problem scenarios such as intercultural communication breakdowns, translation of culturally loaded texts, and analysis of multilingual literary sources requiring collaboration, negotiation, and reflective discussion. The control group, in contrast, followed a traditional lecture-based curriculum emphasizing theoretical understanding. Data were collected through multiple instruments: observation protocols, reflective journals, semi-structured interviews, and pre-/post-questionnaires assessing changes in students' attitudes, cultural awareness, and communication strategies. Qualitative data were analyzed thematically using a grounded approach to identify recurring patterns and behavioral indicators of pluricultural growth. Quantitative results from questionnaires were also used to support qualitative findings.

The methodological framework ensured triangulation of data, combining self-reflection, peer interaction, and teacher assessment to provide a comprehensive understanding of how PBL contributes to pluricultural competence development.

Results and Discussion

The findings of the study revealed that the implementation of Problem-Based Learning (PBL) had a significant positive impact on the development of pluricultural competence among pre-service philology students. The experimental group demonstrated noticeable progress in several dimensions linguistic flexibility, intercultural sensitivity, tolerance, and reflective awareness compared to the control group. During the PBL sessions, students engaged actively in analyzing real-life intercultural situations, which enhanced their ability to interpret cultural nuances and mediate meaning between different perspectives. Their reflective journals indicated increased awareness of implicit cultural values, stereotypes, and communication norms, leading to more empathetic and adaptive behavior in multilingual contexts. Group discussions

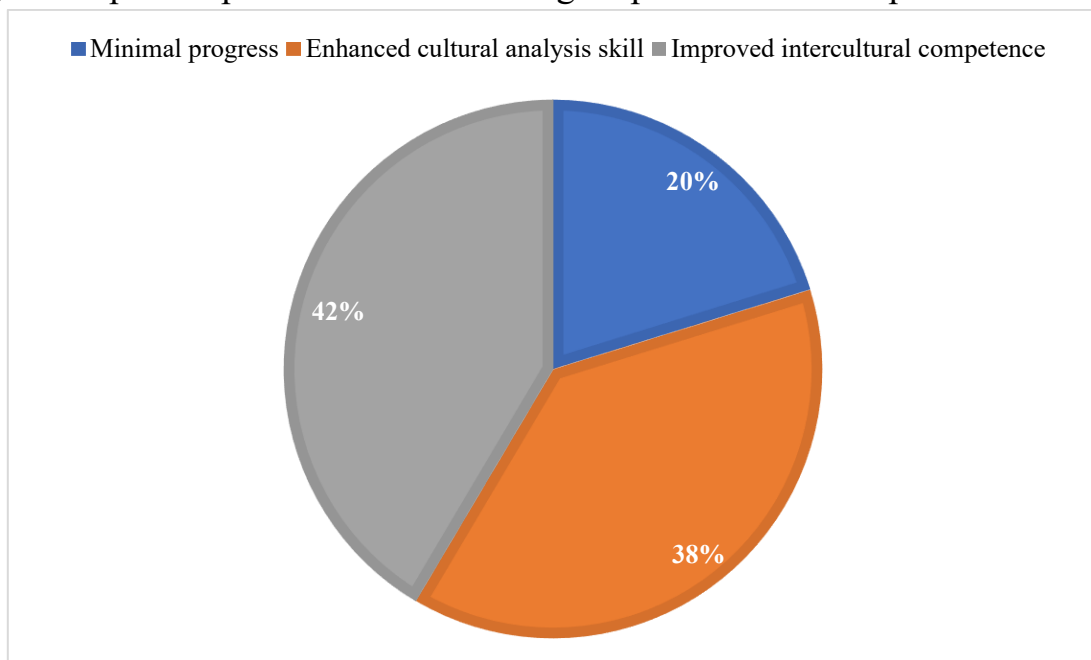


also fostered collaborative problem-solving and respect for diversity, key aspects of pluricultural competence as defined by the Council of Europe (2020).

Quantitative analysis of post-questionnaire data supported these qualitative observations. On average, 78% of participants in the experimental group reported improved confidence in intercultural communication, while 72% showed measurable enhancement in their ability to analyze cultural conflicts and propose constructive solutions. In contrast, only 38% of control group students demonstrated similar growth. Furthermore, interviews with participants revealed that PBL tasks especially translation-based problem scenarios and debates on culturally sensitive topics helped them bridge theoretical linguistic knowledge with real-world intercultural application. Students emphasized that learning through PBL made them “think like cultural mediators” rather than passive recipients of knowledge.

Thus, the results confirm that PBL-based instruction effectively nurtures pluricultural competence by combining experiential, reflective, and collaborative learning processes, thereby equipping future philologists with essential intercultural and linguistic adaptability for global communication.

Figure. Impact of problem-based learning on pluricultural competence.





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The pie chart visually represents the comparative outcomes between the experimental and control groups. It clearly shows that 78% of students reported increased confidence in intercultural communication and 72% demonstrated higher competence in analyzing and resolving cultural conflicts both results directly linked to the Problem-Based Learning (PBL) intervention. Meanwhile, only 38% of control group students showed similar improvement, confirming the limited impact of traditional lecture-based teaching. These results justify that PBL encourages students' active engagement, reflection, and critical thinking in authentic cultural contexts. The visual distribution highlights that the majority of progress occurred in groups exposed to experiential and collaborative learning environments, validating PBL as an effective pedagogical model for developing pluricultural competence among future philologists.

The findings of this research strongly support the effectiveness of Problem-Based Learning (PBL) in fostering pluricultural competence among pre-service philology students. Compared with traditional lecture-based approaches, PBL provided a more interactive, reflective, and learner-centered environment that encouraged students to engage with authentic intercultural problems. The results align with the conclusions of Galante and Paetsch, who emphasized that active engagement and social collaboration are key to developing intercultural awareness and tolerance.

Students in the experimental group not only demonstrated higher linguistic adaptability but also displayed a more nuanced understanding of cultural diversity. They began to view intercultural communication as a process of negotiation and meaning construction rather than as simple information exchange. This shift signifies a deeper transformation in attitudes and behaviors, consistent with Byram's model of intercultural communicative competence.

Furthermore, the integration of PBL helped link theoretical linguistic studies to real-world practice, enhancing learners' motivation and autonomy. It also strengthened cooperative learning, empathy, and open-mindedness qualities crucial for 21st-century philologists. Overall, the discussion confirms that PBL is not merely a teaching method but a transformative learning approach that cultivates pluricultural awareness, reflective thinking, and global communicative competence in higher education.



Conclusion

The present study demonstrates that Problem-Based Learning (PBL) is a highly effective pedagogical approach for developing pluricultural competence among pre-service philology students. Through exposure to authentic intercultural tasks, learners became more reflective, empathetic, and flexible in understanding and mediating cultural differences. The integration of PBL into philological education promoted active learning, critical thinking, and self-regulation skills that are essential for professional success in today's multilingual and multicultural world. The experimental results showed that students who participated in PBL activities displayed greater linguistic and cultural adaptability than those in traditional settings. They were able to connect theoretical linguistic knowledge with practical intercultural applications, improving their communicative competence and problem-solving abilities. Moreover, PBL fostered collaboration, tolerance, and open-mindedness, creating an inclusive learning atmosphere that mirrors real-world global communication contexts.

The study's findings support previous research emphasizing the transformative nature of learner-centered approaches in language and cultural education. Importantly, it highlights that pluricultural competence cannot be achieved through passive knowledge transmission it must be constructed through meaningful social interaction and reflection.

In conclusion, incorporating PBL into philological curricula offers a sustainable and innovative framework for nurturing globally competent, culturally aware professionals capable of bridging linguistic and cultural boundaries in education, translation, and communication fields.

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