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DEVELOPING INTERCULTURAL BEHAVIOR THROUGH DIGITAL WEBQUESTS

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Abstract

This article examines the potential of WebQuests in practical intercultural skills acquisition, especially by non-philology students. Traditional cultural education often focuses on theory and struggles to build real intercultural competence. Digital WebQuests are online tasks that engage students in learning, develop critical thinking, and let students apply cultural knowledge in real-life situations. The study suggests that using WebQuests can bridge the gap between culture knowledge and intercultural behavior, providing students with the skills vital for effective cross-cultural communication and action. Besides, being the online format, WebQuests make learning accessible and flexible, allowing educators to create diverse cultural simulations or case studies without constraints. It is vital in higher education, where students may have limited opportunities for direct intercultural experiences.

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Key words: WebQuests, intercultural competence, potential, cultural scenarios, global context, knowledge, culture, intercultural interactions, digital tool, real-life situations, digital, online, practical skills, cognitive.

The demand for intercultural competence, the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately across cultures has been increased by globalized environment (Byram, 1997). Due to interconnection of societies, people frequently interact with diverse cultural groups in academic, professional, and social settings. Educational programs typically focus on understanding cultural norms, traditions, and values. However, they do not always provide learners with the skills necessary for real cross-cultural communication (Deardorff, 2006).

New approaches for practical learning can be offered by digital technology. Among these, WebQuests—task-based online activities—create a platform for inquiry, collaboration, and critical thinking. According to Dodge (1995), WebQuests engage students in problems solution that usually involve gathering, evaluating, and synthesizing information from online sources. The instructor suggests some of the sources and some of them may be found by the learners themselves. Such kind of tasks lead to boost intellectual development of students and present real-life scenarios where learners can consider various cultural viewpoints, take decisions, and also reflect on the outcomes.

WebQuests can duplicate real cultural scenarios in intercultural education, that challenge students to reflect on standards, attitudes, and behaviors while applying their knowledge appropriately. Role plays might include negotiating solutions to different cultural conflicts or challenges, designing strategies to communicate, respect cultural sensitivities, or evaluate ethical issues in global contexts. Tasks can be organized to

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represent participants diverse cultural norms, customs and languages which helps to develop understanding and tolerance, that is also crucial in intercultural communication and education. This article aims to explore how WebQuests can support the development of intercultural behavior, with a focus on shifting from knowledge to action and highlighting how digital tools can improve educational learning outcomes.

According to Deardorff (2009), intercultural competence includes more than just cultural knowledge; it also involves being open, curious, empathetic, and possessing skills for effective communication. Five main components of intercultural competence were categorized by Byram (1997):

1. **Attitudes:** Being open and curious towards other cultures.
2. **Knowledge:** Social, cultural, and linguistic systems understanding.
3. **Skills for interpreting and relating:** Being able to analyze cultural information and relate it to personal experiences.
4. **Skills for discovery and interaction:** Being able to gain new insights and cooperate effectively in cross-cultural situations.
5. **Critical cultural awareness:** Being able to assess practices and perspectives from various cultural viewpoints.

While attitudes and knowledge can be taught through traditional methods, developing practical skills requires active involvement and reflective practice (Fantini, 2009). Without hands-on tasks and activities, students may face challenges while applying their knowledge in real-life situations, limiting the effectiveness of intercultural education.

WebQuests as a Pedagogical Tool

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WebQuests feature meaningful tasks that require students to engage actively with online sources, collaborate with peers, and present solutions or conclusions (Dodge, 1995; March, 2003). WebQuest-based learning, in its turn, promotes higher-level thinking skills such as analysis, evaluation, and synthesis while providing a structured environment for inquiry-based learning.

In intercultural settings, WebQuests can simulate real-life challenges such as cross-cultural negotiations, problem-solving in diverse teams, and decision-making in unfamiliar cultural environments. For instance, a WebQuest could ask students to develop a culturally sensitive marketing campaign for a multinational company, requiring careful consideration of language, symbolism, etiquette, and local customs. Such tasks encourage learners to anticipate cultural differences, adapt their communication strategies, and reflect on their assumptions (Huang & Hwang, 2013). Cultural difference anticipation is important while learning a foreign language and developing intercultural competence as this process leads to effective cross-cultural communication and can also be applied in business negotiations to anticipate social shifts and prepare for future changes by developing strategic foresight.

Additionally, digital WebQuests can be conducted online, making them accessible to a wide range of participants, regardless of their geographic location and culture, which will make intercultural competence development more effective.

Experimental learning theory emphasizes that we build knowledge through experience, reflection, conceptualization, and experimentation (Kolb, 1984). WebQuests encourage students' engagement in learning, reflection on their viewpoints, and application of their ideas to tasks that are similar to real intercultural situations. Reflection helps students think not only about what they have learned but also how they might behave differently in one or another real situation. Through this method, students

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gain both cognitive understanding and practical skills, which are indispensable for effective intercultural communication. The ability to analyze cultural contexts, predict and avoid misunderstandings, adapt and adjust behavior accordingly is a key learning outcome of applying digital WebQuests in intercultural education.

Non-philological students—those in fields not related to language or culture—often have limited experience with intercultural environments, as fewer hours are allocated for foreign language learning and foreign culture as well. WebQuests provide these learners an accessible way and engage them in study through cultural materials, group work, and practice problem-solving in various intercultural scenarios. By including digital inquiry-based learning in their curricula, educators can foster both cognitive understanding and practical skills, bridging the gap between theoretical knowledge and real-world application (Chen, 2017).

Constructivist and experiential learning theories, emphasizing active participation, collaboration, and reflective practice, are aligned with integrating WebQuests into intercultural learning.

The expected outcomes of this approach include:

- * **Improved practical skills:** Students are more likely to use cultural knowledge in real situations.
- * **Better attitudes and openness:** Interactive tasks foster curiosity, empathy, and critical thinking about cultural assumptions.
- * **Enhanced thinking skills:** Students develop flexibility and problem-solving abilities by navigating complex cultural issues.
- * **Improved group and communication skills:** Collaborative tasks strengthen teamwork, negotiation, and intercultural dialogue.

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Moreover, WebQuests offer a flexible platform that allows teachers to simulate various cultural scenarios without the need for physical travel or in-person interactions. For instance, an educator can assign the UN online global summit simulation for future diplomats, or international business conference for economists in which they will have to communicate across cultures, taking into consideration international etiquette and norms of behavior, or a WebQuest on workplace communication styles in multinational companies that can be assigned to engineering and business management students. Students will compare and analyze so-called **high-context and low-context** cultures using case studies and short interviews of employees from different countries. They will have to collect their findings to write a group report. As a result, intercultural competence will be formed via WebQuests, which shows the method's adaptability and effectiveness. Such kind of tasks include better sensitivity and increased knowledge of contextual cues, and greater ability to adjust their communicative strategies in multicultural situations. The given examples emphasize the adaptability of WebQuests to the educational model for non-philological students and prove its potential in the development of applied intercultural competence in created digital environment (Thomas & Reinders, 2010; Dodge, 2021). Such online and class role-plays may reflect any country or culture, and imaginary participants from all over the world. This flexibility is especially valuable in higher education, where students may lack opportunities for direct intercultural experiences. The theoretical framework suggests that teaching with WebQuests is an effective tool for promoting well-versed intercultural competence by combining knowledge acquisition, attitude development, and practical skills.

In other words, developing intercultural behavior involves more than just theoretical knowledge. It also requires practical learning, reflection, and active engagement of learners. Digital WebQuests provide a structured yet flexible setting for

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students to practice culturally appropriate interactions, cultivate empathy, and enhance communication skills in realistic contexts.

In summary, this theoretical framework shows that WebQuest-based education can link knowledge and practice, preparing students to navigate culturally diverse environments confidently. While more empirical research is necessary, existing studies strongly support the concept that WebQuests can develop intercultural competence, particularly among non-philological students such as diplomats or economists. Future studies could explore the long-term effects of WebQuest interventions on students' intercultural behavior and their adjustment to professional or international situations. In today's intercultural environment it is essential to act, not only know, as knowledge is power, but practice makes perfect.

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