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The Case Approach in Cross-Cultural Studies and Projects

Abstract

The problem of the study is to substantiate the content of the implementation of the case method of teaching. The article outlines the content of the case method of future bachelor training based on qualitative research. In the example of the academic subject “Cross-cultural studies and projects”, the main steps of developing cross-cultural student projects are traced. The main requirements for creating cross-cultural projects within the distance form of education are defined. The significant result of the study is that the use of teaching methods opens opportunities for students to master the content of professional training.

Keywords: *case study, distance learning, cross-cultural project, professional training*

Introduction

The transformation of the informational, methodical, and technological resources of future social sphere specialists’ professional training that have ex-

isted today in higher educational institutions in Ukraine is caused by objective factors (quarantine conditions of study, the need to use mixed and remote forms of education during wartime). At the same time, in today's Ukrainian educational sphere, it is impossible to borrow or adapt the foreign experience of distance learning as it could have been before. Ukraine found itself at the centre of radical socio-political processes that determine the specifics of the state's educational policy, the specifics of information technology and methodical support for the professional training of future specialists in higher education.

Distance learning became a kind of forced model of higher education that the world turned to at the beginning of the 2019 pandemic. However, virtual universities and educational Internet platforms existed long before quarantine times, filling, first of all, the informal component of the educational system in many countries. The most famous among such universities is the Open University of Britain or Israel or the Internet platform edX, which contains more than 3,500 online courses and is supported by the most famous universities in the world (Harvard, Boston, Berkeley University, and others).

We believe that in connection with the above, the use of innovative learning methods within distance education is an urgent need of the hour and opens opportunities for students to master the content of professional training with the help of online tools provided by the virtual world and modern information technologies.

The problem of creating and implementing the case method in the training of future humanitarian specialists in Ukraine has found its partial expression in the works of Angeles (2023), Loboda et al. (2023), Obeng (2015), and others. The issue of cultivating global citizenship among university students through the case study of the Great Debates course implemented by three universities (Tuke et al., 2021). The significant role of the case study influences the unique sociocultural aspects of language learning (Lachance, 2018), contributes to social and educational inclusion (Quintero et al., 2015), and overcomes educational inequality remain, segregation and the "achievement gap" (Rury, 2014).

Cross-cultural pedagogy as a tool for strengthening social interactions and social care against cultural discrimination is an object for investigation with different age groups: pre-school children (Mamat et al., 2022); school students (Anggito et al., 2023; Naparan et al., 2021); universities' students (Zbyr, 2021); participants of the non-formal learning processes (Skupa et al., 2021).

At the same time, we consider that the saturation of training cases for professional subjects with specific professional content, which enables the combination of offline and online methods and techniques of mastering individual educational components, is not sufficiently resolved.

Research Methodology

Research Background

The prominent American educator Ken Robinson, in his speech “Does school really kill creativity?” on the well-known web platform Ted Talks, noted: “The modern education system relies on the idea of academic abilities” (Robinson, 2006). Unfortunately, in specialists’ professional training, the share of academically oriented content remains quite significant. At the same time, Western universities offer students a complex of practically filled tasks (cases), which aim to develop appropriate algorithms for a specialist’s professional activity, model his special competencies, and develop soft skills.

Cases belong to definitely innovative methods of teaching in higher education, although it does not mean that they are not related in terms of content and technology to other methods of teaching students, namely:

1. Methods that ensure the mastery of the academic subject, first of all, verbal, visual, and reproductive methods of learning; as well as the problem-searching method known in pedagogy a century ago; see, for example, the development of the theory of C. Frenet and his “method of searching for experience” (Kuznik, 2016). In our opinion, the innovative pedagogical techniques at that time, , became the basis for modern educational innovations, including training cases.
2. Methods of stimulating and motivating students to study, a significant part of which is a component of a modern training case – educational discussions, problem-solving situations, educational games, creative tasks, etc.
3. Methods of students’ control and self-control, which are the resulting part of the training case (especially in the context of self-control). However, the overload of the modern system of specialists’ professional training with some forms of control (especially tests, control tasks, etc.) causes severe criticism from well-known teachers of the 21st century. So, the mentioned American teacher, K. Robinson, in his speech “How to avoid the valley of death in education?” notes, “Part of the problem, I think, is that the dominant culture of education has focused not on teaching or learning, but on testing. Testing is important. Standardised tests should be. However, they should not be the dominant culture of education. They must diagnose. They should help” (Robinson, 2013).

The main task of the training case is to train students in specific situations related to their professional activities. This teaching method has been used in European and American universities for almost a hundred years, although it

appeared in the domestic educational system relatively recently, especially in the professional training of humanitarian specialists. The basis of the training case is the principle of precedent, a factual feature of the case. The content of the case depends on the purpose and tasks of the academic subject within which it is used. “Cross-cultural studies and projects” as an academic subject of the student’s choice performs the function of forming in students a comprehensive understanding of the basic principles, methods and techniques of conducting cross-cultural research and working out the algorithm for developing and implementing cross-cultural projects in specific professional spheres.

Sample

The study involved two academic groups of social work bachelors who studied the academic subject “Cross-Cultural Studies and Projects” in 2022 and 2023. The sampling method was continuous cluster sampling, with all students who chose this subject to study participating.

Instruments and Procedures

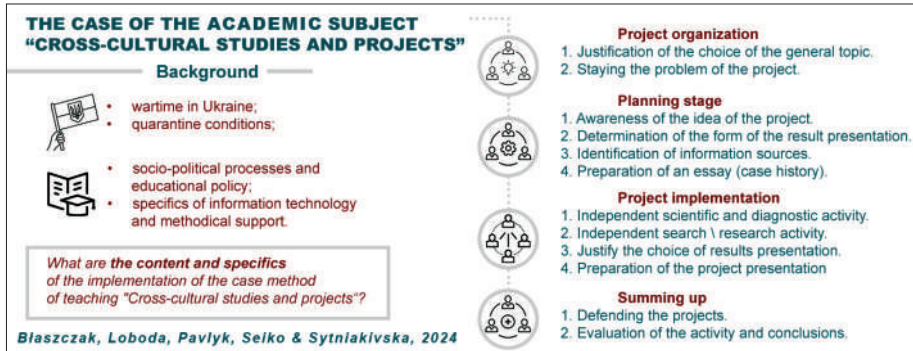
To prepare a training case within the academic subject “Cross-cultural studies and projects”, which should be used within the distance learning model (by the way, the distance learning model and its organisation can also be considered an example of a global training case), the teacher must implement the following basic requirements:

1. Imagine the result – both within the limits of a separate case and the entire academic subject. It allows both the teacher and the student to predict the logic of solving the case in time and to reflect on the intermediate results during the entire time of studying the subject “Cross-cultural studies and projects”. If we take the entire academic subject as one big case, divided into smaller ones, the future bachelor should learn to develop and represent cross-cultural projects of the chosen content and issues as a result of solving this main case.
2. Create an audio presentation and visualise the content of the case and the process of solving it. For this purpose, modern software products, such as information and technological resources for distance learning (Zoom, ClickMeeting, BigBlueButton, Teams, and many others), are used. The specified platforms enable the creation of a quasi-auditory educational space, facilitate the communication process in the distance learning model, and provide students with evaluation and self-evaluation of the results of their case study.

3. Select the necessary volume and ensure the appropriate quality level of information. This requirement applies to information for reading (mainly online) and other types of work with information – collection, storage, exchange, accumulation, transformation, presentation, etc. For the effective implementation of this requirement in the conditions of distance learning, the most suitable are the universities' own Internet platforms with separate virtual offices of teachers and students, as well as social networks, ordinary e-mail, as well as the mentioned software products and platforms that enable the posting of information in the mode "live" or in remote time. For developing and presenting group cross-cultural projects, working with relevant sources is defined as one of the main tasks of a cross-cultural case (project).
4. Provide as many opportunities as possible for educational discussion within distance learning. As we know, distance learning impoverishes subject communication. Therefore, the teacher should foresee all the resources available in the university and the modern virtual space for communication in preparing a cross-cultural project. Therefore, in this regard, the Zoom platform makes it possible to create groups of cross-cultural project developers and conduct intragroup and intergroup discussions. Virtual "guests" – speakers from various online platforms, such as the Ted Talks platform – can become monologue subjects of this discussion. The recommended form of educational discussion of cross-cultural content is a focus group, for which 40 to 50 minutes of study time are allocated during one of the practical classes on the subject "Cross-cultural studies and projects". Finally, the resulting form of virtual communication should be a video conference provided by the same web platforms.
5. Create an appropriate number of online tests for students, which will allow in a short time to determine the level of students' awareness with the content of cross-cultural research and projects and the possibilities of their development in a specific professional sphere. In the process of studying the named academic subject, we introduced online tests on the main topics of this educational program: "Methodology of conducting cross-cultural research", "Gender cross-cultural issues in social projects", "Algorithm for carrying out cross-cultural research and projects" etc.
6. Ensure proper feedback between the teacher and students – in any form convenient for implementation, which virtual software resources have. It can be a regular chat within a video conference, a video performance by a student or a group of students, a separate presentation of the results of a cross-cultural project conducted remotely, etc.

During the study, the lecturers used qualitative methods to analyse the performance of future social work bachelors within the subject “Cross-Cultural Research and Projects” in 2022–2023. The research logic is presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1. The research logic



Data Analysis

The main research question, “What are the content and specifics of implementing the case method of teaching “Cross-cultural studies and projects?” refers to the following questions: What requirements are important to follow when using the case study method? What is the algorithm for working with cases in the future social workers’ professional training? What can serve as a basis for case studies in the academic subject of intercultural studies?

Results

Considering the requirements for creating training cases for “Cross-cultural studies and projects”, we have developed a model template for developing and implementing such projects as a resulting case within the scope of this educational programme. The specified model had a step-by-step algorithm and consisted of several logically consecutive stages.

Step 1. We suggested students choose an *issue* (which became the basis for the case situation and case story) to develop a cross-cultural project in some regions of cross-cultural differences, namely cross-cultural religious differences, personal cultural differences, ethnic differences, gender differences, and socio-institutional differences.

Step 2. We suggested students choose a cross-cultural project *topic* from those formulated by us or design their own author’s cross-cultural project topic, such as: Opening the musical atlas of the world; Cross-cultural communica-

tion in the professional sphere; Cross-cultural differences and globalisation in the modern world; Folk traditions in different countries of the world; Christmas charity as a cultural tradition; Gender as a cross-cultural phenomenon; Dance as a cultural universal; Ethnic minorities in conditions of predominantly monoculture society; Stereotypes of the “Other” perception in the multicultural world; Issues of cross-cultural interaction in the youth environment; Ethnic picture of the world in folklore; Ethnocentrism: stereotypes and prejudices; Megalomania and xenophobia in the modern world; Ukrainian national character; Clothing as a cross-cultural universal and others.

Step 3. After defining the topic and the main issue of the cross-cultural project, students started working on its *plan* (in small groups). The logic of the work plan for creating the project in the form of a training case structure is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. The structure of the training case within the subject “Cross-cultural studies and projects”

Work on the project (stages)	Step-by-step algorithm for the implementation of the stage	Designing or implementing the result of the stage following the chosen topic of the project
Project organisation	Justification of the choice of the general topic. Staying the problem of the project.	Online discussion Formulation of the problem Discussion of the concept
Planning stage	Awareness of the idea of the project (what is the project’s main idea?)	Online discussion Presentation of the project concept
	Determination of the form of the result presentation	Online discussion
	Identification of information sources (indicate 3-4 main sources of information related to your project)	Creation of a database of information resources for the project
	Preparation of an essay (case history) revealing the topic, problem and main idea of the cross-cultural project	The essay (up to 10,000 printed characters) and familiarising students with its content (by e-mail, in the conference chat, etc.)
Project implementation	Independent scientific and diagnostic activity	Preparation of diagnostic methodology (questionnaire, interview materials, content analysis matrix, etc.)
	Independent search/research activity	Working out a specific cross-cultural situation from the life of a community, society, or person, illustrating the problem chosen for the cross-cultural project

Work on the project (stages)	Step-by-step algorithm for the implementation of the stage	Designing or implementing the result of the stage following the chosen topic of the project
Project implementation	Independent search/research activity	Working out a specific cross-cultural situation from the life of a community, society, or person, illustrating the problem chosen for the cross-cultural project
	Presentation of results (justify the choice of results presentation)	Possible options: Conference Quest Social action Festival Round Table Focus group Exhibition of works Presentation
	Preparation of the project presentation	The result is a presentation of the project on 10-15 slides
Summing up	Defending the projects	The defence takes place online (Zoom platform) at a practice session in the form of a presentation of the developed project
	Evaluation of the activity and conclusions	Conclusions about the meaning and role of the developed project Conducting a focus group

Step 4. After developing a cross-cultural project plan, students should prepare a *case story* relevant to their project and present it in a practical lesson via video conference. So, for example, within the framework of the student cross-cultural project developed in 2022 on the topic “Child-free movement in modern Ukraine”, the developers offered a real case story taken by them from social networks: “Inna, a citizen of Ukraine, 27 years old, shared her example. She says: “At one moment, I realised that children do not cause me any emotions. I am a workaholic and cannot imagine myself without work. For me, children are not a certain achievement in life. I consider it my mission to change the country for the better. If I decide to have children, I will have to postpone this goal. And now is the most favourable period for changes. There are people with similar goals and values nearby, and I don’t want to lose this chance. And I love freedom too much. It is important for me to be able to go to the festival in any time. I wasn’t even going to get married. I wanted to change the country, hang out more with like-minded people. When Serhiy appeared to me, I immediately

told him that I work a lot and am not at all made for relationships, children, cooking. But we fell in love with each other and got married. And the fact that we do not want children does not oppose our feelings”.

Another group of students, who chose the topic “Language interaction in the conditions of war in Ukraine” for their cross-cultural project, presented their case situation in the form of the point of view of a well-known Ukrainian researcher in the field of socio-linguistics, professor of the Kyiv-Mohyla Academy Larisa Masenko: “The main problem of Ukraine is not multilingualism, but bilingualism, the spread of two languages on its territory, when, along with the state Ukrainian, Russian also claims to be used in all spheres of life”.

In another case, the students used a specific life situation, which became a case story for the topic of the project “Cross-cultural differences in the perception of the LGBTQ+ community in Ukraine and Belgium”: “Serhiy, 26, comes from Ternopil. The man is an open homosexual, but he did not come to this immediately. As a child, he was equally friends with boys and girls, but after one situation (described in more detail in the video) that happened to him, he began to feel a stronger attraction to representatives of the male sex. Being a teenager, on the recommendation of friends, he registered on the Mamba site and saw the “I’m a man – looking for a man” function. After that, he became actively interested in this topic (homosexuality) and went on dates with men. His awareness and acceptance of his own orientation happened naturally and gradually. He did not feel discomfort because he was not like everyone else. He came out with the help of a newsletter to his closest circle in the social network, having pessimistic expectations, which fortunately were not confirmed. And to this day, his close circle of communication treats him tolerantly. Despite this, sometimes society could criticise his position and orientation in life, but Serhiy did not pay attention to it, so it did not affect his views”.

Step 5. *Presentation* of the cross-cultural project and mutual evaluation of its results in the form of a discussion during a video conference. As shown in Table 1, students were asked to create a presentation and present it at a practical lesson for 10 minutes, followed by a discussion. In our opinion, this is the most interesting and meaningful part of the work on the case, as it enables the mentioned feedback on all subjects of education within the framework of this academic subject. An example of topics for cross-cultural projects developed by students in the form of presentations is presented in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Element of the presentation of the cross-cultural project

In recent years, the number of coming outs has begun to grow significantly, and accordingly, there have been more open representatives of the LGBTQ+ community. This affected the perception of the specified category of persons by society, therefore it is important to consider the aspects related to this topic		
TOPIC	ISSUE	GOAL
Cross-cultural differences in the perception of the LGBTQ+ community in Ukraine and Belgium	The tolerant attitude towards the LGBTQ+ community in Belgium is considered more progressive, while in Ukraine, on the contrary, conservative views on this phenomenon are maintained	The high standard of living and development of society affects the formation of tolerance towards the LGBTQ+ community

Based on the results of implementing cross-cultural cases, reflexive focus groups are held with students who participated in creating cross-cultural projects and solving cross-cultural cases. Feedback experience shows that from 90 to 96% of students express a desire to conduct practical classes in the form of creating cross-cultural projects and solving interdisciplinary cases of social, cultural, psychological and pedagogical content. Among the main difficulties students encounter in developing cross-cultural projects and implementing cases they name the lack of adequate information for creating a project or case and the presence of certain cross-cultural stereotypes in the student environment regarding this or that cross-cultural object.

The experts on the problem we investigated were also teachers of two institutions of higher education – Zhytomyr Ivan Franko State University (Ukraine) and the Institute of Social Sciences and Pedagogy of the Warsaw University of Life Science (Republic of Poland), a total of 4 people. The expert interview included questions about the advantages, disadvantages, and main problems of conducting classes with students in cross-cultural cases. The feedback makes it possible to ascertain the favourable attitude of experts to the use of the project approach to solving cross-cultural cases and the presence of specific problems, such as the difficulty of applying an interdisciplinary approach in conducting classes using the case method; the need to constantly improve one's skills in using modern methodical and informational resources in the teaching process, etc.

Discussion

A culture of peace and reconciliation is based on understanding the behaviour of “others”, e.g., representatives of other cultures, nationalities, social statuses,

beliefs, social characteristics of their lives, etc. Information or traditional teaching methods alone are not enough to develop values, understanding, knowledge and behaviour patterns in social workers. The case method is important because of the need to foster a culture of interaction with other people, which allows students to motivate themselves to find answers to pressing social issues. The testing of the case method in studying the subject “Cross-cultural studies and projects” showed the students’ interest in the search defined by the method and confirmed the relevance of using innovative teaching methods in the study of controversial and complex topics of social interaction.

Conclusions

Thus, we have outlined the content and specifics of the case method of teaching future bachelors within the distance model of the educational process. For this purpose, it was stated that using innovative teaching methods within distance learning is an urgent requirement of the time and opens opportunities for students to master the content of professional training with the help of online tools provided by the virtual world and modern information technologies.

The opinion that the case method as an innovative method of learning in high school is closely related to all other traditional methods of learning (methods that ensure the mastery of the educational subject; methods of stimulating and motivating students to study; methods of control and self-control).

Based on the academic subject “Cross-cultural studies and projects”, the main steps of the development and representation of cross-cultural projects are traced, such as choosing the issue of the cross-cultural project, justification of the project topic, development of a cross-cultural project implementation plan; preparation of a case history; presentation of a cross-cultural project.

The main requirements for the creation of cross-cultural projects within distance learning are defined (clear outline of the result of the cross-cultural project; audiolisation and visualisation of the content of the case; determination of the required volume and quality of information; provision of maximum opportunities for discussion; creation of an appropriate number of online tests; ensuring the appropriate level of feedback).

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