Intercultural Training in Language Learning: A Reflective Approach

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Abstract— Using language efficiently within an EFL context is no more equated with linguistic or grammatical accuracy, but it has to do more with understanding and producing language that is appropriate to communicative situations in accordance with specific sociocultural parameters. Within this concern, developing students' intercultural skills has become a major educational goal and an issue of inquiry and debate. Indeed, the question that remains to be addressed is how to equip students with the necessary intercultural skills that can help them communicate efficiently via different cross-cultural situations. In attempt to answer this question, this paper suggests an intercultural training approach which aims to provide students' with both pragmatic knowledge and skills through prompting their reflection and practice of communicative activities. Within such training, creating an interactive learning atmosphere is also targeted where teachers and students engage in a culture of negotiating meaning and shared learning. It is worth noting, that students' reflection on how language is used within a given context is the core component of this training process. This paper explains how this reflection needs to be undertaken, i.e., its component and the teacher's role. Besides, it provides a set of communicative activities to illustrate and help teachers integrate this training approach into their classes.

Keywords—Intercultural training, student reflection, awareness-raising, interaction, communication.

1 INTRODUCTION

With the overwhelming technological development and the increased need to keep informed of global events and news, communication has become an endless process that is no more dependent on time, space, identity or nation. With Internet access, people can interact, collaborate, keep on connected, share ideas and learn from each other. This virtual space has strengthened communication across boundaries for a variety of purposes within different contexts. To this end, possessing intercultural awareness and competence are deemed essential for today's effective communication.

Education's mission is thus to prepare students develop the necessary intercultural competence to communicate properly and cope with the world's diversity. Indeed, according to Hanover Research (2011) communication, collaboration and teamwork are among the first ranked 21st century skills besides the need for creativity, imagination, critical thinking and problem solving. To develop such skills there is a need for students' intercultural training so that they can develop the competence required to interact with others despite their different identities. This requires a shift from 'Instruction Paradigm' where students are receivers of information to a 'Learning Paradigm' where they involve actively in discovering and constructing knowledge. Therefore, the aim of this paper is to suggest a reflective approach to student intercultural training in language learning. Prior to accounting for its stages, one is attempting to define intercultural competence and outline some of its models.

2 INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE DEFINITION

competence implies: "The ability to effectively and appropriately execute communication behaviors to elicit a desired response in

To develop students' intercultural competence, there is a need to understand what this competence entails. As Deardorff (2008) states "helping students acquire intercultural competence presumes that we know what the concept is" (p.50). According to the Council of Europe (2014), intercultural competence is a combination of attitudes, knowledge, understanding and skills applied through action which enables one to understand and respect people with different cultural affiliations from oneself; respond appropriately, effectively and respectfully when interacting and communicating with such people; set positive and constructive relationships with such people; besides understanding oneself and one's own multiple cultural affiliations when interacting with cultural differences. This means that intercultural competence is not just a matter of skills to be applied within a given context, but it encompasses more attitudes, knowledge, understanding and skills which are necessary to communicate effectively in various intercultural encounters. Likewise, Deardorff (2004) describes intercultural competence as a process in which attitudes like respect for different cultures and values, openness and curiosity lead to cultural self-awareness, emphatic understanding of other cultures, and the ability and willingness to behave accordingly.

Hence, intercultural competent persons must not only know how to interact effectively and appropriately with people and environment, but also know how to fulfil their own communication goals using this ability as Chen and Starosta (1998) definition of such

a specific environment (p. 241–2). Indeed, such competence does not only allow for interaction with different cultures,

understanding differences in values and behaviours, but it also renders such interaction an enriching experience (Byram et al., 2002). According to Erll and Gymnich (2007, cited in Praxmarer, n.d., p.19), intercultural competence includes three competences:

Cognitive component:
- Knowledge about other cultures (culture- and country-specific knowledge)
- Theoretical knowledge of cultures (knowledge about the way cultures work, cultural differences and their implications)
- Self-awareness

Affective component
- Interest and open-mindedness towards other cultures
- Empathy and ability to understand others
- Ambiguity tolerance

Pragmatic-Communicative component:
- Use of appropriate communication patterns
- Use of effective conflict resolution strategies

It follows that, knowing about the other cultures and owing the necessary linguistic repertoire to use words appropriately for a given communication goal do not suffice to develop this competence without being open-minded, tolerant and displaying interest in knowing and accepting cultural differences. One can conclude that developing intercultural competence requires reflection on once own culture and other's. Out of reflection can emerge knowing the other's, recognizing and understanding differences and selecting the appropriate language that fits within the context. To this end, one is suggesting an intercultural training approach based on enhancing students' reflection in learning about the target culture. Before describing such approach, some intercultural models are outlined below.

2   MODELS OF INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE

There are several frameworks and models that describe the development of intercultural competencies. Their aim is to explain what intercultural competence means and how it needs to be approached to support learners develop it. Within this section, the following models are reviewed: Byram's (1997) Model of Intercultural Communicative Competence, the Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (Bennett 1986, 1993), and the Process Model of Intercultural Competence (Deardorff, 2006, 2009).

3.1 Byram's Model of Intercultural Communicative Competence

Byram's (1997) model is based on Hymes and van Ek's model of communicative competence. He starts off with a thorough analysis of the factors that influence intercultural communication, namely attitudes, knowledge and skills.

	Skills interpret and relate (savoir comprendre)	
Knowledge of self and other; of interaction: individual and societal (savoirs)	**Education** political education critical cultural awareness (savoir s'engager)	**Attitudes** relativising self- valuing other (savoir être)
	Skills discover and/ or interact (savoir apprendre/ faire)	

Figure 1.Factors in intercultural communication

According to Byram (1997), attitudes are essential for successful intercultural communication. These include attitudes of "curiosity and openness, of readiness to suspend disbelief and judgement with respect to others' meanings, beliefs and behaviour … a willingness to suspend belief in one's own meanings and behaviours, and to analyse them from the viewpoint of the others with whom one is engaging" (Byram,1997, p.34). In addition to attitudes, knowledge is also necessary in intercultural encounter. Byram (1997) divides this knowledge into two categories. The first one is described as "knowledge about social groups and their cultures in one's own country, and similar knowledge of the interlocutor's country"(p.35). The second category considers procedural knowledge and is summarized as "knowledge of the processes of interaction at individual and societal levels"(p.35). This knowledge takes into account linguistic and cultural behaviours of the participants in intercultural communication.

With regard to the skills required in intercultural communication, Byram (1997) identified two skills that are dependent on the participants' knowledge and attitudes. These are skills of interpreting and relating or referred to as "the ability to interpret a document or event from another culture, to explain it and relate it to documents from one's own"(Spencer-Oatey & Franklin,2009, p.66).

The second set of skills, discovering and interacting, is described as the "ability to acquire new knowledge of a culture and cultural practices and the ability to operate knowledge, attitudes and skills under the constraints of real-time communication and interaction" (Spencer-Oatey & Franklin 2009, p.66). Both skills require an active engagement of the participants in intercultural communication.

It follows from Byram's (1997) model, that intercultural communicative competence is the interplay of the affective domain (attitudes), the cognitive (knowledge) and the skill domain. To highlight the importance of communicative competence, Byram (1997) combines intercultural competence with communicative competence, and thus calls for a model of intercultural communicative competence in language teaching. His model has provided insight into the concept of intercultural competence as several definitions have been based on it. Since the model was designed for language teachers, it can support the development of intercultural approaches and thus help learners not only develop their linguistic competence but also their intercultural competence in learning the target language.

3.2 Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity

Bennett's (1986, 1993, 2004) Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS), is a framework that intends to explain how people experience and engage in cultural differences.
According to this theory intercultural competence advances along a developmental continuum, with increasing complexity and sophistication in the perception and understanding of cultures and cultural differences. The intercultural competence development begins with an ethnocentric mindset characterized by a simplistic set of perceptions regarding cultural commonalities and differences. There are six distinct stages through which intercultural competence progresses toward an ethnorelative mindset characterized by a complex understanding of cultural commonalities and differences and the ability to shift between cultural perspectives. These six stages are (a) denial, (b) defense, (c) reversal, (d) minimization, (e) acceptance, and (f) adaptation (Hammer,2011).
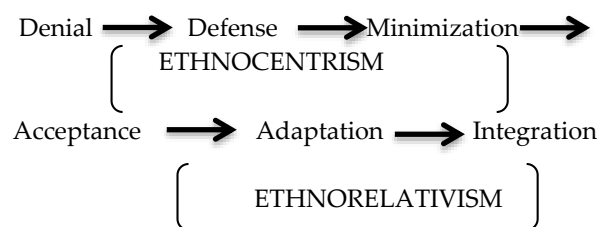

Figure.2: The Stages of Development (Bennett, 2004)

According to Bennett (2004) the Denial of cultural difference is the most ethnocentric experience where the individual displays inability or disinterest in cultural difference, followed by the Defense against cultural difference which generates positive stereotyping of one's own culture and negative stereotyping of other cultures. Whereas, Reversal experience is when the adopted culture is regarded as superior to one's own culture. In the middle of the continuum the Minimization of cultural difference seemed to be a transition from the more virulent forms of ethnocentrism to a more benign form, leading to the ethnorelative Acceptance of cultural difference. At the heart of ethnorelativism was Adaptation to cultural difference, followed in some cases by the Integration of cultural difference into identity (Bennett, 2004).

3.3 Process Model of Intercultural Competence

Deardorff (2006) highlights the importance of a continuous process toward intercultural competence with her Process Model of Intercultural Competence. According to her, developing intercultural competence is a lifelong process as the learner continues to learn, change, evolve, and become transformed with time. To this end, this process orientation model is circular and uses arrows to indicate intersections and movement of the individual between attitudes, knowledge and comprehension, internal outcomes, and external outcomes related to intercultural interactions (Deardorff, 2006). Deardorff 's (2006) model is open and allows individuals to enter at any point and move freely between categories, sometimes moving ahead, and at other times returning to delve deeper into a concept previously encountered.
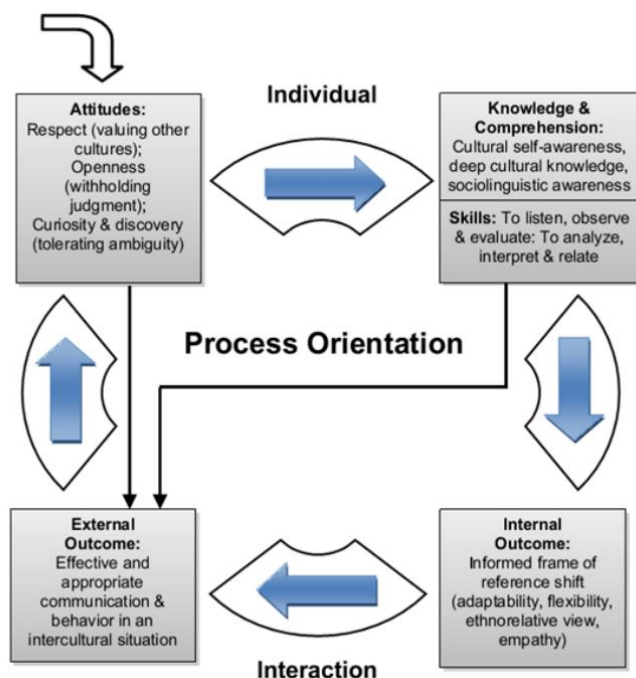
Figure.3: Process Model of Intercultural Competence (Deardorff, 2006)

This framework is comprised of attitudes, knowledge, skills, internal and external outcomes. According to Deardorff (2009) attitudes refer to openness, curiosity and discovery while knowledge includes cultural self-awareness (meaning the ways in which one's culture has influenced one's identity and worldview), culture-specific knowledge, deep cultural knowledge including understanding other world views, and sociolinguistic awareness. With regard to the skills required, these cover observation, listening, evaluating, analyzing, interpreting, and relating. When acquiring the necessary attitudes, knowledge and skills for intercultural competence, an internal outcome emerges consisting of flexibility, adaptability, an ethnorelative perspective and empathy. The behavior and communication of the individual in cross-cultural contexts constitutes the visible outcomes or the external outcomes of intercultural competence experienced by others (Deardorff, 2009).

To sum up, there are necessary attitudes, knowledge and skills for successful intercultural communication as Byram (1997) suggests. Teachers need to target such elements within their intercultural approach to language teaching while considering communication in a foreign language as integral to the intercultural situation. Besides, developing students' intercultural competence is a process which requires time as Bennett's model highlights. It is indeed a continuous process with several stages. Therefore, it is essential to determine which stage students and teachers have reached before designing any lesson plan (Spencer-Oatey &

Franklin, 2009). In fact, many researchers of intercultural competence describe the classroom experience as a process (Byram, 1997; Deardorff, 2006; Moloney & Harbon, 2010) where learners bring their own background, experiences, and views. During such process, learners' reflection needs to underpin the different stages of their intercultural encounter and discovery of cultural differences.

3 INTERCULTURAL REFLECTIVE TRAINING MODEL

Since developing intercultural competence is a process that requires experience and change, ongoing preparation is required through training students into the necessary knowledge, attitudes and skills for effective intercultural communication. Still, training students into such process is not likely to support the achievement of the intended goal, i.e., intercultural competence, in case teachers are the sole dispenser of knowledge while students remain passive and unengaged. Intercultural training needs to foster students' reflection through involving them in self-reflection, mindfulness, and experiential learning within and beyond the classroom. Indeed, Byram et al. (2002) emphasize the fact that since culture is an ever-changing force, foreign language teachers must be prepared to create an environment of curiosity and inquiry in order to guide learners toward intercultural competence. Similarly, there is a common consensus that if students do not have the opportunity to reflect upon and unpack their experiences in a meaningful manner, they may never learn from an intercultural experience (Einbeck, 2002; Williams, 2005).

In fact, engaging in reflection does not only contribute to recognizing behaviours as culturally inappropriate, but it also leads to understanding the process of becoming interculturally competent which is essential as Taylor (1994) noted: "Without understanding the process of becoming interculturally competent, it is difficult to determine what changes actually take place in the stranger and how those changes take place. Furthermore, without this understanding, it is difficult to better educate adults for successful intercultural experiences (p. 157).

For this purpose, the suggested intercultural training model aims to develop English students' intercultural competence through fostering their reflection on intercultural experiences. Within the present context, one needs to highlight the importance of integrating such training earlier in students' learning process, i.e., from the first year of the Bachelor degree since such process requires time, continuous preparation and support. Also, since British English is the target English variety, exposure to the British culture is advocated here. As figure 4 shows, this training consists of the following stages: Awareness raising, providing input, output and follow-up tasks. It needs to be noted that within this model students' reflection needs to underpin all these stages. The latter are described in details.
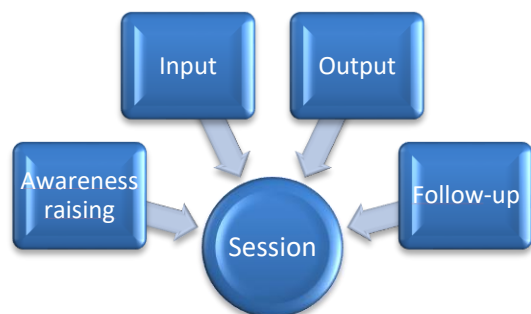
following dialogue can be used to stimulate students' reflection on their beliefs and attitudes regarding how politeness needs to be expressed in the British culture.

Telephone conversation

P: Hello, is Mr. Simatapung there please?

S: Yes.

P: Oh…may I speak to him please?

S: Yes.

P: Oh…are you Mr. Simatapung?

S: Yes, this is Mr. Simatapung.

Figure.5: A dialogue illustrating cultural misunderstanding

Figure.4: The Stages of Intercultural Reflective Training

a. Awareness-raising

Awareness-raising is deemed essential to recognize cultural differences and show understanding and respect towards them. As Brislin and Yoshida (1994) explain "becoming aware of culture and cultural differences would help people to monitor their ethnocentrism, to respect and be sensitive toward culturally different others, and also to become comfortable with the differences" (cited in Wang, 2006, p.3). Indeed, intercultural awareness implies "a move from 'ethnocentrism' to 'ethnorelativism', the ability to 'decentre', to see things from someone else's perspective, to develop 'empathy' as well as an awareness of the intercultural process of change of both individuals and societies arising out of the dynamics of encounters between them" (Rantz & Horan, 2005, p.211). Thus, intercultural awareness occurs when people no longer see their own culture as the best way or the only way, and begin to evaluate other perspectives.

Prior to raising students' awareness of the target culture, teachers need to explore their beliefs and attitudes towards this culture in order to identify their needs and the kind of tasks and approach to be integrated within this training. This can be achieved through prompting their reflection on their beliefs and attitudes through involving them in intercultural experiences, i.e., true or false statements, discourse analysis, video observation, etc., that result in misunderstanding or culture shock. Students can be asked to reflect on such situations, indicating where communication breakdowns lie, what they would say and how if they were involved in similar situations. Teachers can ask them to work in pairs or groups to share and discuss their views. To illustrate, the

Within this stage, teachers need to clarify to students what effective communication in English entails and that linguistic or grammar competence is not enough to exchange ideas and achieve a given communication goal. Besides, native speakers often forgive the phonological, syntactic and lexical errors made by foreign speakers but usually interpret pragmatic errors negatively as rudeness, impoliteness or unfriendliness. In fact, students cannot get involved in this intercultural training unless they recognize its benefits over their learning process.

Therefore, teachers should raise their awareness of cultural differences, the need to relativize one's own values, beliefs and behaviours, not assuming that they are the only possible and naturally correct ones. Moreover, the importance of showing interest in understanding them and being sensitive and open-minded should be highlighted within this stage. The above example can be used to illustrate that expressing politeness differs among cultures and misunderstanding can emerge when interpreting meaning from once own perspective.

b. Input

After sharing their reflections on the telephone conversation, teachers' feedback can be communicated, explaining misunderstanding (The foreign student failed to understand that the professor's first question is not asking if he is there or not but it is a request to talk to him) and what appropriate utterances have to be used. Yet, students need to process a variety of input within different contexts so that they can understand how language is shaped by context. In this case, different forms of politeness are to be provided (words, expressions, phrases, idioms, tenses, gestures), for multiple purposes (greeting, saying thank you, accepting thanks, requesting, disagreeing, etc.) in various contexts

(restaurants, hotels, business meeting, etc.). It is also worth noting that providing knowledge about the target culture needs to cover both verbal and non-verbal communication.

Hence, teachers should not overload students with a lot of input or knowledge of the target culture but rather focus on the most relevant one according to their language level and needs. Within this stage, it is necessary to foster a certain engagement with this knowledge and possibly a first step towards 'understanding the culture of the target country (Rantz & Horan, 2005). To this end, an inductive approach is to be followed to introduce this input to support students think over it, reconstruct meaning and get more involved and engaged in its learning. Teachers need thus to provide students with more opportunities to experience, inquire, reflect and discover the target culture by themselves.

In this respect, a variety of authentic materials can be implemented ranging from audio tapes, videos, magazines, newspapers articles, etc. Also, to enhance students' motivation and autonomy, they need to have their voices and choices heard. Indeed, opportunities are to be given for students to make choices regarding the 'what' and 'how' of their learning. There is a need to address the kind of cultural knowledge they need to learn, allow them to opt for materials to study in class and share with their teacher and classmates.

c. Output

To develop students' intercultural competence, tasks have to be selected according the students' needs, preferences and the intended learning outcomes. These need to:

1. be communicative, i.e., focusing on meaningful use of language and providing practice of real life situations of the target culture;
2. endorse students' reflection on their own culture and the target culture and involvement in constructing meaning;
3. interactive, i.e., providing opportunities to share and express their views;
4. cover the different language skills (skill integration) to maximize learning opportunities;
5. encourage students to respect and understand cultural differences, tolerate ambiguity and show empathy;
6. develop the necessary strategies to negotiate what would be appropriate and effective in intercultural encounter.

Additionally, tasks' language need not be too complex so that students can cope with the task at hand. In the same concern, to sustain students' interest in learning about the other culture, tasks have to vary. Teachers can use different communicative activities such as role-plays, opinion-sharing activities, map-reading, jigsaw activities, etc. The following suggested activities are an illustration of how students' reflection can be fostered at this stage. It is worth noting, that their objective and content are related to the cultural knowledge which the course is centred around.

-Activity One: Reading can be a powerful tool to immerse students in the target culture. Students can read articles, magazines or texts dealing with the target culture, more particularly the cultural knowledge or content studied in class. Then, they can compare such cultural values with their own and think about what cultural misunderstanding can emerge on the part of foreign language speakers. They can, in groups or in pairs, imagine dialogues or situations and share them with the rest of class.

-Activity Two: Role-play is also another motivating activity. Teachers can involve students in intercultural encounter (e.g., imagine you are at the airport's reception, you need to get information about your plane boarding time), then ask them to role play. Teachers can monitor and provide feedback on students' performance.

-Activity Three: Students' reflection can be prompted through case studies. Teachers hand out case studies depicting cross-cultural issues that foreigners are encountering in the target culture. In each case study, a piece of advice is required to help solve the issue. Each student deals with one case study. After providing them time to reflect on them and write their pieces of advice, students can share their ideas and discuss them with their teacher and classmates.

-Activity Four: Film clips on videos, DVD or online can be used in different ways to stimulate students' thinking and understanding of the target culture. Teachers can introduce a video clip depicting a culture shock or conflict situation. At any stage the teacher freezes the picture and asks students what they think will happen next or what a character will say next. Silent viewing can also be used where the teacher plays the film without the sound and asks the students what they think the characters are saying.

-Activity Five: Activities also need to provide much more practice into what appropriate language is required for a given purpose and in a particular context. In this respect, teachers can integrate vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation activities. For example, teachers give students texts and ask them to pull out chunks of language and analyse connected speech; they can reflect on how the conditional can be used to express politeness; after listening to or watching dialogues they can study intonation and stress when apologizing, greeting, etc.,

-Activity Six: Inviting a native speaker to the classroom to talk about his/her culture and discuss related issues with students would be a fruitful opportunity for students to pose questions and learn more about the target culture. In case this cannot be realized,

this native speaker can be invited via Skype to provide such interaction. Yet, teachers need to inform students beforehand about this meeting and clarify what they are expected to do and how to maximize and enhance learning time.

-*Activity Seven*: Teachers can create interaction between his students and students of the target culture through online discussion of texts belonging to both cultures. Furstenberg (2010) describes these online activities as a process of negotiation, in which students work together to make observations, craft

hypotheses, and search for patterns, while simultaneously confronting and pondering their own attitudes, beliefs, and values.

As aforementioned, tasks need to reflect real life situation of the target culture. Besides, practice needs to embrace different contexts. Variety of interaction patterns is also advocated here to allow for more students' communication in the classroom and thus less teacher talking time.

d. Follow-up

This intercultural training needs to be incentive to students' involvement in much more practice beyond the classroom learning context. Indeed, follow-tasks do not only provide students with further practice, but they also allow teachers to gain feedback about students' learning progress, thereby clarifying the existing learning gap. These tasks should provide avenues for students' choice, initiation and responsibility. Thus, teachers need to act as facilitators who demonstrate, model and boost students' engagement in their learning process.

Follow-up tasks can include, for instance, making further reading of articles, books, reports or listening to interviews, watching TED talks, videos, etc., concerning intercultural issues. Students can be asked then to write their reviews and share them in class. It is advocated here to provide them, from time to time, the opportunity to decide the materials to be reviewed to hold more ownership over their learning.

Additionally, involving students in collaborative learning is essential to support them build in the necessary knowledge, skills and attitudes for successful intercultural communication. In groups, students can conduct projects or case studies outside class elaborating critical intercultural communication issues. In class, they present their research findings, discuss and answer their teacher and peers' questions. It is worth noting that, instructions have to be clarified along with the assessment criteria of the

assigned tasks in order to avoid any confusion or misunderstanding among students.

4 CONCLUSION

Within 21st century education, developing students' intercultural competence is deemed essential to support them engage and collaborate in a global society using appropriate ways to interact with people from other cultures. Yet, such process requires time, continuous preparation and support. To this end, an intercultural training in language learning is recommended where students' reflection is fostered along its stages. Reflection is considered here the bedrock upon which students' intercultural competence is constructed. Indeed, within the awareness-raising stage students are prompted to explore their beliefs and attitudes vis-à-vis the target culture. While reflecting, they are likely to recognize cultural differences and the need to consider them when communicating cross-culturally. Input is the stage where students explore, discover, analyse and evaluate meaningful information through interacting with authentic materials. Providing practice over such input requires different tasks which reflect different contexts and involve a variety of interaction patterns. Finally, to extend such practice beyond the classroom walls and enhance students' autonomy in learning, follow-up tasks are to be included at the end of each training session.

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