

INCREASING INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE IN LANGUAGE CLASSES

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Annotation. Teaching intercultural competence in EFL classes is the focus of this article. Grammatical proficiency, communicative proficiency, language proficiency, and cultural proficiency are all components of learning a foreign language. Understanding another country's conventions, cultures, beliefs, and philosophical systems is known as having cultural competence.

Keywords: culture, EFL, Intercultural competence, sociocultural competence, cross-cultural concepts.

Introduction. Culture and language go hand in hand. The basis of communication is culture. Language itself has no use or significance outside of the cultural context in which it is used. To improve students' intercultural communication skills, EFL teachers should place a high priority on teaching both linguistic knowledge and the culture of the target language. Teachers of foreign languages should also instruct in culture. Learning a new language teaches people about that language's culture, and using that language teaches people how to interact with people from that culture. Successful communication with native speakers requires not only language proficiency but also an understanding of cultural norms and expectations. The focus of EFL instruction must alter in the century of global communication, shifting instead to the development of intercultural competency.¹

The majority of language instructors concur that understanding one's cultural surroundings is essential for effectively putting language skills to use. Language proficiency is only one component of effective cross-cultural communication; comprehension of the speaker's objectives cannot be guaranteed even when one can grasp the language. It also involves understanding cultural customs and expectations. Furthermore, one of the fundamental aims of language education is to promote global understanding. Understanding the variations among the numerous cultures in which individuals of various racial, religious, political, and social beliefs coexist is crucial. Understanding, tolerance, interchange, and cooperation are essential for international peace and advancement. One of the essential educational components for accomplishing this goal is the study of foreign languages. Additionally, pupils

¹ Atay, D. (2005). Reflections on the cultural dimension of language teaching. *Language and Intercultural Communication*, 5(3, 4), 222-237.



themselves could be curious about those who speak English. EFL students are curious about them, their way of life, and how they differ from themselves.

However, if students have not received regular cultural instruction at school or university, their understanding of the fundamental characteristics of the target culture may be imprecise. To meet the demands of social development, foreign language teaching should generally assist students in building a strong foundation of language and developing their cultural awareness. Currently, a wide range of cross-cultural notions needs to be mediated through English as the primary language of international communication. As a result, teaching English as a second language and teaching English culture is becoming more important, and EFL teachers should not ignore culture and give it the respect it deserves in the classroom. As EFL students first and foremost ground communication on the background of their native culture and only then on the culture of the target language, which is known as intercultural communication, it is imperative to learn how to understand and create a language that is following the socio-cultural parameters of the specific situation. Communication across cultures, communication across cultures, or comparative data, and research of a wide range of civilizations are all examples of intercultural communication. Unmediated communication between individuals from various cultural origins is the focus of intercultural communication.²

We are forced to coexist and converse across cultural boundaries in the twenty-first century. What proficiency then should language learners have to meet the need for acceptable and successful communication in such a world? The intercultural communication skills of learners should be fostered in EFL instruction, is the answer. The ability to achieve successful outcomes in settings involving intercultural communication is known as intercultural communicative competence (ICC). Intercultural communicative competency has recently grown in importance as a subject of study in intercultural communication. Cultural elements influence intercultural communication because they represent such factors in real-world communication situations. More and more EFL instructors emphasize both linguistic proficiency and ICC development simultaneously. ICC also assumes knowledge of a variety of societal and cultural tenets, including address conventions, register and style preferences,

² Byram, M. (1997). *Teaching and assessing intercultural communicative competence*. Clevedon: **Multilingual Matters**.



distinctions between social and regional dialects, and the social values associated with these distinctions³.

To allow students to gain perspective through comparison and gain leverage over both cultures, cultural awareness instruction should involve viewpoints. This will help students develop their intercultural communication skills. Since culture is frequently not regarded as a crucial component of the course material, students frequently are unaware that the teacher is trying to teach them components of the target language culture. At the moment, assessing facts and understanding cultural behavior is the most useful method for testing culture. Assessing and measuring this learning process is one of the most challenging parts of educating students for intercultural competence. It becomes nearly impossible to simply expect students to grow interculturally at the same rate because everyone enters the classroom with different perspectives and worldviews. As a result, the classroom experience is referred to as a process by many intercultural competency researchers.

The intercultural learning process is linear, according to Byram. Depending on their origins, viewpoints, and life experiences, learners enter the process at different stages and progress at different rates. The students' eventual objectives in the classroom are not predetermined; rather, each experience shapes its intercultural objective. Byram characterizes someone who develops intercultural communication skills as successful in establishing connections while conversing in the other participant's foreign language, negotiating effective communication strategies to meet both parties' communication needs, mediating conversations between people from different cultural backgrounds, and continuing to develop communicative skills in foreign languages not yet studied. This last trait emphasizes how an effective intercultural communicator builds a foundation of language and cultural learning when she learns to communicate with people from a particular culture. As a result, the person is more likely to keep learning languages from other cultures to broaden her range of intercultural encounters. Building relationships and communicating even when participants do not hold similar worldviews are at the heart of developing intercultural communication competency (ICC), which goes beyond straightforward interactions. What goals do intercultural communication skills have in the context of foreign language instruction?⁴

³ Castro, P., Sercu, L. & Garcia, M. C. M. (2004). Integrating language-and-culture teaching: an investigation of Spanish teachers' perceptions of the objectives of foreign language education. *Intercultural Education*, 15(1), 91-104.

⁴ Edelhoff, C. (1993). English among the other European languages. In *English language learning in Europe: issues, tasks and problems* (p.27). Best of ELTECS, British Council 1995; ELTECS Conference, Bratislava.



According to Byram's Model of Intercultural Communicative Competence, foreign language instructors are expected to assist students as they develop interculturally relevant attitudes, knowledge, and abilities while using a foreign language. Teachers must guide students through exercises that take attitudes toward the "other" into consideration, ideally changing the learner in the process. The Internet has made it much simpler for foreign language teachers to create a setting where meaningful interactions between students of the target culture and those from the United States can occur. In Furstenberg's Cultura program, English-language learners from France and Americans studying French converse online while comparing and contrasting literature with a similar theme that was produced in each culture. Students from two different cultures are encouraged to create questions for one another during the online experience to achieve the goal of widening one's perspective during the process of perspective-exchanging.

Conclusion. Intercultural competency must be a core component of the foreign language curriculum if educators are to prepare students for success in a globally interconnected world. Researchers have identified themes that describe an ICC classroom, such as identity change, the student as an inquirer, and process, which can help teachers design lessons that can advance students' intercultural competence. When intercultural competency is emphasized in the language classroom, students get hands-on practice using language to communicate effectively and develop cross-cultural understanding. They can negotiate opposing points of view, acquire insight into another culture from the inside, and reexamine their ideas and habits through a new lens. Based on acknowledged theoretical frameworks for interculturality, the activities given in this paper represent a diversity of approaches to teaching and evaluating intercultural competence. Students start to understand how their attitudes, knowledge, and language abilities might affect their intercultural experiences as a result of the inclusion of such activities in the foreign language curriculum. Students will learn how to approach intercultural circumstances with an open mind as a result, which will lead to more effective communication as well as the development of deep connections with speakers of the target language.

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