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Intercultural communication in education: a theoretical review

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Abstract. In recent years, the cultural dimension of foreign language education has expanded its scope in the field of research. Today language teachers are expected to facilitate learners' awareness of intercultural communication and develop their acquisition of intercultural competence. However, due to the growing number of studies in this field, most language teachers and students might face difficulties in understanding the concept of intercultural communication and its close connection to language learning and teaching. In addition, some teachers confront challenges regarding the development of appropriate teaching approaches and the preparation of engaging materials to raise learners' intercultural awareness. Therefore, this theoretical paper intends to present an overview of the literature on this topic and provide an educational rationale for reinforcing intercultural competence, which is acknowledged as the major component of foreign language studies. The review discusses key features of integrating intercultural communication in language education and concludes by stressing that enhanced intercultural communicative competence is likely to facilitate more proficient and competent users of English as a foreign language.



Keywords: intercultural communication, intercultural communicative competence, language education, English as a foreign language.

Introduction

It is a widely known fact that teaching and learning a foreign language cannot be reduced to the teaching of culture. The contemporary models of communicative competence indicate that the vital component of cultural knowledge and awareness is integrated into learning a language [1, 11]. In

other words, learning a language well usually requires knowing something about the culture of that language. Communication that lacks relevant cultural content often becomes the source of serious miscommunication and misunderstanding, which might further lead to negative and objectionable consequences.

There is an indisputable common view that the knowledge of the culture, values, and national characteristics of a foreign-language conversational partner allows language to be fully used as a means for intercultural communication and that this is a precondition for mutual understanding between individuals and societies from different cultures generally. One cannot but agree with the view that one should not so much teach 'language' as the 'meaning' of its content, as found in a country where it is the native tongue. After all, language is the greatest indicator of culture. It is generally established that the greater the distinction between one's own culture and a foreign one, the harder it is to use the language of the foreign culture in a communicative way. The impact of the cultural-historical component on foreign language learning is so great that it has had an influence on the choice of teaching method [2, 58]. If you want to speak another language effectively, you must learn the culture of your target audience. It is one thing to know the words to say. However, if we want to convey our message clearly, we need to know how to address our audience correctly. At this rate, the adage "*actions speak louder than words*" comes into play. If we utter the perfect sentence but unintentionally address our audience with disrespect, our words will be meaningless. Therefore, it is essential to understand that language and culture are intertwined and interdependent. We need to tackle both together to become competent in a second or foreign language.

Language and culture are interconnected. A particular language usually points out to a specific group of people. When we interact with another language, it means that we are also interacting with the culture that speaks the language. We cannot understand one's culture without accessing its language directly. When we learn a new language, not only it involves learning its alphabet, the word arrangement, and the rules of grammar but also learning about the specific society's customs and behavior. When learning or teaching a language, it is essential that the culture where the language belongs be referenced because language is very much ingrained in the culture [2, 59].

As it is widely known, everyone's views depend on the culture, which has influenced them, as well as the language that culture has been described with. The knowledge of their language can enhance the understanding of culture and, most importantly, its people. Another analogy for the relationship between language and culture is that of a *person*. Language is the flesh, and culture is the blood. You put the two together, and you have a whole person. However, one without the other results in death.

When it comes to language teaching, students, in fact, have already received almost all grammatical rules during their several years of study, but they often lack the ability to use English and to understand its use in authentic intercultural communication [2, 62]. Misunderstandings caused by cultural differences might involve them frequently in intercultural miscommunication. Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to present the concept of intercultural communication competence, focus its importance on foreign language teaching, and indicate how to cultivate students' intercultural communication competence.

The role of intercultural communication in language learning and teaching

Intercultural communication can be defined as the interpersonal interaction between members of different groups, which differ from each other in respect of the knowledge shared by their members and in respect of their linguistic forms of symbolic behavior. Intercultural communication is not only a field of communication but also can be defined as a set of knowledge. Intercultural communication competence includes high/low context, direct and indirect communication, verbal and non-verbal communication, obstacles/barriers of Intercultural communication, intercultural communication competence/incompetence, and other vital spheres of people's lives. Intercultural communication is targeted at allowing for positive and productive interaction. We are not joining this culture, we are not becoming a member of another socie-

ty, and we are not abandoning our own culture. That would be assimilation and that is not what we are after.

Intercultural communication is not simply a language proficiency. Without any doubt, communication requires the ability to understand language, but just think about how much of our communication is nonverbal: our body language, our attitudes, and the rituals from hand shaking to the stink eye. Some researchers estimate that up to 93% of all human communication is nonverbal, although according to recent studies, it is actually closer to 60%. To better understand and grasp the theory and practice of ICC, we need to see the light of Intercultural communication competence.

Intercultural communication competence

Intercultural communication competence (ICC) is the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in various cultural contexts.

To communicate effectively means to get your point across in the way that you intend. The message that you intend to send has been received by your audience in the way in which you have intended it. Misunderstandings will unlikely to occur in that case.

To communicate appropriately means to attend to the rules and expectations that apply in a social situation. This component is a bit trickier since appropriate communication varies with the individual with whom you are communicating and the cultural identities this person holds.

Mutual understanding and intercultural competencies are very important in today's global world because they allow us to overcome prejudice, discrimination, and misunderstandings between people of different cultural backgrounds. Intercultural communicative competencies (ICC) in education permit learners to understand and communicate successfully with representatives of the target language cultures. Acquiring ICC is a complex matter, which involves a

new approach not found in traditional language lessons. Additionally, teachers find it challenging to identify themselves with and apply intercultural aspects of the target language [3, 4].

In the context of English language teaching, the learners are guided through the process of acquiring competencies of attitudes, knowledge, and skills related to intercultural competence while using English as a foreign language. English teachers must lead learners through activities in which attitudes about other cultures with the intent of becoming more willing to seek out and engage with other in order to ultimately experience relationships of reciprocity [4,107]. Once learners have taken time to discover the similarities and differences between their culture and that of the target culture, the teacher must construct activities that will prepare learners to build relationships with people of diverse backgrounds and languages. Then, English language learners should be facilitated with the time and the space to develop skills in interpreting and relating the meaning among different cultures [4,123]. When learners begin to identify ethnocentric perspectives and misunderstandings related to cross-cultural situations, they become able to understand and explain the origins of conflict and mediate situations appropriately in order to avoid and prevent misinterpretations. Finally, skills in discovery and interaction allow intercultural speakers to identify similarities and differences between home cultures and foreign cultures, resulting in successful communication and the establishment of a meaningful relationship. A successful intercultural speaker seeks out opportunities to meet individuals from diverse cultures in order to share information through communication in a foreign language [5, 14].

The practical view of integrating intercultural communication competence in language teaching

When it comes to lesson materials, many sources might be helpful in integrating these cultural aspects of teaching and learning. For example, during a course "Multilingual

School”, most recently, we were acquainted with various projects [6], attempting to enhance students’ knowledge about diversity and multilingualism. One of these projects was “Festivals”, created to increase students’ awareness about different cultures that can also be used to develop their human values.

This project included an overview, objectives, activities, and reflection part provided for teachers. Additionally, activities were designed considering students’ knowledge and language proficiency (see the pictures below).

Overview

Grade	Lower secondary (Grades 7–9)
Language focus	Listening, speaking and writing in home languages and English; English grammar
Content focus	Social studies, cultural studies
Description	Festivals are important social events that are shared by people who belong to cultural and faith-based communities. This project can also be combined with Project 5: Cultural artefacts. Students discuss and write about these topics in their home language(s) and English.

This project includes four activities:

- 1 Introducing a local festival
- 2 Talking about a festival
- 3 Writing about a festival
- 4 How my family celebrates



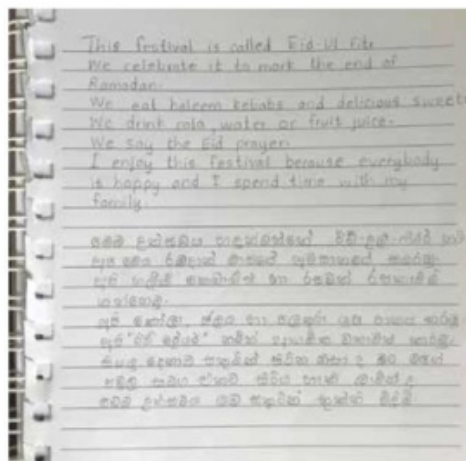
Why are these activities useful?

Festivals are important and happy social events that are held regularly to remind people that they belong to a community of people who share similar beliefs or faith; a cultural heritage that includes history, stories (spoken and written literature), music, song and dance; traditional practices, knowledge and values; and often also the same language. An important purpose of holding regular festivals is to remind people that they belong to this cultural group, and the festival is associated with a social event that is joyful

Example questions with model answers

Question	Model answers
What is the festival called?	The festival is called ... The festival's name is ...
When do we celebrate this festival?	We celebrate this festival in [month]. This festival is celebrated every [season].
Why do we celebrate this festival?	We celebrate this festival because ... The reason for this festival is ...
How does your family celebrate this festival?	We go to [place] and [activity]. We like to celebrate by ...
What do you eat and drink?	We eat ... and drink ...
...	

together to write sentences with interesting detail and accurate expression. Students may use the same sentence structures as their partner, but may choose to include different information. As you walk around the classroom, help students with grammar and spelling.



Activity 2: Talking about a festival

Objectives

- Students ask and answer questions in their home languages and English.
- Students develop vocabulary associated with festivals in their home languages and English.

Time

40 minutes

Materials

- Model questions about festivals

Steps

- Give out or display questions with model answers (examples below). Include a variety of questions as in Activity 1.
- Put students into pairs. One student asks questions based on the prompts. The other student answers, in English where they are able, using words in their home language where needed. Students can swap roles halfway through. Walk around the room and listen to the pairs. Help them with expression and vocabulary (in both the home/local language and English) where needed.
- After their discussion, students add to their vocabulary chart from Activity 1 in their home languages and English.

Example questions with model answers

Activity 3: Writing about a festival

Objectives

- Students write sentences in their home or local language(s) and English.
- Students read aloud in both their home or local language(s) and English.

Time

40 minutes

Materials

- Vocabulary chart from Activity 1
- Questions and answers from Activity 2
- Writing materials for each student

Steps

- Prepare prompts to help students write sentences about the festival. The vocabulary chart from Activity 1 and the questions and answers from Activity 2 may be very useful here. Also, look at the example below. You might want to share this with your class before they start.
- In pairs, students write six sentences each about their festival. The students can use translanguageing between their home language and English when they draft their sentences. Then they help each other to edit and translate where necessary to rewrite the sentences in English. They work together to write sentences with interesting detail

Picture 1 – Examples of projects for developing the cultural dimension of foreign language teaching

Conclusion

There is no doubt that the main aim of FLT is communication. As future teachers, we need to make an appropriate environment for our learners in order to give them knowledge about all spheres of life. It is essential to prepare our students to meet the demands of today's changing global society. With increased engagement, ICC encourages a deeper understanding of culture and language. In addition, the goal of teaching will be achieved when students use their knowledge in the future, and in this case, Intercultural communication skills will be the students' ID for their study and workplace in different countries.

In short, the most important thing in the cultivation of ICC is to let students develop such a worldview and thinking mode. Teachers should be fully aware of the importance of competence in foreign language teaching theoretically and emotionally and then cultivate and improve the students' ICC with practical activities. The development of ICC with a wider worldview can encourage students to jump out of their personal perspective to look at problems. Their minds will open, rather than being simply neutral, simply accepting or excluding without judgment. The ability to reflect on one's

own culture and the culture of others will be of great significance for the future development of students and for building a peaceful and harmonious world.

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Білім берудегі мәдениетаралық коммуникация: теориялық шолу

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Аңдатпа. Соңғы жылдары шет тілдерін оқытудың мәдени өлшемінің саласы өзінің зерттеу аясын кеңейтті. Бүгінгі таңда шет тілдерінің оқытушылары оқушылардың мәдениетаралық коммуникация туралы хабардарлығын арттыруға және олардың мәдениетаралық құзыреттілігін дамытады деп күтілуде. Алайда, осы саладағы зерттеулердің көбеюіне байланысты шет тілі мұғалімдері мен оқушыларының көпшілігі мәдениетаралық коммуникация тұжырымдамасын және оның тіл үйрену мен оқытумен тікелей байланысын түсінуде қиындықтарды кездестіреді.

Себебі зерттеулердің көбеюі мен әлемдегі күнделікті өзгерістер мәдениетаралық коммуникация концепциясының нағыз түсіндірмесін ұсынуда шектеулер қояды. Сонымен қатар, кейбір мұғалімдер оқушылардың мәдениетаралық хабардарлығын арттыру үшін тиісті оқыту тәсілдерін әзірлеуге және қызықты материалдарды дайындауға байланысты қиындықтарды кездестіреді. Сол себепті бұл теориялық мақала осы тақырып бойынша әдебиеттерге шолу жасауға және шет тілдерін оқытудың негізгі құрамдас бөлігі ретінде танылған мәдениетаралық құзыреттілікті нығайту үшін білім беру негіздемесін ұсынуға арналған. Бұл теориялық шолу мәдениетаралық коммуникацияны тілдік білімге біріктірудің негізгі ерекшеліктерін талқылайды және қорытындылай келе, мәдениетаралық байланыс құзыреттілігінің жоғарылауы ағылшын тілін шет тілі ретінде оқып жатқан білім алушыларға тәжірибелі және сауатты түрде дамытуға көмектесетінін атап көрсетеді.


 **Тірек сөздер:** мәдениетаралық коммуникация, мәдениетаралық коммуникативтік құзыреттілік, тілдік білім, ағылшын тілін шет тілі ретінде оқыту.

Межкультурная коммуникация в образовании: теоретический обзор

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 **Аннотация.** В последние годы культурное измерение обучения иностранным языкам расширило сферу своих исследований. Ожидается, что сегодня преподаватели иностранных языков будут способствовать повышению осведомленности учащихся о межкультурной коммуникации и развитию у них межкультурной компетенции. Однако из-за растущего числа исследований в этой области, большинство преподавателей иностранных языков и учащихся могут столкнуться с трудностями в понимании концепции межкультурной коммуникации и ее тесной связи с изучением языка. Кроме того, некоторые учителя сталкиваются с проблемами, связанными с разработкой соответствующих подходов к обучению и подготовкой увлекательных материалов для повышения межкультурной осведомленности учащихся. Поэтому данная теоретическая статья призвана представить обзор литературы по этой теме и предоставить образовательное обоснование для укрепления межкультурной компетенции, которая признана основным компонентом изучения иностранных языков. В обзоре обсуждаются ключевые особенности интеграции межкультурной коммуникации в языковое образование и в заключение подчеркивается, что повышенная межкультурная коммуникативная компетенция поможет учащимся стать более опытным и компетентным пользователем английского языка.

 **Ключевые слова:** межкультурная коммуникация, межкультурная коммуникативная компетенция, языковое образование, английский как иностранный язык.

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