

Developing Intercultural Communicative Competence Using Different Techniques

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Abstract – In this article we have tried to give information about modern methods of teaching EFL, teaching culture especially intercultural communicative competence in teaching English and the problems of their teaching ways in language classroom as well as to work out methodical recommendations for teaching processes.

Keywords – EFL, intercultural communication, teaching process, methods, competence, culture, multilingual, multinational.

Our groups are becoming more multilingual and more multinational under the irretrievable effects of globalization. This situation drastically increases the importance of culturally responsive pedagogy. Before explaining what culturally responsive pedagogy is, it should be noted that this term is used interchangeably with several terms such as culturally responsible, culturally appropriate, culturally congruent, culturally compatible, and culturally relevant. All these terms indicate that teachers need to be responsive to their students by integrating some elements of the learners' culture in their teaching. That means that teachers need to meet their teaching objective, making use of the concepts, speeches, images, films, and/or materials that are familiar to the students.

To exemplify, let's imagine a culturally responsive multinational writing group where students from diverse backgrounds coexist, and the target subject of the group is writing an expository paragraph. A culturally responsive task to do in this group would be, for example, utilizing the proverbs of students from different countries. Students might be given a piece of paper with a list of proverbs from the home countries of the students in the group. They may be asked to choose one of the proverbs (not the ones from their home country) and write an expository paragraph. This simple task would not only increase students' awareness of the cultural values and norms of other cultures but also might make them see that there are similarities between their and the other cultures since proverbs carry very similar messages across cultures. Another culturally responsive task to do in a multinational group is using a speech or text from the home country of some students. For instance, a reaction-response paragraph activity can be designed with such texts: students might be asked to react to some of the ideas presented in the texts.

Teacher trainer programs should prepare their trainees to work with diverse students in multinational groups. There are five important areas that need to be involved in teacher training programs. These areas are as follows: Developing culturally diverse knowledge base, designing culturally relevant curricula, demonstrating cultural caring and building a learning community, building effective cross-cultural communications, and delivering culturally responsive instruction. To be able to demonstrate cultural caring and building a learning community, teachers should use "cultural scaffolding—that is students' cultures and experiences—to expand their intellectual horizons and academic achievements". They also should emphasize holistic or integrated learning; rather than making different types of learning (cognitive, physical, emotional) discrete, deal with them in concert.

A responsive teacher is sensitive to the needs, interests, learning preferences, and abilities of their students. Moreover, these teachers do not implement the same kinds of activities in their groups all the time and never follow the same teaching methods and materials. Culturally responsive teachers need to utilize the three dimensions within the culturally responsive teaching framework:

- a) Academic achievement: Teachers aim to make learning meticulous, exciting, and challenging.
- b) Cultural competence: Teachers know and facilitate in the learning process the various range of students' cultural and linguistic groups.
- c) Sociopolitical consciousness: Teachers need to recognize and assist students in the understanding that education and university do not occur in a vacuum. The interaction among these dimensions would help teachers considerably meet the needs and expectations of a diverse group. Culturally responsive teachers make use of the group and non-group time to have a better understanding of the cultures of their students. In or out of group, culturally responsive teachers try to develop personal relations with their students, and they do not do that at random intervals. Developing personal relation with students is one of the predominant characteristics of culturally diverse students. For example, they may go to field trips, join student nights at university, or they may celebrate their students' national, religious, or special days with them. Many teachers today find themselves facing an increasingly multicultural group which can sometimes prove challenging when keeping an atmosphere of equality and respect within the group. Despite these challenges, it is wonderful to have such diversity of culture within a group, as this variety of experience and background creates tolerance and mutual respect within the group that is transcribed into later life and can even improve academic results.

To fully embrace multiculturalism, there needs to be university-wide effort and an implemented policy for all groups to follow. Some teachers believe that they become culturally responsive when they organize special tasks or celebrations during, for example, Christmas or Shabbat times for their multinational students. Of course these are expected behaviors of a responsive teacher, but it should be remembered that being responsive is not limited to a couple of days. Every special occasion - national holidays and independence days - is a great opportunity to incorporate culture into group teaching and to let some learners express their culture while helping the others learn more about the other cultures. Through these remembrances, teachers would also enhance their own knowledge on their students' cultures.

Furthermore, culturally responsive teachers are very patient when it comes to listen to their students and let them share personal stories or anecdotes during group time. Personal story exchanges should not be seen as a problem because of time constraints; on the contrary, they should be regarded as learning opportunities for students (and even for teachers themselves) and students should be encouraged to share stories about their families, weekend activities, and even hobbies. Likewise, responsive teachers should consider sharing "appropriate stories about their personal lives and connect their own and their students' lives to the content if the instruction". Additionally, culturally responsive teachers promote equality and mutual respect among students and emphasize that no culture is superior to another. They also acknowledge students' differences as well as their commonalities. Last but not least, responsive teachers understand that they need to educate themselves in their students' values, history, and in any other element that constitutes the learners' culture. Teacher cannot teach and cannot increase awareness of something they do not know themselves.

In any EFL group which places intercultural communicative competence at the core, any FL teacher would raise the following question: how to integrate the intercultural dimension in an EFL group and how to acquire ICC? FL teaching which integrates an intercultural dimension combines between the two following objectives:

1. Helping learners to acquire the communicative competence needed to communicate in speaking or writing, to formulate what they want to say/write in correct and appropriate ways.
2. Developing the learners' intercultural competence i.e. their ability to ensure a shared understanding by people of different social identities, and their ability to interact with people as complex human beings with multiple identities and their own individuality.

As stated earlier, the teaching of culture will not be limited to the transmission of information about the people of the target culture and their general attitudes, as traditional thought in FL education suggests. Instead, EFL teachers should be concerned with following goals:

1. To help learners see relationships between their own and other cultures

2. To help them acquire interest in and curiosity about 'otherness', and an awareness of themselves and their own cultures seen from other people's perspectives.
3. To help learners to understand how intercultural interaction takes place,
4. How social identities are part of all interaction,
5. How their perceptions of other people and others people's perceptions of them influence the success of communication,
6. How they can find out for themselves more about the people with whom they are communicating.

To achieve these goals effectively, FL teachers should try to design suitable activities that would prepare FL learners to communicate with open minds with other intercultural speakers and tolerate differences.

One question germane to the present paper is how can we incorporate culture into the foreign language group, with a view to fostering cultural awareness? There are many possibilities to follow to develop Intercultural communicative competences in our learners; relevant methods, techniques are to be chosen. However, the subsequent practical part will not concentrate on this broad area, but present some specific techniques to be used in the group. Prior to considering some concrete techniques for teaching culture in the foreign language group, it is useful to provide some guidelines for culture teaching.

First, in tune with ICC and the dynamic view of culture, already discussed, receptive knowledge of cultural competence is not sufficient; learners will also need to acquire some skills in culturally appropriate communication

Second, to deal with culture teaching in a systematic and structured way

Third, to include evaluation of culture learning as a necessary component of the foreign culture teaching, providing students with feedback and keeping teachers accountable.

Acquiring ICC is a complex matter involving more than traditional language lessons. ICC is the best gained practically, just like learners acquire phonological accuracy, syntax or morphology through actual practice. Regular conversational topics should be about daily tasks, which should highlight identity, similarity and differences in comparable patterns of culture. Research findings indicate that teachers mainly teach socio-cultural aspects (factual information, holidays, traditions, food, housing, etc.) and pay little attention to sociolinguistic, pragmatic competences and non-verbal communication. Often only pleasant aspects of the target culture are presented, which creates an unrealistic picture in learners' perception. Realistic, accurate, contemporary and factual information should be presented.

1. Comparison method.

The *comparison method* is one of the most used techniques for teaching cultures. This technique concentrates on discussing the differences between the native and target cultures. Not only features of different cultures, but also those within a single culture should be compared, because cultures never remain static, they are constantly changing and different generations interpret things differently. The following activity can be used for developing socio-cultural knowledge, sociolinguistic, pragmatic and non-verbal competences. A very popular example the topic of "University", including university routine, subjects, length of groups, clothes to wear, university buildings, homework, university meals, phrases, and ways of behavior. Learners watch a simple short video, which shows a typical British university day. The video presents a typical university day for students. It offers socio-cultural knowledge, but also sociolinguistic and pragmatic phrases (greetings, addressing people, polite requests, and proper use of please and thank you, formal register) and also non-verbal communication. Learners can discuss and compare the typical Uzbek and British University day, decide for pros and cons of each university system. It is also an important comparison between the phrases for requesting, offering, thanking, and addressing the teacher and also the differences of non-verbal communication.

2. Cultural assimilation.

With the technique of *cultural assimilation* the learners are presented with a critical incident, which would probably be misunderstood. Learners are given several possibilities, from which they choose the one which they think is correct. Non-verbal greetings are probably the most common examples of misunderstanding. Cheek kissing is a common greeting, which people think is universal. However, cheek kissing varies from one to four kisses, depending on culture. The following activity practices non-verbal communication. A teacher can demonstrate on somebody different types of cheek kiss greetings: one kiss, two kisses, three and four kisses. Learners should decide which type of kiss greeting is correct. Based on their own experience, they would choose

the type of greeting typical for their own culture. Teacher should explain that all types of cheek kiss greetings are correct, but vary across different cultures. The teacher should acknowledge for the learners that there are differences even within one culture.

3. *Cultural capsule.*

The technique of *cultural capsule* demonstrates, for example a custom, which is different in two cultures. It can be accompanied by visual aids to show differences and a set of questions for group discussion. The following activity practices socio-cultural knowledge, sociolinguistic and pragmatic competences. For example, the issue of the main meal of the day could be discussed. For example, the main meal of the day in Uzbekistan is an evening meal consisting of national dishes followed by fruits, and in the UK it is generally the evening meal with a main course and a pudding. Pictures of different typical meals can be presented. Learners should discuss the pros and cons of the eating habits of each culture. Sociolinguistic and pragmatic phrases connected to eating habits should be also compared.

4. *Cultural island.*

Cultural Island is a very simple but effective technique, as it is always subconsciously effecting the learners. Contemporary posters and pictures of actors, singers, films, writers, books, and famous places should be put on the walls in the groups. Their aim is to attract the learners' attention, evoke comments and maintain the cultural atmosphere. Cultural Island focuses on socio-cultural knowledge. In most language groups grammar charts, vocabulary posters and other language connected pictures are present, which are not really attractive to learners. They should be replaced by attractive, popular posters and pictures.

5. *Reformulation*

Reformulation is retelling a story to a partner in his/her own words. *Noticing* is paying attention to particular features. Both techniques could be used with the previously mentioned video of the British university day. Learners could retell parts of the story, through which they practice speaking and their socio-cultural knowledge.

Noticing is a very effective technique, by which learners look for specific features connected to the topic (e.g. differences between British and Uzbek University, the number of times the word "please" is used, etc.). Reformulation and noticing can be used for practicing socio-cultural knowledge, sociolinguistic, pragmatic and nonverbal competences.

6. *Prediction.*

Prediction engages students actively by finishing (predicting) a half told story, guessing the contents of an article or a book based on the headlines, predicting the contents of a topic based on a few pieces of information. This should evoke the students' curiosity and interest to talk, no matter if their predictions are correct or not. For example, a headline from a magazine "Brad Pitt, Angelina Jolie to adopt again" already suggests the two famous people and the generally known knowledge of their adopted children. Learners discuss and predict what the article might be about. The topic of adoption can be discussed in deeper ways and different cultural views can be compared. This activity is more suitable for advanced mature learners and it can practice socio-cultural knowledge, but also system of values.

7. *TPR.*

TPR technique is designed to respond to oral commands in order to act out a cultural experience. TPR is very popular with small children, who love to act out songs, stories, and even grammar structures. TPR in cultural teaching is most suitable for non-verbal communication and can be used with different age groups. Learners need to acknowledge by practice, different gestures and their meanings in different cultures. Good examples, such as what was already mentioned, can be: kissing on the cheek, a hand shake, thumbs up, a thumb and forefinger sign, shaking of the head, etc. These actions often have different meanings in different cultures. A learner acts out various gestures and other learners assign it to the cultures where the gesture is appropriate or inappropriate.

8. *Role play.*

Role play is a very effective technique practicing sociolinguistic and pragmatic phrases, socio-cultural knowledge, but also non-verbal communication. For example, learners can practice situations in a restaurant, shop, bus station, etc. The role plays are the closest possible opportunities for learners to practice real life situations, which are necessary for intercultural communication. Role plays are suitable for all levels of language proficiency and age groups.

9. *Treasure hunt*

Treasure hunt involves searching for certain items set in advance, for example people, dates, events in a news or magazine article. *Research* is a powerful learning tool, which combines learning and interests. Students are asked to research any aspects of

the target culture which interest them, present their projects and also create and present posters. *Drama* is a technique where learners act out short scenes of misinterpretation and also clarification of something that happens between two cultures, which is caused by misunderstanding the target culture. An effective technique for the development of the intercultural perspective is the use of *personal diaries, journals and portfolio*. Learners should make notes of their own understanding of intercultural elements; describe encounters with someone in the foreign language, experiences from visiting a foreign country, etc. They can retrospectively look at the development of their ICC. Also most of the standard EFL activities (games, field trips, songs, etc.) could be adapted for teaching culture.

By way of conclusion, we should note the main premise of the present study: the teaching of culture should become an integral part of foreign language instruction. Culture should be our message to students and language our medium. In order to avoid this embarrassing cultural and political disintegration, and encourage empathy and understanding, teachers should present students with a true picture or representation of another culture and language. And this will be achieved only if cultural awareness is viewed as something more than merely a compartmentalized subject within the foreign language curriculum. Language teachers ought to receive both experiential and academic training, with the aim of becoming 'mediators in culture teaching'. At any rate, culture teaching should aim to foster empathy with the cultural norms of the target language community and an increased awareness of one's own 'cultural logic' in relation to others. This cultural logic, though, is achieved through a recognition of 'otherness', and of the limitations of one's own cultural identity.

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