



## Implementation of the Intercultural Language Education in the Classroom

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### Abstract

*Current paper touches upon the problem of intercultural language education in the classroom.*

*Culture is a complex system of concepts, attitudes, values, beliefs, conventions, behaviours, practices, rituals and lifestyle of people who make up a cultural group, as well as the artifacts they produce and the institutions they create. Intercultural education is an effective form of education that integrates the values and viewpoints of all students in a class.*

*Within the scope of this article we tried to accentuate the key element in the intercultural process, which is a real communication and an intercultural dialogue in the classroom rather than any kind of artificial language tasks.*

*First and foremost, we consider that **being intercultural** means understanding another world. So this process can only take place from a position where students challenge their world and let it be enriched by others.*

*Actually the teacher must be interculturally competent. He/she must understand cultural backgrounds of all students, their real-life experiences. The teacher must recognize learners' beliefs, preferences, hobbies or other identities for implementing interculturalism in class.*

**Key words:** *pair/group work, collaboration, intercultural discourse, cooperation, learner autonomy, learner identity, cross-cultural awareness, motivation.*

The main goal of intercultural learning is the development of intercultural competence, which is the ability to act and relate appropriately and effectively in various cultural contexts. Intercultural competence is generally thought to require three components on the learner's side:

- a certain skillset;
- culturally sensitive knowledge;
- motivated mindset.

In greater detail, the skills, values and attitudes that constitute intercultural competence include:

- intercultural attitude (openness, curiosity, readiness, respect and tolerance towards the culture of others)
- general knowledge and information (about cultural artifacts or works of art, ways of living, places and institutions, events and symbols)
- skills of discovery and interaction (the ability to discover information about another culture)
- critical/creative thinking skills (there are different cultures with their peculiarities next to our own).

The teacher's task is to implement all these aspects in class, producing interculturally successful learning results - culturally competent learners.

Culture rules every aspect of our life and actually we are unaware of this. In fact the things produced by a culture are simply manifestations of the deeper concept of culture:

- what we do;
- what we think;
- what we feel.

Culture must be taught, learned and shared – there is no culture of one. And yet, culture is not monolithic – individuals exist within the same culture. Finally, culture is symbolic.

The Notion of being Intercultural was put forward by Phipps and Gonzalez (2004). In 1959 E. Hall authorised the term **intercultural communication** as a new discipline in human sciences. People need to interact and communicate with the people of different cultures across the borders. So successful



communication largely depends on the cross-cultural awareness and competence. Intercultural communicative competence “involves the knowledge, motivation and skills to interact effectively and appropriately with members of different cultures”.

So, the key element in the process of being intercultural is real *communication and dialogue* in the classroom rather than any kind of artificial language tasks. Being intercultural means understanding another world. Crucially, this process can only take place from a position where students challenge their world and let it be enriched by others.

Learning foreign language is no longer about knowing how to use language for the purpose of speaking and reading, but about knowing how to communicate with people who have different cultural identities or preferences. In the line with Zhang’s theory, there are three levels of the Intercultural teaching objectives and criteria:

**Level 1** - Knowledge including linguistic and cultural-general awareness, language ability of the target culture, culture knowledge of the target country.

**Level 2** - the existence/germination of the communicative language competence containing abilities of using verbal and non-verbal messages, sociocultural competence, and communication strategies.

**Level 3** - the existence/germination of the attitude which is about empathy in intercultural communication, and critical cultural awareness. (Zhang, 2007). Many year experience shows that first and foremost is essential the existence of the interculturally competent teacher in the classroom.

The development of teachers’ intercultural communicative competence is more important than any implementation of intercultural concept in class. ICC must be an integral part of the teacher’s profession In a rapidly changing world, it is more and more urgent to promote and encourage teacher’s professional development through different education programmes that lead to the development their ICC as well. Here we suggest some ideas, the implementation of which will foster intercultural language teaching in class:

#### **Recognize/understand students**

First and foremost, it is very important to understand the cultural backgrounds of our learners. It helps address them and elaborate lesson plans more effectively. We can achieve it by interviewing the learners or asking previous teachers about them.

#### **Identify learners strengths and weaknesses**

An effective intercultural teacher must identify the strengths and weaknesses of the learners to know how to eliminate them. For this account we can:

- check previous academic achievements
- interview individually each student
- frequently/permanently assess the student’s intercultural language performance in class.

#### **Encourage the learners to share their real-life experiences**

Organizing different kind of group-work/whole-class activities and sessions will allow students to share their life experiences, to exchange ideas and build communication/team building skills.

#### **Organize open discussions**

Open discussions allow students to become good listeners, to follow turn-taking and know how/where/when to use verbal or non-verbal ways of communication [4; p.146].

#### **Encourage cultural storytelling**

An effective intercultural teacher must ask the learners to tell different cultural stories and draw moral lessons from them.

#### **Hold multicultural seminars and events**

Permanently organizing different intercultural seminars and events will germinate intercultural language education.

#### **Celebrate national festivals**

Celebrating different national festivals or holidays will make the students understand and respect cultural values of others and be responsible with their attitudes towards others.

#### **Quizzes**

Quizzes on different intercultural topics will enrich the learners intercultural/cognitive knowledge and form appropriate mindset.



### Projects on intercultural issues

Projects help learners work collaboratively, share their knowledge and real-life experiences. Projects help learners think and work together.

### Debates and discussions

Simply stated, an interculturally effective person is someone who is able to live and work successfully in another culture. Taken a little further, the interculturally effective person has three main attributes:

- an ability to communicate with people of another culture in a way that earns their respect and trust
- the capacity to adapt his/her professional skills (both technical and managerial) to fit local conditions and constraints
- the capacity to adjust personally so that s/he is content and generally at ease in the host culture.

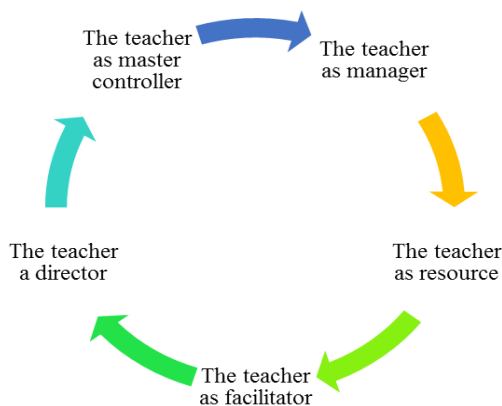
Intercultural education projects develop students' abilities to think, act, discriminate and experience cultural difference in appropriate ways. When applied to languages education, intercultural language learning in the classrooms asks students to pause, reflect, question, move back and forth between understandings they have in, and of, their various languages. No longer is linguistic proficiency the sole aim of teaching and learning in language classrooms, rather there are "new names and targets" [3; p. 3]: that is, students learn the foreign language and gain a set of intercultural understandings which allow them to explore why language is as it is, and how processes of language and culture impact on meaning making.

### Classroom resources for multicultural education

An effective intercultural teacher must use textbooks as well as authentic material (reading stories on different cultures, fairy-tales, poems as well as menus, newspaper articles, announcements, etc.) to promote interculturalism in class.

**Role of the interactive teacher** - An interactive teacher is fully aware of the **dynamics** in in classroom. The success of classroom learning is very much dependent on how students relate to each other, what the classroom environment is, how effectively students cooperate and communicate with each other, and of course what roles the teacher and learners play.

#### Roles of teachers in class:



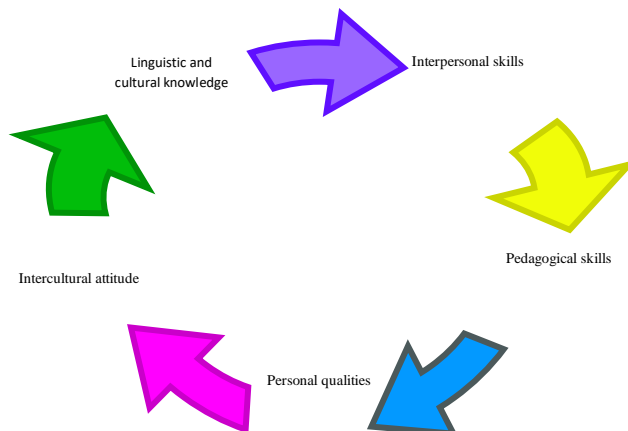
If we wish to develop a good learning environment in the classroom, we need to establish an appropriate relationship with our students. For this account teacher-student rapport is positive and useful. Rapport means the relationship the students have with the teacher and vice-versa. Although it maybe, in J. Scrivener's words, notoriously difficult to define or quantify [4; p. 23], nevertheless we can recognise it when we see it: a class where there is a positive, enjoyable and respectful relationship between teacher and students, and between the students themselves. So interaction is positive and effective if it goes from student to the teacher or from student to student.

However the rapport also depends on the way that we - teachers build up classroom interaction. For successful

relationship it is essential that the students have confidence in their teachers. As the learners think that they are in "good hands".

Successful interaction depends on some factors that the teachers should master.

As P. Ur states, the intercultural language-teacher combines the following qualities:[5;p.284-286].



The concept of intercultural learning aiming at the development of intercultural competence also requires a new understanding of the teacher him/herself. S/He is no longer a mere communicator of knowledge, but a mediator and moderator, and has to be educated accordingly.

Language teachers assist learners to understand that:

- Cultural systems are transmitted through the process of socialisation in which language – both its linguistic forms and the messages conveyed by them – plays a primary role.
- Many cultural codes are acquired unconsciously.
- Defining language as simply a symbol system made up of words, encoded by sounds or graphic conventions and arranged by rules of syntax, is inadequate for understanding language as a human communication system.

Language, culture and learning are fundamentally interrelated concepts. Implementing intercultural language learning in the classroom means the fusing of these three elements into a single approach.

Intercultural language learning is based on five pedagogical principles, they are:

- active construction;
- making connections;
- social interaction;
- reflection responsibility.

### **Language material and activities**

As with most activities employed in the classroom, activities for intercultural learning are supposed to keep the **affective** domain of learning in mind, that is, they are to keep the students motivated and enable them to somehow identify with topic that is dealt with. For intercultural learning the use of authentic material in the classroom is mostly effective.

Authentic texts can be:

- **Informational texts and instructions**
  - advertisements
  - news
  - reports
- **Newspaper texts**
  - articles
  - interviews
  - cultural texts
- **Online texts**
  - letters
  - information
  - articles
  - comments



- **Magazines**
  - articles
  - interviews
  - cultural texts
- **Literary Texts**
  - Using literary texts in the language classroom can make the students more aware of the language they are learning, help them develop skills and strategies they can apply in many different situations and contexts, increase their interest and motivation, and make the learning of the language a more enjoyable. The use of literary texts can promote reflection on cultural differences, develop understanding of the home culture, and consequently enhance more tolerant and open attitudes towards other cultures.

### Requirements for the selection and elaboration of authentic texts

	Is the text interesting for the students?
<b>Content Appropriateness</b>	Do the learners need the text?
	Can the text be used for teaching purposes?
<b>Availability and Relevance</b>	Is the text relevant to the learners skills?
<b>Text Exposure</b>	Is the text actual and interesting?

### Classroom Activities

The teacher can introduce wide variety of activities in class to develop the learners' interculturalism:

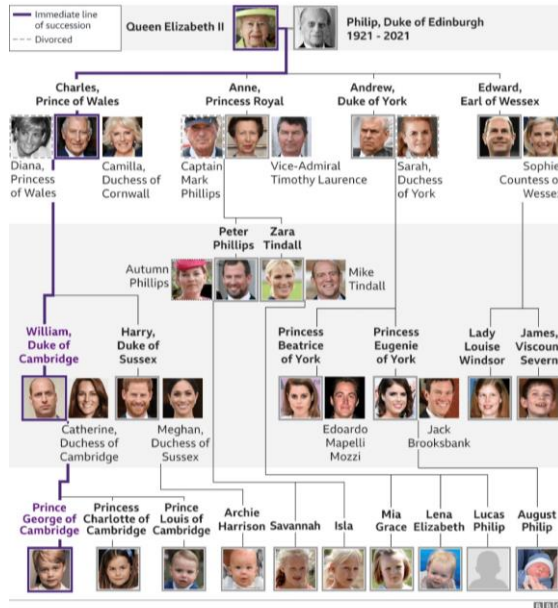
- information-gap activities
- telling stories
- class sessions
- surveys
- introducing famous people
- student presentations
- debates
- different kind of discussions
- questionnaires
- quizzes, etc.[2; p.343].

We suggest some activities or tasks the implementation of which can foster the learners interculturalism:





## The Royal Family Tree



The teacher can ask the learners to search trees of different royal families, for example, the royal tree of Elizabeth II-The Queen of the UK. The learners observe the picture, identifying the succession line to the throne. After that the teacher asks the learners to create their own family tree template. They must enter the names and pictures of their relatives with the date of their birth. So the learners can reveal their ethnic/social background with newfound relatives.

Purposeful application of authentic material in the classroom leads to the formation of the learners communicative competence and their interculturalism. It increases self-confidence and enlarges the mind-set, making teaching/learning process more interactive, enjoyable and intercultural.

### Text from the internet:

**Task: Menu – Introduce how to make a Sea-food salad with the ingredients introduced in the picture**



### Introducing intercultural topics Easter Celebrations

#### Task 1: Easter quiz - Are these statements True or False?

- Easter day is always on a Sunday.
- Easter is on the same date every year.
- Easter eggs symbolise rebirth.
- Lent lasts for the 50 days before Easter.
- The Easter rabbit is a symbol of fertility.
- The name Easter comes from an ancient Anglo-Saxon goddess, Eostre.



**Task 2: Answer the following questions:**

- What did you find out about Easter in the UK?
- Would you like to spend Easter in the UK? Why / not?
- Are there any special times of year in your country when you eat special sweets or chocolate?

**Task 3: Write a poem about Easter Use the letters in the word EASTER to write a short poem**

E  
A  
S  
T  
E  
R

So, Interculturalism is primarily important in the context of the foreign language teaching. Actually learners have knowledge of their own culture, even if they are not aware of their cultural practices or able to talk about them. Language teachers can be effective in teaching culture when they allow the learners' own experiences, understandings and insights in the language classroom. In developing learners' interculturalism, teachers must create a classroom environment in which exploration rather than repetition or any kind of mechanical drill will become the central focus of the classroom instructions. For this account fostering the learners' critical and creative skills is also essential. These skills are generally manifested through different productive activities. And students should be encouraged to talk or write freely about various cultural topics, expressing their experiences, ideas and attitudes. Carefully selected or elaborated tasks/activities will lead to the development of learners' communicative language competence, interculturalism and their higher-level thinking as well.

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