

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF FORMING INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE IN TEACHING ENGLISH

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Abstract: *the term "culture" carries various meanings across different fields, and through our socialization, we utilize culture to acquire methods for communicating, moving, thinking, and interacting with objects and tools in the world. This article explores topics including language, culture, cultural typologies, forms of communication, oral communication, cultural adaptation, and the challenges and conflicts that arise in intercultural interactions. This article emphasizes a significant topic within a new branch of linguistics: intercultural relations in foreign language education.*

Keywords: *culture, social communication, cross-cultural communication, communicative competence, intercultural relations, linguistic competence, sociolinguistic competence, existential competence.*

Learning a language is a complex process that involves not only the alphabet, vocabulary, and grammar, but also understanding the content of texts, such as behavioral and cultural norms. Due to new information technologies, all characteristics of intercultural interactions in work processes, daily lifestyles, education, and everyday communication are changing before our eyes. For example, when students are learning a new language, they gain the ability to interact directly with the culture alongside the linguistic features.

To learn any language, they go through a process that includes studying all related aspects: place, space, history, and culture. Thus, by communicating in the language, they can automatically immerse themselves in the culture associated with that language, emphasizing the strength and essence of the connection between language and culture. This is why linguists like Gao, Tang, and Xu have firmly stated that "language is culture, and these two concepts are closely interconnected" in their 2009 work "Culture and Language." Other experts like Brok and Nagasaka highlight the necessity of considering intercultural or pragmatic competence in all stages of language learning in their 2005 publication "Fundamentals of Language Teaching."

This program can equip learners of a foreign language with social skills, as students can establish social communication through these skills and achieve success in this area. Language serves as a communication tool, while culture is applied as a unity. In the field of English language teaching, there are two contrasting viewpoints regarding the relationship between language and culture: the first emphasizes their intrinsic connection. This idea was presented by Biram and Grandi in their 2003 article. "However, according to the second perspective, teaching English should be learned individually from cultural contexts," as emphasized by Sardina in their 2002 book. These well-known debates examine whether the concepts of language and culture are interconnected or not. Language and culture are inseparable concepts. The most recent debate about the importance of the concept of culture as a central theme in educational programs was presented by Bennett and others in 2003. These scholars outlined several misconceptions about excluding culture from the language teaching process.

First, they argue that language curricula have already been developed and cannot be entirely changed. Thus, they believe that there's no additional space to incorporate the concept of culture into foreign language curricula. Second, many teachers find teaching the culture of a particular people more challenging than teaching the language. Educators often feel unprepared to teach intercultural competence, resulting in a lack of experience in teaching related to culture. "Even when they have experience, concepts of culture and opinions about it are constantly changing," notes Corbett.

Third, some higher education institutions do not favor teaching culture and language in an integrated manner. They often focus on developing educational skills that prepare students for high scores on universal or national tests, leading to insufficient cultural competence among students. It is important to note that the above points are based on evidence given not just by Bennett, but also by other educators and practitioners.

Within the realms of language and culture, there are not only linguistic forms used in the cultural reality present in the real world, but also other symbolic systems, such as the habits, beliefs, monuments, and cultural events we collectively refer to as culture. For culture to emerge, every component of language must carry meaning. "This is akin to focusing on the things we consider essential for our daily lives," argues Kramersch.

Language learning and teaching programs should be developed considering rich pedagogical experiences, including:

- experience gained as an entry into communication;
- the ability to mediate in the learning process;

- the process by which students receive information or determine their learning style;
- the use of technologies in the process of teaching language and culture;
- the establishment of diverse active groups in the classroom;
- the study of the connection between education and culture

This text discusses the integration of tools, technologies, activities, and practices within educational systems, particularly in foreign language learning. It emphasizes that through language acquisition, students learn to operate in at least two languages and their respective cultures simultaneously. A sociocultural approach to language learning supports students in utilizing their experiences, engagements, and intermediary roles in practical contexts. The sociocultural perspective influences how students learn new academic "cultures" in educational institutions, shaping their actions, interactions, and methods of evaluating and using languages, objects, and processes.

Teaching culture and language alters the thinking framework, with language user competence being formed through communication abilities and social competencies. These aspects can be seen as components of communicative competence, which includes declarative knowledge (skills in using modern technologies, sociocultural knowledge, and intercultural awareness), practical skills, existential competencies, and learning abilities.

Communicative language competencies encompass linguistic competencies (lexical, grammatical, semantic, phonological, orthographic, and orthoepic), sociolinguistic competencies (linguistic indicators of social relations,

politeness norms, expressions of folk wisdom, noting differences, dialects, and intonation), and pragmatic competencies.

Foreign language teachers and researchers universally recognize the existence of another competency, cultural competence, which is included as a fifth competency in models developed by Bardos Kanal and Sveyn. They argue that culture is embedded in all competencies and is essential to them. Furthermore, various reflections and views on the role, significance, and meaning of culture in foreign language education highlight the complexity of this issue, as noted by Rivers, Biram, and Silay. Rivers emphasizes that educators should focus on both the structured plan that aids students in grasping lesson content and the development of creative abilities.

In conclusion, this article highlights the importance of focusing on the relationship between language and culture and emphasizes why teaching culture should be an integral part of foreign language curricula. A deep analysis of literature aims to enhance the understanding of the significant aspects of culture in the process of learning foreign languages. Language learning or teaching should be directed towards developing students' communicative competence, which goes beyond just knowing and understanding the grammatical, lexical, and phonological features of the target language; it should also engage with learning or teaching the culture of that language.

Some scholars, such as Pulitzer and Brusk, argue that "language and culture are synonymous." Teachers need to not only present and describe how intercultural communication occurs but also employ practical tools, such as games or simulations, that can be implemented in intercultural communication. Effective

intercultural and interpersonal communication cannot be achieved without a sufficient understanding of these concepts.

The goal of learning a foreign language alongside its culture is to primarily analyze communication issues with a focus on language and culture, facilitate communication between different cultures, and prevent conflicts. Language and culture are interrelated and cannot be separated, as language itself is a form of culture. Teaching culture allows students to gain insights into people's lifestyles, beliefs, and values, as well as enhance their language skills.

Evidence suggests that when teachers incorporate the concept of culture into language teaching methodology, students can achieve success in language learning, gaining access to all necessary resources related not only to the language but also to the cultures corresponding to that language. This is crucial, as culture is a concept that predates the emergence of language itself.

References

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