

INTEGRATING INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION SKILLS
INTO THE LANGUAGE CURRICULUM:
A LITERATURE REVIEW

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Abstract

There is an increasing need for cross-cultural communication skills in the era of globalization, where language mastery alone is not enough without cultural understanding. The purpose of this study is to identify effective strategies to incorporate intercultural communication skills in language learning so that students are not only proficient in language but also able to understand and adapt to different cultures. The methods used in this research are literature review and analysis of existing curriculum in several educational institutions. The results show that integrating intercultural communication skills in the language curriculum can improve students' understanding of the cultural context in language use and encourage the creation of a more inclusive and dynamic learning environment. The implications of this study emphasize the need for curriculum adjustments to be more holistic, covering linguistic and cultural aspects, as well as the importance of training for teachers in implementing this approach.

Keywords: *Intercultural Communication, Language Learning Curriculum, Cultural Integration*

1. INTRODUCTION

In today's globalized world, the ability to communicate effectively across cultural boundaries has become increasingly important in a variety of educational contexts (Welzer et al., 2010). To achieve this, educational interventions should adopt a comprehensive and interdisciplinary approach that not only addresses language proficiency but also includes attitudes, social behaviors, and cultural understanding to foster intercultural communication competence among students (Veliz-Rojas et al., 2019). This approach is crucial as it ensures that language learners develop cultural sensitivity and empathy, enabling them to navigate diverse cultural contexts more effectively, ultimately leading to more meaningful interactions in a plural world (Koch & Takashima, 2021).

In addition, the integration of intercultural communication skills into the language curriculum encourages learners to acquire knowledge of specific cultural norms and practices, thus fostering a greater awareness of the expectations that different cultures have of social interaction and communication. This becomes particularly relevant in English as a Foreign Language settings, where research has indicated that a well-rounded curriculum should include not only linguistic competence but also cross-cultural communication skills, as these are crucial for effective engagement in diverse cultural environments (Kim, 2020).

A number of studies have highlighted the importance of incorporating intercultural communication skills into language education programs. For example, a study conducted in China examined the need to convey cross-cultural knowledge to students in the classroom, emphasizing the importance of addressing failures in students' cross-cultural communication (Khoirunisa, 2020). This is in line with the views of educators who advocate the inclusion of cultural education as an important aspect of language learning, who emphasize that learners should be equipped not only with language proficiency but also with the ability to navigate and appreciate cultural differences. Moreover, language educators are called upon to move beyond traditional methodologies that prioritize grammatical accuracy and lexical richness, aiming to foster an environment where students engage with the cultural dimensions of language to promote understanding and acceptance across diverse backgrounds. By doing so, educators can instill the necessary intercultural communicative competencies that not only enhance language acquisition, but also prepare them for real-world interactions, thus bridging the cultural gap and fostering harmonious relationships in an increasingly interconnected society (Tran & Duong, 2018).

Researchers have also highlighted the effectiveness of using cross-cultural language teaching approaches, which emphasize the integration of cultural elements into the language curriculum. This pedagogical shift is crucial as it enables learners to build meaningful connections with the target culture while developing their linguistic skills, ultimately improving their ability to communicate appropriately in various social contexts and reducing misunderstandings that may arise from cultural differences (Chengchieh, 2020; Hsueh & Shih, 2020).

Moreover, the implementation of cross-cultural classroom activities, in addition to language teaching, is essential to foster an immersive learning environment where students can practice communication in culturally relevant contexts, thus preparing them to deal with the complexities of global interactions (Hsueh & Shih, 2020). By incorporating these interactive elements into the curriculum, educators not only stimulate students' interest in foreign cultures, but also provide them with the practical tools necessary to navigate cross-cultural dialog more effectively, which is especially important given that traditional teaching methods often ignore the cultural nuances inherent in language use.

Ultimately, the integration of intercultural communication skills into the language curriculum in educational institutions is an important step in preparing students to thrive in today's interconnected world. This comprehensive educational strategy not only enhances linguistic competence, but also fosters an understanding of various cultural perspectives, which is crucial for encouraging effective interactions among individuals from diverse backgrounds, as highlighted by recent pedagogical frameworks advocating a holistic approach to language teaching and learning.

2. RESEARCH METHODS

This research uses a literature review approach that aims to analyze the integration of intercultural communication skills in the language curriculum. The literature review was conducted by collecting, evaluating and synthesizing various relevant scholarly sources. This process involved identifying literature related to intercultural

communication, language teaching and curriculum implementation, which was then analyzed to reveal trends, challenges and best practices in the integration of these skills into language education. The data obtained from the literature was critically evaluated to ensure that the research findings were based on solid evidence and relevant to the current educational context. This approach enabled the researcher to formulate recommendations based on a comprehensive understanding of the theory and practice of intercultural communication in education.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Challenges and Obstacles

The need to develop intercultural communication skills is becoming increasingly important in today's globalized world. The complexity of this integration is often hindered by educators' limited understanding of intercultural competence and the challenges inherent in the Communicative Language Teaching framework, which demands a comprehensive approach to effectively address the nuances of language and culture in diverse contexts (Usó Juan & Martínez Flor, 2008). One significant challenge lies in the persistence of a deficit model that frames international students as needing assimilation and local students as lacking diversity.

This mindset often fails to recognize the connection between students' diverse identities and their different needs, making the translation of education policy into inclusive classroom practice a daunting task (Ippolito, 2007). Moreover, educators may face resistance from curriculum designers and institutional frameworks that prioritize traditional language teaching over innovative approaches that promote intercultural awareness, thus limiting opportunities for mutual learning and development among students from different backgrounds. Furthermore, the lack of practical guidelines and best practices for implementing intercultural communicative competence in the classroom may leave teachers feeling unprepared to navigate complex cultural dynamics, further complicating efforts to foster an environment conducive to intercultural learning (Moeller & Osborn, 2014).

Despite these barriers, researchers have proposed pragmatic solutions to help bridge the gap between theory and classroom implementation. One approach is the development of accessible frameworks and best practices that empower educators to effectively integrate intercultural communicative competence into their teaching, thereby enhancing students' ability to engage meaningfully with peers from different cultural backgrounds and navigate the complexities of intercultural interactions (Moeller & Osborn, 2014). Moreover, the incorporation of cultural comparisons and high-leverage teaching practices can provide teachers with the necessary tools to foster intercultural awareness and cultivate a sense of global citizenship among their students.

In conclusion, the integration of intercultural communication skills into the language curriculum faces significant challenges, including limited understanding of intercultural competence, resistance to inclusive approaches, and a lack of practical guidance for educators. However, by recognizing the important role that cultural diversity plays in enriching the learning environment and implementing targeted strategies that promote intercultural engagement, educators can turn these challenges into opportunities

for growth and development, ultimately preparing students to thrive in a multicultural world (Ippolito, 2007). In addition, the ongoing evolution of English as a global lingua franca requires that language teaching not only incorporate pragmatic competence but also emphasize the importance of understanding and accepting cultural differences, thus fostering relationships that transcend geographic and cultural boundaries (Hunt, 2014).

Moreover, developing a curriculum that effectively integrates these intercultural communication skills requires not only awareness of students' diverse cultural backgrounds, but also adaptability in teaching methods that reflect the complexities of contemporary global interactions, ultimately guiding students to become competent communicators in our multicultural world. Given these considerations, it is imperative for educators to engage in continuous professional development focused on cross-cultural understanding, as this empowers them to facilitate learning experiences that are not only language enriching but also culturally sensitive, thereby ensuring that all students are equipped with the necessary skills to navigate the challenges and opportunities of our globalized era.

3.2. Impact of Integrating Intercultural Communication Skills on Language Learning Effectiveness

The integration of intercultural communication skills has become an important component of the language learning process (Khoirunisa, 2020). This approach not only improves linguistic proficiency, but also fosters a deeper understanding of the cultural context in which a language is used, ultimately leading to more effective communication and learning outcomes for students. Incorporating a cross-cultural perspective allows students to engage with diverse cultural norms and practices, thus enriching their educational experience and enabling them to navigate the complex social interactions that arise in a multilingual environment (Khoirunisa, 2020).

Moreover, when students develop their linguistic abilities alongside cultural awareness, they are better equipped to participate in meaningful exchanges that go beyond vocabulary and grammar, thus enabling them to relate more empathetically to speakers of other languages and cultures (Kim, 2020). This dynamic interaction between language and culture not only prepares students to communicate more effectively, but also equips them with the necessary skills to overcome potential misunderstandings that may arise in intercultural situations, thus fostering their overall intercultural competence, which is crucial for success in an increasingly globalized world (Dimas, 2016).

Researchers have emphasized the need to move beyond traditional communicative approaches to language teaching, which often focus solely on linguistic competence, and instead adopt an intercultural perspective that considers the cultural nuances inherent to language use (Moeller & Osborn, 2014). This shift not only overcomes the limitations of conventional methods, but is also in line with the realities of contemporary communication, where understanding cultural context is as important as mastering grammar rules, as highlighted by various academics in the field of language education (Khoirunisa, 2020).

In addition, implementing strategies that promote intercultural communicative competence in the classroom has been associated with greater student engagement and success in language acquisition, as students benefit from the integration of pragmatic skills and cultural insights necessary for effective interaction in diverse environments

(Hunt, 2014; Kim, 2020). By cultivating an understanding of cultural differences and the ability to navigate cross-cultural interactions, language learners can develop a more comprehensive and nuanced command of the target language, allowing them to communicate with greater proficiency and sensitivity. This comprehensive understanding not only reduces the likelihood of miscommunication, but also encourages learners to cultivate an openness to foreign cultures (Lim & Griffith, 2016), increasingly important in our interconnected world (Zhang, 2021).

Building cross-cultural awareness in language education helps learners to engage in multiple cultural perspectives, which ultimately leads to improved communicative competence that goes beyond language accuracy, as understanding the cultural context allows them to interact more effectively with native speakers of the target language (Huang et al., 2020). Moreover, by integrating intercultural competence into the language learning curriculum, educators can prepare students to face real-world challenges associated with multicultural communication, thus emphasizing the relevance of cultural understanding in ensuring effective interactions and fostering a collaborative environment in diverse settings (Koch & Takashima, 2021).

This integration not only enhances students' linguistic abilities, but also prepares them to become global citizens who can engage and appreciate the complexities of different cultures, thus enriching their overall learning experience and effectiveness in communicating (Moeller & Osborn, 2014). Moreover, such an integrative approach allows learners to develop not only their communicative skills, but also their emotional intelligence, which is crucial for building rapport and trust across cultural boundaries, thus facilitating smoother interactions and reducing potential conflicts stemming from cultural misunderstandings.

Moreover, developing intercultural communicative competence inherently fosters cultural sensitivity and promotes empathic understanding among learners, which are essential attributes for thriving in diverse social environments and ultimately contribute to a more successful language learning experience overall. As a result, the emphasis on cultural context in language education not only encourages a more holistic approach to language acquisition, but also directly impacts learners' ability to engage productively in a globalized society, where intercultural interactions are commonplace and often challenging.

4. CONCLUSION

Intercultural communication skills are essential to be integrated into the language learning curriculum. Research shows that developing these skills not only improves students' linguistic competence, but also enhances their ability to interact with people from different cultural backgrounds. Language teaching that incorporates intercultural understanding helps students cope with cultural differences and forms critical thinking abilities and sensitivity to diversity. In addition, this study emphasizes the need for specialized training for educators to ensure that they can be effective in teaching intercultural communication skills in the classroom.

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