THE DEVELOPMENT OF INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCY THROUGH ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING

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ABSTRACT

Culture shows the life people live and as of this fact, we see that the term culture refers to beliefs, ideas, values, and knowledge of one nation. On the other side, we also can say that culture and language are bonded together and they cannot be separated when learning takes place as it develops standard communication skills. Otherwise, if languages are taught without their cultures, students are only the visitors of the language who aren't familiar in detail about the origin of a particular language. Therefore, one of the strategies to learn English as a foreign language is if we see it through its culture and acquire this learning through the technique of competency base learning as it helps students develop their skills in their pace and provides students with useful models of authentic use of the language in the classroom and online. The purpose of this study is to discover the possibilities of learning English for the development of intercultural competence and to distinguish successful teaching methods for the development of this competence in higher education and also to show that students need to acquire these competencies, so they can have the most effective communication with individuals from the cultures of English-speaking countries.

Keywords: ELL, EFL, intercultural differences, cultural value

1. INTRODUCTION

Living together means being in contact and interacting with individuals of different cultures. There are hundreds of definitions of culture, which proves that it is difficult to give an accurate definition of it. Culture can be interpreted in different ways by different individuals. As Jackson J. puts it, culture can distinguish you from others in a number of ways like for example geographical location, language, race, religion or political affiliation, clothing, food and so on (Jackson. J., 2014).

People, whose English language is not the first language, tend to learn English language for the fulfillment of communicative needs for their academic and professional career. The process of learning English as a foreign language requires an individual to practice the linguistic forms and together with it they find a need to become familiar with its culture in order to interpret intercultural communication. This is what is called intercultural competence which is a long process that builds itself on the existing knowledge and experiences by rebuilding them to gain new knowledge. According to Barret (2013), in order to understand the intercultural competence, we must understand the concept of identity, culture, intercultural meeting and intercultural competence (Barret, M., Byram, M., Lazar, I., Mompoint-Gaillard, P., Philippou, S., 2013).

Identity helps people define their individuality and orients and positions them in the world around them.

Culture includes cultural materials, social institutions, norms, values, attitudes which members of the group use as a reference to make sense of and connect with the world.

Intercultural Meeting: A meeting is considered intercultural, when two or more people come from different cultures and the differences between them are perceived and emphasized by the situation or by the orientations and attitudes of the respective persons.

Intercultural competence does not only mean a set of skills applied in a given context, but a combination of attitudes, understanding, knowledge and skills used to respond successfully to different situations that may present challenges, difficulties or certain tasks.

According to the Byram model that develops intercultural competence, consists of five elements (Byram, 1997). According to Byram, 'a person who has developed intercultural competences is able to understand different cultures, from the external and internal aspect of a society, is able to mediate and interpret for himself and others; has a critical understanding of his and his culture to others, he is aware of his perspective, and understands that the way he thinks and understands is determined by the cultural context and not something invented' (Byram, 1997).

• *Knowledge* - According to Byram, this means 'knowing how social groups and cultural identities function, and to understand that every word, every action is related to the cultural context in which one lives' (Byram M., 2001)

• *Critical Cultural Awareness* – It is 'the ability to evaluate, critically and over well-defined criteria, perspectives, practices and products both in the personal and native culture, as well as in the culture of the other state' (Byram M., 1997). Students begin to appreciate their culture. Each topic discussed in class will make them aware of the advantages and disadvantages of their culture. Byram emphasizes that the goal is not to changes students' values, but to make them clear and conscious.
• *Attitude* - They are 'curiosity and open-mindedness, willingness to give end disbelief in cultures and belief in your culture' (Byram M., 1997).

• *Interpretative and Comparative Skills* - It is an 'ability to interpret a document or event from another culture, to explain and related documents from a relevant culture' (Byram, 1997: 52). This means positioning oneself in the role of mediator, being able to identify the misunderstandings that come from cultural differences and being able to explain them, according to the two cultures (Byram M., 2001).

• *Ability of Discovery and Interpretation* - This is the 'ability to discover new knowledge about culture and cultural practices and to apply this knowledge, attitudes even under limitations offered by real-time communication and interaction' (Byram M., 1997). This means using all the knowledge, skills and attitudes to communicate with individuals of different cultures, given the similarities and cultural differences. So based on this conclusion, we can say that intercultural competence is the degree to which a person is able to exchange information efficiently and appropriately with individuals who belong to a different culture.

With this in mind, when learning English as a Foreign language (EFL) takes place, it is of a great need to provide learners with language cultural context including here its beliefs, values, ideas and knowledge so they can obtain proficiency in intercultural competency of a particular language in our case the English Language.

If language is not learned together with its culture, it can be interrelated negatively on the proper understanding of the use of language in social behavior which can lead to a misunderstanding of language communication as learning a foreign language is not related only to send and receive information but its function must be in a cultural context.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

English Language as a global and an intercultural source of communication raises a number of discussions and challenges for teachers and learners of English when it comes to intercultural competency. There is no doubt that learning linguistic knowledge is the number one rule for effective communication, yet, more attention needs to be paid to the intercultural competency of the target language.

According to Koester & Lustig (2010), in their research based on Intercultural Competence and Interpersonal Communication across cultures, intercultural competency involves individuals of different cultures who don't have similar orientation and interpretation to their ideas, beliefs, values, and knowledge (Koester & Lustig, 2010).

Schmidt, G. (2000), in his book "Teaching culture and language for specific purposes" states that every institution must introduce the culture of its language and familiarize the students with the major differences in the fundamental cultural pattern and behavior (Schmidt, 2000).

For example, in some countries around the world, people may find it difficult to adjust themselves in a democratic society where every human right is respected and not keeping a gender-biased attitude. These cultural differences are related to the beliefs, ideas, values and knowledge of a particular social system. Therefore, students need to develop an advanced level of communication skills while exchanging ideas about diverse cultural contexts.
According to Kim (1991), the most challenging issues of intercultural competency are cultural differences, unfamiliarity, and disagreement among the individuals (Y.Y, 2001).

How to smoothly work on intercultural competency while learning a foreign language, let’s understand the intercultural competency in foreign language learning.

3. UNDERSTANDING THE INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCY IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING

The intercultural dimension in foreign language teaching has become an important issue for educators as well as for researchers in the field of foreign languages. Learning a foreign language has always been focused on improving the methods of learning language competencies. Already with the increase of intercultural contacts, the question of the importance of the intercultural dimension is raised, questioning what is the main purpose of learning a foreign language. Learning a foreign language considering the aspect intercultural helps students acquire language competencies to communicate as well as intercultural competencies. According to Byram, Gribkova, and Starkey 'transcendental dimension' in foreign language learning aims to enable the student as a summative speaker or enable him to have skills as a complex identity and to avoid stereotyping where he organizes a limit when perceived through a single identity (Byram M., Gribkova B. & Starkey H., 2002).

Communications made without knowing the cultural elements of the target language lead to misunderstandings and disagreements. Non-cultural competence is not the only one with learning a foreign language, but we can only look and offer in any field. That is, engineers, businessmen, politicians, doctors, diplomats, students, anyone who comes into contact with individuals from other cultures to possess cultured competencies.

All of us without exception may have had conversations with individuals of different cultures and backgrounds. When a dialogue takes place between individuals belonging to different cultures, understanding depends on what cultural background that person has.

If intercultural competence is not properly developed, then the way the message is perceived often leads to misunderstandings. When people talk to each other their social identity is an inevitable part of this interaction (Byram, M., Gribkova B. & Starkey H., 2002). Through intercultural competence it is intended to prepare intercultural speakers, to be able to communicate with people with different cultural identities (Byram M., Gribkova B. & Starkey H., 2002).

Intercultural competence requires skilled educators to prepare students to acquire the linguistic competencies we understand the ability to use a foreign language according to its rules and intercultural competencies which means the ability to communicate with different individuals both linguistically as well as the cultural one (Byram, M., Gribkova B. & Starkey H., 2002).

Through intercultural learning competencies, students learn:

- how an intercultural interaction occurs;
- that social identities are part of the overall interaction;
- that their perception and that of other people affects communication;
- how to find more information about the people they communicate with

In other words, language learning within intercultural competence not only aims to help students develop language competence, for example, the ability to speak, write, read correctly and correctly, but also helps students to develop intercultural competence so they learn how intercultural interaction takes place, understand that the perceptions they have, the perspectives they have that affect communication (Byram M., Gribkova B. & Starkey H., 2002).

In conclusion, intercultural competence involves sharing knowledge with each other and discussing their opinions.

4. THE IMPORTANCE OF INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCY

Intercultural competencies are already widely accepted and, day by day, the importance of their acquisition is increasing. Intercultural competence plays an important role in communication, and that competence characteristics influence the way we act in different situations. Lack of competence leads to misinterpretations and conflicts as values, attitudes, beliefs, etc. depend on the cultural environment we grew up in. In most cases, we do not notice the impact we have on others. This is the reason why intercultural competence should be introduced in the curricula as an essential competence.

Today's multicultural environment requires that intercultural competencies be acquired by each individual. A good tool is precisely the foreign language, which puts you in direct contact with the foreign culture. It

is the teachers of these languages who perform the role of mediator between two languages, applying classroom teaching methods and practices. The role of the teacher as a mediator is fundamental.

Methods for teaching and learning a foreign language have evolved a lot. To understand the changes that have taken place, we are giving a summary of the methods used since the early 19th century.
According to Neuner (2003), grammar-translation methods were used in the 19th and early 20th centuries. It focused on teaching grammatical aspects, proper translation, and reading literature (Neuner, 2003).
This was the most widespread method of learning a foreign language in the 19th century and had as its main purpose that students learn and write in the foreign language. According to Schmidt, G. the grammar-translation method is 'a method of learning a foreign or second language that uses translation and the study of grammar as a basic basis for teaching and learning' (Schmidt, 2000).

Linguists later were oriented towards new methods of language learning. This is how the direct approach evolved. The direct method is a method of teaching a foreign language, especially modern languages through dialogues, discussions and readings, without the use of the mother tongue, without translation and without the study of formal grammar.

In recent years we have seen that the methods used at universities have undergone radical changes, compared to previous years. It is important that in every textbook, in every lesson and at every level, a cultural comparison is made, increasing the ability to reflect on the two cultures.

Regardless of the existence of new theories and methods, we can say that in our classrooms the old models of foreign language teaching still prevail. Traditional ways of learning a foreign language do not promote the development of intercultural competencies. Therefore, it remains a primary task to seek and implement new successful methods for learning a foreign language, to facilitate the learning process of students.

5. TEACHING METHODS AND INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCES

In the process of learning foreign languages, the methods used are of particular importance. In the teaching of these languages, changes have been made, adapting more to the demands of the time.

The aim is for educators to be updated and trained with these new teaching methods. The traditional methods used to date have proved very little success. In these methods, the focus is on the teacher, while the students have a passive role. Today, the most successful are the methods of cooperation, where the student is at the center of attention and contributes to the acquisition and deepening of his knowledge. The question that many educators have is: how to develop intercultural competencies? As we have mentioned, intercultural competence does not mean the transmission of factual knowledge to another country.

According to Byram, the best theory is the theory of social identity, which explains how to understand others, how people of a social group interact and react to people belonging to different social groups. This theory is of great interest and can be used usefully by foreign language teachers (Byram M., 2009).

All students, when learning a language, have in mind a stereotype of the place of that language, which can be positive or negative (Byram M., 2009). Stereotypes and prejudices are based more on feelings than on reasoning.

Some methods for developing intercultural competence:

Verbal or written description: It can be a written or verbal text that describes the same event or behavior presented by other people, with different cultural backgrounds, who look at it from a different perspective. This way it affects the students to develop a sense of empathy, non-judgmental thinking, the skills of observation, interpretation, comparison, analysis, etc. This helps students understand why people see the same event or behave differently.

Story Narration: This way helps students move away from their values, norms, and beliefs to see the perspective of the people involved in the story. Students explore each other as complex individuals (Navaitiene J., 2013).

Presentations: Any presentation that aims to present an individual's country and target language helps to develop intercultural competence. This method aims to increase the student's interest in the country in which he lives and at the same time to increase motivation for other countries (Navaitiene J., 2013).

Project work: This method has become very useful for the development of intercultural competence. The student is assigned a cultural topic or may even choose the topic himself/herself, and then he/she has to manage time to investigate on a certain phenomenon. Materials are submitted for evaluation (Navaitiene J., 2013).

Use of media: Media is not a neutral way of transmitting information. The media influences an individual's beliefs and attitudes. An example the author suggests is to take a picture and then discuss whether there are racist messages in the photo. The first step towards developing intercultural competence is what intercultural message the picture carries. The same can be done with movies from different sources (such as YouTube).

Intercultural shock: The moment an individual is in a different cultural environment can be overwhelmed by an uncomfortable feeling. This method can be used in classes, e.g. presenting a certain scene of a movie; however, would be ideal for traveling and contacting people from different cultural backgrounds (Navaitiene J., 2013).

Case study: A specific case study should be offered and then alternative solutions should be offered for this case. This method encourages critical thinking and develops problem-solving skills (Navaitiene J., 2013).

In addition to the materials brought, educators can also share their personal experience. This can make students reflect and present, too, situations from their own experience. In the following, we are presenting a situation in which we have been present.

6. CONCLUSION

In Kosovo, the teaching of intercultural competence in English language classes can be expressed as at an average level. Knowing that the motivation to learn English is in one high degree, despite the fact that learning English is considered difficult according to my previous research I claim that students have an intermediate level knowledge about English language culture.

By learning a foreign language, students inevitably learn about other societies and cultural practices. Learning a language as spoken by a particular group means learning the common meanings, values and practices of that group as they are carried over into that language (Byram M. & Felming M., 1998).

Based on the presented data, it is very clear that the development of language competence, together with the learning of intercultural competencies remain the primary objective in Language Learning. Although many authors recommend methods of comparison, analysis with mother tongue culture they are not frequent in foreign language learning. Culture, like language, is part of a person's identity. It is important that traditional learning methods are replaced by more effective methods that promote the development of this competence. Such are the methods of comparison, analysis, interpretation, etc.

Some activities that can be done to develop intercultural competence are: role play an activity that makes the clock attractive and develops a sense of empathy and respect; presentation and analysis of critical situations, those cases which give rise to conflicts and misunderstandings as a result of the way he perceives things; theater, poetry and creative writing that helps not only to develop the imagination, but also to deal with situations they do not encounter in real life; movies and texts as a good way to discover the culture of foreign; social media and online communication, as a good opportunity to exchange views and opinions with a group of different individuals.

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