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## Using Case Study to Develop Students' Intercultural Competence in EFL Classrooms

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### ANNOTATION

In today's globalized and intercultural world, successful foreign language learners need to have intercultural communicative competence that goes beyond linguistic knowledge. Effective communication requires the ability to function in communicative settings and requires more than knowing what (vocabulary) to say and how (grammar) to say it. These five elements: how, why, when, where and to whom must all function together in order to be able to communicate with others in a meaningful way. This article focuses on advantages of using case study method to develop students' intercultural competence in EFL classrooms.

**KEYWORDS:** culture, language, communication, intercultural competence, communicative competence, case study.

### Introduction

The relationship between language and culture, as well as the role of cultural competence in communicative competence has come increasingly under many studies. Research shows that achieving higher levels of language proficiency depends on thinking like a target language speaker and such thinking requires cultural understanding. Extra-linguistic elements such as values, beliefs, norms, rituals, and traditions are also key components of communication exchanges, which should be taught target culture interactively in foreign language classrooms in order to enhance intercultural competence.

An intercultural speaker needs to possess knowledge and awareness of cultures, open-mindedness, and a set of skills, which will allow her/him to avoid misunderstandings and stereotyping. Thus, how is the EFL learner supposed to develop cultural knowledge and skills? Is one required to have a first-hand experience abroad to be able to do so? According to Deardorff (2006), intercultural competence does not just naturally occur in most people; rather, intercultural competence must be internationally addressed through education. As such, educators need to help students develop an openness towards other cultures, as well as an understanding of their own, and the development of skills that will allow them to be competent intercultural communicators.

## Materials and Methods

There are two main approaches to teaching intercultural competence: the culture-general approach and the specific contexts of cultures approach. The first approach helps students to understand what culture is, to realize the role of culture and the fact that there can and should be many cultures. The idea of this approach is to get rid of prejudice, consider stereotypes and recognize the presence of different points of view, which are as important as their own. The second approach involves preparing to work with representatives of certain cultures, as sometimes you have to deal with partners and colleagues from one or two countries. This situation is typical for expatriates working for a long time in a foreign country. This method includes some elements of the first approach.

*Stereotypes.* Stereotypes are generalizations often used to simplify and classify other cultures and their representatives. We often resort to them when trying to understand a new situation or unfamiliar behavior (for example, it can be useful to know about the importance of facial expressions in Asian countries), but their "usefulness" is limited. One of the main problems is that stereotypes do not provide for divergence from the "norm". Therefore, we believe that all members of a certain group behave in a certain way, and do not make discounts to individual members of this group.

*Distance between superiors and subordinates.* Different cultures have different customs. People either communicate easily with superior individuals and may even criticize them. Or subordinates simply do what they are told, not having the right to discuss the orders of superiors.

*Individualism and collectivism.* Some countries cultivate individualism and competition, while others encourage collectivism and loyalty.

*Status.* This concept is interpreted in different ways, depending on the culture. For example, in Japan, the age of the individual is respected.

*The attitude towards ecology* is very important in most cultures, however, it has taken different forms in different countries. Many cultures believe that nature can be controlled, while others see themselves as part of the environment.

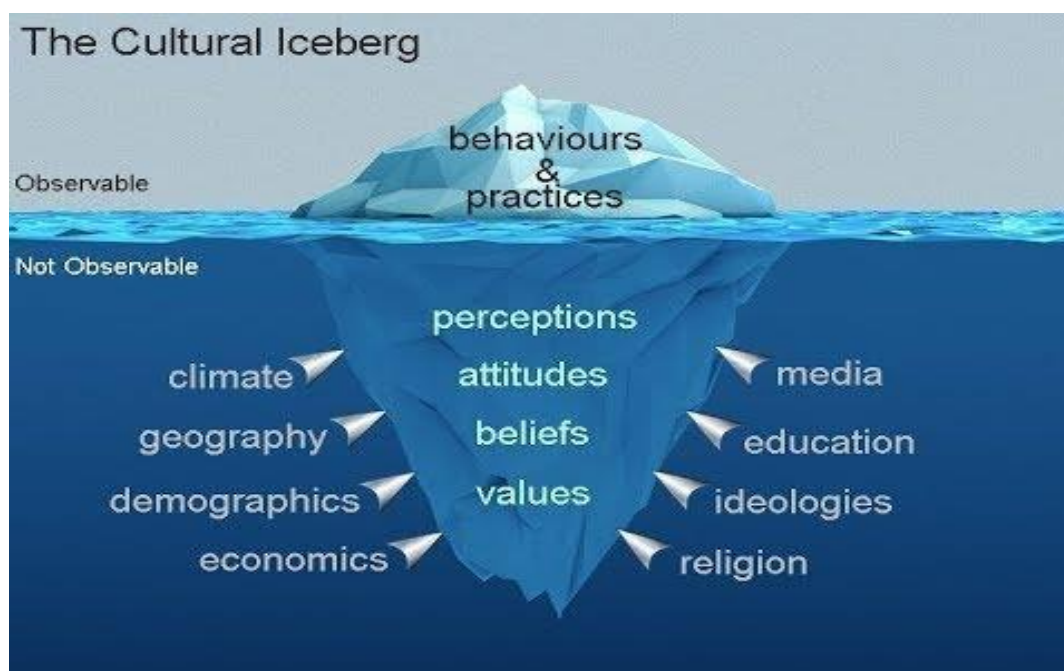
There are many more methods for analyzing cultural differences, but non-verbal communication competence is of particular interest. These include kinetics (body language), oculism (visual contact), haptics (touch), and proxemics (keeping distance). The field of verbal communication competence includes paralinguistics, which considers tone and pitch, speed and volume of speech.

The above competencies can be learned through creative tasks with elements of analysis. For example, compare and analyze a series of advertisements from different countries; discuss the use of metaphors in different situations (this is a good way to combine linguistic orientation with intercultural communication).

Intercultural competence includes the ability to perceive differences within other cultures. In teaching, the use of language for real communication may not work very well with a very large group of students, or with students whose own backgrounds and cultures suggest that the teacher is just one of the speakers. Similarly, not all English teachers feel comfortable using the communicative language teaching method, which at times requires native-level language proficiency. Classes and cultures around the world can use their own, more appropriate way to accommodate the expectations and needs of local students. The reality is that educators choose the method most suited to their own experience and teaching style to the needs of the students.

Learning styles are also highly influenced by students' culture; for example, in many Asian countries, the teacher is considered a specialist whose job is to explain to students what to do or what constitutes a correct answer. This can cause problems if the teacher is self-taught and has only taught in Western environments, where he is seen as a facilitator who encourages students to be autonomous when the latter expect something completely different. Besides, it is important to remember that analyzing the needs of language learners is an ongoing process. Hofstede (2009) describes culture as "mind software" that distinguishes members of one group or category of people from another. F. Trompenaars (2008) defines it as "a way of solving human problems". Culture deals with attitudes, behaviors, beliefs, values. It is influenced by many factors, including environment, gender, family, age, and ethics. It can be taught, but not inherited at the genetic level. It manifests itself in communication between people and is constantly changing. Some cultural differences are minor and relatively simple. For example, it is easy to notice that people dress or eat differently. However, cultural differences are not always so obvious.

The iceberg model is often used to show how hidden a culture is from prying eyes. Like an iceberg, most of which is invisible under the water column, these hidden aspects can cause problems if we are not aware of them (Pic. 1).



Picture 1. The cultural iceberg model.

According to Frendo (2007), a teacher should constantly ask himself the questions: "What was successful today and what was not and why?", "Do the textbook and additional materials fit the "cultural context" of students in terms of content and approach?" Using a case study allows students to look at a particular problem from different perspectives. Roell (2009) states that case studies are useful for learners of English as a foreign language (EFL) because to find a solution to a case study, the learners need to apply linguistic skills in combination with analytical and/ or interpersonal skills - the kind of situation that can occur in "real life," outside the classroom. Case studies, a form of task-based learning (TBL), allow teachers to implement the

communicative approach: the central focus is on completing a task, and students use language as a tool to communicate their ideas instead of doing language exercises to practice a grammar point or lexical item.

### Results and Discussions

A case study should be based on the description of a particular situation or conflict-arousing issue to which students can discuss and find solutions.

Evan Frendo (2007) cites the following incident in his book “How to teach Business English” as an illustration of what can happen when people of different cultures meet: “I was a participant in a conference on teaching the language in Korea. Once another member came up to me, looked at the sign with my name and said: “Ah, Evan Frendo. So young!” I was somewhat jarred by her remark, I muttered somewhat dismissively that in reality, I’m not that young. I had my own family and I had teaching experience. “So young,” she repeated again with a smile. I invited her to take a closer look at my gray hair. Anyway, she looked much younger than me. “So young,” she said again. Now I didn’t know what to say. I have never been spoken to like this before. And then I noticed a sign with her name “So Young” (so young). It describes a case when a representative of one culture, having heard an unfamiliar name, mistook it for a strange comment. Even the simplest things can become complex, and what is worse, we often do not realize what the problem is in such cases. It feels like we are on different wavelengths.

Teachers can use ready-made cases studies that are included in some coursebook packs and found on reputable Internet sites, or they can write their own cases. Teachers can create original cases based on current affairs or on topics contained in the coursebook focused on developing students’ intercultural competence.

### Case 1

Laylo an Uzbek girl from the countryside of Uzbekistan was given an opportunity to study in the USA. She was calm, shy girl who loved poetry and literature. That is why she decided to be an English teacher and improve kid’s English via English literature. It was her first time being in the USA and she felt homesick. The first thing that made her shocked was that how students call the teacher. Just with the first name Tom. Another thing that was strange for her was that students come in and go out without getting permission from the teacher. She didn’t miss a class, took notes during the lessons, and submitted all written tasks required. However, she wasn’t so active in class and she had lack of confidence in oral presentations. When the scores started being announced she found out that her score was F. Laylo was confused by not knowing what is D and why D? (Mamura Alimova, (2018). Cultural Bridges, Course book on Intercultural Competence. p.16)

Case studies are suitable for all types of students (with the exception of a low level of language competence), since the necessary information is usually presented in the task. Students with work experience (similar to that described in the assignment) can use it if necessary. Such assignments often require students to integrate their language skills in writing, speaking, presentation, listening, and so on. The case-study method is highly adaptable in terms of topic areas, complexity of content, linguistic difficulty, and length. If necessary, teachers can write their own simple cases or create more-complex case studies in collaboration with colleagues who teach specific subject areas. Students themselves can create original case studies as a way to relate the method to their own interests and experiences.

Acquiring intercultural competence help foreign language learners to communicate successfully with people from other cultures. The teacher needs to teach students the ability to use the appropriate vocabulary in various contexts, as well as develop an understanding of the role of culture in the communication process.

**Conclusion**

Experiences show that students are more actively engaged when solving a problem than when just reading a text and answering questions. Using case study allows EFL learners to practice different types of language skills in communicative situations and combine linguistic skills with analytical and/or interpersonal skills.

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