

The classroom activities to integrate intercultural competence development into tourism English classrooms in the enhancement of learners' intercultural competence

Le Van Ba
Nguyen Thu Hang

Abstract

Within the unprecedented growth of tourism industry, as a wide variety of cultures interact and intermingle in the international arena, intercultural communication has, more than ever before, been of global significance. The notion of intercultural competence has consequently attracted massive attention among scholars worldwide. What's more, a growing body of literature has showed that intercultural competence can foster creativity and boost learning autonomy based on genuine intellectual background and skills proficiency. In this context, this research paper aims at investigating teaching and learning activities for the integration of intercultural competence development into Tourism English classrooms at University of Foreign Language Studies, The University of Danang. This research paper used questionnaires to collect data among lecturers in order to investigate their teaching activities in promoting intercultural competence among Tourism English-majored students.

Keywords: intercultural competence; intercultural communication; intercultural awareness

¹ Corresponding author E-mail: lvba@ufl.udn.vn

² Corresponding author E-mail: nthang@ufl.udn.vn

1. Introduction

Within the context of global integration, a deep insight into intercultural aspects will create the premises for mutual understanding and hence effective cooperation between business partners from different countries around the world. Regarding globalization in the business English classroom setting, intercultural competencies can equip learners with essential knowledge, skills and attitudes demanded by the labour market. That very context poses the essential need of in-depth research into the integration of intercultural competence training into English classes in general and, and Tourism English classes in particular. Within Vietnam's economic integration, it is imperative for students of Tourism English to develop ICC so as to study and work in a cosmopolitan world.

In light of the utmost necessity of enhancing ICC among Tourism English-major students, this research paper focuses on examining the classroom activities most frequently used by lecturers in Tourism English classrooms in order to boost ICC among the students at University of Foreign Language Studies – The University of Danang.

2. Objective

The purpose of this paper is to look into the utilization of teaching activities among lecturers in Tourism English classrooms for the development of ICC at University of Foreign Language Studies – The University of Danang. Therefore, based on research findings, this research paper aims at putting forward thoughtful pedagogical recommendations for classroom activities so as to enhance learners' ICC.

3. Literature Review

1. The notion of Intercultural competence (ICC)

The importance of intercultural competence has attracted a substantial attention from many researchers worldwide. Bennett (2004), Fantini (2000), Byram (1997), Guo-Ming Chen & Starosta (1996), Wiseman (2002), Thomas (2007), Deardoff (2006), Earley & Ang (2003)..., with various perspectives, all assert that ICC is the prerequisite for interactions between people from different cultures.

ICC has been widely defined by a number of scholars as the ability of effective and appropriate interaction among members of different cultures (Wiseman, 2002), the ability of reconciliation the cultural values and the performance of effective and appropriate communicative behaviours (Guo-Ming Chen & Starosta, 1996), the possibility of relinquishing value-based culture to adapt to different cultural contexts based on aspects of cognitive and transcendental procedures, motive mechanisms and behavioral adaptation (Earley & Ang, 2003).

Byram (2003) defines intercultural competence as the ability to secure people from different societies who can understand and interact with each other with various characteristics and individualities".

According to Schenker (2012: 450), intercultural competence is "knowledge about oneself and others, open-mindedness and curiosity towards knowledge, interpretation and communication skills, exploration and interaction skills and cultural awareness associated with critical thinking". Sharing part of the viewpoint by Schenker (2012), Byram (1997) seems to have gone further and launched the model of intercultural competence as groups of knowledge, skill groups, and attitudes as follows:

- Knowledge of themselves and others, knowledge about interactions, about individual's relationship with society;

- Skills of interpretation and information contact;
- Recognition of cultural behaviors with critical thinking;
- Skills of discovery and interaction;
- Intercultural attitudes: curiosity, openness, and judgement from different perspectives with various values, beliefs and behaviors.

In addition to Byram (1997), Sercu et al (2005) also claimed that intercultural competence is composed of 3 integral parts, namely knowledge, skills and attitudes. From the aforementioned research on intercultural competence, it can be concluded that ICC can be defined as a combination of many factors, including knowledge, skills and attitudes.

2. The importance of integrating ICC into English classroom

The importance of integrating ICC in foreign language teaching has been supported by a number of scholars who all associate language learning with cultural development. To be more specific, a number of researchers (Abdel, 2000; Savignon and Sysoyev, 2002; Rathje, 2007 and Fleet, 2008) demonstrate that language acquisition is always associated with awareness of target language culture. . Besides, developing ICC is synonymous with the promotion of ICC as well as language competence so that learners can interact with people from different cultures as individuals with distinct perspective, cultural values and behaviors (Byram, 2003).

Sharing the same light as the aforementioned scholars, Alptekin (2002) states that English should be taught as an international language whose culture is the world. Jia (1997) points out that the ultimate goal of foreign language education is to cultivate and promote ICC and that language teaching, on a large scale, should be synonymous with cultural teaching.

In addition, the ultimate goal of learning a foreign language is geared towards cultural insight and proficiency, rather than just merely proficiency in the language (Byram, 1997; Abdel, 2000; Savignon and Sysoyev, 2002; Rathje, 2007).

4. Conceptual Framework

A variety of activities in four language skills to equip learners with ICC are recommended by Corbett (2010) and Byram (2001) including interviewing, role playing, ethnographic observation, analyzing advertising symbols, online exchange, explanation and analysis, presentations and case studies.

According to Byram & Feng (2005), themes treated in textbooks can lend themselves to development in an intercultural perspective while grammatical exercises can reinforce intercultural understanding. There exist a wide range of sources of information such as authentic texts, audio recordings, maps, photographs, diagrams and cartoons...

In addition, it is important to use authentic materials but to ensure that learners understand its context and intention. Materials from different origins with different perspective should be used together to enable learners to compare and analyse the materials critically. It is more important that learners acquire skills of analysis than factual information.

Overall, the conceptual framework on classroom activities recommended by the aforementioned authors for ICC development can act as theoretical foundation for the author of this paper to choose the teaching activities included in the questionnaire for participants.

5. Research Methodology

The purpose of this study was to investigate the teaching activities for the integration of intercultural competence development into Tourism English classrooms in Danang University of Foreign Language Studies. In the research design, quantitative data was obtained and analyzed to achieve the research purpose.

For data collection, a questionnaire was carried out from January 2020 to April 2020 at Danang University of Foreign Language Studies. Participants were 11 lecturers teaching Tourism English at Danang University of Foreign Language Studies, Viet Nam. Their teaching experience ranges from 7 years to more than 20 years of teaching and the teaching content covers different notions, Tourism English terminologies and procedures within the syllabus. Some parts within Tourism English textbooks engage students in critical thinking for intercultural development. The decisions of the classroom activities for intercultural development lie in the hands of all these 11 lecturers of Tourism English. Within the scope of the research, it is apparent that this group of participants are representatives of all lectures in charge of Tourism English as there are only 11 lecturers of Tourism English.

The lecturers were provided a thorough explanation on how to rate the frequency in which they apply various teaching activities for the integration of ICC development in Likert scale ranging from 1—5 (always, often, occasionally, rarely, never). After the stage of data collection, the statistics were then analyzed using SPSS 22 for further reliability in calculation.

6. Results of the research paper

Based on data analysis, some research findings were then drawn out. Chart 1 illustrates the average mean score of overall lecturers' responses on the frequency in which they apply various teaching activities for the integration of ICC development.

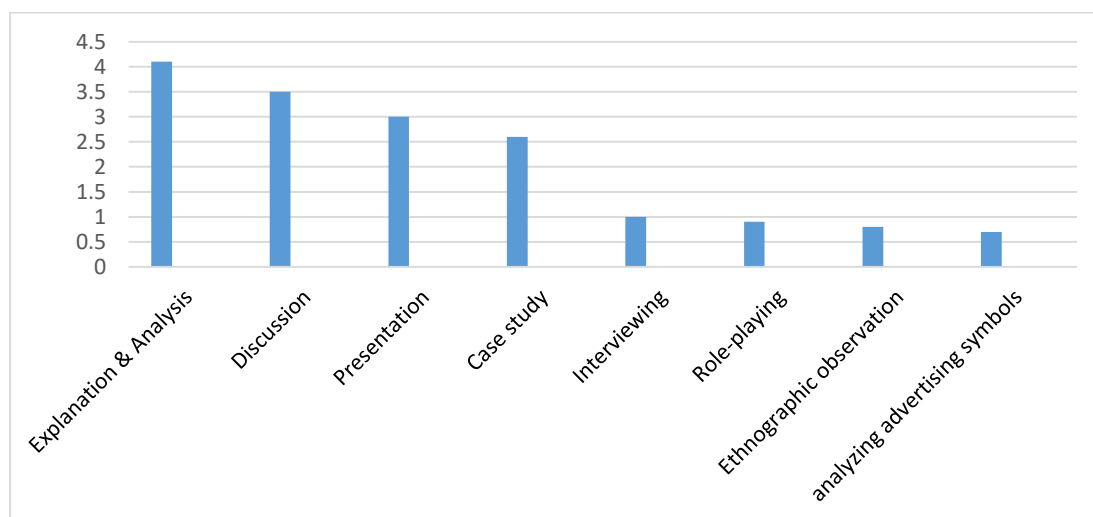


Chart 1. Average mean score of overall lecturers' responses on the frequency of use for various teaching activities

The results of the questionnaire reveal that the most common way that teachers use to integrate ICC development is “Explanation and analysis” with the highest mean score ($M = 4.1$), which is then followed by “Discussion” with a mean score of 3.5. “Presentations” and “Case Studies.” received slightly lower value of 3 and 2.6.

In contrast, activities such as interviewing (interviewing), role-playing (role-playing), ethnographic observations (ethnographic observations), analysis of advertising symbols (analyzing advertising symbols) got relatively the same low mean score for frequency rate of under 1.0.

Thus, from the search results, it can be concluded that teachers often apply such methods such “Explanation and analysis”, “Discussion”, “Presentations” and “Case Studies” to integrate the enhancement of ICC in Tourism English classrooms at Danang University of Foreign Language Studies.

7. Conclusion and Discussion

In general, it is evident from the findings of the research that some classroom activities including “Explanation and analysis”, “Discussion”, “Presentations” and “Case Studies” prove to be more frequently utilized than others among the lecturers for the purpose of ICC development in Tourism English classrooms at Danang University of Foreign Language Studies.

8. Suggestions

Based on the theoretical background and the research findings, this research paper puts forward thoughtful pedagogical recommendations for the application of classroom activities such as “Explanation and analysis”, “Discussion”, “Presentations” and “Case Studies” to integrate the enhancement of ICC in Tourism English classrooms so as to fully equip students with indispensable intercultural knowledge, skills and attitudes for their global business experiences. The integration of ICC training into Tourism English teaching and learning aims at training human resources equipped with the necessary knowledge, skills and attitudes to take part in intercultural tourism contexts.

In addition, teachers of Tourism English in particular should be aware of the benefits that ICC development brings to their students and regularly update new applications to construct a wide range of classroom activities so as to enhance students’ ICC.

9. References

- Abdel, S. L. (2000). Teaching towards cultural awareness and intercultural competence: From What through How to Why culture is?, *The annual meeting of Teachers of English to speakers of other languages in Canada*. Retrieved from <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED446434.pdf>
- Alptekin, C. (2002). Towards intercultural communicative competence in ELT, *ELT Journal*, 56(1), 57-64.
- Bennett, M. J. (2004). *From ethnocentrism to ethno relativism*. In J.S. Wurzel (Ed.) *Toward multiculturalism: A reader in multicultural education*. Intercultural Resource Corporation.
- Byram, M. (1997). *Teaching and Assessing Intercultural Communicative Competence*. Multilingual Matters.
- Byram, M. (2003). *On being "bicultural" and "intercultural"*, *Intercultural experience and education*. Multilingual Matters.
- Corbett, J. (2001). *Intercultural Language Activities*. Cambridge University Press.
- Deardorff, D. K. (2006). The Identification and Assessment of Intercultural Competence as a Student Outcome of Internationalization at Institutions of Higher Education in the United States, *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 10, 241-266.

- Earley, P. C., & Ang, S. (2003). *Cultural intelligence: Individual interactions across cultures*. Stanford' Business Books.
- Fantini, A.E. (2011). Teaching ESOL as Intercultural Competence. *Article for ESL MiniConference Online*. The SIT Graduate Institute.
- Guo-Ming, C. and Starosta, W.J. (2005). *Foundations of Intercultural Communication*. University Press of America.
- Jia, Y. X. (1997). *Intercultural Communication*. Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press.
- Roberts, C., Byram, M., Barro, A., Jordan, S., & Street, B. (2001). *Language learners as ethnographers*. Multilingual Matters.
- Rathje, S. (2007). Intercultural competence: The status and future of a controversial concept. *Language and intercultural communication*, 7(4), 254-265.
- Schenker, T., (2012). Intercultural competence and cultural learning through telecollaboration. *CALICO Journal*, 29(3), 449–470.
- Savignon, S. and Sysoyev, P. V., (2002). Sociocultural strategies for a dialogue of Cultures. *The Modern Language Journal*, 86 (4), 508-524.
- Sercu, L. et al. (2005). *Foreign Language Teachers and Intercultural Competence*. Multilingual Matters Ltd.
- Thomas, A. (2007). Cultural standards on behavior. Research into the influence of cultural standards on behavior. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Competence & Management*, 5, 119-160.
- Wiseman, R.L. (2002). Intercultural communication competence. In W. B. Gudykunst, & B. Mody (Eds.), *Handbook of international and intercultural communication* (2nd ed.), 207-224. Sage.