

## **ENHANCING INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE IN INDIAN ENGLISH LANGUAGE EDUCATION**

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### **ABSTRACT :**

Integrating cultures into English language teaching is urgent and necessary for ESL/EFL learners to enhance their intercultural communicative competence (ICC) in a globalized community where English is used for communication among people from diverse cultural backgrounds. Despite its importance, ESL/EFL educators and teachers in various contexts often neglect this issue in their English language teaching practices. In Indian, similarly, ICC is not given significant attention in English language education by EFL teachers or learners. Therefore, this paper examines the roles of ICC in English language education, aiming to raise awareness among EFL teachers and learners about the importance of intercultural communication, thus helping EFL learners become competent in multicultural contexts.

**Keywords:** ICC, intercultural competence, English language education, globalization.

### **INTRODUCTION :**

In the globalized context, English has become an international language for communication among people from various multilingual and multicultural backgrounds. Therefore, it is crucial for learners to master not only linguistic competence but also intercultural competence. English language learners must focus on developing and enhancing their intercultural communicative competence (ICC). Tran and Seepho (2015) assert that ICC is one of the most essential skills for people in the 21st century to thrive in multicultural communication contexts. To develop this skill and become effective intercultural speakers and communicators, learners need to actively engage in intercultural communities. Indeed, ICC is a core component of English language instruction, preparing learners for intercultural communication (Byram, 1997). In the Indian context, ICC plays a significant role in the process of teaching and learning English, particularly as Indian citizens gain more opportunities for international interactions (Trinh, 2014). Despite the importance of ICC being confirmed by various researchers and numerous studies (e.g., Tran & Seepho, 2014, 2015; Trinh, 2014), the role of culture and intercultural communication in English language education in Indian has not always been well acknowledged, and the concept of ICC remains unfamiliar to many researchers and educators (Tran & Seepho, 2016). Since ICC is a crucial skill for effective and appropriate communication in the globalized community, this paper will discuss the importance of ICC, its elements, and evaluation methods. Finally, it will examine the implications of incorporating ICC into English language teaching to help teachers develop their students' ICC competence.

### **What is intercultural communicative competence?**

Before discussing the definitions of ICC, it is necessary to distinguish between Intercultural Competence (IC) and Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC). According to Byram (1997), the IC of foreign language learners refers to their ability to interact in their own language with people from another country and culture. To achieve this, they must draw upon their knowledge of intercultural communication, attitudes regarding interest in otherness, and skills in interpreting, relating, and discovering. Additionally, IC consists of five categories of "savoir": savoir être, savoirs, savoir comprendre, savoir apprendre/faire, and savoir s'engager. These categories represent four aspects of IC: attitudes, knowledge, skills, and awareness (Nguyen, 2014). In comparison, ICC is the ability to interact with other people from different cultures and countries in a foreign language. The participants' knowledge of another culture is linked to their language competence through their ability to use language appropriately and their awareness of the specific meanings, values, and

connotations of the language (Aguilar, 2010). Moreover, ICC includes linguistic competence, sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence, and intercultural competence (Byram, 1997). Recently, the concepts underpinning ICC have been expanding in the field of foreign language teaching and learning (Aguilar, 2010). The term ICC is used interchangeably with 'intercultural willingness to communicate', 'cross-cultural competence', 'intercultural effectiveness', and 'intercultural sensitivity' (Mete, 2009). Similarly, Sinicrope, Norris, and Watanabe (2012) suggest a list of ICC-related terminology, including cross-cultural adaptation, intercultural sensitivity, multicultural competence, transcultural competence, global competence, cross-cultural effectiveness, international competence, global literacy, cultural competence, and cross-cultural adjustment. However, many scholars prefer to use the term ICC due to its neutrality and because it is not bounded by any specific cultural attributes (Kim & Ruben, 1992, as cited in Ahnagari & Zamanian, 2014). Baxter introduced the idea of ICC as early as 1983, and Byram, since the mid-1990s, has extensively developed the concept and its application. Since then, ICC has garnered significant interest from many researchers and scholars. Tran and Seepho (2016) define ICC as the ability to effectively and appropriately interact in a language other than one's native language with people from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. In the Indian context, ICC plays an important role in the process of teaching and learning English, especially since India became involved in international interactions with the establishment of its open-door policy in 1986, its membership in the WTO in 2007, and its inclusion in the ASEAN Economic Community in late 2015 (Trinh, 2014). Consequently, new teaching and learning goals need to be established to focus on promoting both linguistic and intercultural competence (Nguyen, 2014; Trinh, 2014).

#### **THE ELEMENTS OF ICC :**

According to Galante (2015, p.33), "Byram's model of ICC is one of the most influential and widely cited models that guide language teachers' interculturality in the classroom." In 1997, Byram's ICC comprised three components: knowledge, attitudes, and skills, which later expanded to include the following five elements:

**Attitudes:** Curiosity and openness, readiness to suspend disbelief about other cultures, and belief about one's own.

**Knowledge:** Understanding social groups and their products and practices in one's own and in one's interlocutor's country, as well as the general processes of societal and individual interaction.

**Skills of interpreting and relating:** The ability to interpret a document or event from another culture, explain it, and relate it to documents from one's own.

**Skills of discovery and interaction:** The ability to acquire new knowledge of a culture and its practices, and to apply knowledge, attitudes, and skills in real-time communication and interaction.

**Critical cultural awareness/political education:** The ability to critically evaluate practices and products in one's own and other cultures and countries, based on explicit perspectives.

It is clear that the development of ICC should be a critical combination of the above elements, as positive attitudes can help a person explore their own culture and the cultures around them. Consequently, one's knowledge, skills of interpreting, discovering, analyzing, and critical awareness will enable them to cope with multicultural differences and interact effectively and appropriately with others in a globalized community. Overall, it is desirable for the development of ICC to involve and combine the five components outlined above.

#### **The importance of ICC in ELF setting and its' roles in Indian educational context :**

Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) holds profound significance within English as a Foreign Language (EFL) settings, particularly in the context of India's educational landscape. As English continues to serve as a global lingua franca, proficiency in the language extends beyond mere linguistic competence to encompass ICC. This competence enables learners to navigate and effectively communicate across cultural boundaries, essential in today's interconnected world. In the Indian educational context, where diversity is a hallmark, ICC plays a pivotal role in fostering

inclusive communication. India's rich tapestry of cultures, languages, and traditions underscores the importance of equipping learners with the ability to understand and respect diverse perspectives. ICC empowers EFL learners to not only grasp the linguistic nuances of English but also to interpret and engage meaningfully with cultural contexts embedded within the language. Moreover, ICC enhances learners' readiness for global interactions and professional environments. In a country like India, where economic globalization has spurred international trade and collaborations, proficiency in ICC becomes a strategic asset. It equips learners with the skills to negotiate cross-cultural challenges, build rapport, and facilitate effective communication in multicultural settings. Furthermore, integrating ICC into EFL education in India aligns with broader educational goals of promoting tolerance, empathy, and global citizenship. By fostering attitudes of openness and curiosity towards other cultures, ICC cultivates a more inclusive and harmonious society. Educators are thus encouraged to incorporate activities that promote cultural awareness, critical reflection on cultural differences, and practical skills for intercultural communication. ICC stands as a crucial component of EFL education in India, offering learners not only the tools to communicate effectively in English but also the cultural competence necessary to thrive in a globalized world. Embracing ICC in educational practices not only enhances language learning outcomes but also contributes to building a more interconnected and culturally sensitive society. Thus, prioritizing ICC in EFL settings is essential for preparing learners to succeed in the diverse and interconnected global community of the 21st century.

#### **IMPLICATIONS FOR ENHANCEMENT OF ICC :**

As previously discussed, ICC holds significant importance in English language education, necessitating that ELT teachers and educators concentrate on employing a diverse array of methods to enhance learners' ICC. Several critical issues must be addressed to successfully incorporate culture and develop learners' ICC. These include implementing the Intercultural Language Teaching (ICLT) model in ICC training processes (Tran & Seepho, 2015), employing various activities to integrate culture into EFL instruction (Tran & Seepho, 2015), developing suitable materials and content, conducting ICC assessments, and, most importantly, effectively training English language teachers (Tran & Duong, 2015).

#### **THE USE OF VARIOUS ACTIVITIES TO INTEGRATE CULTURE IN EFL :**

Tran and Seepho (2015) proposed several activities aimed at integrating culture into EFL teaching to enhance learners' ICC levels. These activities include cultural asides, culture capsules, culture clusters, slice-of-life techniques, creating authentic environments, culture self-awareness exercises, quizzes or multiple-choice assessments, role-plays, inviting foreigners, and discussions.

#### **MATERIALS AND CONTENT**

The materials and their content play a crucial role in helping learners understand and assimilate cultural components. These materials should encompass content from learners' own culture, the target culture, and international cultures (Alptekin, 2002; Cetinavci, 2012). However, according to Tran and Duong (2015, p.20), "commercial English textbooks used in ASEAN countries... predominantly focus on linguistic competence," with minimal cultural content. Since English has become an official language in ASEAN countries since 2007, and English language education in many ASEAN nations has shifted from teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL) to English as a Lingua Franca (ELF), it is imperative to emphasize the teaching and study of ASEAN cultures (Kirkpatrick, 2011). This emphasis will help learners function effectively in multilingual and intercultural contexts (Crocco & Bunwirat, 2014). Furthermore, both visible and invisible cultural elements should be targeted and integrated into textbooks (Tran & Duong, 2015).

### **ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHERS TRAINING :**

The role of teachers in fostering ICC development for learners is highly important, as they act as guides, helping learners acquire attitudes, knowledge, and skills related to intercultural competence when using a foreign language (Moeller & Nugent, n.d). Tran and Seepho (2015) highlight that teachers' lack of knowledge and methods hinders their ability to integrate culture into their teaching practice, posing a significant limitation to learners' acquisition of ICC. Therefore, training programs, workshops, and seminars on intercultural language education for teachers are crucial. These initiatives aim to raise awareness of the importance of ICC and equip teachers with the appropriate methods to effectively teach intercultural language classes (Tran & Duong, 2015).

### **CONCLUSION :**

The literature review to date conclusively indicates the need to integrate ICC into English language teaching (Galante, 2015). Incorporating intercultural knowledge is essential for helping learners efficiently gain proficiency in ICC for effective and appropriate intercultural communication. The role of teachers in this process is also crucial, and more extensive training in incorporating ICC into their teaching practices should be encouraged. This paper aims to contribute to the body of knowledge regarding the importance of integrating intercultural elements and ICC into English language teaching and learning in India.

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