

THE IMPORTANCE OF INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION COMPETENCE IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING

Abdieva Vazira Ashurovna

Doctoral student of

Samarkand State Institute of Foreign Languages

Abstract: This article discusses the important role of intercultural communication competence in learning a foreign language. Developing this competence improves the language learning process as it helps learners better interpret cultural contexts, avoid misunderstandings, and gain a deeper understanding of the language's nuances.

Key words: Competence, research, learning, relationship communication, techniques, knowledge, concept.

INTRODUCTION. Recent studies have highlighted the significance of learning about culture as an essential part of foreign language education, confirming its relevance within the field of linguistics. These studies emphasize that intercultural communicative competence should be taught alongside language skills. They also stress the importance of the sociocultural context in foreign language learning and the interactions necessary for developing this competence in learners. Theoretical research in this area frequently uses terms like cultural competence, the intercultural dimension, and intercultural communicative competence, continually underlining the value of understanding cultures and learning about cultural communication in the language learning process.

The importance of intercultural communication competence in foreign language learning is highlighted because language is viewed as a tool for conveying thoughts, knowledge, ideas, emotions, and events.

Literature review. According to Schmidt, there is a reciprocal relationship between language and culture. The way language is used is closely linked to the culture that shapes it, so it is not enough to learn just the basic grammar and vocabulary. It is also necessary to understand the extralinguistic factors of the specific speech and cultural community. Language and culture complement each other, and both should be studied equally, as understanding the language system is crucial for intercultural communication, as is being familiar with the cultural patterns of the target language and culture [6,140].

Sercu argues that including intercultural objectives in a foreign language curriculum should not be limited to language teaching alone, as it addresses various

important issues. She also points out that foreign language learning inherently involves intercultural elements, as two cultures are interacting and must be negotiated. Learning a foreign language in the classroom exposes learners to a world that is culturally different from their own [5,115].

The concept of intercultural competence, as defined by prominent scholars, refers to an individual's ability to interact and communicate effectively with people who have different cultures, ethnicities, languages, or other significant differences. It is a crucial part of a foreign language learner's overall competence in speaking another language. Intercultural competence involves the ability to respond appropriately and flexibly when dealing with the actions, attitudes, and expectations of individuals from other cultures. It also includes the capacity of language learners to maintain their own identity while navigating between cultures and helping others do the same. One key reason why intercultural competence is vital for language learners is that much of people's culturally driven behavior happens unconsciously. Being aware of this helps learners understand the implicit messages that members of other cultures may convey, as well as the many meanings that may not be immediately obvious or verbalized.

Byram emphasizes that understanding the shared values and beliefs of social groups in different countries and regions—such as religious beliefs, taboos, and assumed common history—is crucial for intercultural communicative competence. He also notes that linguistic and cultural competence in any language is shaped by knowledge of other languages and cultures, contributing to intercultural awareness, skills, and practical know-how. This knowledge allows individuals to develop a more complex and enriched personality, enhances their ability to learn additional languages, and fosters a greater openness to new cultural experiences. His research has explored the link between language and culture, using these findings to guide studies on the importance of intercultural communication competence in foreign language education [2,36].

Discussion. One of the most significant shifts in language learning and teaching in recent decades has been the recognition of culture as a vital component. This change has greatly transformed the nature of language teaching and learning. Today, the goal of language learning is not only about acquiring communicative competence in a foreign language, which includes the ability to act appropriately in linguistically, socio-linguistically, and pragmatically suitable ways, but also about understanding the cultural context.

In second and foreign language learning, it is observed that language is used as a cultural tool to exchange ideas, opinions, and experiences. The relationship between language and culture is so intertwined that without a proper understanding of the cultural context and social behaviors associated with language use, misinterpretations and communication breakdowns can occur. This lack of understanding can lead to errors and misunderstandings, as language is not just about exchanging information, but also a form of social behavior within a specific cultural setting. Foreign or second language learners often face difficulties in interpreting and communicating appropriately within the required context. Research in the field of English language teaching reveals that learners struggle with communicating language effectively in context. While many language programs focus on developing skills like listening,

speaking, reading, and writing, cultural teaching has yet to be integrated into most learning curricula.

Understanding culture not only enhances communication skills but also increases awareness of how language is used in intercultural exchanges. Intercultural communication competence refers to an individual's ability to grasp key issues involved in using language across culturally diverse contexts. Cultural differences carry distinct meanings and values within social structures, requiring speakers to have a deep understanding when engaging in intercultural communication. It demands advanced communication skills to fully interpret the meaning behind messages in such diverse contexts.

Furthermore, studies on intercultural communication highlight the importance of both competence and cultural awareness for effective communication.

According to Kim, the main challenges in intercultural communication stem from cultural differences, unfamiliarity, and incompatibility between individuals. The global role of English as a tool for intercultural communication presents various issues and challenges for both teachers and learners. While acquiring linguistic knowledge is essential for communication, greater emphasis must be placed on the cultural context of the target language. This involves understanding the cultural norms, values, and patterns of the society using the language. Therefore, intercultural communicative competence cannot be achieved without developing communicative competence as well [3,269-275].

Intercultural communicative situations often require participants to behave in a manner appropriate to the cultural context of the communication. This aspect of interaction involves an individual's ability to adapt to new cultures. How well a person adjusts to new conventions reflects their ability to take appropriate actions that minimize ambiguity in intercultural communication. The ultimate goal of teaching a foreign language is to enable effective communication. The focus of language instruction is on developing all aspects of communicative competence, including speaking skills, which are built upon language knowledge, cultural understanding, and insights into the country's culture. In many studies, the concept of competence is defined as the intellectual and personal ability to engage in practical activities, with Zimnya defining competence as a content component of this ability, expressed through knowledge and skills [8,47].

Results. The importance of intercultural competence has grown significantly in recent years due to globalization and the increasing interactions between companies, organizations, and individuals worldwide, all of which require successful communication. Essential skills include sensitivity and self-awareness—understanding the behaviors and ways of thinking of others, as well as the ability to express one's own views in a clear and transparent manner. The goal is to be understood and respected, maintaining flexibility where possible and clarity where necessary.

In support of the above, Professor Yakhshiev has also confirmed in his works that intercultural communication competence plays an important role in learning foreign languages [9,474-478]. Intercultural competence refers to the ability to communicate successfully with people from different cultures, a skill that can either be innate or developed and enhanced through effort and competence. Successful

intercultural communication relies on emotional competence and intercultural sensitivity. The goal is to assess whether a person possesses this ability or the potential to develop it. Cultural differences can exist not only between countries or continents but also within the same company or family, as every individual has their own unique history and life experiences, leading to their own cultural affiliations—whether geographical, ethnic, moral, religious, political, or historical.

The concept of “communicative competence” emerged from the efforts of methodologists worldwide to define a shared goal for foreign language teaching, and to organize and synchronize teaching content and methods to achieve this goal. The term “communicative competence” was first introduced by Dell Hymes in his work *On Communicative Competence*. This concept was developed based on N. Chomsky’s idea of “linguistic competence,” which he used to describe an individual’s internal mental grammar. Chomsky believed that language exists in the form of abstract rules, which are deeply embedded in the subconscious intuitive understanding of the individual [10,66-68].

Language teachers generally agree that foreign languages should be taught in conjunction with their respective cultures. For learners to become familiar with a new culture—especially the culture of the language they are studying—they must undergo a learning process that can be lengthy and challenging. Even though similar categories may exist in their own culture, the interpretation and meaning of these categories, as well as the reactions and behaviors towards them, are often quite different. Understanding a concept from a different cultural perspective is not always easy. Therefore, it is important for learners to be taught about the various ways these concepts can be interpreted, or at least to become aware of the multiple ways of reacting to them.

In today’s world, education is widely regarded as an investment in the development of society. One of the key objectives of Uzbekistan’s education system is to incorporate a competence-based approach in foreign language teaching, with a focus on developing intercultural competence. This competence is seen as a key indicator of a person’s ability to communicate effectively in a foreign language at an intercultural level. Since the learner is at the core of the educational process, both the target language content and the aspects of foreign language education are framed within an intercultural context.

The foreign language teaching system is being structured to promote the intellectual growth of students. By comparing different conceptual systems, learners expand their worldview through intercultural understanding and the means of structuring a global perspective. The culturally-driven system of foreign language education, developed at specific levels of language teaching, builds on the strengths of both the national education system and global educational principles, while adapting to changing socioeconomic conditions. The principle of communicative and intercultural interaction plays a crucial role in developing students’ ability to engage in intercultural dialogue in foreign languages.

Brooks distinguished between Culture with a capital C and culture with a small c in language learning. Culture with a capital C refers to traditional cultural aspects, while culture with a small c pertains to the everyday behavioral patterns and lifestyles

of ordinary people. He argued that although the latter is less visible, it is equally, if not more, important [1,23].

Kramsch noted that in the past, culture in language classes was often reduced to literature, geography, and facts about the target language—what he refers to as the “fours”. However, with anthropology's influence, culture came to be understood not just as a collection of facts, but as something shared among group members, deeply ingrained in their behaviors and values. Kramsch believes that foreign language education should teach students to recognize cultural differences by focusing on culture with a small c, helping them understand these differences more deeply. While learners may not fully internalize the culture of the language they are studying, they can develop a better understanding of that culture by learning about its key cultural dimensions, ultimately enriching their experiences when they interact with or live in that culture [4,14-17].

At the forefront of foreign language education is not merely the mastery of lexical and grammatical knowledge, but the development of a well-rounded individual capable of effective communication in an intercultural environment. A linguistic personality must possess intercultural competence, which is built upon a combination of linguistic and psychological traits.

Conclusion. The communicative approach was key in shaping the proficiency levels of foreign language education for curriculum developers. They acknowledged that the structure of communicative competence they proposed was not complete and required further refinement and specification. This led to the development of a new model for educational content focused on enhancing communicative competence.

Cultural barriers can hinder mutual understanding in communication, and to overcome these obstacles, it is necessary to train students for real communication in a foreign language with native speakers. However, a paradox arises: long-term preparation for intercultural communication often involves training students in a foreign language with peers from the same culture, rather than through direct interaction with speakers of the target language. Therefore, real intercultural communication preparation remains indirect, as foreign language education typically occurs outside the language's native environment, far from the actual context where the language and culture function.

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