ASPECTS TO CONSIDER IN DEVELOPING INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE

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ABSTRACT

In this article we aim to discuss information about intercultural competence. In this article there are given the basic aspects of intercultural competence and their peculiarities, ideas on how to develop, what issues affect this process.

Keywords: cross-cultural competence, cognitive, behavioral, motivational, intercultural environment.

INTRODUCTION

Intercultural competence has generated confusing and contradictory definitions because it has been studied by a wide variety of academic approaches and professional fields. One author identified eleven different terms that have some equivalence to intercultural competence: cultural savvy, astuteness, appreciation, literacy or fluency, adaptability, terrain, expertise, competency, awareness, intelligence, and understanding. The United States, which is currently engaged in a study of intercultural competence has defined it as "A set of cognitive, behavioral, and affective/motivational components that enable individuals to adapt effectively in intercultural environments".

The development of intercultural competence is mostly based on the individual's experiences while he or she is communicating with different cultures. When interacting with people from other cultures, the individual experiences certain obstacles that are caused by differences in cultural understanding between two people from different cultures. Such experiences may motivate the individual to acquire skills that can help him to communicate his point of view to an audience belonging to a different cultural ethnicity and background. Intercultural Communicative Language Teaching Model. In response to the needs to develop EFL learners' ICC in the context of Asia, a theoretical framework, which is an instructional design (ISD) model ADDIE with five stages (Analyze – Design – Develop – Implement – Evaluate) is employed as a guideline in order to construct the ICLT model for EFL learners. The ICLT model is an on-going process of ICC acquisition. There are three parts: Language-Culture, the main training process. (Input – Notice – Practice – Output), and the ICC, which are systematically integrated. The second part is the main part consisting of four teaching steps to facilitate learners' ICC development, and each step reflects a step of the knowledge scaffolding and constructing process to facilitate learners' ICC development.

DISCUSSION AND RESULTS

A salient issue, especially for people living in countries other than their native country, is the issue of which culture they should follow: their native culture or the one in their new surroundings. International students also face this issue: they have a choice of modifying their cultural boundaries and adapting to the culture around them or holding on to their native

culture and surrounding themselves with people from their own country. The students who decide to hold on to their native culture are those who experience the most problems in their university life and who encounter frequent culture shocks. But international students who adapt themselves to the culture surrounding them (and who interact more with domestic students) will increase their knowledge of the domestic culture, which may help them to "blend in" more. Here it stated, "Segmented assimilation theorists argue that students from less affluent and racial and ethnic minority immigrant families face a number of educational hurdles and barriers that often stem from racial, ethnic, and gender biases and discrimination embedded within the U.S. public school system". Such individuals may be said to have adopted bicultural identities.

Another issue that stands out in intercultural communication is the attitude stemming from ethnocentrism. Levine and Campbell defines ethnocentrism as people's tendency to view their culture or in-group as superior to other groups, and to judge those groups to their standards. With ethnocentric attitudes, those incapable to expand their view of different cultures could create conflict between groups. Ignorance to diversity and cultural groups contributes to prevention of peaceful interaction in a fast-paced globalizing world. The counterpart of ethnocentrism is ethnorelativism: the ability to see multiple values, beliefs, norms etc. in the world as cultural rather than universal; being able to understand and accept different cultures as equally valid as ones' own. It is a mindset that moves beyond in-group out-group to see all groups as equally important and valid and individuals to be seen in terms of their own cultural context. Intercultural competence is determined by the presence of cognitive, affective, and behavioral abilities that directly shape communication across cultures. These essential abilities can be separated into five specific skills that are obtained through education and experience:

1. Mindfulness: the ability of being cognitively aware of how the communication and interaction with others is developed. It is important to focus more in the process of the interaction than its outcome while maintaining in perspective the desired communication goals. For example, it would be better to formulate questions such as "What can I say or do to help this process?" rather than "What do they mean?".

2. Cognitive flexibility: the ability of creating new categories of information rather than keeping old categories. This skill includes opening to new information, taking more than one perspective, and understanding personal ways of interpreting messages and situations.

3. Tolerance for ambiguity: the ability to maintain focus in situations that are not clear rather than becoming anxious and to methodically determine the best approach as the situation evolves. Generally, low-tolerance individuals look for information that supports their beliefs while high-tolerance individuals look for information that gives an understanding of the situation and others.

4. Behavioral flexibility: the ability to adapt and accommodate behaviors to a different culture. Although knowing a second language could be important for this skill, it does not necessarily translate into cultural adaptability. The individual must be willing to assimilate the new culture.

5. Cross-cultural empathy: the ability to visualize with the imagination the situation of another person from an intellectual and emotional point of view. Demonstrating empathy includes

the abilities of connecting emotionally with people, showing compassion, thinking in more than one perspective, and listening actively.

We look at communication as a process of coding and decoding of messages, it is obvious that there are many points in the process where the communication can break down. In particular, successful communication depends crucially on shared culture.

In every society, important functions, events, ceremonies, festivals are marked by certain acts or a series of acts that are perceived to have a symbolic value. Rituals are observed almost religiously because, in most cases, they have a religious backing and, therefore, considered important for individuals in the society. It is the presence of rituals that make an event formal and traditional. Hindu religion, a young boy has to undergo a ritual called yagyopavit sanskar (also called Janeu sanskar in some parts of India) where his head is shaven, and he is made to wear a string across his shoulder, both acts having symbolic values. This is somewhat similar to baptism for Christians that marks the initiation into Christianity of an individual.

A tradition is an act, behavior, or a belief system that is handed down from one generation to another in a society or culture and which has a special significance for the members of the society. Traditions were mostly passed down in the form of folklore or stories for the future generations to remember and learn the moral from it. The concepts of unity, compassion, friendship, valor, loyalty etc. are traditions that have passed down from one generation to another. Traditions have helped in binding a society together serving as a fabric running across the social spectrum. Traditions help individuals in a society to know how to act and behave when interacting with others. It was the definition put forward by Edward Shills in his book "Traditions" that tradition is anything that is handed down by the past to the present that has become a universally accepted definition of this concept. What is the difference between Ritual and Tradition:

- Tradition is a generic term that encompasses a wide variety of things and concepts that are handed down by one generation to another.
- Ritual is an act or a series of acts that are performed or observed in a society on occasions, events, festivals and ceremonies. These rituals have a symbolic value and also have a religious basis.
- So a handshake to greet others is a ritual, while the practice to honor and respect the seniors is a tradition.

Taboo is an implicit ban on something (usually against an utterance or behavior) based on a cultural sense that it is excessively repulsive or, perhaps, too sacred for just anyone. Such prohibitions are present in virtually all societies. On a comparative basis, taboos, for example related to food items, might make no sense at all to many, but may be explicitly prohibited for others by custom or religion.

CONCLUSION

Having looked through all the gathered information related to intercultural communication and intercultural competence we may conclude that this process is ongoing during the whole life of people. In special circumstances they may have opportunities to share different cultures and beliefs. People`s thinking, outlook and also background on culture can affect respectively to the development of intercultural competence together with the motivations of their surrounding

people. According to their desire and communication style it can either develop or stay unchanged. In these type of situations a person should consider other cultures and their norms also in order to avoid misunderstandings.

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