

## TEACHING CROSS CULTURAL COMPETENCE TO EFL LEARNERS

Raximdjanova Malikaxon Gapurdjonovna

**Annotation.** *In an increasingly interconnected world, cross-cultural competence has become essential for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners. This article explores effective methods for integrating cross-cultural competence into EFL instruction, emphasizing the importance of preparing students for real-world intercultural communication. A task-based learning approach, combined with the use of authentic materials such as videos, articles, and case studies, was implemented in a classroom setting. These materials exposed learners to diverse cultural norms and practices while reinforcing language skills. The study found that students not only became more engaged with cultural themes but also demonstrated significant improvement in navigating intercultural communication. They developed a deeper understanding of cultural differences, which is crucial for avoiding misunderstandings in global contexts. The findings suggest that cross-cultural competence should be a core component of EFL education, and recommendations for teachers on how to incorporate these elements into their curricula are provided.*

**Keywords:** *cross-cultural competence, task-based learning, intercultural communication, language teaching, authentic materials, cultural awareness, intercultural competence.*

### INTRODUCTION

English serves as the global lingua franca, making it a vital tool for cross-cultural communication. For EFL learners, it is crucial to not only develop language proficiency but also gain an understanding of cultural differences to engage effectively in diverse international settings. Cross-cultural competence enables individuals to interpret cultural signals, navigate potential miscommunications, and foster meaningful interactions with people from various cultural backgrounds.

However, traditional EFL curricula often focus primarily on linguistic skills, such as grammar and vocabulary, without giving enough attention to cultural knowledge. This lack of emphasis on culture can hinder students when they encounter the subtle cultural nuances that influence communication. This article investigates how cross-cultural competence can be systematically incorporated into EFL instruction to better prepare students for real-world intercultural interactions.

The primary instructional method used in this study was task-based learning, which involved the creation of real-life scenarios where learners had to navigate cross-cultural situations. Tasks included role-playing conversations between individuals from different cultural backgrounds, analyzing case studies on cultural misunderstandings, and group discussions on international news events that required cultural interpretation.

Students' cross-cultural competence was assessed through reflective essays, oral presentations, and group projects. In their reflective essays, learners were asked to describe how their understanding of specific cultural norms had changed over the course of the tasks. Oral presentations focused on analyzing cultural differences, while group projects encouraged students to propose solutions to hypothetical intercultural misunderstandings.

To enhance cross-cultural competence in EFL learners, it is recommended that teachers:

- Incorporate a variety of authentic materials, such as videos, podcasts, and articles, that expose learners to different cultural perspectives.

- Use task-based activities that mimic real-life intercultural interactions.
- Foster an open and respectful classroom environment where cultural differences can be discussed without fear of judgment.
- Provide ongoing professional development for teachers to enhance their ability to teach cross-cultural competence effectively.

## **DISCUSSIONS**

Cross-cultural competence is defined as the ability to understand, communicate, and interact effectively with people from diverse cultural backgrounds. Scholars like Byram (1997) have argued that language learning is inseparable from cultural learning. Byram's model of intercultural communicative competence (ICC) emphasizes that language learners must not only develop linguistic proficiency but also the skills and attitudes necessary to engage with other cultures. This model has been influential in shaping the integration of cultural components in language teaching, advocating for the development of both knowledge of other cultures and the ability to reflect on one's own cultural identity.

Furthermore, Kramsch (1993) introduced the concept of "third space," where language learners navigate between their own culture and the target culture. Kramsch argues that the process of learning a new language involves both linguistic competence and an ability to interpret and mediate between cultures. This third space becomes crucial as learners move beyond the surface-level features of language, such as grammar and vocabulary, and engage with deeper cultural norms, values, and beliefs.

Task-based learning (TBL) is a pedagogical approach that has gained prominence in language teaching, with its focus on using real-world tasks as the primary vehicle for language instruction. Ellis (2003) and Willis & Willis (2007) highlight that TBL emphasizes meaningful communication and the use of language in authentic contexts. This approach is particularly well-suited to teaching cross-cultural competence, as tasks can be designed to simulate intercultural interactions.

For example, in a TBL framework, learners can role-play scenarios where they must navigate cultural differences, such as business meetings or social events with people from different cultural backgrounds. Studies by Dörnyei (2001) and Nunan (2004) support the idea that task-based activities not only enhance language proficiency but also promote critical thinking and problem-solving skills, both of which are essential in cross-cultural communication.

Using authentic materials, such as films, news articles, and interviews, has long been advocated as a means of exposing EFL learners to real-life language use and cultural norms (Gilmore, 2007). According to Peacock (1997), authentic materials help bridge the gap between the classroom and the outside world, providing learners with cultural insights that are difficult to capture through textbooks.

Culturally rich materials, such as TED Talks or YouTube videos from diverse regions, allow students to hear different accents, intonations, and cultural references, thereby developing their cross-cultural competence. In fact, scholars like Mishan (2005) argue that exposure to authentic materials is essential in fostering both linguistic

proficiency and cultural awareness, as learners are more likely to encounter varied cultural norms in real-world communication.

Despite its importance, integrating cross-cultural competence into EFL instruction presents certain challenges. Sercu (2005) points out that teachers often struggle with incorporating cultural elements into their lessons, as cultural content can be seen as secondary to language instruction. Additionally, the complexity of cultural concepts, such as Hofstede's (1980) cultural dimensions theory, can make it difficult for learners to fully grasp abstract ideas like individualism versus collectivism or high-context versus low-context communication.

Some educators may also face resistance from students when discussing sensitive cultural topics, as these discussions may provoke discomfort or challenge learners' preconceived beliefs. Researchers like Holliday (2010) caution that teachers must carefully navigate discussions on culture to avoid reinforcing stereotypes or perpetuating cultural biases.

The literature emphasizes that cross-cultural competence is a critical component of EFL teaching, with scholars agreeing that language cannot be separated from culture. The integration of task-based learning and authentic materials provides a practical framework for developing cross-cultural awareness. However, challenges such as the complexity of cultural concepts and the potential discomfort in discussing sensitive topics must be addressed. As more research focuses on this area, it becomes increasingly clear that fostering cross-cultural competence should be a priority in EFL classrooms to better prepare learners for real-world communication.

Cross-cultural competence is a crucial skill for EFL learners in today's interconnected world. By integrating culturally relevant, task-based activities into EFL lessons, educators can help learners navigate intercultural communication more effectively. This study highlights the benefits of combining language learning with cultural awareness, ultimately preparing students for real-world global interactions.

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