
Intercultural Competence Methods and Assessment Tool

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Abstract:

When you are learning a foreign language, you are also learning its culture. Language can never be understood without the effect of culture. Culture and language are interrelated and cannot be separated. Foreign language professors must aim to help students to gain knowledge of both language and culture be. Taking into consideration the political and social developments, mobility of people etc. charges teachers with the responsibility to prepare students not just for today, but for the future as well. On the questionnaire that was completed by the professors of Universities in Albania, it was mentioned that one of the difficulties they encountered is how to assess intercultural competence.

Key words: intercultural competence, English teachers, intercultural development continuum.

1. INTRODUCTION

Learning the culture through a foreign language is very important because it helps students to become familiar with the target culture. When we learn another culture it makes us to think on our own culture too. Nowadays, it is widely mentioned the importance of intercultural competence. Foreign language teachers should aim to equip students with linguistic

competence and intercultural competence. Despite all the methods that different authors suggest, regarding the intercultural competence, professors still lack information on how to measure intercultural competence. In this article, I will offer some suggestions of different methods how to measure intercultural competence.

In the process of teaching a foreign language a special attention is dedicated to the methods. The professors need to be updated with the new methods and techniques of teaching and assessing students' performance. The traditional methods of teaching a foreign language are not effective anymore. In the traditional methods the professor is at the center of the attention, and the student has a passive role. Today, the most successful methods are those methods that require the collaboration of the students and professors, where the student plays an active role and contributes in the development of his knowledge too.

2. DATA DESCRIPTION

In order to find out the difficulties that professors had regarding intercultural competence I adopted the questionnaire by Lies Secu (An international investigation) and focus group questions. An estimated amount of 20 University Lectures answered a series of questions. Professors mentioned several difficulties they encounter and why they don't teach intercultural competence. One of the difficulties they mentioned is how to assess intercultural competence. In this article I will mention different ways to measure intercultural competence.

3. DEVELOPING INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE

It is important not to transmit factual information about the English-speaking countries. Intercultural competence does not mean you should transmit factual knowledge about the English speaking countries.

Byram (2000) suggested that the professors should take into consideration social identity theory. Social identity theory is one approach to analysing how we understand 'others', how people of one social group interact with and react to people of another social group.¹ Every student when they learn a foreign language, they have in their minds a stereotype of the people of the target language. This stereotype might be positive or negative. Stereotypes and prejudice are based on feeling rather than on reasoning. The theory of social identity helps the professor to understand how these stereotypes are created, how it function the process of categorizing the people, and to help students to understand their own identity. Social identity theory can help teachers understand how such stereotypes arise, and how the process of categorizing people functions.

The professors need to use modules that will help to develop students' identities and understand the others' identity. Professors need to make a few changes in their syllabus. Professor should use several activities that will help the students to research independently, to reach conclusion based on what they have read so far and from their personal experience. Students should by the end of the term learn how to:

1. acquire ways of understanding other cultures;
2. reflect on their own culture;
3. acquire more open attitudes towards others' experience and interpretation of the world;
4. re-evaluate their own experience and interpretation of the world.

A project that can be developed in foreign language classes:

Topic 1: Celebration of Christmas in English-speaking countries

¹ Byram et al. 'Social Identity and the European Dimension Intercultural Competence Through Foreign Language Learning' A joint publication of the European Center for Modern Languages (Graz) and the Modern Languages Division (Strasbourg) (2000: 17

Objective:

1. Development of interpreting and analysing skills.
2. Development of communication skills.
3. Skills of curiosity and discovery to find information regarding the English-speaking countries.
4. Students must understand and appreciate the culture of English-speaking countries and reflect on their own culture.

Materials:

- a. Documents or other materials form different books
- b. Media, films
- c. Dictionary of English Language and Culture (Longman)
- d. Maps or posters

Activities:

1. Students make a presentation of their topic
2. Professors write down on the blackboard

Assessment

1. Student can compare their answers and give their assessments. The professors can encourage discussion among each other.
2. Ability to make a presentation.
3. Ability to organize information.

In order to achieve these aims, professors should have:

1. Clear objectives and plans; also materials.
2. They should encourage students to use comparative methods and critical analysis.
3. To helps students to gather information and help them how to analyses them.
4. To increase curiosity of other cultures.

In order to realize this in the classroom, professors should be aware of the latest technologies and how to practice them in the

classroom. This means that they should look carefully at the syllabus. The professors have a lot of questions which aspects they should involve in their teaching; the most important is the comparative analysis between cultures. To help the students to develop intercultural competence **Deardorff** (2000) suggested the **OSEE Tool**

- O- Observe what is happening
- S- State objectively what is happening
- E- Explore different explanations for what is happening
- E- Evaluate which explanation is the most likely one.

This method starts with observing and listening, the second step 'state objectively what is happening' and according to Deardorff this is the most difficult step. Third step is to 'explore different explanations for what is happening' this means to see from the others perspective, this might be personal and culture-related. The last step can be done by collecting information and answering questions. If students are aware of the elements that compose OSEE will help them to develop intercultural competence.

The development of intercultural competence requires also a well management of the class, because it is the professor who should organize the class in groups or pairs, or the inclusion of the all class in discussion, this mean the students should

- Respect each other opinions
- They should listen to their colleagues and wait for their turn to give their opinion
- In every discussion they should use a respectful tone
- To show respect when other comment
- To avoid discrimination in the classroom

4. ASSESSMENT OF INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE

To assess the five dimensions of intercultural competence is not something easy. Most of the professors are used to assess

general knowledge. According **Fantini** (2009) the assessment of intercultural competence, does not start with a method or a tool, but it starts with what we would like to measure and we must ensure that it is in accordance with the course program. After it is chosen which is the most important aspect to measure he suggests to choose one of the tests.

Some techniques that **Fantini** (2009:464) suggested

- Opened questions
- Individual activities or in group
- Dialog, interviews, discussions
- Role play, posters
- Oral and written activities

Deardorff (2009) suggests prioritizing the most important aspect of intercultural competence where even the students can contribute to define which the most important aspects are. After they have chosen the most important aspect, professors should define the objectives and aims. Deardorff suggested that is difficult to use only one method of assessment since it is a difficult and complex process, but it may be used several methods.

Hammer (2012) suggested **Intercultural Development Continuum (IDC)**: Intercultural Development Continuum (IDC) a theoretical framework that ranges from the more monoculture mind-sets of Denial and Polarization through the transitional orientation of Minimization to the intercultural or global mind-sets of Acceptance and Adaption.²

² Hammer, M. (2012). The Intercultural Development Inventory: A new frontier in assessment and development of intercultural competence. In M. Vande Berg, R.M. Paige, & K.H. Lou (Eds.), *Student Learning Abroad* (Ch. 5, pp. 115-136). Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing

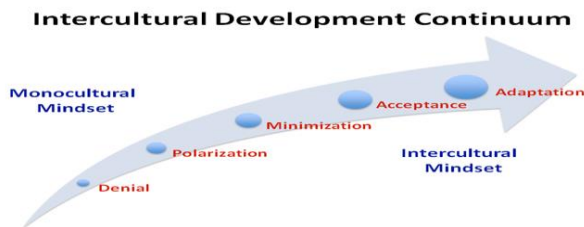


Fig. Intercultural Development Continuum, Hammer,M. (2012:119)

These are all the steps that students need to acquire in order to develop intercultural competence.

1. Denial – ‘A *denial orientation is characteristic of individual who have limited experience with other cultural groups and therefore tend to operate with broad stereotypes and generalizations about the cultural ‘other’*” (Hammer;2012). At this phase the students are not interested in the target culture. The professor duty at this phase is to develop curiosity at the students by using the right techniques and methods.
2. Polarization - At this phase culture is seen as ‘*us versus them*’. ‘*Polarization can take the form of Defense or Reversal*’ It is important for the professor to help students to increase tolerance and to pass in one of the extremes.
3. Minimization – At this phase the students are aware of other cultures but at the same time can learn a lot about their own culture. ‘*Minimization, as a transitional mindset, highlights cultural commonality and universal values and principles that can mask a deeper understanding and consideration of cultural differences*’.
4. Acceptance and Adaptation - at this phase it the movement towards more global and intercultural orientation. ‘*An individual with an Acceptance orientation begins to understand how a cultural pattern of behavior makes sense within a different cultural community*’

5. Adaptation – *‘is an orientation that is capable of shifting cultural perspective and changing behaviour in culturally appropriate and authentic ways’*

Since one of the most difficult points is the measurement of intercultural competence, Hammer (2012) suggested this simple model to be implemented. These are very simple steps to follow.

CONCLUSION

It is necessary for the professors to be updated with the latest methods. It is time to bring innovation in the methodology of teaching. The professors are the one that should help the students to acquire the adequate skills for developing intercultural competence. Some of the methods that I have mentioned will be very helpful to the students.

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