



INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE: EFL TEACHERS' BELIEFS AND PRACTICES

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Developing 'communicative competence' in today's classrooms is the main aim of foreign language teaching. On the other hand, enhancing the communicative competence of EFL learners also requires the development of intercultural knowledge and skills due to the 'lingua franca' nature of English. In this paper, EFL teachers' practices and beliefs about the concept 'intercultural communicative competence' (ICC) in classrooms are discussed by gathering their opinions with the help of interviews. The results show that EFL teachers, especially the ones working at a university, believe that enhancing learners' intercultural communicative competence and making them aware of various cultures other than their own is an effective and beneficial approach in due course of teaching English. In addition, it was found that teachers are knowledgeable about the issue and they try to put their knowledge into practice in order to raise students' cultural awareness. Yet, the only suspense is that they do not have clear-cut activities to use for this cause. Therefore, teachers need instructive studies and new research on how to develop students' intercultural communicative competence and what kind of materials to use on this basis.

Keywords: ICC, EFL teachers, Teacher beliefs, Teacher practices.

Introduction

The effects of globalization have been felt in various fields for over a decade including foreign language teaching. In this regard, many countries have learned the English language either a second or a foreign language. On the other hand, 'lingua franca' nature of English language raised the issue of 'intercultural communicative competence' that also affected the foreign language teaching methods, approaches, and beliefs. Prior to the occurrence of ICC, 'communicative competence' was put forward by Dell Hymes (1972) which was broadened form of Chomsky's 'competence' and in fact, it was an opposition to Chomsky's linguistic competence which mostly focuses on the language structure. Later, Canale and Swain (1980) conceptualized it as a model composed of four competencies: grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse and strategic competence.

On the other hand, ICC is the popular term nowadays and need to be considered in detail. Many language teaching programs of various countries include the concept into their curriculum. Yet, it is controversial whether it has been handled with great care or not. In general, it is still not clear how to incorporate ICC into classroom practice. Therefore, there is a growing need to extend teachers' subject and pedagogic knowledge to global knowledge and perspective. In this respect, many researchers believe that intercultural aspects need to be included into teacher education and practice (Alptekin, 2002; Atay, 2008, Erling, 2008). In addition, Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) (2001) stress the

importance of cultural awareness and suggest developing the cultural awareness of language learners and building their intercultural competence.

In fact, it seems that the principles of CEFR is followed in many schools in Turkey. Yet, the discussion is that: Are the teachers' themselves competent enough to build ICC of students? Therefore, the present study focuses on the ideas and practices of EFL teachers.

Review of Literature

Intercultural Communicative Competence

In today's FL learning and teaching, there is a shift from accepting English as a native language to taking it as a 'lingua franca'. Besides, with the widely used nature of English, nowadays much communication in English occurs between non-native people who nearly do not have any chance of coming across with a British or American. For these reasons, it is ineffectual for English teachers to try to teach the so-called 'pure' and 'natural' English language and thus English culture. Therefore, the main aim of recent language teaching is to enhance students' ability in being aware of the various cultures of the world and recognize and respect the other cultures while at the same time developing 'multicultural identity'. Accordingly, intercultural communicative competence satisfies those expectations of English Language Teaching.

Chen and Starosta (1996) define ICC as the ability to settle on cultural meanings and to perform appropriate and effective behaviours of communication that recognize the interactants' multivariate identities in a certain environment. The emphasized items of ICC in this definition are compromising over cultural elements, realizing various cultural identities and developing appropriate and effective communication patterns. So as to develop learners' ICC, educators need to guide students in being sensitive to other cultures as well as being aware of their own cultures, see the world through the others' eyes, and enhance communicative ability and knowledge.

Foreign language learner after achieving such an ICC level is said to be 'intercultural speaker'. Intercultural speakers have certain qualities and these qualities mentioned by Byram (1997) as attitudes, skills and knowledge and he suggest that 'curiosity and openness, being ready to suspend disbelief about other cultures and belief about one's own' are the attitudes that make intercultural speaker. Knowledge, on the other hand, is composed of 'social groups and their products and practices in one's own and in one's interlocutor's country, and of the general processes of societal and individual interaction' and skills include interpreting and relating as well as discovery and interaction (Byram, 1997). Yet, training learners, in order to gain these qualities are not as easy as it seems.

ICC in Classroom

Marking out ICC is just one-step that is taken towards developing it; however applying it in the classroom is much more complex, because the teaching of ICC should go beyond general language competencies and centred upon communicative skills. Besides, in order to realize this aim, students need to think beyond their culture and cultural differences and overcome the barriers resulting from those varieties. However, incorporating ICC into classroom does not mean that teachers should use new methodology, instead as many researchers suggest (Byram et al. 2002; Corbett, 2003) foreign language teachers can also use many methods that they are familiar with such as role- play, cooperative activities, tasks and so on. Here the difference lies in the focus on the development of ICC and designing the tasks or activities in a way that naturally promotes intercultural advanced learners. At this point Byram (1997) differentiates between 'Intercultural Competence' and 'Intercultural Communicative Competence' and states that the first is the ability of one to communicate his own language with people from other cultures by overcoming cultural differences and enjoying this contact though he can gain this ability while learning a

foreign language. In this case, he does not need to use that foreign language. However, the second necessitates the usage of a foreign language in the context of communicating people from different cultures.

Then, what kind of activities can be used in class to promote ICC? At this point Uso-Juan and Martinez-Flor (2008) suggests activities for each language skill: First of all they come up with listening activities such as video- or audio-taped cultural dialogues or cultural misunderstandings, tape-recorded interviews with people from different cultures, listening to songs, watching films and so on. Secondly, to develop ICC with the help of speaking, face-to-face tandem learning, role-play, interviewing a native speaker etc. can be used. As for reading, critical readings, cultural bump activities, cultural extensive reading and so forth are prominent ones. Lastly, sample writing activities might be those; tandem e-mail learning, designing stories and story continuation. As it is seen, those types of activities are already used in language classrooms; however, here the difference is that Uso-Juan and Martinez-Flor (2008) propose to gather these activities in a culture project that can be implemented in three stages: explanation, collection, and implementation. At the explanation stage, teachers are expected to announce students that they are going to make a project based on the learning various cultures. Then at the second step, students are told to collect various cultural materials ranging from texts to audio- or videotaped materials that they can access and lastly teachers gather those materials and apply them in the classroom. If necessary, teachers might adapt those materials but without spoiling the cultural elements. With such an approach to the development of ICC, teachers can bring students in on which in turn may result in students paying attention to the lessons more than before because of their attending to the process of gathering course materials.

Non-Native English Teacher as an Intercultural Communicator

Today, with an excessive number of people learning English as a foreign or second language, it is impossible to have native speakers of English all over the world besides the necessity of it is arguable. For this reason, as in many other countries in the world, in Turkey there are generally non-native English teachers. As Canagarajah (1999, cited in Bayyurt, 2006) states, % 80 of English teachers around the world are non-native speakers but they are competent to teach English as a native speaker. However, there are opposite views about the expertise of non-native English teachers. According to the research findings of Ma (2012), the advantages of non-native English teachers include ‘their proficiency in students’ L1, their knowledge of students’ learning difficulties, the ease students experience in understanding their teaching, and in communication’, on the other hand, the advantages of native English teachers are ‘their good English proficiency and ability to facilitate student learning’. However, remarked in Kang (2015) the bilingual, multicultural experience of non-native English teachers can be a form of cultural capital.

In order to develop themselves, non-native English teachers need to dive into the exploration of various cultures with the help of multimedia and internet. After equipping themselves, they are required to apply their knowledge to the class. While teaching English, teachers should provide the cultural frames of topics to enhance the cultural knowledge of students.

Related Studies

ICC is a recent issue, therefore it takes much attention and there are studies conducted both in Turkey and abroad.

The studies conducted in Turkey focus on both EFL teachers’ and EFL teacher candidates’ perceptions of ICC. Atay et al. (2009) investigated the role of ICC in foreign language teaching by gathering Turkish EFL teachers’ opinions and attitudes. It also aims to reveal how these views are reflected in classrooms. The researchers collected the data via a questionnaire applied to 503 teachers and they found that EFL teachers in Turkey are aware of the role of culture in language education but do not directly integrate culture into their teaching.

Another study conducted by Bektaş-Çetinkaya and Çelik (2013), aims to ascertain if Turkish pre-service EFL teachers are ready enough to deal with cultural matters in the classroom that help the development of intercultural competence of their students. The researchers used both quantitative and qualitative research approach to data collection that includes the application of a survey and interviews. As a result, it was found that teacher candidates lack enough knowledge about foreign cultures though they are willing to learn. Besides, the findings show that Turkish pre-service English teachers do not have adequate knowledge about ICC because of their teacher preparation program. They have stereotypical perceptions of European cultures. Thus, they conclude that their teacher education program is not enough to equip them to have and apply ICC in their future classrooms.

Kılıç (2013) examined English lecturers' beliefs regarding intercultural competence and carried out her study with 368 English lecturers in İstanbul, found that English lecturers believe that culture learning is not primary objective of English language teaching and instead they believe attitudinal dimension of culture teaching. Besides, they think that they are familiar with foreign cultures.

The study of Holguin (2013) revealed that pre-service teachers started to improve ICC by developing skills, interpreting skills and with the help of contextualization cultural applications and thus raising awareness.

Methodology

Research Questions

This study aims to answer to the following questions:

1. What do the EFL teachers think about developing students' 'ICC'?
2. Do they incorporate ICC into their classrooms? If so, how do they handle?
3. What do they think about being a non-native EFL teacher and developing ICC of EFL learners?

Setting and Participants

As the aim of this study is to investigate the views and perceptions of EFL non-native practicing teachers, the study was conducted with university teachers working at a university in Turkey. University teachers were chosen, as it is believed that, they work with young adults who knows her/his own culture and, therefore, is ready to meet new cultures with the help of English course. There are five participant teachers. Each at least holds a Masters' degree in their field or in other educational fields, yet they all hold a Bachelor's Degree in English language teaching field.

Instruments

In order to gather the views of participant teachers, a semi-structured interview composed of eight questions in total and three parts was developed with the help of literature review and related studies in the field. The first part of the interview focuses on the concept of ICC and aims to reveal the participants' knowledge over ICC, the relationship between ICC and foreign language learning, the second part questions the necessity of developing EFL students' ICC in classrooms, ways of developing it and lastly queries whether the teachers include ICC into their classroom practices. The third part centers upon gathering the views of EFL teachers on the roles of them in teaching ICC and discuss the advantages and disadvantages of being a non-native EFL teacher in achieving the aims of ICC.

Data Collection Procedures

The interviewer took notes during the interviews. The language of interviews was English as the interviewees are proficient users of English. Each interview took nearly 20 to 30 minutes and the aim of

the research and interview was explained one by one to every interviewee. Their permission was taken before the interview.

Data Analysis

The data gathered was analyzed qualitatively. The answers were analyzed one by one, each answer was compared to the other participants' answers, and thus the overall tendency tried to be composed. Every question in the interview was grouped and analyzed according to the related research question.

Limitations

The first limitation of the study is the participant number. In another study, participant number can be increased and even EFL teachers from various schools can be included into the research. Therefore, a comparative and comprehensive study can be conducted. In addition, the interview questions might be extended and even a questionnaire can be included to reach as many participants as possible.

Findings

What do the EFL Teachers Think about Developing Students' 'ICC'?

The aim of this research question is to reveal EFL teachers knowledge about ICC as a term and thus to have an opinion about their knowledge on the topic. Therefore, the first two questions of the questionnaire were asked in this context.

First, it was asked to define the ICC. The given answers generally define ICC as the ability to communicate with people of other cultures. Here, they mostly focus on its characteristics as 'ability to communicate', including 'people of other cultures' and its relatedness to 'other cultures'. One of the participants also mentioned about 'own culture' and suggested integrating the features peculiar to the cultures of learners. In addition, another participant refers that ICC entails communicating in another language apart from one's mother tongue, which was also previously addressed in the second part of the study. Thus, it can be said that the participant English teachers are generally aware of what ICC is and they can differentiate 'intercultural competence' from 'intercultural communicative competence'. This was concluded from their focus on 'ability to speak' phrase. Their sayings are in accord with Byram's (1997) who states that in ICC learners need to use the FL that they learn, however, in order for intercultural competence they do not need to use a FL. They can use their own. Here, the focus is on knowing other cultures as well as theirs.

The second question interrogates the participants' views on the relationship between FL teaching and ICC. Thus, the aim of this question is in line with the first research question of this study. Besides, this question asks the teachers to relate ICC to the FL learning and teaching. The answers given to this question vary, yet, all of them remarks that there is a relationship between FL teaching and ICC. In addition, they focus on the lingua franca nature of English and speak of non-native-to-non-native communication as some of the teachers said in the following:

...different people from different countries speak English as their foreign language so they have their own accent or lexicon of English. To be able to communicate in English with different people requires intercultural communicative competence.

Intercultural communicative competence necessitates communicating with people who have different cultures.

....while talking to another person from a different background who speaks the foreign language you speak...

After analyzing first two questions, it can be said that all of the interviewees know something about ICC and they find it necessary to develop in a foreign language-learning environment because of it is being related to FL learning and as one of the participants said, "Foreign language teaching is a way to improve ICC". The findings of this part of the research are in phase with the findings of Atay et al. (2009). Both studies reveal that ELT teacher candidates or teachers in our context are aware of the importance of 'culture' and 'ICC'.

Do they Incorporate ICC into Their Classrooms? If so, How Do they Handle It?

This question aims to learn teachers' in class practices of ICC, in other words, whether the teachers actually incorporate it into their own teaching. The answers to this question are nearly the same. Most of the participants said that it is essential to include activities that develop ICC. However, one of the interviewees said the following:

...I am not very optimistic about the possibility of this happening, especially with the crowded classes and uninterested students. Achieving this is a harder task than it may sound, and it requires a bigger change than we think and is a long process.

Here, in fact, the teacher centers upon the expectations and realities of a classroom environment. Every teacher wants his/her students to be good communicators in the target language yet, the real classroom environment and other factors existing such as school curriculum, overcrowded classes, uninterested students and so on might prevent the teachers from realizing their aims.

Though nearly all of them believe in the necessity of incorporating ICC activities in language teaching when it comes to the integrating phase of it, it seems that they are a bit confused.

The activities they suggest to use:

- *Doing project with a teacher from a different country,*
- *Teaching the lifestyles (food and drinks, clothes, manners peculiar to societies, introducing culture of various societies)*
- *Providing enough opportunities to discuss various cultures as well as their own,*
- *Reading texts of various cultures,*
- *Students doing research on different cultures and sharing them in class,*
- *Raising students' awareness about 'World Englishes' etc.*

As is seen from the given suggestions teachers have some ideas about the activities to use in class. Yet, it seems that there are some missing points on how to enhance ICC. However, this is not limited to our participants because as mentioned in many studies in the field there is a debate on this issue. In fact, their ideas are good but need some development. For instance, 'doing project with a teacher from a different country' is a good activity but does not explain 'how'; or teaching the lifestyles, clothes etc. does not mean that students can really be intercultural communicators. Culture is not only information about various people it is a kind of framework used by people to exchange ideas, negotiate meanings and understand social reality which is possible in the case of communication Scarino (2010). Moreover, 'providing enough opportunities' does not show 'how' to do so and when asked the participant how we can provide opportunity then the given answer is mostly on the difficulties of applying such activities and the answer is below:

...Such activities (?) should be brought into the ELT curricula. Of course, they will be harder to conduct and control compared to those prepared with the old-fashioned ELT methods. They will also take more time...

In addition, 'pointing out the importance of understanding different cultures' is a beneficial point of view but again does not answer the question of 'how'.

All the above-mentioned answers partially answer the question, yet there is a lot to be learned on especially 'how to incorporate ICC into the classroom'.

What Do they Think about Being a Non-Native EFL Teacher and Developing ICC of EFL Learners?

The second part of the interview is dedicated to answering this question. There are three questions at this part and interviewees are asked to discuss the role of EFL teachers in teaching ICC and advantages and disadvantages of being a non-native EFL teacher in realizing the aims. Initially, they were asked to explain the role(s) of EFL teachers in teaching ICC in EFL classes. The answers are generally centered upon the roles such as teachers' being a 'guide' and 'role model'.

EFL teachers should be a guide to facilitate learners to improve their intercultural communicative competence. They should teach learners ways to develop this ability and help them when they have any problem.

Above given answer also speaks out the ICC as an 'ability' as well as depicting the role of EFL teacher as a guide in advancing ICC. This and the other answers define the role of an EFL teacher in developing ICC as a general role. Because, in FL teaching being a 'role model' or a 'guide' is the expected position of a teacher it is not incidental to ICC. One of the participants also refers to teachers influence on their students and says if the teachers do not make their students aware of various cultures then the students themselves might not pay attention to.

Teachers themselves as well as they teach a language influences the learners. If a teacher does not give importance to teaching different cultures in class, students may not pay attention to the cultural aspects on their own. Therefore, teachers should encourage their students learn different cultures by pointing out their importance as well as teaching the structure of the language.

When it comes to the advantages or disadvantages of being a non-native EFL teacher, participants believe that being a native or non-native speaker of English do not directly influence teachers ICC practices. Because while developing ICC, a native speaker might not be aware of other cultures except English culture, therefore it is all about the English teachers her/his own level of cultural development. However, non-native teachers might be much more beneficial as they also experience the same process in developing their own ICC and thus they are expected to be more beneficial in understanding and thus helping the learners of the same culture. Participants also said that the advantages of non-native English teachers are predicting students' competencies or deficiencies as they have experienced the same process, thinking from the perspective of their students, sharing common culture, being more knowledgeable about the students' process of acquiring English, passing through the same phase etc. One of the interviewees identified the situation as in the following:

Before becoming a teacher, non-native EFL teachers also experienced understanding a foreign language from many aspects. During this experience phase, they learn about the different cultures the language is used and has a better understanding of their own culture. For that reason, I believe a non-native EFL teacher may help students understand different cultures better since they have also passed through the same phases while they were learning that language.

As for the disadvantages of being a non-native EFL teacher, some answers focus on the 'culture' not 'intercultural' and thus they mention about the advantages of native speakers as knowing their culture better than a non-native can grasp. Such as:

...native EFL teachers can have superiority only on their own culture because everybody knows their own culture better than any foreigners do.

Above quoted words only treats the native culture of English, however, being an intercultural speaker necessitates having knowledge about various cultures where English is spoken as a native, second

or even foreign language. A so-called native speaker knows his/her culture better than non-native does, but this does not mean that every native speaker knows every other culture where English is spoken except his or her own country. In fact, she/he even might not be aware of other cultures because the English language is spoken everywhere and thus they might not need to learn other cultures and other 'Englishes' spoken in various countries. Thus, those two questions were a bit tricky in nature in order to question teachers judgments made at the beginning of the interview and thus to compare whether they mistake ICC for just 'learning native culture'.

Discussion and Conclusion

The main aim of this study was to collect the views/ideas of EFL teachers on the issue of developing ICC. In this respect, their practices in class were also questioned during the interviews made. The analysis of the interviews gave some clues about the competency of participant English teachers. Besides, their education or knowledge on the ICC was revealed as well as their practices. Yet, these interviews were small-scale and thus need to be done with many more interviewees in order to reflect a comprehensive general of EFL teachers. Though this study is not enough to generalize about the views of all Turkish non-native EFL teachers working at universities, it still reflects some of the views of EFL teachers.

First, all the participants defined ICC very well and draw the borders of it by giving some key terms as 'communication, ability, other cultures' and they all find a relationship between FL teaching and ICC by mentioning lingua franca nature of English and 'World Englishes' as well as referring non-native to non-native speaker communication. This might result from that the education of interviewees, as mentioned in the 'methodology' part, is at least Master's level and they all have been working at least 5 years in the same field and even two of them go on their Doctorate education. Therefore, it is inevitable to get such clear and expected answers from them on the definition of ICC.

Interviewees also seem eager to develop their students' ICC and as understood from the interviews they try to do so. They believe in the necessity of it in raising equipped EFL students and preparing students to the challenges of meeting various cultures in the real world of communication. However, it seems that they are a bit confused on how to raise intercultural speakers and whether they need to use the same methods and activities or not and they still need to consider much on the activities in this regard.. At this point, many researchers (Byram et al. 2002; Corbett, 2003) suggest that teachers might benefit from the already known methodology, tasks and activities for this cause. Moreover, there are some articles and books that explain the ways to incorporate ICC into classroom (Marchis et al. 2008; Uso-Juan & Martinez-Flor (2008); Corbett, 2010) and these can help EFL teachers.

As for the issue of the role of a teacher in developing ICC of a learner, certainly the roles of the EFL teachers do not differ from the other teaching situations. They are always needed to be guides, role models, facilitators, co-learners, language or in this case culture providers and so on. Therefore, the answers given in the interviews are in line with these approaches. Just as the teacher attends in the learning-teaching process, students should also participate in the process in order to feel themselves active and thus communicate in order to develop ICC.

Lastly, non-native teachers of English, of course, have some pros and cons when it comes to the teaching of various cultures with the usage and help of a FL rather than their own. However, in developing ICC, both native and non-native teachers of English might have difficulty in mastering various cultures that English is spoken. Therefore it can be said that whether native or non-native, EFL teachers should, in the first stage, develop themselves and be ready to embrace various cultures as well as having a profound vision in teaching and meeting new cultures.

Overall, non-native EFL teachers are aware of ICC and have some ideas about developing it in spite of crowded classes and uninterested students. In this respect, they still need to habilitate classes and students.

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