

The Cultural Identity and Intercultural Understanding : An Analysis of Significance in the Context of Languages



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Background

UNESCO's 1996 report of the *International Commission on Education for the Twenty-first Century* identifies four pillars of learning as the foundation of education for lifelong learning and for drawing out the full potential and latent abilities of learners as individuals and as members of society, while learning to live together for sustainable human development (Delors, 1996). One of the four overlapping and interconnected pillars of learning is 'Learning to Live Together' clearly emphasizes on socio-cultural harmonious development and intercultural understanding (ICU).

UNESCO's Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity (2001) seeks to promote awareness of the positive value of cultural diversity by humanizing globalization, making it more culturally sensitive, believing that inter-cultural understanding is the best guarantee of peace. Another significant international document relevant to education for ICU is UNESCO's Declaration of Principles on Tolerance (1995), which calls on nations to take all positive measures necessary to promote tolerance as a "necessity for peace and for the economic and social advancement of all peoples. ASEAN-SEAMEO Statement (2006) on the promotion of identity and socio-cultural identity (CI) in the region emphasized the critical role that education plays in fostering intercultural, inter-religious and inter-racial understanding within and between societies in the region.

The global documents as well as Indian reports and frameworks highlight 'the need' to develop the academic environment where the ICU and acceptability can be enhanced. This is why the Indian educational committees and commissions always put its necessity in school level teaching-learning. **National Policy on Education (NPE)**, 1986's some statements are very pertinent here:

These elements will cut across subject areas and will be designed to promote values such as India's common cultural heritage, egalitarianism, democracy and secularism, equality of the sexes, protection of the environment, removal of social barriers, observance of the small family norm and inculcation of the scientific temper (Para 3.4). Minimum levels of learning will be laid down for each stage of education (Para 3.7). **NPE** especially recalls for school education for this peaceful ICU concern: Higher (school) education provides people with an opportunity to reflect on the critical social, economic, cultural, moral and spiritual issues facing humanity (Para 5.24).

Further **National Curriculum Framework for Teacher Education, 2010** favors the issue of cultural learning as in *Vision of Teacher and Teacher Education (1.14)*, there is increasing recognition of the worth and potential of social context as a source for rejuvenating teaching and learning. Multi-cultural education and teaching for diversity are the needs of contemporary times (section 2.2.2).

The basic question is how the Learners are aware for this concern. Which type of attitudes the learners have on their cultural heritage? What do they expect as ideological changes in present cultural setup? And very essentially what and how they behave in academic and social surroundings where they find the cultural diversity and some conflicts too? Furthermore, this is also an issue that English language is facilitating this CI and ICU or not? Finally the cultural and intercultural development is a part of their overall development or NOT? Some problematic issues should be considered through a systemic research.

UNESCO's Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity (2001) defines culture as "the spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features of a social group" including the values, beliefs, attitudes, behaviours, customs, traditions, practices, identity, lifestyle, language and religious faith of diverse peoples (Marshall, 2002; Campbell, 2004). Culture is therefore a continuous, dynamic process, which indicates that we reinterpret and modify our assumptions (Hernandez, 1989). It is manifest in material goods and artifacts (e.g. food, dress, and arts) as well as in fundamental beliefs, perceptions of time and space, and precepts about human nature (Marshall, 2002).

Culture as that complex includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities (Tylor, 1958; Edward Sapir, 1956). Anthropologically culture is a connection of ideas and feelings accepted by the majority of people in a society (Rocher, 1972; 2004; Bottomley, 1997; Stern, 2009; Mahadi and Jafari, 2012; Wardhaugh, 2002; Roohul&Amini, 1989; Goodenough, 1996; E. B. Tylor, 1958, 1974; E. Sapir, 1921; G. Bottomley, 1997; J. A. Banks, 1988; D.P. Britzman, 1991; Onowa McIvor, 2009).

The making of new information and communication technologies and global media may possess the potential to transform their CI and how educational institutions should understand and respond to this evolving cultural reality (Koç, 2006). The center, or core, of CI is an image of the self and the culture intertwined in the individual's total conception of reality (Brislin, 1977).

In the present context, ICU included close acquaintance, empathy and appreciation between people of different culture. ICU includes three broad concepts: Intercultural Awareness, Intercultural Competence and Intercultural Communication (Meier, 2007). ICU identifies knowledge, skills, behaviours and dispositions that assist students in developing and acting with ICU at school and in their lives beyond school (Kalantzis and Cope 2005). Inter-(cross-)cultural awareness is a prerequisite for the achievement of ICU that begins when a person realizes that he or she has a particular CI that is one among many (Bennet, 2003). The ability to differentiate enables people to compare and therefore evaluate their culture in relation to that of others, which means that they take a decisive step away from the ethnocentric position (Cushner&Brislin in Sen Gupta, 2003).

Developing intercultural competence (ICC) includes self-reflection, gathering information about your own and other cultures, appreciating cultural similarities and differences, using cultural resources, and acknowledging the essential equality and value of all cultures (Klein & Chen, 2001). It is demonstrated, amongst other things, by the ability or sensitivity to interpret intercultural styles of communication (language, signs, gestures, body language, and customs). ICC requires an understanding of culture as a dynamic multifaceted process (Bennet, 2003). People communicate within and between cultures by means of language, which is therefore central to their social relationships. It both reveals and marks status, power, authority, and levels of education (Campbell, 2004); while intercultural communication refers only to communication among individuals from different nationalities (Gudykunst, 2003).

Recognizing the attitudes and structures that shape their personal identities and narratives, at an interpersonal level, it considers commonalities and differences between people, focusing on processes of interaction, dialogue and negotiation (Liddicoat, Papademetre, Scarino and Kohler 2003; Wiggins and McTighe

2005). Students learn to take responsibility for their interactions with others, to act on what they have learnt and to become intercultural citizens in the world (Byram 2008).

Hannigan (1990) found a strong relationship between successful intercultural communication and certain personal traits such as: cultural empathy, flexibility, organizational skills, and superior linguistic skills. Armstrong (1984) and Hansel (1985) showed that a study abroad experience positively influences later language study, promotes favorable attitudes toward other cultures, and brings about a greater level of cultural awareness. Armstrong (1984) found that study abroad impacted career choices and positively influenced attitudes toward the host culture. Along these lines, Jurasek (1995), Robinson & Nocon (1996) have recently argued that without direct experience of the culture, culture learning is only cognitive boundary crossing.

One important consequence of the cultural homogeneity between teacher and student in FL classrooms is that neither educator nor pupil need consciously attend to the ways in which they are engaged in cultural transmission (Ferdman, 1990). In the study of ESL classes in South Asia, Canagarajah (1993) found that the students felt alienated and negative towards the target language and culture. In Meara's (1994) study, students did not feel that their reading and writing skills improved during their study abroad experience. Individual knowledge is a potential resource for group creativity, and group creativity could be a driver of knowledge creation (Zhou and Lingling, 2012). Another study related with prospective teachers aimed at creating a new context through which pre-service teachers improve their awareness through another culture (Belgin Anriverdi, Yıldız Öztan Ulusoy and Sezen Seymen, 2011).

Further a study is found that describes some processes through which adult EFL learners developed ICU. This research aimed to provide clear examples of how significant and necessary it is to give foreign language learners the chance to become aware of the foreign culture while they are becoming proficient in the target language (Leonard R. Bruguier and Louise M. Greathouse Amador, 2012; Ferney Cruz Arcila, 2007). A study was reviewed related to Disorienting Experiences in Informal Learning Contexts Promote Cross-Cultural Awareness in Pre-service Teachers (Suniti Sharma, Kadriye El-Atwani, Jubin Rahatzad, Jason Ware, Jo Ann Phillion, & Erik Malewski, 2012). However, the traditional approach to foreign language teaching views culture teaching as an adjunct or secondary priority (Lies Sercu, 2005).

A book review introduces students to the foundations of intercultural communication, a vibrant discipline within the field. In addition to emphasizing a value-oriented perspective on intercultural encounters, the text contains a robust ethical chapter, complete with specific guidelines that will help students become ethical intercultural communicators (Ting-Toomey and Chung, 2012). Persons with a disability represent an oppressed minority. To understand better the nature of these barriers, this paper explores able-bodied and disabled persons' communication as a form of intercultural communication (Robert Emrys and Richard L. Wiseman, 1987). The components of intercultural sensitivity examined include: self-esteem, self-monitoring, open-mindedness, empathy, interaction involvement, and non-judgment (Guo-Ming Chen, 1997). Through literature, children have the opportunity to go beyond a tourist perspective of gaining surface-level information about culture. They are invited to immerse themselves in the story worlds, gaining insights into how people feel, live, and think around the world (Short, 2009).

Taken together intercultural adroitness, intercultural awareness, and intercultural sensitivity account for being communication competent in a global society. The article indicates levels of and approaches to the study of intercultural awareness. Models for the study of basic cultural knowledge and cultural values are also discussed and evaluated (Chen & Starosta, 1998). Some studies of intercultural communication have tried to

answer the question, “How do people understand one another when they do not share a common cultural experience?”

A meta-analysis demonstrated that both knowledge and skills were positive predictors of the association between intercultural communication competence and intercultural communication effectiveness (Ruben, 1989). More research efforts should be aimed at empirically testing theoretical assumptions and the measurement of various moderator variables (Bradford; Allen; Beisser, 1998).

An Analysis of Significance with some contexts of Languages

Cultural changes and conflicts are always critical issues to observe and research. These situations definitely affect the present norms and standards of economy, education, and politics of a society. Peoples of India think they are losing own CI, sometime under the influence of globalization, westernization and modernization. Is it fact? Another side they think they have clear ICU. They think they are globalised and have an understanding of cross-culturalism. Is it fact? They realise this but research goes further this realization, and seeks the fact. Actually this is researchable with everyone, but not feasible at all. The present research is designed with ESL learners with an assumption that these learners have really the CI, and more than this they have an ICU.

The basic assumption behind this research is to find out the attitudes, behaviours and expectations. The learners are now more social and connected home-culture and foreign cultures through the academic interaction and social media. Here are some basic questions: Are they really having CI or not? Furthermore are they acknowledging any ICU or not? What do they mind over the cultural diversity and conflicts? What do they consider the influence of globalization, westernization and modernization on own traditional cultural patterns? What is their ICU with English Language Education? Are they aware, competent and good communicator with English learning with any ICU?

Finally to preserve the Indian culture, this is first of all to identify the present CI of ESL learners. They are expected preserve and transform it. CI and ICU is crucial consideration to global peace and harmony. This research has very long term perspectives and implication which is useful and applicable to Indian social and educational reforms, furthermore for English Language Education as Second Language.

ICU in learning indicates how Learners behave within the academic scenario, and is an attribute of teachers and learners who very positively pursuing for a happy life and relationship. It is more fundamental issue with school learners who living the present of Indian Education and in multi-lingual society. Now these learners touch the national and global issues, they negotiate the home and global discusses, they feel the happiness and pain of a person from each and every corner of this globalized world. So this is crucial to identify the status of ICU that can be transformed to the other learners, and further more to the whole society.

This research is really relevant to present scenario. Some points are evident for the rationale of this research as following:

- In India English is most accepted international language, and French, German, Spanish and so on far from the position in India where English stands. This is clear assumption that as an international language English is utilized for intercultural exchange and understanding. BUT, is it really working for this purpose. ESL is taught for international perspectives, this is much clear! But this is really happening in this country that the learners are becoming cultured with this most international language? This is an issue for a research.
- If English is enhancing the human development in each and every sector, this is definitely for appreciation. But if this is degrading the home-culture any way or any mode, is this not alarming?

Language connects the people worldwide, this is desirable. ESL learning should promote the culture identity. Is it happening or not? This is second issue for a deep research.

- Only information sharing is not the matter of acculturation of new generation. This is more than this cognitive exchange. English should facilitate the learning by which our new generation can assimilate the own CI with ICU. Is this being realized by ESL Learners? This is third issue for a research.
- First of all, we need and expect for a cultured and well civilized society. And with so called perceptions and reasons English is conceptualised useful for this matter. Finally the ESL learners are learning or acquiring the attitudes, skills and behaviors favorable for cultural learning. And what do they expect with English for intercultural entity? This is another issue for research.

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