

# Conceptualising Intercultural Communicative Competence and its Role in English Language Learning

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## Abstract

This paper gives an overview of the current theories and empirical research findings on intercultural communicative competence, which is a complex construct and composite term made up of several competences. Detailed consideration is given to understanding the main construct, its constituent parts, and how these can be conceptualised and incorporated into EFL learning. Specific strategies and methods are presented for teaching and learning as well as evaluating intercultural communicative competence. Acquiring it may take a lifetime of effort, but most researchers believe that it is indispensable for successful interaction in our increasingly globalised world.

*Keywords:* intercultural communicative competence (ICC), intercultural competence, communicative competence, English as a foreign language (EFL), lingua franca, culture, interculturality, intercultural encounter, globalisation, internationalisation

Learning intercultural communication facilitates EFL students' successful participation in intercultural citizenship, which is essential in today's world (Byram, & Wagner, 2018, p. 149). In addition to linguistic ability, there are several competences required for a person to achieve intercultural communicative competence, and each of these is examined in this paper.

The study begins with a description of communicative competence, followed by consideration of the language - culture nexus, globalisation and culture, as well as the contested role of culture in EFL learning. Following this, the central part of the study, namely intercultural competence and intercultural communicative competence is

examined. Then the role of education in intercultural communicative competence is considered, followed by a section on approaches to develop intercultural communicative competence, after which examples are given of methods for evaluating students' intercultural communicative competence and a self-reflection on intercultural experience in Japan. In the final section, internationalisation in relation to intercultural communicative competence is discussed before concluding the study.

Intercultural communicative competence is a complex construct comprising intercultural competence, communicative competence, and other competences. It is necessary to understand the difference between the two related terms of intercultural competence and intercultural communicative competence, and also to understand the meanings of the constituent parts, such as competence, communicative competence, culture, and other related concepts such as intercultural encounter. Intercultural competence involves interacting with people from a different culture while continuing to use one's native language (Byram, 1997). This means that intercultural competence does not require an individual to understand or speak a foreign language. Conversely, intercultural communicative competence incorporates communicating in a foreign language as an integral component of the intercultural situation. Therefore, in order to acquire intercultural communicative competence, individuals need intercultural competence and also communicative competence in foreign language/s. These three major competences are considered in detail in the following pages.

An 'intercultural encounter' is defined as a face-to-face or virtual (i. e. online social media) contact with another person (or people) that is perceived to have different cultural attachments to oneself. It occurs

“... when cultural differences are perceived and made salient either by the situation or by the individual's own orientation and attitudes” (Barrett, Byram, & Lazar, 2013, p. 6). Competence in this study means, “... the capacity to respond successfully to types of situations which present tasks, difficulties or challenges for the individual, either singly or together with others ... [and] is always susceptible of enrichment or further learning through exposure to, and acting in response to, this variation” (Barrett et al., 2013, p. 7). Other important definitions are provided throughout the paper.

By synthesising the main research literature on the topic, this study sets out to answer four questions. Firstly, what is intercultural communicative competence and how can it be conceptualised? Secondly, how can it be learned and developed? Thirdly, how can it be measured? Fourthly, how can it be incorporated into EFL learning? This paper aims to discuss some of the answers to these questions. To begin the study, one prominent component of the main construct, communicative competence, is examined.

## Communicative Competence

Communicative competence (or language proficiency) consists of knowledge an individual has of what is appropriate as well as correct language behaviour and also what is effective language behaviour in relation to specific communicative goals. Therefore, it includes both linguistic competence (for example, knowledge of grammatical rules) and pragmatic competence (for example, knowledge of what is appropriate linguistic behaviour in a particular situation) (Ellis, 1994, p. 13). There are several major theories of communicative competence.

Del Hymes (1971) proposed a theory of communicative competence which subsequently became a basis of much research by other scholars on speaking proficiency. He defined communicative competence in terms of four types of knowledge that a “normal member of a community” can use in deciding:

- whether (and to what degree) something is formally *possible*;
- whether (and to what degree) something is *feasible* in virtue of the means of implementation available;

- whether (and to what degree) something is *appropriate* (adequate, happy, successful) in relation to the context in which it is used and evaluated; and
- whether (and to what degree) something is in fact done, actually *performed*, and what its doing entails (Hymes, 1971, p. 281).

This theory consists of the interaction of four components: grammatical, psycholinguistic, sociolinguistic, and probabilistic language ability. These four constituent features of communicative competence could be used by an individual to make judgements about a particular instance of language use, namely whether (and to what degree) it is *possible, feasible, appropriate*, and actually *performed*. Building on Hyme's theory, Canale and Swain (1980), and later Canale (1983), developed their own model of communicative competence, which also includes four elements:

- Linguistic competence – grammatical correctness in respect of the forms, inflections, and sequences used to express a message;
- Sociolinguistic competence – knowledge of how to express a message in terms of the other person and the overall situation and purpose of the communication;
- Discourse competence – the selection, order and arrangement of words and structures as an effective and clear way of expressing a speaker/writer's intended message; and
- Strategic competence – strategies used by a speaker/ writer to compensate for any weaknesses in the foregoing three areas (Canale, 1983).

A further point regarding strategic competence is that it consists of “verbal and non-verbal communication strategies that may be called into action for breakdown in communication due to performance variables or to insufficient competence” (Canale & Swain, 1980, p. 30). And the same competence is used to “enhance the effectiveness of communication” (Canale, 1983, p. 11). This aspect of competence is particularly important to intercultural situations.

Henry Widdowson (2003) observes that the correspondence of Canale & Swain's theory

with Hyme's model is difficult to discern because of terminological variations and the apparent disappearance of the 'feasible' and the 'performed' components (Widdowson, 2003, p. 166). Over the decades, various other theories and models of communicative competence have been proposed, but most of them acknowledge that it involves both linguistic competence and pragmatic competence. Communicative competence is deeply rooted in culture and, therefore, communication strategies are also closely bound to culture.

### **The Language - Culture Nexus**

The language-culture nexus has been recognised by linguists for a long time, but research on it intensified from the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. One of the most influential researchers in the field, Claire Kramsch, asserts that culture "is always in the background, right from day one, ready to unsettle the good language learners when they expect it least, making evident the limitations of their hard-won communicative competence, challenging their ability to make sense of the world around them" (Kramsch, 1993, p. 1). It is, therefore, through the lens of culture that language learners need to interpret and communicate meaning (Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013, p. 46).

Culture needs to be incorporated into communication theory in order to understand the meaning of intercultural communication, but doing this is a complex task and has been approached in numerous ways by researchers. In fact, defining 'culture' itself is extremely difficult because there are degrees of difference and variability within a culture and also between cultures (Perry & Southwell, 2011, p. 456). According to Furstenberg (2010, p. 329), " ...culture is a highly complex, elusive, multilayered notion that encompasses many different and overlapping areas and that inherently defies easy categorization and classification."

Recognizing the multidimensional nature of culture, the Council of Europe (2016) defines it as a group of people who share in material resources, social resources (e. g. language and social rules), and subjective resources (e. g. values and beliefs). The group of people can be of any size and includes such entities as, "nations, ethnic groups, religious groups, cities, neighbourhoods, work organisations, occupational groups, sexual orientation groups,

disability groups, generational groups and families." The authors further note that, "cultural group boundaries are often very fuzzy" (Council of Europe, 2016, p. 19). In this view of culture, individuals are likely to be members of many different cultures simultaneously.

Today, intercultural contacts have become commonplace for most people living in most places of the world, a situation that has resulted from increased mobility and faster, more efficient and affordable transportation, and Internet-based sophisticated technology which facilitate instantaneous communication across the world. This rapid change is mainly attributable to the processes and impacts of globalisation.

### **Globalisation & Culture**

Globalisation is an extremely complex, much-researched and much-contested phenomenon. Many different models and approaches to conceptualise it have variously emphasized or minimized economic, political and cultural forces that interact with each other in multidirectional ways that can have either positive or negative affects on society. According to one influential educationalist, Fazal Rizvi (2004), globalisation has been linked to most of our contemporary social changes, including the "knowledge economy, the declining authority of the state and the demise of traditional cultural practices ... [as well as] the spread of neo-liberal economic regimes and the advent of a postmodern consumer culture" (Rizvi, 2004, p. 158). Furthermore, numerous studies have sought to clarify how " ... social, cultural, political and economic formations are being reshaped by an increasingly interconnected and interdependent world" (Bulut & Pitton, 2010, p. 150).

Cultural globalisation has resulted in contemporary cultures being more complex and interconnected, simultaneously multiplying, diversifying, fragmenting and reconfiguring in continual processes of cross-cultural exchange and interaction that is free from territorial limitations and unconfined by national borders. This free flow of ideas, knowledge, attitudes, media and cultural commodities now rapidly spreads around the world, unrestricted by time and space, facilitated mainly by the Internet, telephone, TV, satellite and other increasingly sophisticated communications technology. In education there

is an increasing adoption of new information and communication technologies in schools and universities across the world, including the increasing use of distance or 'online learning' courses made possible by the Internet and incorporating applications such as Blackboard.

The various forces linked to globalisation that are mainly responsible for the intensification of cross-cultural exchanges and interactions are arguably unstoppable and will eventually influence all existing cultures (Kuran & Sandholm, 2008, p. 221). Today only a few nations are culturally and racially homogeneous (notably Japan and Iceland) ; most are multicultural due to their multi-ethnic populations. Also, there is a shared identity among the world's social elite who have a similar education and life experience (James, 2005, p. 321-2). These factors may constitute evidence of a trend towards a common global culture.

However, a closer examination reveals unprecedented numbers of people participating in multiple global cultures, such as online social networking and messaging, as well as consuming global brand products. These are not connected to any single location, and this phenomenon is resulting in 'both greater homogeneity and heterogeneity of culture' (Rizvi, 2004, p. 159). In other words, there is simultaneous spreading out and contracting of cultures as the processes and effects of globalisation continue apace. One of these effects is English becoming an international language – a global *lingua franca*, borne of the necessity to use English in many situations, including business, travel, sport, politics, entertainment, and person-to-person contacts. The global *lingua franca* status of English has been accompanied by worldwide EFL learning.

### **Culture in EFL Learning**

Today, roughly 20% of the world, or 1.5 billion people, speak English, and most of these are not native English speakers. In fact, around 75% of the world's English speakers are non-native and they use English as their second (L2) or foreign language (FL). Widdowson (2003) emphasises that the language taught to EFL learners is English *as a foreign language* because it is an unfamiliar language to them and, therefore, cannot be the English of native speakers (Widdowson, 2003, pp. 114-115). Consequently, we

refer to Englishes in the plural and not English in the singular because we recognize that there are several variations of the same language. These realities starkly contradict the hitherto accepted pedagogy of foregrounding the target language cultures of English-speaking countries in EFL learning.

The role of culture in EFL teaching and learning has been fiercely debated for several decades. Weninger & Kiss (2013) have identified three main periods of changing perceptions on the role of culture in EFL learning situations. The first period is from the 1950s until the early 1990s when culture was treated as an object and students were taught factual information about the target language culture. By immersing a learner into the target language culture, it was thought they would have a greater chance of becoming a member of the target language community and succeed in acquiring the language. This perspective was shared by motivational experts (e. g., Dörnyei, 1990; Gardner, 1988; Gardner, Day, & MacIntyre, 1992) who claimed that 'integrative motivation' occurred when a learner desired to identify with the culture of the target language group. Therefore, the benefits of 'integrative motivation' for language learning were emphasised (Weninger & Kiss, 2013, p. 697).

The second period, spanning one decade from the 1990s, saw major change in perceptions of culture. Researchers (e. g., Kramsch, 1993, 1998) pointed out that successful language learning involves awareness of the cultural behaviour and practices of the target language speakers. Other scholars began to argue against the concept of a target language culture of English speakers (Prodromou, 1992), because English was becoming a global *lingua franca*. Concurrently, other researchers (Byram, 1997) started to focus on inter-cultural, cross-cultural, and transcultural issues in order to develop intercultural communicative competence (Weninger & Kiss, 2013, p. 697).

In the third period, beginning around 2000, culture came to be viewed as an increasingly complex and transnational phenomenon, involving key concepts such as 'critical citizenship,' 'intercultural competence of the world citizen,' 'global cultural consciousness,' and 'intercultural citizenship' (Weninger & Kiss, 2013, pp. 697-268). According to Byram & Wagner (2018), competence in culture has replaced mere knowledge about culture, and the most frequently used terms are intercultural competence, cross-cultural

competence, and transcultural competence. The last term, transcultural – or ‘transkulturell’ is the preferred expression of German scholars (Byram & Wagner, 2018, p. 145).

It is clear that these approaches move beyond a simple understanding of the target language culture or merely including cultural content into classroom learning. Instead they require reflective and active engagement with cultural information in order for EFL learning to “foster intercultural citizenship and a critical understanding of self and the other in a global world” (Weninger & Kiss, 2013, p. 712). Also, the increasing importance of English as a global lingua franca challenges a ‘national’ context and speaker, and it suggests that learners’ own understandings and linguistic practices do not need to be altered to those of a ‘native’ speaker in the same way as in the past (Byram & Wagner, 2018, pp. 143-144). Moreover, much of the worldwide communication in English increasingly involves non-native speaker – non-native speaker interactions. These realisations have major implications for EFL learning and the concept of intercultural competence.

## **Intercultural Competence**

More than half a century of effort has been invested by scholars to develop research on the concept of intercultural competence, resulting in a vast amount of literature. It has been variously referred to as ‘cross-cultural competence’, ‘transcultural competence’, ‘global competence’, ‘global citizenship’, ‘cultural awareness’, or other similar terminology, but it lacks any single and precise definition. Numerous theories, models, and frameworks of the concept have been published and this paper examines the most influential of these.

Similar to the difficulty in defining culture, the concept of intercultural competence defies a single, precise definition. Michael Byram’s definition (1997) of intercultural competence was summarized as follows: “Knowledge of others; knowledge of self; skills to interpret and relate; skills to discover and/or to interact; valuing others’ values, beliefs, and behaviors; and revitalizing one’s self. Linguistic competence plays a key role” (Byram, 1997, p. 34). Byram’s definition is important because it was one of the earliest and has been widely quoted, and remains a classic in the discipline of intercultural studies. Included in

Byram’s model (1997) is the notion of “critical cultural awareness: an ability to evaluate, critically and on the basis of explicit criteria, perspectives, practices and products in one’s own and other cultures and countries” (Byram, 1997, p. 53). This feature encourages learners to critically reflect on their own perspectives as well as those of others.

In a slightly different conception, Darla Deardorff defines intercultural competence as “the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations based on one’s intercultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes” (Deardorff, 2004, p. 194). Her model of intercultural competence is a pyramid shape and emphasises both internal outcomes and external outcomes of intercultural competence (p. 255). This model conceptualises intercultural competence as dependent on the foundations of particular attitudes and particular sets of knowledge.

The pyramid model of intercultural competence includes provision for degrees of competence, so that the more components of competence gained by an individual increases their degree of intercultural competence as an external outcome. Also, by including both general and specific definitions of intercultural competence, the model allows the development of assessment indicators relative to a particular context or situation. The model moves from the individual level of attitudes and personal abilities to the interactive cultural level in relation to the outcomes. The specific skills shown in the model are the skills necessary for acquiring and processing knowledge about other cultures as well as one’s own culture. The importance of attitudes and knowledge are both emphasized in the model (Deardorff, 2004, p. 255).

The personal attribute of attitude is the basic starting point in acquiring intercultural competence. Attitude assumes a fundamental role in the learning that follows, according to Deardorff (2004) and Byram (1997). Reinforcing the importance of attitude, Okayama, Furuto, and Edmondson (2001) state that “what may be most important is ... to maintain culturally competent attitudes as we continue to attain new knowledge and skills while building new relationships. Awareness, the valuing of all cultures, and a willingness to make changes are underlying attitudes that support everything that can be taught or learned” (Okayama, Furuto & Edmondson, 2001, p. 97).

Excluding the linguistic component found in the foregoing definitions, but introducing a relational aspect of how individuals manage intercultural interactions, Spitzberg & Chagnon (2011) define intercultural competence as, “the appropriate and effective management of interaction between people who, to some degree or another, represent different or divergent affective, cognitive, and behavioural orientations to the world” (Spitzberg & Chagnon, 2011, p. 7). Based on a review of numerous models and definitions of communicative competence, Huber & Reynolds (2014) proposed a definition that is comprehensive and yet relatively concise and especially suited for educators, as follows:

Intercultural competence is a combination of attitudes, knowledge, understanding and skills applied through action which enables one, either singly or together with others, to:

- Understand and respect people who are perceived to have different cultural affiliations from oneself;
- Respond appropriately, effectively and respectfully when interacting and communicating with such people;
- Establish positive and constructive relationships with such people; and
- Understand oneself and one’s own multiple cultural affiliations through encounters with cultural “difference” (Huber & Reynolds, 2014, pp. 16-17).

The three foregoing definitions (Deardorff, 2004; Spitzberg & Chagnon, 2011; Huber & Reynolds, 2014) include the words ‘effective’ or ‘effectively,’ as well as ‘appropriate’ or ‘appropriately.’ But what do they mean? Firstly, ‘effective’ or ‘effectively’ seem to suggest that all of the participants are able to achieve their objectives in the interaction at least partially. Secondly, the terms ‘appropriate’ or ‘appropriately’ imply that all participants in the situation are satisfied that the interaction occurs within expected social norms. In a similar vein, Arasaratnam & Banerjee (2011) define ‘effectiveness’ as the ability to achieve one’s goals, and ‘appropriateness’ as a capacity to exhibit expected and accepted behaviour in intercultural situations (Arasaratnam & Banerjee, 2011, in Bowe et al., 2014, p. 229). In a similar though slightly different conception of these potentially ambiguous words, Deardorff (2006, p. 256) states

that “... appropriateness is the avoidance of violating valued rules and effectiveness is the achievement of valued objectives.”

Building on her (2004) definition of intercultural competence, Deardorff (2006, 2009) redefined the concept as, “... knowledge of others; knowledge of self; skills to interpret and relate; skills to discover and/or interact; valuing others’ values, beliefs and behaviours; and revitalizing one’s self.” Deardorff further described the concept as a process. Her ‘process model of intercultural competence’ contains the same elements as her pyramid model (see above) but intercultural competence is conceived as a continuing process that can be acquired by taking different routes.

First, intercultural competence development is a continuing process, which requires individuals to reflect on and evaluate the development of their own intercultural competence over time. Second, critical thinking skills are needed by individuals to acquire and evaluate knowledge. Third, attitudes of respect, openness and, curiosity are important because they effect all other aspects of intercultural competence. Fourth is the ability to understand other worldviews and to view situations from others’ perspectives. Therefore, knowledge of other cultures by itself is not sufficient for developing intercultural competence; the development of skills for thinking interculturally is more important than knowledge alone (Deardorff, 2011, p. 68).

Deardorff’s (2004) process model of intercultural competence is open and allows learners to enter at any of the four points and to move freely between categories of concepts. The model is circular with arrows to indicate movement of the learner between attitudes, knowledge and comprehension, internal outcomes, and external outcomes related to intercultural interactions. The journey is ongoing as the learner continues to learn, develop, and become transformed with time. The degree of intercultural competence depends on acquired degree of attitudes, knowledge/comprehension, and skills (Deardorff, 2004, in Deardorff, 2011, p. 67).

Although no consensus exists on a precise definition of intercultural competence, there are common themes that emerge in the research literature (Deardorff, 2011). For example, many accounts include four common elements: knowledge, attitude, skills, and behaviours. Furthermore, Bennett (2008) reports on similarities between most definitions, citing

agreement by most researchers that intercultural competence comprises “a set of cognitive, affective and behavioural skills and characteristics that support effective and appropriate interaction in a variety of cultural contexts” (J. M. Bennett, 2008, p. 16). Intercultural competence is the essential ingredient of intercultural communicative competence.

### **Intercultural Communicative Competence**

‘Intercultural communicative competence’ or ‘intercultural communication competence’ are the terms most often used to describe a person’s ability to accomplish successful intercultural communication. Though some researchers appear to conflate intercultural communicative competence (ICC) with intercultural competence, the two concepts are distinct, with each having a separate and extensive body of theory and research on them.

According to Lily Arasaratnam (2011), a competent intercultural communicator is someone who is, “conversant in navigating communication in intercultural spaces.” She goes on to define an intercultural space as, “a symbolic representation of an instance when communication between individuals is affected by cultural differences in a way that would not have been noteworthy in the absence of these differences” (Arasaratnam, 2011, p. viii).

Lázár, Huber-Kriegler, Lussier, Matei & Peck (2007), in the Common European framework of reference (CEFR) for language teacher guidelines, define ICC as, “the ability to communicate effectively in cross-cultural situations and to relate appropriately in a variety of cultural contexts” (p. 9). This definition from the Council of Europe emphasizes two main elements: skills and attitudes. The former involves the development, “in the areas of observation, interpreting and relating, mediation and discovery;” the latter is to, “increase respect, empathy and tolerance for ambiguity, to raise interest in, curiosity about, and openness towards people from other cultures, and to encourage a willingness to suspend judgment” (pp. 9-10).

The Council of Europe publications typically tend to conflate the two related concepts of intercultural competence and ICC. For example, Barrett et al. (2013) states that the four necessary components of intercultural competence are attitudes, knowledge, understanding and skills. To describe these, the

authors compiled detailed and extensive lists under each of the main components which they commend for using in education to develop intercultural competence (pp. 8-9). However, ICC is also implicated in the detailed description because the list of skills includes several specific communicative competences that are needed for intercultural encounters. An edited version of the original lists is shown as follows:

#### Attitudes:

- Valuing cultural diversity;
- Respecting people who have different cultural affiliations from one’s own;
- Curiosity about cultural affiliations and perspectives that are different from one’s own;
- Empathy with people who have different cultural affiliations from one’s own;
- Questioning what is ‘normal’ according to one’s previously acquired knowledge and experience;
- Tolerance of ambiguity and uncertainty;
- Willingness to cooperate with individuals who have different cultural perspectives from one’s own;

#### Knowledge:

- Knowledge of different cultural beliefs, values, practices, discourses and products;
- Communicative awareness, including that people of other cultural affiliations may follow different communicative conventions;
- Critical awareness of one’s own and other peoples’ assumptions, stereotypes and prejudices;
- Critical awareness of the socially constructed nature of knowledge;

#### Understanding:

- Understanding the internal diversity and heterogeneity of all cultural groups;
- Understanding the influence of one’s own language and cultural affiliations on one’s worldview;
- Understanding of the processes of cultural, societal and individual interaction;

#### Skills:

- Ability to discover information about other cultural affiliations and perspectives;
- Autonomous learning – interpreting other cultural practices and beliefs in relation to one’s own;
- Empathy – the ability to understand and respond appropriately to other people’s expressed

thoughts;

- Cognitive flexibility – the ability to change and adapt one’s way of thinking in response to a new situation;
- Analytical and critical thinking ability to evaluate one’s own and other cultures, and be able to explain one’s opinions;
- Linguistic, sociolinguistic and discourse skills to ensure smooth communication; and
- (Synthesised from Barrett et al., 2013, pp. 8-9; Council of Europe, 2016, pp. 31-32).

The foregoing extensive lists of competences were devised for use in educational planning. Their creators believe that all of these competences should be teachable, learnable and assessable (through either self-assessment or evaluation by others). Also, to accord with their definition of culture (see in previous section, *The Language-Culture Nexus*), the authors refer to ‘people who are perceived to have different cultural affiliations from oneself instead of ‘people from other cultures’ (Council of Europe, 2016, p. 21).

Byram’s (2017) model of ICC was designed mainly for foreign language learning contexts. The model combines communicative competence (comprising linguistic, sociolinguistic, and discourse competences) with five dimensions of intercultural competence which are suitable to teach and assess in EFL classrooms:

- Knowledge: of social groups, their products, and their way of life in one’s own country and in others, and the general processes of social interaction;
- Skills of interpreting and relating: the ability to interpret a document or activity from another culture, to explain it, and relate it to one’s own culture;
- Skills of discovery and interaction: the ability to acquire new knowledge of a culture and the ability to draw on knowledge, attitudes, and skills when constrained by real-time interaction;
- Attitudes: curiosity and openness, willingness to suspend disbelief about other cultures and belief about one’s own; and
- Critical cultural awareness: the ability to evaluate critically on the basis of specific criteria, perspectives, practices, and products in one’s own and other cultures and countries (Byram & Wagner, 2017, p. 1).

To attain ICC, students will need not only intercultural competence but also proficiency in at least one foreign language. Therefore, Byram’s (2017) model of ICC could be usefully incorporated into the EFL curriculum. Because of the importance of ICC, it needs to be front and centre in education programs, particularly in EFL learning. Some of the reasons for the importance of integrating ICC with education are explained in the following section.

### **Education in Intercultural Communicative Competence**

Education about intercultural principles can help to develop students’ ICC to more effectively interact with other cultures. Also, the practical experience of living in a different culture for a considerable time (at least five years is necessary, according to Bagnall, 2008, p. 120) can further enhance one’s intercultural competence. Also, on-campus interaction with students from different cultural backgrounds can provide valuable learning opportunities. Ultimately, such intercultural knowledge and skills will help promote understanding and mutual friendship, and thereby avert potential conflict between different cultures.

James (2005) suggests ‘intercultural values’ including “ ... empathy, consideration of others’ perspectives, mutual understanding, tolerance, acceptance, respecting differences, caring, inclusiveness, and appreciation of diversity are ... necessary to enable people to live together [in harmony]” (p. 317). These intercultural values can be deployed in person-to-person interactions in order to advance mutual understanding and produce friendly relationships which can then provide the basis for initiating economic, political, or cultural transactions that will lead to benefits for both sides. Specific ways in which intercultural values might be implemented are considered in the next section.

Intercultural education plays a pivotal role in shaping a society’s cultural values. Because of this, it is also capable of raising awareness of cultural differences, encouraging inclusiveness and acceptance of diversity, and thereby help to dispel racial prejudice and xenophobia. In EU member states, for example, intercultural education is regarded as an important component of curricula. Luciac (2006) reports that



in western European states, the aims of intercultural education are to “...deepen students’ knowledge and appreciation of different cultures, and ... to facilitate a critical awareness of institutional [racial] discrimination and the origins of social inequalities” (Luciac, 2006, p. 75). Ideally, such an approach should be incorporated into every school curriculum, be a central part of teacher training programs, and be adopted for pre-service training of all school and university employees

The UNESCO Guidelines on Intercultural Education (2006) state “Interculturality is a dynamic concept and refers to evolving relations between cultural groups. It has been defined as the existence and equitable interaction of diverse cultures and the possibility of generating shared cultural expressions through dialogue and mutual respect...[and] presupposes multiculturalism” (p. 17). Therefore, the role of intercultural education is to equip students with cultural knowledge, attitudes and skills that will help them to respect and understand people from other cultures. To achieve these goals, the design of curricula for intercultural education needs to comprise the following principles:

- Discovery of cultural diversity, awareness of the positive value of such diversity, and respect for diverse cultural heritage;
- Critical awareness of the struggle against racism and discrimination;
- Knowledge about cultural heritage through history, literature, and other subjects;
- Understanding and respect for all peoples;
- Awareness of the increasing global interdependence between peoples and nations;
- Awareness of right and duties of individuals, social groups and nations toward each other;
- Understanding of the need for international solidarity and cooperation;
- Awareness of one’s own cultural values that underlie interpretation of situations and problems and the ability to reflect on and review information by using the knowledge of different cultural perspectives; and
- Respect for different ways of thinking (UNESCO, 2006, p. 37).

Teaching EFL students the foregoing principles will help to produce interculturally competent citizens. However, knowledge, attitudes and skills

that constitute intercultural values are not sufficient for producing interculturally competent citizens. It is necessary for the knowledge, attitudes and skills to be translated into action by deploying the principles of intercultural competence. Barrett et al. (2013) suggest that “Intercultural competence has strong active, interactive and participative dimensions, and it requires individuals to develop their capacity to build common projects, to assume shared responsibilities and to create common ground to live together in peace” (p 9). The necessary actions they suggest include:

- Seeking to interact with people who have different cultural orientations and perspectives to one’s own;
- Interacting and communicating appropriately and respectfully with people who have different cultural affiliations to one’s own;
- Cooperating with people who have different cultural orientations in group activities, discussing differences in views and outlooks, and forming common views and outlooks; and
- Challenging attitudes and behaviours (including speech and writing) which degrade human rights, and taking action to defend the human rights of people regardless of their cultural affiliations (Barrett et al., 2013, p. 9).

Nobody can attain ‘full’ intercultural (communicative) competence because it is a process that requires lifelong effort (Barrett et al., 2013, p. 9), and this belief is supported by Deardorff’s (2006, 2011) process model of intercultural competence. However, putting into practice the foregoing suggested actions will go a long way to achieving harmonious interaction and successful participation that is necessary for demonstrating a high degree of ICC.

### **Approaches to Develop Intercultural Communicative Competence**

Barrett et al. (2013) reports on a variety of educational approaches that are effective in the developing of intercultural competence, and these equally apply to ICC. Under the umbrella term of ‘experiential learning’, “...or ‘learning by doing’ involving experience, comparison, analysis, reflection and cooperative action” (p. 17), there are two

main pedagogical approaches: ‘project work’ and ‘cooperative learning’. These two distinct types of experiential learning will now be considered separately.

The ‘project work’ approach involves theme-based tasks in which the content, purpose and objectives are collectively decided by all participants, who design their own study materials that they present and evaluate together. DePalm, Rego & Moledo (2006) describe a teaching practicum in Delaware, USA, where trainee teachers attempted, with varying degrees of success, to build relationships with students from a different culture (Latino) in a community-based practicum outside the school context and free from institutional constraints. The children’s mainly active participation in collaborating with the trainee teachers to plan, implement, present and evaluate their group projects fostered ‘dialogic relationships’ where teachers engaged in dialogue with children from a minority culture and low income backgrounds that were very different to their own. Results of the research indicate that “ ... forming dialogic relations with children may not typically be a part of teachers’ repertoires, but that it may be one of the factors that distinguish excellent teaching” (DePalm et al., 2006, pp. 337-332).

The other type of experiential learning, ‘cooperative learning’, refers to a learning process that involves groups and collaborative task work in a similar way to project work (described previously), but is structured differently so that the “specific cooperative principles” are embedded in the actual tasks. In cooperative learning, participants become involved in discovery, analysis, comparison, reflection and cooperation in tasks that “ ... engage learners as whole persons and address their intellectual, emotional and physical potential” (Barrett et al., 2013, p. 17).

Reflecting cooperative learning principles, Chang (2006) proposes the concept of a “transcultural wisdom bank”, which is a collection of all possible solutions from different cultural perspectives to problems concerning crucial or complex issues of human society (p. 371). In the researcher’s University of Melbourne sociology classes, her students are required to form study groups of three members who each come from different cultural backgrounds, and these students learn to work together as a team in their culturally diverse groups (p. 372). In this way, students from different cultural backgrounds very often become friends, and the “Experience in

interacting and working with people from different backgrounds is crucial for developing students’ capability for constructive teamwork” (Chang, 2006, p. 275).

Learning that is based on cultural diversity and a comparative perspective provides exposure to diverse cultures combined with reflection (through comparison and contrast of different cultures and the learner’s own culture/s). This will help a learner to accomplish the following:

- Develop non-ethnocentric views about cultural issues in one’s own life;
- Enjoy the intellectual adventure of breaking out of the comfort zone of one’s own culture because of cultural contrast which generate surprises, stimulate thinking, and provoke new thoughts and discovery;
- Discern what is of value within one’s own culture and what is of value in other cultures; and
- Understand other cultures better, but also understand oneself better (Chang, 2006, p. 370).

The previous aims, especially the final two, are fairly closely aligned with UNESCO (2006) principles in the previous section titled Education in Intercultural Communicative Competence, which state:

- Awareness of one’s own cultural values that underlie interpretation of situations and problems and the ability to reflect on and review information by using the knowledge of different cultural perspectives; and
- Respect for different ways of thinking (UNESCO, 2006, p. 37) .

At various stages in the learning process, teachers need to collect evidence to confirm that students’ ICC is developing, and also to determine the extent of that development in relation to predetermined and clearly stated goals.

### **Evaluation of Students’ Intercultural Communicative Competence**

Measuring and evaluating ICC as a learning outcome is necessary in order to confirm that students have acquired sufficient intercultural competence to be able to live and work successfully in a global

world. According to Deardorff (2006), “Defining and measuring students’ intercultural competence [and their ICC] will help not only to measure the effectiveness of intercultural learning, but at a minimum, it gives meaning to outputs (numbers) that are commonly cited as evidence of successful internationalization efforts” (Deardorff, 2006, p. 259). However, the task of evaluation is difficult because of the complexity of ICC. Therefore, before undertaking assessment of learners’ ICC, evaluators need to start with a clear definition and framework of ICC from the literature, and then decide on realistic and specific goals as well as measurable student learning outcomes (Deardorff, 2011, p. 77).

To assist the evaluator, Deardorff (2011) advocates use of multiple methods in evaluating competence. In particular, she recommends direct and indirect assessments to ensure stronger measurement. She reports that there are more than one hundred survey instruments available to collect indirect evidence of student learning around intercultural competence, but warns it is critical for users to understand what each instrument measures and to align that with the specified learning outcomes (Deardorff, 2011, p. 75). Two research instruments which could be used for collecting data are provided in the appendices of this paper: Learner’s Diary (Appendix A) and Interview Questions (Appendix B).

Examples of indirect evidence are students’ perceptions and feedback on their intercultural learning and ICC development. This information can be collected by means of focus groups and interviews (see Appendix B). On the other hand, direct evidence includes, for example, critical reflection which students write in journals (see Appendix A), blogs, and reflection papers in which they critically examine their own opinions, attitudes, and relations with others whom they engage with in the broad social and cultural context (Deardorff, 2011, p. 75).

Another framework for evaluating ICC is the Holmes & O’Neill (2012) PEER model (prepare, engage, evaluate, reflect) which the authors suggest is helpful for understanding ICC from the perspective of individuals and the Cultural Other. First, the PREPARE (P) stage requires students to prepare for an intercultural encounter (see definition in Introduction) by identifying and recording any assumptions, prejudices and stereotypes they have about their Cultural Other, and also any anticipated

social and communicative difficulties, as well as gauging how these perceptions might impact successful intercultural communication (Holmes & O’Neill, 2012, p. 710).

In the second phase, students ENGAGE (G) through intercultural encounter/s with their Cultural Other over a period of time and in various socio-cultural contexts that use conversation as a basis, but also in sharing social activities such as meals and sport. The EVALUATION (E) phase requires students to record data in field notes or journals of their experiences and thoughts by drawing on their knowledge of ethnographic data collection through note-taking and observation. The final REFLECTION (R) phase asks students to reflect critically on their intercultural encounters by, for example, noting any “challenges to their preconceptions about communicating with their Cultural Other which prompted a (re) construction and/or (re) negotiation of taken-for-granted ways of thinking, behaving and communicating” (Holmes and O’Neill, 2012, p. 711). The four components of the PEER model facilitate self-evaluation by students of their ICC in their intercultural encounters. This model and the foregoing Deardorff methodology are both useful for evaluating the extent of ICC needed by students preparing to enter the global world.

### **Self-reflection on Intercultural Experiences in Japan**

Hunter, White & Godbey, (2006) propose that “... person-to-person contact is the most powerful way of exhibiting and sharing a nation’s or culture’s key values.” It is therefore concomitant, they suggest, for educators to “encourage and train people to interact with, and open themselves to, other cultures and to build relationship capital that makes the exercise of sharp power [aggression] less likely” (Hunter et al., 2006, p. 269). Therefore, education about multicultural principles and practical experience of living in a different culture can help to develop ICC (or the ‘global competence’ referred to by Hunter et al.) and the ability to more effectively interact with other cultures. Moreover, such intercultural skills will help promote understanding and mutual friendship, and thereby avert potential conflict. In such circumstances, the sharing of a nation’s or culture’s key values is facilitated by person-to-person interaction so that

mutual understanding is advanced, and the friendship can then provide the basis for mutual benefit.

For the past two decades I have lived, studied, and worked in Japan, a society and culture that is very different to my original culture of Australia. During my extensive and mainly favourable experience of living in a foreign culture, I have made some long-term friendships with Japanese people, acquired semi-fluency in the local language, and acquired a liking for Japanese cuisine, customs, manners, and aesthetics. Overall, my person-to-person interactions with Japanese people have enriched my life and made me appreciate and respect their culture and values. Having acquired considerable intercultural experience, I am now able to identify with several of the UNESCO (2006) principles (see previous) because I possess a heightened awareness of my own cultural values that I regularly use to interpret new cultural situations and challenges, as well as the ability to reflect on and review information by using the knowledge of a Japanese cultural perspective.

Before venturing outside my own culture and starting to live in Japan, my cultural self-awareness was undeveloped and my understanding of Australian culture incomplete. However, my basically shy personality, immaturity and lack of social skills contributed to feelings of dissatisfaction with my cultural environment in Australia. Through the forming of friendships with Japanese people who lived in Sydney, my attraction to Japan, Japanese society and culture began to evolve and strengthen. What impressed me most about Japanese people was their politeness, respectfulness, and general good manners, and this favourable cultural evaluation remains with me to this day.

Living in Japan as a foreigner or 'outsider', I have often felt a strong sense of my Western cultural origins and 'Australianness'. Corresponding to this is my feeling of responsibility to be a worthy 'ambassador' or cultural representative of Australia so that Japanese people whom I interact with might receive a positive impression of Australians and Australian culture. I am keenly aware of how I represent my culture and how my behaviour, values, attitudes, and lifestyle have an influence on the Japanese people around me. Also, I understand the reality that the people whom I interact with are acquiring information and knowledge about the values of my culture through my words and conduct, and through the way I interact with them.

## **Internationalisation & Intercultural Communicative Competence**

In today's globalised world there is a strong emphasis on the knowledge economy; rapidly improving information and communication technology (ICT) ; and increasing mobility for students, academics, programmes and faculties. These are all factors that combine to propel the internationalisation of education (Altbach & Knight 2007, pp. 302-3). Internationalisation in higher education is a general term for a wide range of practical activities involving teaching, learning and research which occur by crossing national borders and also locally in cooperation with international partners and students (Kelm & Teichler, 2007, p. 261). This pragmatic view of internationalisation involves processes and practices of "integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of higher education in the institutional and national levels" (Knight, 2008, p. 21).

However, internationalisation also comprises a philosophical dimension, incorporating ideals to promote peace, harmony and understanding between nations through an educational philosophy of individual moral development and responsible citizenship (Cambridge and Thompson 2004, p. 173). In order to achieve the goals of international cooperation and mutually shared understanding of the common good, the essential requirements are respect for cultural difference, social justice, and mutual respect within and among nations (Welch, 2002, p. 434). To help fulfil these requirements, intercultural friendships and reciprocal cultural relationships within higher education institutions' internationalisation programmes should endeavour to integrate international students and local students in shared learning activities and cooperative interaction (Welch, 2002, p. 439).

According to Deardorff (2006), one important outcome of internationalisation efforts at universities is the development of interculturally competent students, but much more needs to be done. (Deardorff, 2006, p. 241). To address these concerns, the author designed a model of internationalisation which explicitly includes components of intercultural competence.

Recognising that ICC is a complex construct that involves more than one component, internationalisation strategies need to approach the development of intercultural competence in several different ways, and

these need to be clearly linked to specific components of ICC. Accordingly, the various components to develop competence include, for example, ICC course learning, study abroad programs, foreign internships, on-campus interaction with students from different cultural backgrounds, and foreign language learning.

Van der Wende (1996) argues that student mobility is the dominant factor of internationalisation. The personal benefits accruing to students who study abroad include foreign language proficiency, increased understanding of the host country, making new friends in the host country, and subsequently enhanced employment qualifications. However, a reported disincentive to overseas study for EFL students is the linguistic demand of needing to understand and use an international language such as English (Van der Wende 1996, p. 15). The same researcher also enumerates specific curriculum innovations that are connected to internationalisation, including infusing existing courses with international content; comparative approaches in teaching and research; area studies and civilisational approaches; international studies and intercultural studies; international development studies; and integrating foreign languages in the curriculum (Van der Wende, 1996, p. 18).

Several of the foregoing curriculum innovations reflect the UNESCO Guidelines on Intercultural Education (2006), which state “Interculturality is a dynamic concept and refers to evolving relations between cultural groups. It has been defined as the existence and equitable interaction of diverse cultures and the possibility of generating shared cultural expressions through dialogue and mutual respect ... [and] presupposes multiculturalism.” (p. 17). Therefore, intercultural education plays a key role in equipping students and staff of universities with cultural knowledge, attitudes and skills that help them to respect and understand people from other cultures. By incorporating ICC into internationalisation strategies, universities will succeed in producing interculturally competent students.

### **Conclusion**

Conceptualising intercultural communicative competence (ICC) as well as developing and evaluating it have ongoing importance as our world becomes more globalised and our societies more multicultural. Already a vast body of literature exists

and it contains numerous definitions and models of ICC and similar constructs, making the study of it complex, demanding, and difficult to clearly understand, but nonetheless important.

Today, many researchers believe the essential components of ICC are knowledge (or awareness), attitudes, skills, and understanding, but principally the triumvirate of knowledge, attitudes, and skills. These (3-4) components all need to be put into action in order for a person to become interculturally successful. However, for a person to fully acquire ICC, they first need to accomplish substantial intercultural competence as well as substantial communicative competence, which for most people is probably unrealistic and unattainable. Therefore, acquiring ICC is believed to be a continuing process involving several stages, and it may require lifelong effort.

Developing ICC through education in EFL learning is essential for producing interculturally competent citizens. Educational approaches include cooperative learning, where groups of culturally diverse students learn together as they compare and contrast their different cultures. Another approach considered in this paper was project work which encourages participants from different cultures to collectively design, produce, present, and evaluate their own study materials on intercultural topics. Also, having potential for the greatest impact on intercultural learning is the internationalisation process that is already occurring in many university campuses, which has obvious benefits for developing students' ICC.

Due to the complexity of ICC, it is considerably demanding to evaluate the learning outcomes of students. Some of the assessment methods described in this paper included direct and indirect methods. One example of indirect assessment is feedback from interviewing students about their learning. Direct evidence of student learning includes journals and diaries which record students' critical reflections about their attitudes and opinions towards people from different cultures – more appropriately described as people who seem to have different cultural affiliations.

Developing and evaluating ICC can ultimately help students to acquire the competence which they need for engaging in meaningful intercultural dialogue and for living in harmony with people from different cultures. Though fully acquiring ICC may take a lifetime, including periods of living abroad, most researchers believe that it is indispensable for successful interaction

in our increasingly globalised world.

Due to time constraints and the limited number of pages, this study could only partially investigate the complex research topic of ICC. Future research needs to focus directly on the difficult and important question of how ICC can be incorporated into EFL learning and, in particular, to fully explore the area of ICC and EFL learning in the Japanese context.

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## Appendix A

### LEARNER'S DIARY

Date \_\_\_ / \_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_\_

Course/ Unit \_\_\_\_\_

1. What cultural aspect did you learn, and what cultural group (or country) was it about?

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2. Was this cultural learning useful to you? Why?

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3. What do you think of including cultural topics in the lesson?

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4. Was there anything that helped you to learn both English language and cultural topics in this course/ unit? If yes, what was it?

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5. Was there anything that hindered you from learning both English and cultural topics in this course/ unit? If yes, what was it?

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## Appendix B

### INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Date \_\_\_ / \_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_\_

Course/ Unit \_\_\_\_\_

#### A. Interviewees' backgrounds

Number of interviewees: \_\_\_

Names: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Major/ Year \_\_\_\_\_

How long have you been learning English? \_\_\_\_\_

Have you travelled abroad? \_\_\_\_\_

What countries? \_\_\_\_\_

Have you ever taken an intercultural course? \_\_\_\_\_

What was the course content? \_\_\_\_\_

#### B. Guide for focus group discussion

1. How do you feel when you learn about intercultural competence in English language classes?
2. To what extent do you think that your English ability has improved after taking this course?
3. Do you think that your intercultural competence has improved after taking this course?  
If yes, how?  
If no, why?
4. What are the things that help you to develop your ICC?
5. What are the things that hinder you from developing your ICC?