

## THE ROLE OF MEDIA TECHNOLOGIES IN DEVELOPING COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE OF STUDENT'S

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**Abstract:** As the communication on foreign languages comprises the row of key competencies, necessary for each person today for self-realization and developments in rapidly changing world, in given article there are considered some methods of shaping the communicative competence of learners in using the communicative technology at the English lessons.

**Keywords:** communicative competence, forming the communicative competence, communication, foreign languages, teaching the foreign languages, intercultural communication.

It is becoming increasingly frequent for language teachers to incorporate new teaching and learning approaches into their classroom practice, including the use of computer technology. Commonly known as Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) or sometimes called ILT (Information and Learning Technology), these technologies have been greatly influential in creating new opportunities for innovative teaching approaches, especially in language teaching. Indeed, many teachers are fast becoming aware of the potential for “interactive”, language-in-use projects which have ITC as a key element of the teaching process. Innovative uses of Internet and other ICT tools can easily provide opportunities for collaborative language projects which focus on “using the language to learn the language”. Perhaps even more importantly, the new practices developing from the integration of Internet use in EFL or ESL classrooms is ushering in unexpected changes in language teaching objectives.

One such change is the need for a new understanding of communicative competence which includes interculturality. International collaborative projects which use Internet as the tool for communication are providing much wider opportunities for students to contact and communicate with other individuals outside of their own country.

Virtual learning environments provide new and unique ways in which to convey cultural knowledge and develop intercultural communication skills. High-fidelity graphics, sound, and animation make it possible for them to simulate many tangible aspects of a specific culture, such as buildings, streets, art, dress, speech, gestures, and more. This enables the provision of more authentic computer-based practice environments than may otherwise be feasible using traditional live role-play and media based approaches.

Although intercultural training is often motivated by immediate need, such as international travel, researchers and educators are also interested on its longer term impact on cultural learning and development. There is widespread agreement that intercultural growth occurs in stages and can take many years (Savicki, 2008). Whether it is a student studying abroad, or a business executive starting a new branch in a foreign country, the assumption that people acclimate gradually is both intuitive and generally supported by psychometric measures of cognitive, affective, and emotional change (Paige, 2004).

The differences are as follows:

- Intercultural knowledge: research about or exchange of information concerning cultures different from one’s own. This results in knowledge about the other culture.
- Intercultural communication skills: recognition of personal value system and preconceptions + added knowledge about other cultures. This results in empathy with the other culture.

Many foreign language teachers first become interested in using multimedia technologies and Internet because of the opportunities provided for language use and “authentic communication”. Nonetheless, it is

important to point out that there are different ways of “communicating” through Internet, and not all of them require the same level of intercultural competence and collaboration. According to Judi Harris (April 2004), internet communication projects can be classified according to purpose. Evidently, the purpose of the student task will influence the amount of communication and possible intercultural communication required.

While increasing cultural awareness in the EFL classroom it should be kept in mind that understanding a foreign culture should help students of another language to use words and expressions more skillfully and accurately; to understand levels of language; to act naturally with representatives of other culture, while recognizing and accepting their different reactions, and to help speakers of other tongues feel as if at home in the students’ own culture.

According to J. Willis (1996), an appropriate classroom task is “a goal-oriented activity in which learners use language to achieve a real outcome” (p. 53). Willis also suggests that language use in tasks should reflect language use in the outside world. Though, language use in the outside world is quite unclear, and activities and tasks based on structured scenarios tend to miss the nuances and subtleties of meaning negotiation, which is essential to accurate and successful communication. Nunan (1989) similarly states that a task “is a piece of classroom work which involves learners in comprehending, manipulating, producing, or interacting in the target language while their attention is principally focused on meaning rather than form” (p. 10). As such, according to Nunan, a language learning task is an activity that has a nonlinguistic purpose with a clear outcome and that uses any or all of the four language skills in its completion by conveying meaning in a way that reflects real-world language use.

This approach to language learning and teaching is practical on a local or classroom level. However, the problems that persist center more on what exactly constitutes real-world language use and how meaning can be created or negotiated through a common target language between people of different backgrounds and communication styles in unfamiliar contexts, where even basic common sense, values, and perspectives are in a constant state of change. Acquisition of these skills requires a refocusing of goals and ideas for communicative competence. Shehadeh (2005) claims that “what is needed, therefore, is an approach to L2 [second language] learning and teaching that provides a context that activates language acquisition processes” (p. 14). However, if such contexts are indeed constantly changing and unpredictable, how can they be reproduced in a classroom or structured language learning environment for the purpose of practicing tasks for acquiring real-world skills?

In some EFL settings, classes consist of students of different cultural backgrounds; in others, classes consist of student with the same culture. In the former case, learning about diverse cultures and developing intercultural awareness are often not new issues—in multicultural classrooms, students learn about each other’s cultures through various activities, and not only during English lessons. Classes of learners with the same cultural backgrounds, on the other hand, do not present a pressing need to raise cross-cultural awareness, so multicultural education is absent from school curricula.

Human-computer interaction of multimedia technology provides an innovative platform for foreign language education. Particularly, assisted by multimedia technologies, case-based teaching is widely being implemented in teaching intercultural communication, which is a new area in English curriculum system. This pedagogy awakens great concern for its effectiveness of theory input and students’ criticality development.

Multimedia technologies play one of the best roles in creating an authentic learning context. It embodies a task-based principle, a widely supported in language learning practice.

Nowadays, multimedia assisted case-based teaching is broadly used in teaching intercultural communication. Different from traditional exemplification, it values the specifically designed task involvement and teacher-student interaction based on learning targets. Besides, it fortifies students’ analyzing abilities, their introspection and critical thoughts that are important evaluating criteria for students in intercultural communication. Therefore, this pedagogy is accepted as the most effective, attractive and desired teaching method in intercultural communication.

It has been evident that an integral part of learning a foreign language is acquiring some familiarity with the culture associated with it. The problem here is, developing and working out the ways of incorporating cultural knowledge in English language classes. Simply knowing grammar, syntax, phonetics will not give the

students real insights of the daily life of the people whose language they are learning and hope to speak. More and more language teachers are recognizing the need no incorporate sociocultural factors into their classrooms (Palmer and Sharifian 2007); however, there is still not solved problem on how to introduce these necessary cultural elements into the lessons.

One challenge that almost all teachers face is what approach to take. The reason for this problem is that many EFL teachers have had no formal training in incorporating cultural elements, and there is no universally accepted criteria that instructor could use as a guide (Byrnes 2008). Michael Paige's (in Cohen et al. 2003, 53) dimensions of culture learning model would be to adapt, though. Paige groups culture learning into the following categories:

- The self as cultural;
- The elements of culture;
- Intercultural phenomena (culture-general learning);
- Particular cultures (culture-specific learning);
- Acquiring strategies for culture learning.

By exploring and using these dimensions, the connection of the students to the target culture can be achieved as well as their awareness raising and intercultural communicative competence improving (Byram 1997).

All people belong to different cultures all over the world. The culture individuals belong to affects the way they think, interact, communicate and transmit knowledge from one generation to another. In addition, the ability to ask and answer questions based on people's own culture and the process of making connections across cultures. English teachers are to activate in students their "cultural antennas" by explaining them significant elements of their own culture which shaped them (Byram 1997; NSFLEP 1999, 9). Kramch (1993) calls this process forming a "sphere of interculturality".

People differ in their understanding of a culture. While some of them claims that culture is believed to be artifacts such as food, clothing, music, literature or art, others associate culture with social interaction patterns, moral values, ideas and attitudes. The teachers' role here is to defining what culture is before students can engage in interactive cultural discussions. Anthropologist John H. Bodley (1994, 22) describes culture simply as "what people think, make and do".

Under the elements of culture the beliefs, values, customs and the communication styles are understood (Cohen et al. 2003). The Standards for Foreign Language Learning (NSFLEP 1999) provides a framework for students to integrate "the philosophical perspectives, the behavioral practices, and the products – tangible and intangible – of a society" (47). This has become known as 3P model of culture:

- **Perspectives** – what members of a culture think feel and value.
- **Practices** – how members communicate and interact with one another.
- **Products** – technology, music, art, food, literature, etc.; the things members of a group create, share and transmit to the next generation.

While **products** may be easily identified because they are often seen, touched, tasted or heard, **perspectives** and **practices** are not as easily recognized because they are often deep-rooted in a society. Brooks (1968, 1997) differentiates "formal culture" (literature, fine arts, history, etc.) and "deep culture" (patterns of social interactions, values, attitudes, etc.).

Edward T. Halls (1976) developed a tool called "cultural iceberg" useful for conceptualizing elements of culture. Hall's analogy illustrates differences between what people readily see when they come across to a new culture (the tip of the iceberg) and the embodied aspects of culture not readily visible (the submerged part of the iceberg). Using this iceberg analogy can be one of the fun ways for students to reflect on different elements of culture and make distinctions among those which are visible and those which are ingrained. To be exact, students list elements of culture that may be found in each of the three levels: surface, sub-surface culture and deep culture.

Surface culture includes elements such as food, national costumes, music, dance, literature and holidays. Sub-surface culture mainly consist of notions such as body language, gestures, touching, eye-contact, personal space, conversational patterns and the concept of time. Teachers can give specific examples of English speaking countries and give the students opportunity to compare these examples with their own culture. The deep culture is represented by unconscious values and attitudes which are usually complicated to identify. Such characteristics can be so deeply ingrained that people feel that are simply “right” and “normal” way of doing some things. While it might seem strange and abnormal for American parents share their bed with their child, many cultures around the world view this as a normal practice. The idea is, to raise awareness of cultural elements and identify unique values or beliefs that explain why people behave in this way.

Thus, it is very important for EFL teachers to be cultural informants as well as language experts.

When specific cultural community is defined, the focus mainly is given to elements of particular culture such as history, geography or political systems. Again Hall (1976)’s works help us to characterize the ways that members of different cultures see reality. The key factor is Hall’s notion of “context”. This is about cultural backgrounds in which communication occurs. When people from different cultural backgrounds communicate, the interaction can break down as they do not share the same cultures. Hall’s theory of high- and low-context cultures gives the explanation of characteristics affecting communication.

In high-context cultures, people try to emphasize impersonal relationships and prefer group harmony and consensus over individual achievement. Words are less important than a speaker’s intent. People from high-context cultures generally share a high degree of commonality of knowledge and viewpoints. There is little need to spell the things out, and meanings tend to be implicit or can be communicated in indirect ways. High-context cultures are typified by long-lasting social relationships, spoken agreements, and mutual trust (Guffey and Loewy 2009).

Low-context culture representatives tend to be individualistic and goal-oriented, while people from low-context culture value directness. These differences usually can be the cause of interaction problems between communicators. Sometimes, individuals from a high-context culture may find individuals from low-context culture to be overly blunt. At the same time, people from low-context cultures may seem to the opposite group to be highly secretive. Hence, communication breakdowns can occur as people from different types of cultures may have dissimilar assumptions of shared knowledge.

Most native English-speaking countries are classified as low-context cultures, while many Asian or Middle Eastern are classified as high-context cultures (Copeland and Griggs 1985). Elashmawi and Harris (1993) describe the difference in examples that low-context American culture differs from high-context Japanese culture. While Americans value independence and equality and self-reliance, Japanese favor group harmony, collectiveness and cooperation. Moreover, Americans are usually open and direct while Japanese pay more attention to the context in communications. Japanese speakers get ahead other’s need through their facial expressions, behavior and gestures rather than verbal messages.

People from different cultures not only communicate in a various ways, but experience a situation contrarily as well. By contrasting cultural values, successful negotiation can be achieved by representatives of diverse cultures. An interesting activity is to have students reflect on Hall’s classifications (see Appendix 2) to determine whether theirs is a high- or low-context culture. Students can be encouraged to group work or can be given the quiz individually.

Coming out from these elements above certain approaches in raising students’ intercultural competence are to be selected. However, before choosing the relevant approaches and methods of teaching intercultural communication the principles as initial bases should be considered. In our view, approaches to teaching intercultural communication should:

- be based both on personal and social development;
- provide learners with opportunities to access and analyze a broad range of cultural practices in spite of their social status;
- assist learners to develop and understand processes which are connected with interaction of people from different cultural backgrounds or any communicative event producing;

➤ equip learners with means of analysis and reflection on their encounters; help them identify any conflict areas and ways of avoiding such situations and gaining experience in their future actions and behavior.

In the local methodology the intercultural-action method has been suggested by G.Makhkamova (2011) for intercultural teaching in the linguistic universities. This method is realized on the base of the formula “language -> culture -> communication”. That’s why intercultural competence is developed in incorporated teaching intercultural competence on the practical course of the English language and theoretical course “Theory of intercultural communication”.

Suggested by G. Makhkamova initial groundings of the intercultural-action method are intertwined with these principles. In spite of this fact, we would like to describe some effective approaches in which these principles underlie:

1. Comparative-contrast approach
2. The ‘emic’ and ‘etic’ approaches
3. The experiential learning approach

Via comparative-contrast approach teachers and learners have opportunity to reveal and understand culture differences in terms of potential barriers. Learners are encouraged to understand and respect these differences. Mainly two or three cultures are chosen for comparison. Learners aim is not only identifying differences, but also finding aspects in common. One of the advantages of these approaches is an opportunity to reveal students stereotypical opinion as well.

While ‘emic’ approach implies studying cultures inside, ‘etic’ approach focuses on understanding cultures from outside. This means that the learners by the help of teachers attempt to understand cultures as the members of the cultures do; in contrast, the latter compares cultures using predetermined characteristics. The Table 1 sets out the main differences between the emic and etic approaches.

**Table 1. Emic and etic approaches**

Emic Approach	Etic Approach
Studies the behavior from within the system	Studies the behavior from outside the system
Examines only one culture	Examines many cultures, comparing them
Criteria are relative to internal characteristics	Criteria considered absolute or universal

The experiential learning approach relies on empirical learning, the concept of which is based on Kolb’s Experiential Learning Cycle (1984). It is not efficient to read many culture based books or to listen to the lectures about different cultures. It is necessary for every individual to face new and unknown situations, to experience fear, rejection as well as trust and sympathy. Moreover, it is also necessary to learn culture via interacting with native-speakers and non-native speakers.

In the scientific literature on methodology also the cognitive, active and intercultural methods are distinguished. **Cognitive methods** presuppose using different types of material:

**Text-based materials:** They are commonly used in training sessions to transmit facts, ideas and concepts. The materials can be as diverse as readings, textbooks, articles, workbooks, letters, stories, fables, fairy-tales, tourist materials, postcards. These written texts are used to illustrate issues about different cultures.

**Computer-based materials:** Although they are frequently used to acquire conceptual information, we can also find materials that develop skills and /or modify attitudes. The training takes place by means of CDs, DVDs, online programs and web sites. On these web pages, one can find information about different countries and diverse cultures, with the help of quizzes, cultural profiles, intercultural tests, articles, forums, etc.

**Films:** Educational, documentary films or commercial films are a motivating material to transmit knowledge and provide scenarios for cultural debates. In our area of studies, teachers can be made aware of cultural values of English speaking countries

**Case Studies and Critical Incidents:** Case studies present a situation and students must work on assessing the problems entailed and finding possible solutions. Some cases are based on real-world dilemmas so the students get the opportunity to deal with concrete situations and specific cultural problems. This method is highly productive to train business executives. The following web page offers some intercultural cases that can be helpful for classroom practice:

Critical incidents are shorter than case studies and refer to cross-cultural misunderstandings, problems and clashes. The incidents do not illustrate the cultural differences of the interacting parties; rather these are discovered as the activity is carried out. The use of critical incidents can bring about students' understanding of their own personal and cultural identity.

An example of this is the intercultural dilemmas section comprising delicate situations, where the user finds an outline of a situation where cultural difference can lead to misunderstanding of the intentions of others. The user is required to think up possible explanations and alternative ways of curing the situation or advising on solutions, before referring to a pop-up box which offers a possible explanation and/or strategy.

**Active methods** involve learners in active tasks to build up specific skills, where students learn by doing<sup>^</sup>

**Role plays:** Role playing puts information and skills into practice in a safe context and can be focused on content or processes. Participants have the opportunity to rehearse diverse roles in real-life situations for a specific purpose.

**Simulation games:** They are highly motivating and versatile. Educational and entertaining elements combine to build knowledge and develop skills.

**Intercultural exercises:** These activities usually combine two or more techniques (physical response, discussion, or written assignments) and involve learners in content while providing practice. Intercultural exercises are commonly used to raise awareness about cultural differences and develop strategies to adapt to diverse working environments.

The aim of **intercultural activities** is to develop cultural self-awareness, promote intercultural competencies and achieve effectiveness.

**Contrast culture training:** This method has been widely used in the U.S.A. It turns to an experienced actor as the foreigner 'Mr. Khan' to point at cultural differences and elicit a reflection on the learners' own culture.

**Cross-cultural analysis and dialogues:** Cross-cultural analysis is an experiential exercise similar to the previous method but it is not dependent on an actor. Students deal with cultural analysis from their own cultural perspective and from the point of view of one or more target cultures. The discussions also involve a person from the target culture so the participants take note of contrasting dimensions from a member of this target culture. Cross-cultural dialogues are short conversations between two people of different cultures. Each dialogue shows the speakers' values, attitudes and points of view and includes a subtle mistaken assumption in the conversation.

**Area studies:** Most commonly called culture-specific training, these studies build expertise about a specific country. They are highly appropriate for people who plan to live or work in the target country providing an excellent resource for understanding and interacting with people from that culture.

Brief review of some approaches and methods enables to understand their content-based, research-based and interaction experience-based character and their importance in teaching intercultural communication in the national contexts.

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