

Intercultural Competence and Reading

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Abstract: In senior high school English reading classes, cultivating intercultural communication skills can help students learn language more efficiently. It is necessary to strengthen the intercultural communication ability training of students in English reading teaching to meet the current high school English training objectives. The majority of senior high school students now have a basic understanding of English. They still lack knowledge of British culture and the ability to communicate in English. This essay will show the critical thinking about intercultural competence and reading.

Keywords: Intercultural awareness; English teaching; Communication; Reading

1. Introduction

It is important first to understand multicultural communication when it comes to intercultural competency. Scholars in this subject have proposed several interpretations for this idea. According to Samovar et al. (2000), intercultural communication occurs when people's cultural perceptions and symbol systems are considerably distinct from influencing communication^[1]. That is, intercultural communication comprises geographical and physical distinctions, geographical and physical differences, and various perspectives, attitudes, and interpretations, all of which influence the communication process.

2. Intercultural communication

Žegarac provides a cultural-based definition of «intercultural communication», a scenario is defined as an intercultural situation where the distance between the interlocutor is significant enough to influence at least one of the communication partners. As claimed by Lustig and Koester^[2], intercultural communication is a symbolic, interpretative, and contextual process that enables individuals from different cultures to establish common meanings. When broad and significant cultural differences result in divergent views and assumptions about communicating effectively, intercultural communication occurs. In addition, Van Ek proposed two terms: sociocultural competency and social competence^[3], which place foreign language instruction in the context of intercultural communication, and he describes the motivation, attitude, and empathy as social competence. Compared to Hymes, Canale, and Swain's models, Van Ek's communicative competency model is more comprehensive and applicable to language learning and instruction.

3. Reading can be useful for comprehension

As for the relationship between language learning and culture, Byram (1989) believed learning about a new culture might be accomplished by studying a new language and interacting with individuals from other cultures^[4]. Moreover, the underlying meanings of a language relate to a social group's culture, and learners and other speakers must analyze and compress that culture to understand it. But we need to notice that cultural studies do not mean to provide background knowledge for people in a preestablished and unbiased manner without relevant remark or critique. All these statements may assist instructors in understanding the significance of cultural education and shift their focus away from just teaching linguistic knowledge and developing intercultural competency in students. Also, the teacher can have a comprehensive discussion with students and give them concerning feedback to understand the culture better, facilitating the acquisition of EFL reading comprehension.

Whereas teachers should draw attention to some issues on the collision caused by cultural differences, for example, Hellerstein-Yehezkel (2017) indicates the EFL teaching experience in Israel is complicated because of the diverse range of civilizations, races, faiths, and languages that coexist^[5]. His study shows the importance of cultural background in learning and reading methods and the process of acquiring EFL reading comprehension in a multicultural classroom. Based on it, rather than having language learning occur in a 'third place,' where dominant student cultures interact with target language cultures to produce a third culture, students were given the opportunity to negotiate cultural differences in a new 'classroom culture.' This offers teachers inspiration about their involvement of teachers could promote the development of intercultural competence. Students and teachers should create a new classroom culture that embraces cultural variety by fostering intercultural contacts and interaction among students from various backgrounds.

4. Reading can improve intercultural competency

Based on Rodríguez and Puyal's (2012) research, studying literary works in English in a content language integrated learning setting can help students improve their intercultural competency^[6]. Students can engage with literary texts on both a cognitive and emotional level by providing innovative and demanding activities as part of a content-based teaching technique, thereby developing intercultural competence.

In harmony with Yang (2017), reading proficiency in English has become increasingly important in gaining cultural, economic, scientific, and technological knowledge, gathering global information, and conducting international interchange and collaboration^[7]. As a result, teachers and students accept and understand the importance of English reading, and it is the most effective method of absorbing English information. But he didn't describe the efficacy of a flipped classroom on students' language learning by qualitative and quantitative analysis. Thus, teachers should make good use of reading assignments to stimulate students' interest and develop the reading task to help students overcome their reading difficulties while also providing clear intercultural study advice.

In keeping with Nie (2017), reading is a fantastic way to improve literacy and knowledge. Reading novels exposes students to various linguistic inputs while also encouraging them to improve their reading comprehension. Students benefit not only linguistically but also culturally when they read stories.

5. The problems

Nonetheless, the current state of junior high school reading instruction is discouraging, as many students still lack the necessary prior knowledge or cultural understanding. Teachers must actively assist students in gaining a better experience of their cultural heritage. Cultural education aims to improve students' reading abilities should follow certain principles and procedures.

However, there may exist some problems when we adopt authentic contexts for learners, and the chosen authentic resources may not accurately reflect learners' real-life communicative contexts, posing challenges for EFL educators and instructors who have limited access to original instructional materials or authentic activities that reflect real-life language use (Chen & Wright, 2017)^[8]. They focused on the perspectives and practices of teachers rather than students, even though knowing students' perceptions will considerably aid future research and pedagogy.

On the other hand, appropriate nativized reading material also can aid students to understand better. Erten and Razi's study suggests that cultural familiarity affects story comprehension and that narrative nativization or reading exercises can compensate for the lack of understanding. The activities assisted people in comprehending the original story; however, the difference caused by nativization persisted, demonstrating that cultural schema had a significant impact on comprehension. As a result, teachers should encourage students to engage in reading activities that require schematic knowledge and strategic reading practices. Intercultural communication competence is linked to foreign language proficiency, and language learning should be investigated to improve intercultural communication proficiency.

6. The inspiration for teaching

The development of intercultural communication ability was overlooked in previous English teaching, which focused on grammar and words. Teachers must improve teaching methods and use modern approaches to improve language awareness and arouse students' enthusiasm for learning from a pedagogical standpoint. Furthermore, it is necessary to guide students in experiencing different cultures from cross-cultural communication and facing cultural differences to feel the differences between Chinese and English to improve their English pragmatic ability. Teachers should pay equal attention to intercultural communication and language skills, constantly improving teaching methods by tying teaching activities and combining them with language communication.

7. Conclusion

Due to teaching English in the classroom is frequently constrained by content and time constraints, teachers should encourage students to use their free time to enrich themselves by encouraging them to read a wide range of western English literary works. They can develop cultural literacy and art appreciation in this way, broadening their understanding of western culture. Accordingly, this kind of reading teaching will broaden learners' horizons, improve their sensitivity and ability to distinguish between mother tongue culture and English culture, and thus enhance their intercultural communication skills.

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