Targeting the Development of Intercultural Communicative Competence through Designing an Interculturalized Oral Expression Syllabus

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Abstract

The present paper is an attempt to integrate the intercultural dimension in the oral expression syllabus design. In the wake of our volatile world, a new profile, particularly, Intercultural Communicative competence (ICC) is sought in order to keep pace with the tempo engendered by globalisation. Indeed, the present research tries to embody the intercultural dimension in the processes of syllabus design (objectives, content, teaching methods, and evaluation mode). After ascertaining the absence of this perspective the English Language Teaching (ELT) curriculum taught at Batna-2 University, we figured out that the content and activities can be considered intercultural only if they are implemented through the intercultural approach. Nevertheless, there is no specification of the particular teaching method adhered to in order to deliver such syllabi. Ergo, it all depends on instructors; that is why we initiated some teacher-shadowing sessions in which we made sure that classes are driven by Teacher Talking Time (TTT), and there is no place for Intercultural Language Teaching (IcLT). These findings paved the way to conduct an experimental research on a sample of ELT students who are subjected to an interculturally-oriented input in order, then, to test their ICC. Their progress is detected in comparison with a control group on whom traditional teaching is implemented. Our humble paper presents these qualitative and quantitative analyses which dovetail with action research, and which finally ends up with some recommendations for curricula designers at the micro and macro levels and for teachers as well.

Keywords. Curriculum design, intercultural communicative competence, intercultural dimension, internationalising curriculum

1. Introduction

In the wake of our volatile world which tends to be highly driven toward interconnectedness, new competencies that dovetail with the 21st century's changes are sought. Indeed, the variegated languages, and thus cultures, that prevail the world urge respect of, and tolerance toward, otherness. Therefore, the development of such skills can be best accomplished within TEFL contexts where EFL students inevitably refer to their native culture, and where they are exposed to a foreign culture being the English one.

These conditions are present at the Departments of English in Algeria in general, and at Batna-2 University in particular. Thus, for the sake of accomplishing this paper, we deliberated to try to bolster ICC within the 1st year oral expression class through the introduction of interculturally-driven objectives, content, materials, teaching method, and evaluation mode.

As a matter of fact, the present paper tries to elicit the ubiquitous relation between language and culture, in addition to the potential issues that might be encountered in TEFL contexts being themselves intercultural 'milieu.' Moreover, it attempts to overcome them and to foster ICC within the frame of CBA by exposing EFL students to an interculturalised syllabus. Therefore, our research revolves around the following question:

• How do intercultural syllabi enhance ICC in EFL classes?

For the sake of answering this question, we assume that if syllabus design processes are targeted toward the goal of raising students' sensitivity and awareness toward both their native culture and the target culture, they may enhance ICC.

2. Language and Culture

Human beings are by nature communicative; thus, they need languages to interact, to express their feelings and thoughts, to discover, and so on. However, language transcends the act of reflecting linguistic signs only; it also has a relation with culture and identity. Language shapes identity and culture (1):

> When people use language, they do more than just try to get another person to understand the speaker's thoughts and feelings. At the same time, both people are using language in subtle ways to define their relationship with each other, to identify themselves as part of a social group, and to establish the kind of speech event they are in. (p. 1)

When people utter, the language they produce identifies relationships among them. The language they share determines who they are and constructs their identity (2). The latter states that

> Identity gives us an idea of who we are and of how we
> relate to others and to the world in which we live.
> Identity marks the ways in which we are the same as
> others who share that position, and the ways in which
> we are different from those who do not. (pp. 1-2)

Being common or seeking independency are not the only forms of identity. In order to have an identity, a proper culture must be affirmed; and to do so, its language must be acquired (3).

3. Intercultural Communicative Competence

This paper target and tries to develop ICC, the ability to communicate in a rapidly changing world and the need for developing a global citizenship and resilience. Therefore, in FLT contexts, it is related not only to communication and interaction of information as it is believed in CLT, but to cultural understandings, to maintenance of relationships, to decentring of one's own perspective, and to willingness to exhibit politeness as well. These aspects in addition to beliefs and behaviours differ from one culture to another, which seldom engenders conflicts and violation of communications. That is why the intercultural approach ponders over communication as being the "interaction among people of complex cultural and social identities" (p. 14) (4). In fact, the role of FLT in relation to ICC is best described as follows (4):

> FLT needs […] to take account of the ways of living out
> of which others speak and write. Only then can FLT
> claim to prepare learners to communicate and interact
> with foreigners who are 'other' and accepted as such,
> rather than being reduced to people assumed to be
> (almost) 'like us'. (p. 14)

4. The Study

The present study aims at interculturalising TEFL classes by means of integrating the intercultural dimension in teaching the subject of oral expression. They are aimed at raising sensitivity and awareness toward the native culture and the target one.

4.1. Choice of the Method

The study has undergone the experimental research design. Two groups, control and experimental, were randomly chosen, and were taught the same course content. However, the former group was taught through the actual way of teaching after conducting some observation sessions of other teachers, while the latter group was exposed to the treatment which took the form of intercultural content (activities, materials, …) encompassing both students' cultures and the target culture.

In order to set the ground for our research, we ensured the similarity of both groups in terms of ICC using a rating scale. During the experiment, we administered progress tests at the end of each instruction chunk in order to ascertain students' progress. At the end of the experiment, both groups' achievements are compared.

4.2. Population and Sampling

The population targeted in our study is first year LMD students at the Department of English of Batna-2 University. They are 1340 students; however, the huge number of these students cannot be covered in the time-span we had, which urges us to select a representative sample on whom the study is conducted. We adhered to the random sampling technique in which we have chosen 5% of the whole population. Therefore, our sample consists of 66 students who are, then, divided into two groups, the experimental group and the control group.

4.3. The Pre-test

Being ourselves an oral expression teacher, we could get access to students by implementing our treatment on the groups assigned by the administration. We administered a pre-test to our students. It was in the form of a comparative input between the students' life styles and the British one. Their compositions are graded on 20 on the basis of a rating scale indicating their level of ICC.

The results obtained from both groups are summarized in Table 1.

N	Control Group	Exp Group	N			N			N		
1	15,25	13,25	8	14,5	2,75	17	10,5	5	26	3,75	7,75
2	6,75	8,25	9	10	6,5	18	4,5	16	27	6,5	8,25
3	10,5	8,5	10	13,5	15,25	19	6	11	28	11	12,5
4	6,25	5	11	15,5	8,75	20	5,25	6,5	29	9,25	8,5
5	12,5	3	12	3,75	15,75	21	11,75	2	30	7	7,75
6	13	6,75	13	13,5	6,75	22	3,5	14	31	15,5	7
7	12	2,75	14	12,5	7,75	23	10	5	32	13,25	2,75
			15	5,25	8,75	24	4,75	15,5	33	6,75	14
			16	13,5	13,25	25	12	12,25			

Table 1. Results of the Pre-test

The mean of the dependent variable is tested by SPSS according to the regrouping of students. Thus, the t-test is the appropriate measure in this case; particularly, the independent-samples t-test is used since we have two separate non-overlapping samples of people (control and experimental) (Table 2).

Independent Samples t-Test

		Levene Test of Similarity of variances		T Test of Similarity of means							
		F	Sig.	t	ddl	Sig. (bilatéral)	Différence	Standard Difference Error	Intervalle de confiance de la différence à 95 %		
										Inférieur	Supérieur
Score	H$_0$	,001	,981	,933	64	,354	,93182	,99842		-1,06275	2,92639
	Alternative Hypothesis			,933	63,562	,354	,93182	,99842		-1,06301	2,92665

Table 2. T-test (Pre-test)

As revealed from the table, there are no differences between the two groups, for sig. is greater than 0.05 (sig.> 0.05). These results seem to serve the purpose of the pre-test since they establish appropriate conditions for the implementation of the treatment.

4.4.The Experiment

After having ascertained the fact that the students are almost the same, we aimed at teaching them an interculturally-based syllabus. We taught the control group in the same way other oral expression classes are taught, but we introduced the intercultural dimension with an explicit reference to the cultural categories of the students' own culture as well in teaching the experimental group.

4.4.1. Progress Tests

We chunked our instruction into two stages during which we referred to both the native and the target Big C Cultures and Small c cultures, respectively. Each instructional phase is summed up with a formative

assessment on the different aspects discussed in lessons. They are in the form of comparative discussions which intended to engage students in a comparison process between their own worldviews and the target one.

Moreover, we have recorded all discussions as a helping tool and as a data gathering technique which established a clear, structured, and organised record of students' achievements. It consists of two assignments that go hand in hand with the instructional chunks.

The results obtained from the two progressive tests are summarised in Tables 3 and 4 respectively.

N	Control Group	Exp Group	N	Control Group	Exp Group	N	Control Group	Exp Group	N	Control Group	Exp Group
1	15,25	14,25	9	10	7,25	18	4,5	14	27	6,5	10,25
2	6,75	10,25	10	13,5	16,25	19	6	14	28	11	12,5
3	10,5	10,5	11	15,5	10,75	20	5,25	10,5	29	9,25	10,25
4	6,25	7	12	3,75	15,75	21	11,75	5	30	7	11,75
5	12,5	7	13	13,5	10,75	22	3,5	14	31	15,5	14
6	13	9,75	14	12,5	8,75	23	10	8	32	13,25	7,75
7	12	6,75	15	5,25	9	24	4,75	15,5	33	6,75	13
8	14,5	5,75	16	13,5	13,25	25	12	12			
			17	10,5	7,25	26	3,75	9,75			

Table 3. *Results of the Progress test 1*

N	Control Group	Exp Group	N	Control Group	Exp Group	N	Control Group	Exp Group	N	Control Group	Exp Group
1	15,25	15,25	8	14,5	8,75	17	10,5	9	26	3,75	11,5
2	6,75	12,25	9	10	10,5	18	4,5	17	27	6,5	8,25
3	10,5	12,5	10	13,5	15	19	6	14	28	11	12,25
4	6,25	11	11	15,5	13,75	20	5,25	10,25	29	9,25	10
5	12,5	13	12	3,75	15,75	21	11,75	7,5	30	7	14,75
6	13	13,75	13	13,5	10,75	22	3,5	15,25	31	15,5	14,75
7	12	9,75	14	12,5	9	23	10	10	32	13,25	12,75
			15	5,25	10	24	4,75	15,5	33	6,75	14
			16	13,5	12,25	25	12	12,5			

Table 4. Results of the Progress test 2

Again, the mean and the SD calculated from both set of results (Tables 5 and 6) are compared by use of the t-test in order to figure out the extent to which our treatment has had its effect on the experimental group.

Test des échantillons indépendants

		Levene Test of Similarity of variances		T Test of Similarity of means						
		F	Sig.	t	ddl	Sig. (bilatéral)	Mean Differences	Standard Difference Error	Intervalle de confiance de la différence à 95 %	
									Inférieur	Supérieur
Score	H$_0$	4,413	,040	-1,160	64	,250	-1,00000	,86216	-2,72236	,72236
	Alternative Hypothesis			-1,160	60,790	,251	-1,00000	,86216	-2,72411	,72411

Table 5. T-test (Progress test 1)

As revealed from the table, there are differences between the two groups, for sig. is less than 0.05 (sig. < 0.05). These results seem to reflect the effectiveness of our treatment which contributed to the development of students' ICC.

Test des échantillons indépendants

		Levene Test of Similarity of variances		T Test of Similarity of means						
		F	Sig.	t	ddl	Sig. (bilatéral)	Mean Differences	Standard Difference Error	Intervalle de confiance de la différence à 95 %	
									Inférieur	Supérieur
Score	H$_0$	11,964	,001	-3,129	64	,003	-2,51515	,80386	-4,12105	-,90926
	Alternative Hypothesis			-3,129	54,611	,003	-2,51515	,80386	-4,12638	-,90392

Table 6. T-test (Progress test 2)

Again, the results of the second progress test revealed a difference in students' ICC, for sig. is less than 0.01.

4.5. The Post-test

After conducting the experiment, a final test (post-test) in the form of a 20-item Multiple Choice Questions is devised in order to ascertain the extent to which the sample has assimilated and embraced the

foreign culture; and thus, established intercultural competence between both native and foreign cultures. Table 7 sums up the results of the post-test.

N	Control Group	Exp Group	N			N			N		
1	13	15,25	7	15.5	9,75	16	15.5	12,25	25	2.75	12,5
2	4	12,25	8	12.25	8,75	17	5.5	9	26	7	11,5
3	6	12,5	9	8	10,5	18	12	17	27	12	8,25
4	16.5	11	10	16	15	19	10.5	14	28	9	12,25
5	1.75	13	11	10	13,75	20	5.5	10,25	29	8.5	10
6	7.25	13,75	12	13	15,75	21	6.5	7,5	30	1	14,75
			13	14.5	10,75	22	3	15,25	31	2.75	14,75
			14	13	9	23	9.5	10	32	11.5	12,75
			15	13.5	10	24	8	15,5	33	11	14

Table 7. Results of the Post-test

The differences between the means and SDs of the post-test are sketched in Table 8.

Test des échantillons indépendants

		Levene Test of Similarity of variances		T Test of Similarity of means				Mean Differences	Standard Difference Error	Intervalle de confiance de la différence à 95 %	
		F	Sig.	t	ddl	Sig. (bilatéral)				Inférieur	Supérieur
Score	H₀	6,330	,014	-2,780	64	,007		-2,19697	,79033	-3,77583	-,61811
	Alternative Hypothesis			-2,780	55,384	,007		-2,19697	,79033	-3,78057	-,61337

Table 8. T-test (Post-test)

5. Discussion of the Results

Results of the progress test and the comparison of means and standard deviations show progress in the experimental group which is apparently attributed to the introduction of novelty that lies in the use of interculturality in teaching. However, the results of the control group were almost static due to the rigid way of teaching which took the form of lecturing.

The intercultural perspective in the module of oral expression played an important role in bettering students' perception of the different elements of the native and the target cultures. Indeed, the realia used in teaching facilitated students' engagement in understanding, realising, and respecting differences between them. This is apparent in their discussions wherein they expressed respect of, and tolerance toward, both cultures.

Nevertheless, the control group did not get the same results because of the type of teaching in the form of lecturing. Students' failure may be attributed to the excess in TTT which engenders boredom and disinterest, and which prevents the continuing rate to which students keep the same flow of following the whole lesson. Indeed, students' discussions show no realisation of differences between cultures in

the sense that they kept talking exclusively about their own culture as the best, ignoring any possible reconciliation with the 'other' culture.

6. Conclusions and Recommendations

The results drawn from the experiment denote the effectiveness of our treatment especially when we have deployed them to target both respect of, and tolerance toward, both the native and the other cultures. Indeed, this confirms our hypothesis in the sense that interculturally-based syllabus helped enhance intercultural sensitivity. However, we fell in the trap of depending upon students' self-report only which overlooked the fact of engaging them in settings where they communicate interculturally. Therefore, we strongly recommend further research on this particular combination of variables with the condition of considering outsiders' perspectives in the assessment phase.

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