
RESEARCH ARTICLE

Boosting Intercultural Communication Skills: The Role of Authentic Literary Texts in an Intermediate Turkish EFL Classroom

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to explore cultural barriers and methods of establishing effective communication in English as a Foreign language classrooms. Simply learning grammar rules is insufficient for students to interact effectively; they also need to acquire knowledge about culture, history, and geography through the use of textbooks, documentaries, and movies. With this in mind, the research study aimed to incorporate authentic literary short stories into an intermediate-level class based on the belief that literary texts can help learners develop their intercultural communicative competence. The participants of this study were 25 EFL learners between 18 and 21 years old. The data was collected and analyzed through individual interviews. The findings demonstrate that students can enhance their English language abilities and communication skills through reading authentic books.

KEYWORDS

Intercultural Communication, EFL Classroom, Authentic Literary Texts, Cultural Understanding.

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1. Introduction

Over the past two decades, there has been a significant increase in the development of intercultural communicative competence within English classrooms as a foreign language. Teachers are increasingly recognizing the importance of equipping their students with the skills to effectively communicate with individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds. However, some scholars, like Lazar (2003), argue that despite recommendations from the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEF), language learning still tends to prioritize the study of grammar and linguistic competence. Simply focusing on grammar rules and language fluency does not adequately facilitate active learning through cross-cultural communication. Therefore, the primary objective of second language learning should not be limited to using language effectively but rather to understanding cultural boundaries.

1.1 Significance of the Study

Lazar (2003) suggests that intercultural communicative competence in the EFL context can be enhanced through various means, such as engaging with individuals from specific cultural backgrounds and utilizing resources like textbooks, media coverage, documentaries, and films. However, not everyone has the opportunity to interact with native speakers, leading teachers to rely heavily on materials such as songs, films, documentaries, and communicative textbooks to foster intercultural understanding within their classrooms. According to Brown (2009), communicative textbooks offer a wide range of readings on various topics but lack certain genres, such as poetry and short stories. Additionally, some EFL textbooks still use language that is not authentic and provide limited cultural information. Stryker and Leaver (1997) argue that textbooks often contain "artificial language" and fail to provide learners with real-life context or situations. Textbooks do not offer students opportunities to engage with authentic materials or real-life scenarios. In contrast, using authentic materials in EFL classrooms has been shown to enhance intercultural communicative competence. Rather than solely focusing on grammar, learners need to develop their language proficiency and

cultural awareness through the use of authentic materials. For this reason, this research aims to implement authentic literary short stories in EFL classrooms as a means to help EFL learners progress in intercultural communicative competence.

1.2 Research Questions

Consequently, the research will address the following two questions:

- To what extent do EFL learners develop their intercultural communicative competence through the study of literary selections?
- What teaching methodologies can be employed to enhance learners' advancement in intercultural communicative competence when engaging with literary texts?

In order to address these inquiries, several teaching approaches, including the inquiry-based approach, the Dialogic approach, the Transactional approach, and Content-based learning, were implemented in EFL classrooms to examine literary texts.

2. Literature Review

Lazar (2003) defines intercultural communicative competence as an extension of communicative competence, which encompasses both language and cultural proficiency. Sihui (1996) further emphasizes the inseparable connection between language and culture, as language is instrumental in conveying the beliefs, thoughts, and identities of a particular group of people. Principally, all sorts of reading, such as magazines, books, and newspapers, are known to be full of cultural expression because these are the goods of a specific culture that necessarily illustrate cultural context. Amer (2003) says the literature is vital in improving students' intercultural consciousness while growing open-mindedness and empathy for diversity. By choosing proper literary texts, teachers may assist EFL learners in becoming aware of various cultural expressions. In its natural form, humans are exposed to reading and listening to fables, stories, tales, and other children's literature selections. Hence, in EFL learners' classes, it is essential to get the message across naturally. Multicultural literature serves multiple pedagogical objectives. Finally, it aims to broaden students' understanding of the world, exposing them to diverse cultural perspectives. Secondly, it facilitates cross-cultural communication, enabling students to interact effectively with individuals from different nations. By doing so, it helps to counteract racist behavior, prejudices, and stereotypes, fostering an appreciation for aesthetic works originating from various cultural backgrounds. Active student engagement is crucial for knowledge acquisition within the learning process. This can occur through individual exploration or social interaction. Students develop proficiency within their socio-cultural environment as they take on an active role in the learning process. Rather than being passive recipients of knowledge, students are encouraged to explore the world themselves, drawing from their own experiences. Mistakes and errors are considered normal and integral parts of the learning journey. Schooling and Kol (2006) suggest that social constructivist approaches are increasingly significant in EFL education. Students tend to acquire and construct knowledge more effectively through interaction with peers, teachers, and individuals from their own cultural milieu. From this perspective, sociocultural theories offer valuable opportunities in EFL classrooms by promoting oral practice, fostering cultural understanding, appreciating literature, and enhancing language proficiency.

Many academics have categorized reading strategies as fundamental elements of reading proficiency. They segmented reading strategies into two main divisions: cognitive and metacognitive strategies. Cognitive strategies refer to the mental process learners use to navigate both sociolinguistic and linguistic content. (Wenden & Rubin, 1987, p.19) The primary cognitive strategies include grouping, deduction, note-taking, translation, imagery, contextualization, inferencing, and elaboration. (Brown, 2007)

On the other hand, metacognitive strategies primarily involve critical thinking skills, enabling learners to gain awareness of their comprehension of the reading passage. Bishop et al. (2005, p207-208) classify these metacognitive strategies as follows: connecting with learners' prior knowledge, dissecting text structures, questioning, assessing, and summarizing.

Cultural teaching tends to be overlooked in language classrooms, with EFL instructors often neglecting intercultural aspects in their lessons. Kramsch (1993) argues that culture should be a constant presence, "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 (p.1). In today's globalized world, the integration of culture and language is undeniable, highlighting the indispensable need for intercultural communicative competence.

3. Methodology

3.1 Participants

The present study was conducted within an intermediate Turkish EFL classroom. The participants are 25 EFL learners aged between 18 and 21 years. The primary aim of the research project was to enhance the learners' English language proficiency and intercultural

communicative competence. The participants were given four weeks to complete the assigned books, which were read outside of the classroom and subsequently discussed during school sessions.

Age	f	%
18	9	36,0
19	8	32,0
20	4	16,0
21	4	16,0
Total	25	100,0

3.2 Procedures

In an intermediate Turkish EFL classroom, four American short stories have been chosen to enhance intercultural communicative competence among learners. These selected short stories are appropriate for the learners' proficiency level, and each story follows a single plot. The choice of short stories allows learners to read them quickly within a short timeframe, which helps to maintain their motivation during class discussions. By using short stories, learners can stay engaged and prevent feelings of annoyance or fatigue. The four selected short stories are *A Rose for Emily* by William Faulkner, *Of Mice and Men* by John Ernst Steinbeck, *A Worn Path* by Eudora Welty, and *Every Use* by Alice Walker.

To guide their reading process, students were provided with a study guide that contained key questions. These questions served as prompts for individual reading and response preparation at home. During class, students engaged in sharing and discussing their answers, utilizing the language to interact with their peers and partners. Group work was encouraged, facilitating interaction among students and fostering intercultural communicative competence. This enabled students to delve into various aspects of the books, such as plot, cultures, ideas, symbols, characters, and historical contexts.

3.3 Data Collection and Analysis

Individual interviews were conducted and recorded to collect data regarding the impact of the reading experience. Each interview lasted approximately five to eight minutes. Two main questions were posed to the students: (1) What cultural knowledge have you gained through reading authentic literary texts? (2) How would you describe your experience of reading multicultural literary texts in this course?

These interviews served as a means to gather students' responses and insights, providing valuable data on their cultural learning and experiences with the assigned literature. The research solely utilized learners' responses for data collection purposes. The effectiveness and benefits of this approach were attributed to the reliability of the questionnaire statements in assessing the participants' proficiency in English.

4. Findings and Discussions

4.1 Introduction

In general, students did not have any negative experiences with books. They just complained about some unfamiliar words from the book; however, once they got used to its language, they were satisfied. From the students' point of view, it took more time than expected. One of the most remarkable findings in the article is that by reading literary texts, students were able to construct knowledge themselves. Also, authentic reading texts might encourage learner's intercultural communicative competence. Another conclusion is that if you provide learners with the correct original text, they will use the language, which will keep their motivation high.

4.2 Results of the Interviews

Questions: (1) What cultural knowledge have you gained through reading authentic literary texts? (2) How would you describe your experience of reading multicultural literary texts in this course?

Student 1: I trust all nations have interesting stories, texts, or poems to read and share that could provide authentic insight into our lives. I think, despite a busy schedule to keep students engaged and curious about a certain culture and everything in life, a teacher should provide real texts so that I can see the real-life communication in it as well as It can boost my motivation to a higher

place. While reading it, I learned many different and interesting words. I showed them how to use it originally. Besides, when I finished reading, I felt that I had a kind of self-confidence.

Student 2: I read the books outside the class, usually at the café with a few friends. We read it chapter by chapter. We also discussed the chapters with my friends as soon as we finished them. While reading, I learned about American culture, like the course that they have in the morning. I learned a real kind of humor, sarcasm, and anger between two American people. While reading the book, I felt quite good and relaxed. I was happy because I learned numerous new words, and that would make my speech smooth.

Student 3: The books that our instructor provided for us have interesting plots. I loved it because the plot kept my interest alive. I saw many sentences related to requests, advice, kindness, refusal, offers, suggestions, rudeness, meetings, and different behaviors that anybody could show in communication. I also learned a lot about customs, meals, housing, clothes, etc. The book I read developed my cultural awareness and my language skills while I was enjoying my time.

5. Conclusion

The study commenced to investigate The Role of Authentic Literary Texts in an Intermediate Turkish EFL classroom. It investigates students' perspectives and in-class methodologies concerning the instruction of culture. In today's interconnected world of globalization, where cultures are more intertwined than ever before, educators should not overlook the significance of Intercultural Communicative Competence as a critical skill. The study's findings uncovered that a majority of students hold favorable attitudes toward reading authentic books, and a significant portion of students are aware of the significance of Intercultural Communicative Competence in English. Another significant revelation from this study is that reading authentic books makes learning more enjoyable and boosts students' knowledge as well as self-confidence. Students seem to give importance to cultural elements if these elements are integrated into lessons. The majority of students in the study stated that Intercultural communicative competence is important in language learning. The study emphasizes that teaching culture holds the same level of importance as teaching the foreign language itself.

6. Limitations of the Study

The process of conducting face-to-face interviews with students exceeded the anticipated time frame. Some students refrain from fully expressing themselves when responding to the questions. Another handicap was that I personally encountered challenges in determining which books we should have read according to my students' preferences.

7. Suggestions for Future Research

If any researcher has enough time, they could observe students and take notes about their improvement in the classroom. Above this, while having an interview, observers could determine a certain time (for example, 8 minutes for each speaker) not to waste their time.

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