

THE ROLE OF ESP TEACHERS IN TEACHING INTER-CULTURAL COMPETENCE.

**Annaguliyev Jamshid**

Teacher of Termez Institute of Agrotechnology and Innovative Development

**Abstract.** In the present time's globalized atmosphere, the need for intercultural communicative competence in the workplace runs high. Accordingly, in the area of foreign language education, English teachers need more than ever to incorporate intercultural awareness and cross-cultural understanding in their syllabus. This paper tends to suggest a cultural teaching based on standards for intercultural learning elicited from related literature in an English for Specific Purposes (ESP) setting. It proposes ways of instilling multicultural awareness into these language learners through the implementation of intercultural activities, helping them better understanding diversity and developing positive attitudes in the workplace. The research goals comprise increasing students' intercultural global awareness, promoting their tolerance, and helping them remedy negative attitudes towards the target culture and other alien cultures.

**Keywords:** ESP teaching, intercultural communicative competence, internal and external agendas, artifact exploration, documenting activity, attitude exploration.

Today, universities all over the world are characterized by a variety of competing internal and external agendas. Teaching programmes are being broadened and updated in response to imperatives as globalization and economic growth. In this climate of international exchanges, academic relationships and fast travel, it is impossible to function in isolation but through interaction with each other for survival. The success of all these organizations and the people involved in these areas depends on effective cross-cultural communication.

As far as foreign language instruction is concerned, the principles of intercultural language education are strongly implemented in the Common European Framework of Reference of Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment. The aims are recapitulated as follows: In an intercultural approach, it is a central objective of language learning to promote the favourable development of the learner's whole personality and sense of identity in response to the enriching experience of otherness in language and culture.

The literature has shown that the intricate concept of interculturality lies the foundations of "Intercultural Teaching and Learning", as a new and challenging field in the education system, which is heavily influenced by globalization. Its main purpose is focused on the shift from the traditional ways of teaching a foreign language (with focus on language and vocabulary structures), to teaching cultural elements from the very beginning, promoting thus the learners' so-called "intercultural awareness" and "intercultural communication competence". Learners are more prone to use language in a critical and reflective way, and are also given the opportunity to develop their intercultural sensitivity.

For a long time, teachers have been focusing on strategies that may help students to have an immaculate command of English and a 'native-like' accent, but for many learners, this is a distant goal. In an immensely multicultural world, where English is used as a lingua franca, it appears sensible to accept that it is more necessary for a language learner to be able to genuinely communicate with and understand people in a range of various contexts, than to mimic native

speakers. For this purpose, decision makers in the field of education throughout the world stress the need for integrating intercultural teaching in the curricula.

Distinctly, intercultural exploration helps the learners better discover their own culture and the cultures of the others. Through intercultural activities, students can have deeper insights in to their home culture's practices, beliefs and behaviours and can therefore explain them to individuals whose values and practices run counter to theirs. In ESP teaching contexts, where the topics dealt with include learning a variety of skills such as giving a business presentation, making deals, attending worldwide conferences, reading scientific papers, chairing international meetings, and so on, issues may and do arise.

This is why ESP teachers are urged to promote clear lines of constructive communication to minimize the risks of misunderstandings and breakdowns, and to facilitate the building of tolerance and respect among their learners. In a practical and sensible way, this signifies that they have to teach their students how to manage their behaviour since it is the apparent manifestation of a whole system of beliefs and feelings that needs to be comprehended in order to refine one's cultural awareness and manage intercultural worries. In our increasingly interconnected planet, where technology provides a global platform where individuals explore ideas and cultures without restriction, experts in the area of interculturality are claiming that language learners' horizons have to be widened through a sound intercultural instruction because: "people may share a current nationality, place of birth, a language, a religion, a profession or a neighbourhood and still be very different from one another".

The suggested intercultural approach in this study tries to incorporate some intercultural activities in an ESP environment to help the students fulfil three elemental aims: cognitive, affective and behavioural, and would therefore allow them to springboard into the job market. These three basic goals:

- Cognitive, which means, adding to the learner's stock of knowledge and skills.
- Affective, which implies, changing the trainee's attitude by developing openness, tolerance, acceptance and awareness.
- Behavioural, in which the trainee learns and grasps better the 'dos and don'ts' of the new environment.

After discovering similarities and differences between the source and the target culture, the teacher should design activities that aim at preparing learners to interact and build relationships with persons from diverse backgrounds, and to develop their skills in terms of interpreting and relating. Some standard activities suggested by Corbet, in order to actively engage learners in the target culture are role-plays, reading activities, or listening activities. In addition, these activities should deal with various aspects of the target culture, challenging learners to compare them with their own culture and to identify similarities and differences, facts, patterns of behaviour, historical and modern elements, urban and rural elements, etc. Moreover, the activities used in the ESP classroom should shift from preparing students to communicate errorless (which is often the aim of traditional teaching approaches) to communicate openly, to interact and cope with the target culture. Authentic materials and online tools should also be used. Such activities may include: Online Blog Exchange, artifact exploration, documenting activity, attitude exploration and others. When the Online Blog Exchange is expanded for the purpose of comparing materials (such as films, books, literature, images and videos), it slowly turns into a process of negotiation; thus,

learners work together to make observations, formulate hypotheses, create patterns, confront and analyse their own attitudes, beliefs and values.

When learning ESP in an intercultural manner, students get engaged in new and attractive experiences involving the target culture. They become “social actors” engaged in problem-solving activities, role-plays and simulations, debates and discussions, improving thus their abilities to express their personal views and manifesting acceptance and tolerance towards different attitudes, ideas, values, etc.

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