



RESEARCH ARTICLE



UNLOCKING ESL AND EFL LEARNERS' INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE: THE USE OF QUESTIONING SKILLS AND FEEDBACK STRATEGIES

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ABSTRACT

This article focuses on the importance of intercultural communicative competence (ICC) and its significance in language learning. The paper provides an overview of effective strategies for enhancing students' ICC in classroom discourse, such as questioning skills and oral corrective feedback (OCF). By employing these techniques, teachers can enhance students' critical thinking and language proficiency, ultimately equipping them with the skills needed to navigate intercultural communication successfully. However, the article notes that the use of OCF requires careful consideration and execution in the context of classroom discourse. Overall, this article provides a comprehensive guide for language teachers to improve their students' ICC and to prepare them for successful communication in diverse cultural settings. Teachers and educators ought to pay attention to social and contextual aspects of language use, learners' language proficiency, individual differences, and learning context when giving feedback to students.



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BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION

The rise of global interactions has increased communication opportunities significantly, leading to great demand for good communication abilities. As one of the most widely used languages globally, English has been accepted as global language. Consequently, learners of all levels learn English not only as an academic subject but also as a skill and tool to communicate with people worldwide (Sercu et al., 2005). The recognition that communicative competence should be incorporated into English teaching has grown alongside this trend (Markee & Kasper, 2004), and its role has become increasingly crucial in the English as a second language (ESL)/English as a foreign language (EFL) classroom (Shen, 2014).

While using an international language such as English for communication, ESL and EFL learners might experience miscommunication due to the lack of intercultural communicative competence (ICC) (Deardorff, 2009). When interlocutors from different L1 backgrounds communicate but rely only on their L1 sociocultural norms, unpleasantness and miscommunication may arise. Non-native speakers of English may still generate misunderstandings due to their lack of knowledge of each other's original cultures (Shiri, 2015). Effective communication with speakers of other languages is a complex behavior that requires both linguistic and pragmatic competence (Swain, 1985). Pragmatics experts suggest that obtaining ICC allows language users to accumulate pragmatic knowledge of language and culture other than the target language on their comprehension, production, and acquisition of L2 pragmatic information (Rizk, 2003). The challenges

faced by ESL/EFL learners in real-life situations due to a lack of ICC highlight the significance of enhancing ICC and further improving language performance. This article offers an inclusive instructional resource for language educators aiming to enhance their students' ICC and equip them with the necessary skills for effective communication in diverse cultural contexts.

INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE (ICC)

ICC refers to the ability of learners to effectively communicate with individuals from diverse cultures (Byram, 1997, 2000; Deardorff, 2009). According to Ruben (1976), communication effectiveness is interchangeable. This concept is further expounded by Taylor (1994), as ICC a transformative process in which learners of the target language develop the capacity to effectively adapt and accommodate the demands of the culture they find themselves in. Sercu et al. (2005) also stated that ICC is the essential traits for engaging with foreign cultures. In their viewpoints, ICC encompasses a range of traits such as openness to other cultures, self-reflection and self-awareness, adaptability in uncertainty, capacity to view the world from others' perspectives, cultural mediation, conscious use of culture learning skills, contextual awareness, and recognition of individuals beyond their collective identities.

TEACHERS' QUESTIONING SKILL AND CLASSROOM DISCOURSE

The old saying "to question well is to teach well" highlights the importance of questioning in the process of teaching and learning. Asking questions is



a frequently used strategy by educators and teachers in classroom interactions, which is an instructional activity where both students and teachers are obligated to participate (Nunan, 1989). To achieve teaching objectives and efficiency, teachers should possess the ability to ask the right questions in the right manner. Asking good questions can boost the interaction among teachers and students and enhance students' achievement (Chin, 2007). Effective teacher questioning facilitates learning and classroom climate through meaningful interactions between teachers and students (Chin, 2007; Pica, 1996). Seedhouse (2004) acknowledges the extensive diversity found within second language classrooms, encompassing variations in learners' backgrounds, whether they share the same first language or possess multiple languages, their age, geographical location, and the cultural backdrop of instruction. Consequently, it is essential for teachers to consider the interplay between language pedagogy, classroom discourse, and the dynamics of social interaction. By doing so, they can facilitate a more seamless and effective teaching and learning process. In classroom settings, conversations often contain less negotiation, and experienced teachers tend to ask more question types, leading to more fluent and productive communication (Chin, 2007; Pica, 1996). With social interaction, learners' comprehension would be facilitated through meaningful discussions on specific topics (Nystrand, Gamoran, & Heck, 1993; Soter et al., 2008). Well-executed questioning skills provide students with more opportunities to express their thoughts and enhance their language comprehension through the exchange of opinions (Sweigart, 1991; Nystrand, Gamoran, & Heck, 1993; Soter et al., 2008).

When it comes to stimulating classroom interaction, asking questions is just one of the methods that can be used by language teachers (Nunan, 1989). However, it is important for teachers to use this method appropriately and effectively in the classroom settings (Chin, 2007). Regardless of the type of questions being asked, teachers should avoid asking questions that are too vague, tricky, or abstract for their students to understand. Asking questions can be an effective strategy in language classes, and teachers should follow some basic principles such as understanding the instructional goals and materials, considering students' needs, observing the class atmosphere, and using concise language when asking questions (Cohen, 2011).

The act of questioning is considered important, and the quality of questions posed carries significant weight in educational settings (Chin, 2007). In general, higher-level questions require students to utilize their critical thinking abilities more extensively, while lower-level questions demand less cognitive engagement from learners. When students respond to higher-level questions, they must engage in more profound and extensive reflection. Whereas in Ellis's study, (1993) he notes that many teachers tend to rely on lower-level cognitive questions as they perceive that it avoids slow-paced instruction. While asking higher-level questions can be time-consuming, the delay is due to the students needing additional processing time to generate responses. Another challenge to using higher-level questions arises when students are given control of the learning process, leading to discomfort and uncertainty among Eastern cultures that prefer teacher-centered approaches over learner-centered ones (Kennedy, 2002; Wong,



2004). To address this issue, scholars have suggested that lower-level questions could be used in the warm-up session while higher-level questions could be reserved for advanced discussions (Brown, 2001). Moreover, social interaction theorists suggest that lower-level questions can serve as scaffolds for students with lower language proficiency and support advanced discussion later (Chaudron, 1988).

Besides the level of questioning, the nature of the questions asked is also highly valued. Suter (2001) argued that referential questions may enhance the frequency of speaking opportunities in the language classroom, thus promoting language learning. However, a study that observed three language classes revealed that teachers employed more display questions than referential questions (Suter, 2001). These findings support Allwright and Bailey's (1991) research, which highlighted that English as a second language (ESL) teachers often focus more on the immediate context when communicating in class. Allwright and Bailey (1991) found that ESL teachers used more display questions than referential questions, which led to limited real communication in the classroom. Therefore, educators and teachers should carefully consider the types and wording of questions they ask in the classroom, in order to generate meaningful discourse that promotes the development of students' language proficiency and ICC. By doing so, language learners can maximize the effectiveness of classroom interaction and achieve the desired learning outcomes.

TEACHERS' FEEDBACK

The manner in which a teacher provides feedback to students is just as crucial as their ability to ask effective questions in developing students' ICC in the language classroom (Chin, 2007). The significance of teachers' feedback in promoting students' idea-sharing and thought expression during classroom interaction is widely recognized. Various types of feedback are available for teachers to use, including corrective feedback which has been discussed by researchers in the Conversational Analysis field (Sheen, 2011).

Chaudron (1988) and other scholars have argued that corrective feedback (CF) was originally utilized in language classrooms for correcting errors. However, past research has demonstrated that when CF is administered orally, it can promote interaction between teachers and students, thereby improving students' communicative competence (Ellis, 2009; Sheen, 2011). Their finding is further supported by Sheen (2010), whose study reveals that oral corrective feedback is commonly employed in language classrooms and has the potential to encourage more interaction and critical thinking.

Scholars and researchers hold diverse viewpoints regarding the role of oral corrective feedback (OCF), yet there is a general consensus that it brings advantages to language learners. Swain (1985) posits, from the standpoint of the output hypothesis, that OCF plays a crucial role in facilitating learners' awareness of the differences between their own speech and the target language structures. This idea is supported by Gass (1990), who suggests that when learners receive more comprehensible input through OCF, they gain more resources for producing



language output. Schmidt (1995) expands on this notion by introducing the noticing hypothesis, which suggests that by noticing their errors, learners are motivated to correct and acquire more accurate language forms.

Long (1991) explains that during communicative activities, such as conversation or contests, OCF focuses on learners' mistakes and helps them understand the correct forms. By connecting the form and meaning, learners revise their erroneous linguistic knowledge and may correct the same errors in the future. Long (1996) and Sheen (2010) both support the interaction hypothesis, which suggests that OCF increases learning efficiency by allowing learners to pay attention to the correct forms of language through negotiation and communication. OCF triggers error correction by highlighting the gap between learners' errors and the desired language forms, which in turn promotes language acquisition (Lightbown & Spada, 2013; Lyster, Saito, & Sato, 2013; Sheen, 2011).

However, the effectiveness of oral corrective feedback (OCF) as a language teaching strategy has been a subject of debate in the academic community. While some scholars see OCF as a valuable tool for promoting language acquisition, others are more critical of its use. For instance, Ellis (2009) has argued that OCF can be seen as negative feedback due to its focus on error correction. Moreover, in Krashen's (1982) affective filter hypothesis, it is suggested that anxiety can hinder L2 fluency and increase learners' stress levels. Terrell (1977) has also suggested that OCF could harm learners' motivation and learning attitudes, potentially leading to embarrassment. These views were later supported by Truscott (1996),

who argued that error correction, especially in grammar, should be abandoned altogether, as it is inefficient and demotivating. Even studies that actively promote the use of OCF have identified potential issues with its implementation. In the research conducted by Ellis and Sheen (2006) and Lyster (1998), it has been observed that certain forms of oral corrective feedback (OCF), specifically recasts, can be ambiguous, leading to a situation where learners receive multiple forms of OCF simultaneously. This simultaneity poses challenges for learners in accurately interpreting the intended corrective message from the teacher.

To enhance students' pragmatic competence, incorporating OCF into classroom discourse requires careful consideration of social and contextual aspects of language use. Seedhouse (2004) suggests that the use of OCF in classroom interaction can help learners analyze the content discussed at a micro level. This makes it advantageous for language teachers to use OCF as a facilitator to improve students' ICC incrementally. OCF can stimulate learners' critical thinking, but teachers need to be aware of various factors such as the type and level of explicitness of OCF, learners' language proficiency, individual differences, and learning context when giving feedback (Sheen, 2011). Neglecting these factors could lead to unfavorable outcomes. Furthermore, the use of OCF should align with the class objectives to ensure its effectiveness in helping learners.

CONCLUSION

Intercultural communicative competence (ICC) is crucial for language learners to succeed in a global community. As such, it is important for teachers and educators to prioritize the development of students'



ICC. This article reviewed and analyzed the significance of ICC and discussed two effective strategies for enhancing students' ICC through classroom discourse: questioning skills and oral corrective feedback (OCF). By employing these techniques, teachers can foster students' critical thinking and language proficiency, ultimately equipping them with the skills needed to navigate intercultural communication successfully.

The incorporation of OCF in the classroom to enhance students' intercultural communicative competence requires careful attention to social and contextual aspects of language use. Seedhouse (2004) notes that OCF can help learners analyze content discussed, and teachers should use it to facilitate ICC improvement. The types and explicitness level of OCF, learners' language proficiency, individual differences, and learning context should all be considered when giving feedback to students (Sheen, 2011). Paying attention to these factors could lead to more favorable learning outcomes. The utilization of OCF should align with the class objectives to ensure its effectiveness in assisting learners.

In summary, this article covers effective strategies and techniques to improve students' ICC through classroom discourse. It highlights the importance of quality questioning skills and the sequence of questioning to stimulate deeper thinking.

Moreover, it highlights the significant function of oral corrective feedback (OCF) in elucidating students' comprehension of particular content and linguistic structures. However, it also emphasizes the need for cautious execution and skillful

implementation when employing OCF in the classroom.

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