



USING CULTURALLY-RELEVANT AUTHENTIC TEXTS TO FOSTER INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE

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Abstract: This article examines the theoretical role of culturally-relevant authentic texts in fostering intercultural communicative competence (ICC) among language learners. Authentic texts, including literature, media articles, songs, and real-life documents, expose learners to cultural values, norms, and communicative practices of target language communities. Drawing on Byram's model of intercultural competence, Kramsch's cultural theory, and sociocultural perspectives on learning, this paper argues that integrating culturally-relevant materials into language pedagogy enhances learners' ability to interpret, negotiate, and mediate meaning across cultures. The discussion highlights the importance of authenticity, cultural relevance, and critical reflection in developing ICC, while emphasizing the pedagogical role of teachers in scaffolding learners' engagement with texts.

Keywords: intercultural communicative competence, authentic texts, cultural relevance, language pedagogy, sociocultural theory.

Introduction

In the 21st century, language learning extends beyond mastering grammar and vocabulary; it requires the development of intercultural communicative competence (ICC), which enables learners to communicate effectively and appropriately with speakers of other cultures [2]. ICC is particularly vital in an era of globalization, where intercultural interactions occur in academic,



professional, and social contexts. As Byram [1] emphasizes, ICC involves not only linguistic skills but also attitudes of openness, knowledge of cultural practices, and skills of interpreting and relating.

One effective way to foster ICC is through the integration of culturally-relevant authentic texts into language instruction. Authentic texts—materials not originally designed for pedagogical purposes—offer learners exposure to real-life cultural discourses. These may include news articles, films, advertisements, literature, folk tales, social media content, or official documents. By engaging with such materials, learners gain insights into the beliefs, values, and communicative styles of the target culture while developing critical reflection on their own cultural assumptions [3].

This article aims to explore, from a theoretical perspective, how culturally-relevant authentic texts can be used to foster intercultural communicative competence in language education.

Methods

This paper adopts a theoretical methodology, drawing on key frameworks in applied linguistics and intercultural communication studies:

Byram's Model of ICC – which identifies five dimensions of intercultural competence: attitudes (curiosity and openness), knowledge (of social groups and practices), interpreting and relating skills, discovery and interaction skills, and critical cultural awareness [1].

Kramsch's Cultural Theory – which emphasizes the symbolic and identity-forming role of language and culture, highlighting how learners negotiate meaning across cultural boundaries [4].

Sociocultural Theory (Vygotsky) – which suggests that learning occurs through mediated interaction, with authentic texts serving as cultural tools that mediate learners' understanding of the target community [5].

This framework allows for a conceptual analysis of how authentic and culturally-relevant materials contribute to intercultural learning.



Results and Discussion

1. *Authenticity and Cultural Exposure.* Authentic texts provide learners with direct exposure to the communicative practices of target language speakers. Unlike simplified textbook dialogues, authentic texts reflect real-life cultural norms, humor, idiomatic expressions, and social conventions. This authenticity fosters learners' ability to interpret meaning beyond literal translation and to appreciate cultural nuance [6].

2. *Cultural Relevance and Learner Engagement.* Cultural relevance is crucial for meaningful learning. When authentic texts are carefully chosen to resonate with learners' interests or local experiences, they create connections between learners' cultural background and the target culture. This process encourages learners to engage in comparative reflection, which is essential for developing intercultural competence [7].

3. *Critical Reflection and Cultural Awareness.* Engagement with authentic texts promotes critical cultural awareness, a key element of ICC. Learners not only gain knowledge about the target culture but also reflect on their own cultural assumptions. For example, analyzing advertisements, films, or newspaper articles from different cultures can reveal underlying values and social ideologies, prompting learners to question stereotypes and broaden their worldview [3].

4. *Skills of Interpreting and Relating.* According to Byram [1], one of the core skills of ICC is the ability to interpret cultural practices and relate them to one's own. Authentic texts offer opportunities to practice this skill by requiring learners to compare, contrast, and negotiate meaning between cultures. For instance, reading folk tales from the target culture allows learners to interpret moral lessons and compare them with those in their native culture.

5. *Pedagogical Mediation and Scaffolding.* While authentic texts are valuable, they can also pose challenges due to linguistic complexity and cultural unfamiliarity. Teachers play a crucial role in scaffolding learners' engagement, designing pre-reading activities to activate prior knowledge, guiding



interpretation during classroom discussions, and encouraging post-reading tasks that promote reflection and intercultural dialogue [2; 8].

Conclusion

The analysis presented in this article highlights the transformative role that culturally-relevant authentic texts can play in fostering intercultural communicative competence (ICC) among language learners. Unlike simplified or artificially constructed materials, authentic texts expose learners to the real linguistic, cultural, and pragmatic dimensions of language as it is used by native speakers in diverse contexts. This immersion is particularly valuable for learners seeking not only to develop linguistic proficiency but also to cultivate the intercultural sensitivity and adaptability required for successful global communication.

A key advantage of culturally-relevant authentic texts is their ability to provide learners with insight into the cultural practices, values, and perspectives embedded in the target language. By engaging with authentic sources—such as newspapers, short stories, blogs, films, or podcasts—students are introduced to the subtleties of cultural expression, idiomatic language, humor, and social norms that cannot be fully conveyed through traditional textbook-based instruction. This helps learners understand the deep connection between language and culture, thereby encouraging them to see communication not as a neutral transfer of information but as a culturally situated act shaped by values, traditions, and identities.

Moreover, the use of culturally-relevant texts enhances learners' critical cultural awareness, a central component of ICC. Exposure to diverse cultural perspectives challenges learners' assumptions, fosters empathy, and promotes respect for difference. Such engagement is crucial in today's interconnected world, where the ability to navigate intercultural encounters requires more than linguistic accuracy—it demands openness, flexibility, and the recognition of cultural relativity. By analyzing and reflecting upon authentic cultural content,



learners are guided toward developing these higher-order skills, moving from surface-level understanding to deeper intercultural competence.

The motivational value of authentic texts should also be emphasized. Learners are more likely to engage with materials that feel relevant, meaningful, and connected to real-world contexts. Culturally-rich texts provide this relevance, often sparking curiosity, personal reflection, and emotional resonance. When learners see how language reflects the lived experiences of communities, they are encouraged to invest more effort in their learning process. This heightened motivation can lead to increased exposure, more practice, and ultimately greater retention of both language and cultural knowledge.

Nevertheless, it must be acknowledged that the use of authentic texts presents challenges. The complexity of language, unfamiliar references, and culturally dense content can initially overwhelm learners, particularly at lower proficiency levels. For this reason, teachers play a vital role in scaffolding the process. Carefully designed pre-reading and pre-listening activities can activate background knowledge, while guided tasks during and after exposure help learners process, analyze, and internalize the material. Teachers must also select texts that are both culturally significant and appropriate for learners' linguistic level, ensuring a balance between challenge and accessibility.

In conclusion, integrating culturally-relevant authentic texts into language education not only strengthens linguistic skills but also equips learners with the intercultural communicative competence essential for meaningful interaction in global contexts. By providing a window into the cultural realities of the target language, such texts foster empathy, tolerance, and adaptability—qualities that extend far beyond the classroom. While empirical research is still needed to further explore the long-term impact of this approach, the theoretical evidence strongly suggests that authentic cultural engagement can transform language learning into a holistic, humanistic, and globally relevant experience. With thoughtful pedagogical integration, culturally-relevant authentic texts can help



shape learners into not only competent language users but also responsible intercultural communicators prepared to thrive in an increasingly interconnected world.

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