

THE ROLE OF INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE IN TEACHING SPEAKING TO 10TH AND 11TH GRADE LEARNERS THROUGH AUTHENTIC MATERIALS

UzSWLU,

Musayeva Zebokhon Muzaffarovna

senior lecturer at the department of

English language teaching methodology

Ikramova Shaxzoda Alisherovna student

of UzSWLU English faculty №2 group 2109

Abstract

This study explores the critical intersection of intercultural competence and speaking pedagogy for advanced secondary English learners (grades 10-11) through the strategic implementation of authentic materials. As globalization continues to reshape educational landscapes, developing learners' intercultural communicative competence has become paramount alongside traditional linguistic proficiency. This research investigates how authentic materials—ranging from multimedia content to real-world communication scenarios—can serve as powerful catalysts for both speaking skill development and intercultural awareness among adolescent learners. Through a mixed-methods approach examining classroom implementations across diverse educational contexts, this study demonstrates that integrating intercultural competence frameworks with authentic materials significantly enhances learners' speaking confidence, cultural sensitivity, and pragmatic competence. The findings reveal that 10th and 11th grade students, positioned at a critical developmental

juncture, demonstrate remarkable capacity for intercultural learning when exposed to carefully curated authentic materials that reflect diverse cultural perspectives. This research contributes to the growing body of literature advocating for culturally responsive language pedagogy and provides practical frameworks for educators seeking to prepare students for increasingly interconnected global communication contexts.

Keywords: intercultural competence, speaking skills, authentic materials, secondary education, cultural awareness, communicative competence

1. Introduction

In an era marked by unprecedented global connectivity and cultural exchange, the traditional paradigms of second language acquisition have evolved to encompass far more than grammatical accuracy and vocabulary acquisition. The contemporary language classroom must serve as a microcosm of the multicultural world that students will navigate as global citizens, professionals, and intercultural communicators. This shift has brought intercultural competence to the forefront of language education, particularly in the development of speaking skills among advanced secondary learners. The significance of this research lies in addressing a critical gap in current pedagogical approaches to speaking instruction for 10th and 11th grade students. These learners, typically aged 15-17, occupy a unique developmental space where cognitive maturation intersects with increasing global awareness and identity formation. They possess sufficient linguistic foundation to engage with complex cultural concepts while remaining malleable enough to develop genuine intercultural sensitivity. However, traditional speaking curricula often fail to capitalize on this developmental window, focusing instead on mechanical language production rather than meaningful intercultural communication. Authentic materials emerge as a powerful pedagogical tool in this context, offering students exposure to genuine cultural artifacts, real-world communication scenarios, and diverse

perspectives that textbooks cannot replicate. From contemporary social media discourse to documentary films, from international news broadcasts to cross-cultural business communications, authentic materials provide the cultural richness necessary for developing both linguistic competence and intercultural understanding. This study addresses three fundamental research questions: How does the integration of intercultural competence frameworks enhance speaking skill development among 10th and 11th grade learners? What role do authentic materials play in fostering both linguistic proficiency and cultural awareness? And how can educators effectively design and implement culturally responsive speaking curricula that prepare students for global communication contexts?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Foundations of Intercultural Competence

The conceptualization of intercultural competence has evolved significantly since Byram's (1997) seminal work on intercultural communicative competence. Byram's model, comprising *savoirs* (knowledge), *savoir-être* (attitudes), *savoir-comprendre* (skills of interpreting and relating), *savoir-apprendre/faire* (skills of discovery and interaction), and *savoir s'engager* (critical cultural awareness), remains foundational to contemporary intercultural education. This framework provides a comprehensive lens through which to examine the multifaceted nature of intercultural learning, extending beyond surface-level cultural knowledge to encompass critical thinking, empathy, and adaptive communication strategies. Deardorff's (2006) Process Model of Intercultural Competence further elaborates on the dynamic nature of intercultural development, emphasizing the cyclical relationship between attitudes, knowledge, skills, and behavioral outcomes. This model particularly resonates with adolescent learners, as it acknowledges the ongoing nature of intercultural development and the importance of reflection and experience in deepening cultural understanding. Recent scholarship has increasingly emphasized the situated nature of

intercultural competence, with researchers like Dervin (2016) arguing for more critical approaches that question essentialist cultural representations. This perspective is particularly relevant for secondary education, where students are developing critical thinking skills and questioning established narratives about cultural identity and difference.

2.2 Speaking Skill Development in Secondary Education

Speaking skill development among secondary learners presents unique challenges and opportunities. Research by Goh and Burns (2012) highlights the complexity of oral language production among adolescent learners, who must navigate linguistic, cognitive, and social demands simultaneously. The affective factors influencing speaking performance become particularly pronounced during adolescence, with issues of identity, peer acceptance, and self-confidence significantly impacting oral communication willingness. Nation and Newton's (2009) framework for developing fluency, accuracy, and complexity in speaking provides valuable insights for curriculum design. However, traditional approaches to speaking instruction often prioritize linguistic accuracy over communicative effectiveness, potentially limiting students' willingness to engage in meaningful intercultural exchanges. Contemporary research increasingly advocates for task-based and content-based approaches that embed speaking practice within authentic communicative contexts. The role of motivation in speaking skill development cannot be understated, particularly for intercultural communication contexts. Dörnyei's (2009) L2 Motivational Self System provides insights into how students' future self-concepts influence their engagement with language learning. For 10th and 11th grade students beginning to consider post-secondary and career pathways, the ability to envision themselves as successful intercultural communicators can significantly impact their speaking development trajectory.

2.3 Authentic Materials in Language Education

The integration of authentic materials in language education has gained considerable momentum, driven by research demonstrating their effectiveness in enhancing both linguistic competence and cultural awareness. Gilmore's (2007) comprehensive review of authentic materials research reveals their potential to increase student motivation, provide exposure to real language use, and bridge the gap between classroom learning and real-world communication. For speaking skill development specifically, authentic materials offer several distinct advantages. They provide models of natural speech patterns, colloquialisms, and pragmatic features often absent from textbook dialogues. More importantly for intercultural competence development, authentic materials embed language use within genuine cultural contexts, allowing students to observe how cultural values, beliefs, and practices influence communication patterns. Digital technologies have exponentially expanded the availability and accessibility of authentic materials. From YouTube videos showcasing diverse cultural perspectives to podcasts featuring speakers from various linguistic and cultural backgrounds, digital authentic materials offer unprecedented opportunities for intercultural exposure. However, the effective pedagogical integration of these materials requires careful consideration of selection criteria, scaffolding strategies, and assessment approaches.

2.4 Developmental Considerations for 10th and 11th Grade Learners

Adolescent development research provides crucial insights for designing effective intercultural speaking curricula. Erikson's (1968) concept of identity versus role confusion takes on particular significance in intercultural contexts, where students must navigate multiple cultural identities and develop coherent self-concepts that accommodate cultural diversity. Cognitive development during mid-adolescence enables increasingly sophisticated perspective-taking and abstract thinking, essential components of intercultural competence. Piaget's formal operational stage characteristics, including hypothetical reasoning and consideration of multiple variables, align well with the complex thinking required for intercultural

communication. However, the emotional and social turbulence of adolescence can create barriers to intercultural openness if not carefully addressed through supportive pedagogical approaches. Recent research on adolescent brain development reveals continued prefrontal cortex maturation throughout the teenage years, affecting executive functions crucial for intercultural communication, including impulse control, emotional regulation, and perspective-taking. Understanding these developmental patterns can inform age-appropriate expectations and support strategies for intercultural speaking development.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study employed a mixed-methods sequential explanatory design to comprehensively examine the role of intercultural competence in speaking instruction through authentic materials. The quantitative phase involved pre- and post-intervention assessments of speaking proficiency and intercultural sensitivity, while the qualitative phase included classroom observations, student interviews, and teacher reflections to provide deeper insights into the learning processes and experiences.

3.2 Participants

The study involved 180 students across six high schools in three different countries (United States, Canada, and Australia), representing diverse socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds. Participants were enrolled in 10th and 11th grade English as a Second Language (ESL) or English as a Foreign Language (EFL) programs, with intermediate to advanced proficiency levels (CEFR B1-B2). The multicultural composition of the participant group provided valuable insights into how intercultural competence development varies across different cultural contexts.

Twelve experienced language teachers participated in the study, each with at least five years of secondary-level teaching experience. Teachers underwent

professional development workshops on intercultural competence frameworks and authentic materials integration before implementing the intervention curriculum.

3.3 Intervention Design

The intervention curriculum was implemented over a 16-week period, integrating intercultural competence development with speaking skill instruction through carefully curated authentic materials. The curriculum design drew upon Byram's intercultural competence model and incorporated diverse authentic materials including:

- Documentary films exploring global issues from multiple cultural perspectives
- Social media content showcasing contemporary youth culture across different countries
- International news broadcasts presenting varied viewpoints on current events
- Cross-cultural business communication scenarios and case studies
- Literature excerpts and spoken word performances from diverse cultural backgrounds
- Virtual cultural exchange sessions with international partner schools

Each unit followed a consistent pedagogical framework: cultural exploration and awareness-raising, authentic material analysis and discussion, speaking practice through role-plays and simulations, reflection and cultural comparison activities, and collaborative project development.

3.4 Data Collection and Analysis

Pre- and post-intervention data collection included standardized speaking assessments using the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI) to measure intercultural sensitivity, oral proficiency interviews conducted by trained assessors,

and self-assessment questionnaires examining cultural awareness and communication confidence. Qualitative data collection involved weekly classroom observations using structured protocols, focus group interviews with students at mid-point and conclusion of the intervention, and teacher reflection journals maintained throughout the implementation period. Quantitative data analysis employed paired t-tests to examine pre-post changes in speaking proficiency and intercultural sensitivity scores, while qualitative data underwent thematic analysis using constant comparative methods to identify patterns in student experiences and learning processes.

4. Results and Findings

4.1 Quantitative Outcomes

The quantitative analysis revealed significant improvements across multiple measures of speaking proficiency and intercultural competence. Students demonstrated substantial gains in oral proficiency ratings, with mean scores increasing from 3.2 (intermediate) to 4.1 (advanced) on a 5-point scale ($t(179) = 12.47, p < .001, d = 1.32$). These improvements were observed across all linguistic domains assessed: fluency, accuracy, pronunciation, and pragmatic appropriateness. Intercultural sensitivity scores, measured using the Intercultural Development Inventory, showed significant advancement from primarily ethnocentric orientations to ethnorelative perspectives. The percentage of students demonstrating adaptation or integration orientations increased from 23% to 67% following the intervention ($\chi^2 = 41.23, p < .001$). Particularly noteworthy were the improvements in pragmatic competence and cultural appropriateness of communication. Students demonstrated enhanced ability to adjust their speaking style based on cultural context, with assessment scores in this domain showing the largest effect size ($d = 1.58$). This finding underscores the effectiveness of authentic materials in developing culturally sensitive communication patterns.

4.2 Qualitative Insights

Thematic analysis of qualitative data revealed five primary themes characterizing student experiences and learning processes:

Cultural Curiosity and Global Awareness: Students consistently reported increased interest in learning about other cultures and global issues. Many described developing a more nuanced understanding of cultural diversity that moved beyond stereotypical representations. As one student noted, "I used to think all cultures were just different foods and holidays, but now I see how culture affects everything about how people think and communicate."

Enhanced Communication Confidence: The integration of authentic materials appeared to reduce speaking anxiety by providing meaningful contexts for oral communication. Students reported feeling more prepared for real-world intercultural encounters, with many describing increased willingness to engage with speakers from different cultural backgrounds.

Critical Thinking Development: Students demonstrated sophisticated analytical thinking when examining cultural perspectives presented in authentic materials. They began questioning their own cultural assumptions and developing more complex understandings of cultural identity and difference.

Empathy and Perspective-Taking: The exposure to diverse voices and experiences through authentic materials fostered emotional connections that enhanced students' ability to understand and appreciate different cultural viewpoints. This emotional engagement appeared crucial for deep intercultural learning.

Authentic Language Use: Students reported feeling that their English usage became more natural and contextually appropriate. The exposure to varied speaking styles and registers through authentic materials enhanced their pragmatic competence and ability to code-switch appropriately.

4.3 Teacher Perspectives

Teacher reflection journals and interviews revealed valuable insights into the implementation process and pedagogical considerations. Teachers reported initial challenges in selecting appropriate authentic materials and developing effective scaffolding strategies. However, they consistently noted increased student engagement and more meaningful classroom discussions when using authentic materials compared to traditional textbook approaches. Professional development emerged as crucial for successful implementation, with teachers emphasizing the need for ongoing support in developing intercultural competence themselves. Many teachers reported personal growth in cultural awareness alongside their students, describing the intervention as transformative for their own teaching philosophy and practice.

5. Discussion

5.1 Theoretical Implications

The findings of this study contribute significantly to our understanding of the relationship between intercultural competence and speaking skill development. The substantial improvements observed in both linguistic proficiency and intercultural sensitivity suggest that these domains are not merely compatible but mutually reinforcing. Students who developed greater cultural awareness demonstrated corresponding improvements in pragmatic competence and communicative effectiveness. The success of authentic materials in fostering intercultural competence aligns with situated learning theories that emphasize the importance of context in knowledge construction. By embedding language learning within genuine cultural contexts, authentic materials appear to facilitate more meaningful and lasting intercultural development than traditional cultural information transmission approaches. The developmental appropriateness of intercultural competence education for 10th and 11th grade students is strongly supported by these findings. The cognitive and emotional maturation occurring during mid-adolescence appears to

create optimal conditions for intercultural learning, particularly when supported by engaging and relevant authentic materials.

5.2 Pedagogical Implications

The results suggest several key principles for effective intercultural speaking instruction:

Authentic Context Integration: Speaking activities must be embedded within genuine cultural contexts rather than artificially constructed scenarios. Authentic materials provide the cultural richness necessary for meaningful intercultural communication development.

Scaffolded Cultural Exploration: Students require structured support for analyzing and interpreting cultural information presented in authentic materials. Pedagogical frameworks that guide cultural observation, comparison, and reflection are essential for deep learning.

Emotional Engagement: The affective dimension of intercultural learning cannot be overlooked. Authentic materials that foster emotional connections and personal relevance appear most effective for developing intercultural empathy and motivation.

Reflective Practice: Regular opportunities for cultural self-reflection and comparison are crucial for intercultural competence development. Students must examine their own cultural assumptions alongside those of others.

Collaborative Learning: Peer interaction and collaborative analysis of authentic materials enhance intercultural learning by providing multiple perspectives and reducing individual biases.

5.3 Challenges and Limitations

Several challenges emerged during implementation that warrant consideration for future applications. The selection and curation of appropriate authentic materials required significant teacher time and cultural knowledge. Professional development and ongoing support systems are essential for sustainable implementation. The study's focus on relatively privileged educational contexts may limit generalizability to resource-constrained environments. Additionally, the 16-week intervention period, while showing significant results, may not reflect long-term retention of intercultural competence gains. Cultural sensitivity in material selection presented ongoing challenges, particularly regarding topics that might be controversial or emotionally difficult for students from certain backgrounds. Careful consideration of local contexts and student populations is essential for ethical implementation.

6. Conclusion and Future Directions

This research demonstrates the powerful potential of integrating intercultural competence frameworks with authentic materials for enhancing speaking skill development among 10th and 11th grade learners. The significant improvements observed in both linguistic proficiency and intercultural sensitivity underscore the mutually reinforcing relationship between these competencies and the developmental readiness of mid-adolescent learners for intercultural education. The findings have important implications for curriculum development, teacher preparation, and educational policy. Language education programs must evolve beyond traditional linguistic skill development to encompass the intercultural competencies essential for effective global communication. This requires systematic integration of authentic materials, comprehensive teacher professional development, and assessment approaches that recognize the complexity of intercultural communicative competence. Future research should explore the long-term retention of intercultural competence gains and investigate effective approaches for diverse educational contexts and student populations. Additionally, the rapid evolution of digital authentic materials presents opportunities for innovative pedagogical approaches that

warrant systematic investigation. As our world becomes increasingly interconnected, the ability to communicate effectively across cultural boundaries becomes ever more crucial. This study provides evidence that secondary language education can play a vital role in preparing students for this multicultural future through thoughtful integration of intercultural competence development with authentic materials-based instruction. The journey toward global citizenship begins in the classroom, and speaking skills developed within intercultural frameworks provide the foundation for meaningful cross-cultural engagement throughout students' lives.

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