How Can Integrating Intercultural Communicative Competence in The English Language Classroom Motivate Learners and Develop Their Intercultural Awareness? A Case Study in A Private School for Girls in Jordan

Hiba B. Ibrahim
University College London, the UK

ABSTRACT

In a dominating textbook-based approach to foreign language education, research on English Language as a Foreign Language (EFL) has addressed a gap in international textbooks’ cultural content. Furthermore, it has addressed different learning challenges that are believed to impact English learners’ motivation towards acquiring the language. Byram’s intercultural communicative competence (ICC) approach has been known as one of the most effective approaches to develop learners’ intercultural knowledge, skills and attitudes towards the target culture and their own. However, empirical research on the model’s best practices in learning design and teaching methodologies is still limited. Thus, this study investigates Byram’s model as an innovative approach to developing English learners’ ICC and their language learning motivation by designing and implementing supplementary ICC materials. The study findings suggest that the ICC materials have a positive impact on promoting the participants’ language learning motivation. As for ICC skills, the participants demonstrated a development in knowledge, interpreting and relating skills and attitudes of openness and curiosity. It also observed some development in the participants’ critical intercultural awareness and willingness to evaluate cultures critically. Yet, the study’s ICC materials pedagogy needs to be implemented in a wider scope to observe a deeper development of this skill and the attitude of readiness to critically decenter from one’s own beliefs and consider other cultural practices.

Keywords: intercultural communicative competence, English language learning, language learning motivation, intercultural awareness

Introduction

The growing dissatisfaction expressed by teachers with teaching functional uses of language has led to calling for more dedication to incorporate culture in language acquisition. With the
growing of globalization, EFL practitioners’ desire to equip learners with intercultural skills that reflect the variation of communicative situations they might encounter, have inspired theorists to aim for more cultural content in foreign language learning environments (Kramsch in Coperías-Aguilar, 2010). Thus, the integration of communication and intercultural awareness was perceived as a learning objective that foreign language learning should aim for. The need for this integration inspired some theorists to redefine the role of communicative and cultural competences to introduce an intercultural communicative approach to teaching foreign languages.

Although the concept of intercultural communicative competence (ICC) was introduced by James Baxter in 1983, it was Michael Byram who developed the term intercultural foreign language education (IFLE) (Borghetti, 2013). By suggesting ICC as an approach to IFLE, Byram’s model is claimed to be "the only one to define the relationship between intercultural and communicative objectives" in the field (Borghetti, 2013, p.256). Therefore, the aim of IFLE was broadened to include the learner’s personal growth, developing a sense of empathy and curiosity towards the world’s cultures and prompting meaning-making, the process of understanding self, life events and social relationships, in cultural interaction among foreign language speakers (Liddicoat, 2008). The ICC dimensions, or savoirs as called in Byram’s proposed model, include knowledge, attitudes and skills (Byram, Gribkova & Starkey, 2002; Coperías-Aguilar, 2010 & Piatkowska, 2015).

Source: (Müller-Hartmann & Schocker-von Ditfurth, 2007)

**Challenges and attitudes towards ICC and learning the English language**

As much as it theoretically appealed to many, ICC is still confusing for EFL teachers to integrate practically in their language learning environments and fit assessment methods that help learners develop their ICC (Wilkinson, 2011; Xiaole, 2016). Despite its appealing theoretical claims about developing EFL learners’ cultural competence when interacting with other English language speakers, the criticism Byram’s ICC model has received has not been built on classroom practice or research-based evidence. Thus, if developing critical intercultural awareness is a learning objective that practitioners should aim for, they need a clear vision of the type of ICC activities their learners can practice in class.

Since international EFL textbooks are widely used in EFL curriculums around the world, researchers investigated how cultural knowledge is presented and developed in their pedagogy design (Ilieva, 2000; Ndura, 2004; Nazari, 2007; Shin, Eslami & Chen, 2011; Dehbozorgi, Amalsaleh & Kafipour, 2017). Emerging findings have advised on the need for additional ICC materials to develop learners’ ICC in their English language learning. However, empirical research on ICC has not widely introduced EFL practitioners to ICC materials whose design can effectively support ICC
development. This shortage of research has limited the exposure to the role of ICC in promoting learners’ intercultural knowledge, attitudes and skills. Thus, the ICC process is still in need of further investigation at work, and learners’ interaction with it needs significant observation.

Research has also reported on learning challenges that impact learners’ attitudes towards learning English. It has been found that conventional teaching methodologies, in addition to learning assessment methodologies, and national educational systems play a key role in demotivating learners to improve their language skills (Alkhawaldeh, 2010). Therefore, findings have mostly advised on adopting alternative teaching practices that promote language learning motivation and prioritizing the need to revise national EFL teacher professional development programs (Khuwaileh, 2000; Al-Saleem, 2011; Alaraj, 2016).

Why to incorporate ICC in Jordan?

As other regions around the world, adapting ICC in the English learning environment in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan is considered an original approach to learning the language. With a textbook-based approach to English learning, teachers give special attention to grammar knowledge. Skills and competences as ICC, on the other hand, have not gotten acknowledged as primary for classroom practice (Alhabahba, Pandian & Mahfoodh, 2016). As a result, Jordanian learners miss opportunities for further English language practice, and advancing their intercultural awareness of the Jordanian and other English-speaking cultures. The current language learning approach in the nation emphasizes memorization and therefore, learners do not seem to develop comprehension and analytical skills as expected throughout their school years (Oxford, 1996).

On another note, Jordan is in a region surrounded by socio-cultural and political complications. Since 2010, the country has suffered from socio-economic fallout due to the Syrian refugee crisis, in addition to the social media platforms that have been promoting stereotypes and cultural assumptions about Arabs Muslims and people of other cultures. Such factors have created negative attitudes towards tolerating other cultural beliefs and social values. Therefore, it is considered a priority for EFL learning in Jordan to provide learners with opportunities to address cultural sensitivities they experience openly. The impact of the ICC approach on motivating EFL learners in Jordan to redefine what they know about cultural diversity in their country and the target culture is worth investigating.

What is highlighted above suggests that EFL pedagogies need innovative approaches to incorporating English learning with its culture(s) to equip learners with the linguistic and cultural competences they need for effective English language communication. Byram’s ICC model seems to catch attention in its approach to developing knowledge, critical skills and positive attitudes when interacting with other EFL speakers. Moreover, its integration of cultural and communicative competence expects EFL learners to engage positively in different communicative
situations. Therefore, this ICC approach can be explored as an innovative approach to promote English learning.

**Study**

With motivation to explore the impact of ICC on Jordanian learners’ motivation to learn English and its impact on their ICC development, a case study was carried out with a sample of high school students in a private school in the country. The study was conducted as a separate activity from the school English class, with a total of 3 weeks of activity; with an average of 2.5 hours for each session on Thursdays after school or Saturday mornings during the second semester of the 2017-2018 school year. The intercultural materials corresponded to Module 7 of the school’s 9th grade McMillan English textbook The English World 9 series, whose main topic is travelogues.

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<th>Session Title</th>
<th>Lesson Components</th>
<th>Activity Description</th>
<th>ICC Factors Integrated</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Week 1 Entry Point for Cultures in the UK and Jordan</strong></td>
<td>KHW chart on Jordan and the UK. Learn more about the UK and Jordan Portfolio Entry (in-session)</td>
<td>The participants brainstorm what they know about both countries, how they know it and what they wish to know. They watch two videos to acquire knowledge about both countries, and engage in discussion guided by questions. They also reflect on what they learned and demonstrate it by answering 2 questions in a form of a short essay.</td>
<td><strong>Knowledge</strong>: focusing mainly on factual knowledge more than on knowledge of interaction; <strong>skills</strong> of relating and interpreting; <strong>attitudes</strong> of openness and curiosity</td>
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<td><strong>Week 2.1 Learning About Culture and Diversity Through Literature</strong></td>
<td>See, Look, Wonder (Visible Thinking Routines, n.d.). Reading sections from “The Ostrich” by Leila Aboulela (Aboulela, 2005).</td>
<td>The participants make careful observations and thoughtful interpretations of several visuals related to the theme of the story. They read sections, conduct critical analysis analyze in groups and relate them to their own cultural experiences.</td>
<td><strong>Knowledge</strong>: focusing on self and other; <strong>skills</strong>, interpreting and relating; critical cultural awareness focusing on evaluating practices in both cultures; <strong>attitudes</strong> of curiosity and openness.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Week 2.2 Communities</strong></td>
<td>A discussion on communities Multicultural Britain</td>
<td>The participants are introduced to the concept of community and social groups</td>
<td><strong>Knowledge</strong>, focusing on multiculturality and how social groups function; <strong>skills</strong>,</td>
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Research Questions

The research questions explored in this study are:

- What impact does the ICC materials have on the participants’ motivation towards their EFL learning?
- Which dimensions in Byram’s ICC model do the designed materials develop?

Participants

All fourteen participants are 9th grade female students attending the national curriculum program at the case study school in Amman, Jordan. The group has students from all 9th grade sections, with mixed abilities of English proficiency.

The ICC materials

The ICC materials, which are the core of this research, were designed as an attempt to investigate the ICC approach as a motivational tool for EFL learning and the impact of the supplementary intercultural materials in developing learners’ ICC. In my ICC content design, I relied on Byram’s ICC model savoirs and some of the suggested ICC materials produced by theorists and practitioners to be incorporated in the EFL classroom. The materials are designed to introduce learners to cultural information about the countries of the UK, and address a few ICC principles to track the ICC impact on learners’ motivation and ICC development. The information introduced mainly address aspects of social life and sociocultural challenges youth might face in their

| and Cultural Diversity | Portfolio Entry (in-session) | to discuss how values and beliefs impact interaction and commonality. They watch a video through which they reflect on multiculturality in the UK and Jordan, and relate it to the story in the previous session. Divided to 3 small groups, the participants demonstrate their learning in a podcast. | interpreting and relating, demonstrated primarily in producing the podcast; critical cultural awareness focusing on reflecting on own values and beliefs and evaluating cultural practices in both cultures; attitudes of curiosity and openness and focusing on readiness to negotiate values and beliefs. |
| Week 3 Dealing with Cultural Assumptions with Positivity | The danger of a single story (TED Talk, 2009) A Historical Account of Stereotypes on the Irish immigration in the United States. Portfolio Document (in-session) | The participants watch a 5-minute extraction of the TED Talk and discuss the meaning of a single story. They learn about other nations stereotyped in history and relate that to today’s reality. They share their learning either individually in a short essay or small groups via a presentation. | Knowledge, focusing on how people see themselves and others and products of that; auto-stereotypes and hetero-stereotypes; skills, interpreting and relating; attitudes of openness and readiness to see that one’s own beliefs are not the only correct ones. |
everyday life. The participants are to develop a sense of knowledge; factual and on functionality of intercultural interaction, interpretation of cultural texts and videos of their own culture and the target culture and relating them to one another hence developing a sense of mediation. Through interpreting and relating and critical evaluation of cultural aspects in both cultures, the participants get to break through to a more intercultural space where they negotiate and challenge socio-cultural concepts they take for granted.

Methods of Data Collection and Analysis

Due to the nature of the research questions in this study, three qualitative methods for collecting data were used to provide detailed observation of the proposed approach at work: pre- and post-study focus groups, portfolios entries, and class performance observation notes. The pre-session focus group aimed to address the participants’ motivations and challenges in their current EFL learning process and environment and their views on intercultural interaction, its frequency in their lives and their understanding of culture in general. The post-study focus group, on the other hand, was to evaluate the intervention and investigate its impact on the participants’ learning and development of their intercultural awareness as well. The other method used was the portfolio entries. After each session, the participants worked on writing or recording responses on a given task as a closing activity. Those were collected and added to each participant’s portfolio before leaving the classroom. The use of portfolios was adopted as a learning assessment tool for ICC because it is perceived as an effective approach once designed with a critical aspect to tracking the status of the participants’ acquisition of intercultural awareness through operating knowledge, skills and attitudes during the period of the sessions, individually and in small groups (Byram et al., 2002, Aguilar, 2010, Liddicoat & Scarino, 2010). Since the ICC materials rely on class discussions and small group work, collected notes and quotes from class observations were incorporated to track and compare between the participants’ performance and level of engagement in class and their portfolio entries.

Summary of Research Findings

1. The impact of the ICC materials on the participants’ motivation in EFL learning

The study reveals that the task-based facilitated pedagogy in implementing the ICC materials has a positive impact on the participants’ self-esteem as EFL learners. As much as the cultural content of these materials are important, it appears that what seems more motivating to them is the interactive and autonomous approaches that facilitated this content. Thus, facilitating the group tasks and the class activities has a similar, if not a bigger, impact on developing speaking skills and acquiring cultural knowledge about the target culture. These results are similar to the comments made by Byram and Corbett (in Coperías-Aguilar, 2008) when they noted that
designing for ICC activities should not be far from the interactive language learning that many EFL practitioners are familiar with nowadays. However, certain components in the ICC materials design are found to be more influential than others in depicting the participants’ motivation and confidence in expressing themselves openly and reflecting on their intercultural learning. The use of visuals and the role play podcast helps them develop their use of descriptive and explanatory language to describe implied meanings of cultural practices and negotiate different them individually and in groups.

Moreover, facilitating conversations is found to be core in motivating the participants to engage more critically and deeply with the topics assigned. With tactics such as probing and interpreting, the participants are able to develop their skills in relating cultural practices to personal experiences. The various intercultural issues they engaged with motivated them to be more self-expressive and mediate between different perspectives confidently. Similarly, the materials design plays a key role in the participants’ ability to reflect on their ICC learning. When comparing between the level of motivation demonstrated in class and the portfolio entries, it is found that the participants’ performance in tasks that provide detailed guidelines and accurate wording in task description, reflects their intercultural learning and motivation more evidently. This is also related to the nature of the small group portfolio tasks that allow the participants to collaborate and support each other’s ICC learning. When turning to individual work, the participants’ writing abilities slightly developed throughout the study. Most of their writings show the use of new vocabulary acquired in different sessions, less grammatical errors and development is using strategies such as elaboration and supporting claims with reasons and examples. However, the participants are still challenged by the level of intercultural topics and their ability to reflect on their learning in writing hence demonstrating a lower level of motivation when compared to class dialogues and speaking activities.

2. ICC dimensions in Byram’s model developed through the designed materials

The participants developed aspects of knowledge, intercultural skills, and attitudes of openness and curiosity in their ICC. They can recognize different aspects that define cultures such as social groups, social beliefs and values, in addition to history, geography and customs. Moreover, learning about the UK has helped them reflect on Jordan and their cultural practices they take for granted more critically. However, knowledge about the target culture and skills of interpreting and relating are the two savoirs that the ICC materials seem to develop the most. This is evident in the participants’ acquisition of new knowledge about the target culture, and their application of analytical tools to make cultural comparisons, and reflect on local issues such as arranged marriages, and global issues such as immigration and Islamophobia. The discussions and activity work conducted in class has positively developed the participants’ willingness to discuss controversial and sensitive cultural issues and personal experiences in novel ways. This is also driven by their attitude of curiosity to learn more about the target culture, and the different practices of cultural beliefs in the target culture or their own communities. The utilization of
cultural information and perspectives developed more evidently from week to week, and most participants searched for materials beyond the ones studied in class.

Although there is little evidence on the participants’ ability to evaluate their own values and cultural beliefs with ones of the target culture with an attitude of openness, the shortening of the ICC materials and the limited scope of interaction with other EFL speakers limits their readiness to mediate between cultural differences. This is evident in addressing the need to facilitate learning on sensitive issues such as religious diversity and stereotyping the Other to challenge the norms about one’s culture. Therefore, an immersive intercultural experience is needed for learners to be more capable of reflecting on their own culture as critically as they are expected to do on other cultures. Real-time interaction with speakers from the target culture is found to be core in the ICC materials to exchange stereotypes and operate the participants’ knowledge and skills they acquired throughout the intervention.

Final Recommendations
1. The approach to developing ICC materials

With an ICC approach to teaching foreign languages, learners are not only expected to exchange facts about their own culture and the target language culture(s) they are studying, but also to display social identities for analysis and evaluate their perception of their own realities and other people’s alike. Therefore, developing those exploratory skills for learners prioritize the need for adopting a multidisciplinary approach to designing ICC materials. Instead of limiting it to EFL teachers, this can be an opportunity for teachers of other subjects such as social sciences and religious studies to collaborate on planning activities. As highlighted in the research findings, the capacity of interacting with sensitive cultural topics also require raising learners’ knowledge about their own values and communal diversity. Since covering such topics is not limited to the scope of language learning design, the contribution of the other subject teachers is essential and valuable for exposing learners to different intercultural topics that are valid for building their intercultural competence.

Moreover, the integration of more than one culture in the materials is core to keeping learners’ interest and active engagement with their intercultural learning. For that, practitioners are advised to consider involving more than one English language culture to expose their learners to as many EFL speaking communities as possible. However, this is not limited to native speaking English cultures. Since learners are mostly to communicate with non-native speakers of English in their home country or abroad, ICC material designers should take this variability into consideration. This can be reflected by bringing visuals or video dialogues that introduce practices of ethnic groups or different accents to the classroom, so learners can compare between them and identify linguacultural contexts- how language is used in different cultures- in future communicative situations.
Since the study does not include group writing assignments as it does for speaking, there are two emerging areas for further research. The first is related to whether incorporating group writing tasks has a similar impact of the group speaking tasks on motivating learners to engage and reflect on the ICC materials. The second is to evaluate the opposite; which is whether implementing the same ICC materials pedagogy in individual assignments would yield similar learning engagement and motivation towards intercultural learning progress. Yet, teachers can adjust their syllabus to have students practice intercultural writing. Such tasks can be assigned as prompting journal questions or small group writing projects as in online blogs or monthly reports on the issue or topic investigated. Despite the challenges students will face with this type of writing, they are likely to develop intercultural reflection and research skills that will help them practice their writing skills in different forms.

Furthermore, it was previously highlighted that the scope of ICC development requires the development of EFL learners’ skills of discovery and interaction in real-time communication with other speakers. Teachers, in collaboration with their school administrations, can reach out to other schools or organizations in other countries to build annual partnerships through which students could work on collaborative intercultural projects. Those virtual exchange programs can deepen the interaction between learners and provide Jordanian students with the opportunity to develop English language skills. Yet, the ICC experience should not be limited to the exchange itself. As data in the different cases show, EFL learners need to develop a set of intercultural knowledge and skills to be ready to operate in intercultural exchange.

2. Teaching practices

As noted in the study findings, teaching methodologies and classroom practices are core to facilitating the ICC materials, and assessing learners’ ICC development efficiently. Thus, a good starting point for EFL teachers to develop an intercultural approach to their teaching routine is to recognize the different cultural backgrounds his/her learners bring to the classroom. This helps to allocate cultural opportunities to invest in their cultural experiences throughout the academic year. Teachers, then, should synthesize their students’ learning development by adjusting the ICC materials to support their intercultural skills and depict their personal interests in their learning. More importantly, if EFL teachers aim for autonomous intercultural learning, they need to give up on their conventional role as the main source for knowledge. On the contrary, teachers should develop facilitation skills that help them prioritize the development of their students’ new skills and attitudes towards cultures rather than the factual knowledge they will be testing students on later. Thus, the activity design and assessment methods need to align with this facilitating role. Paper testing or oral presentations, for example, are not considered appropriate tools for such a goal. On the other hand, the portfolio approach in assessing the development of learners’ knowledge, skills and attitudes has proven its efficiency to track individual learners’ performance in interactive activities such as role plays and podcasts.
Conclusion

In a globalized world, the development of ICC seems to be a priority that many EFL practitioners and learning designers agree on. Those who are interested in adopting ICC in their EFL education should think beyond a textbook-based syllabus. To help EFL practitioners have a practical sense of ICC looks like in the English class, this dissertation has built on previous ICC research findings in adapting innovative EFL learning approaches. Reporting on ICC principles cannot be limited to one empirical study or a cultural context. Both national and international efforts are still needed to advise on its best practices. If ICC is to become an innovative approach to learning foreign languages, it should include professional investment in foreign language practitioners whose ability to facilitate ICC development is core. Thus, school administrations should invest in their teacher professional development programs and revise educational goals in their comprehensive school curriculum. With a holistic approach in developing ICC materials, EFL learners are guaranteed a variety of intercultural experiences that will empower them to manage their interaction with speakers in different EFL communities with confidence.

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