AWARENESS AND MOTIVATION IN CROSS-CULTURAL LANGUAGE TEACHING

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Abstract:
The focus in language education in the twenty-first century does no longer fall on grammar, memorization and learning from rote, but rather on using language alongside with cultural knowledge as a means to communicate and connect to other people all over the world. Our learners are going to become part of today's intercultural communication network and they will need to use both their language and cultural skills for real life communication. Therefore, teachers themselves should be ready to assume the responsibility of teaching their learners how to become culturally competent. To do this properly and successfully, practitioners need to build and develop their own awareness of and motivation for an intercultural approach.

The current paper will present and analyze some recent research findings on higher education practitioners' motivation to adopt a cross-cultural approach in their classrooms.

Keywords:
Teaching, awareness, motivation, cross-cultural, intercultural.

Introduction

In the current globalized world, one can hardly question the need for teachers to be culturally responsive and competent, as schools, classrooms and education as a whole are becoming more and more linguistically and culturally diverse. As a result, linguistic mastery of the foreign language alone does no longer respond to the communication needs that the modern world has created. Therefore, teachers are expected to teach their learners how to become not only linguistically but also culturally competent. So, it would be just natural to ask ourselves, as conscientious practitioners, whether we are prepared or not to cope with this new challenge posed to teaching a foreign language.

Overall, the current paper intends to approach a few conceptual and practically-related issues in response to today's more and more often raised question about the '*intercultural*'[1] teacher in the field of foreign language education. First, the interrogation on the reasons why practitioners need to become '*intercultural*' in their classrooms is answered through an overview of some of the

[1] Although senses may be sometimes different, in this paper the terms 'intercultural' and 'cross-cultural' will mean 'involving different cultural backgrounds and communicating across cultures' and therefore, will be used interchangeably.

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pressures, salient needs and trends underpinning the globalized world around us. Next, the paper will focus on the issue of the practitioner's expected awareness and motivation, which in the author's view, are seen to be the basic prerequisites of an '*intercultural*' teacher.

The last part of this paper will deal with a few considerations based on some recent research findings regarding higher education practitioners' awareness of and motivation for adopting a cross-cultural approach in the teaching of English as a foreign language.

The need to be 'cross-cultural' in teaching

An immediate argument pleading for the growing need of cross-culturality in teaching would be that, today, the rapidly occurring changes in the social, political and cultural setting of the world have a strong impact on people's life. The common denominators of our day-to-day reality refer to globalized economies and markets, human mobility, development of information and communication technologies, international exchanges, cultural diversity and the internationalisation of educational programmes. The implications of all these global developments are obvious and short-termed: intercultural interaction situations are bound to become the common norm in every segment of society, from professions and education to leisure activities.

Education holds a primary central role to the development of society. The '*school*' is perhaps the first social institution that comes under the well-documented pressure to provide training for the individual's capability to interact effectively with people from culturally diverse backgrounds. It is education that is being called upon to promote social cohesion, dialogue and peaceful coexistence within the 'global village' the current world has turned into. However, the reform of the school system cannot be carried out without the unconditioned involvement of the teaching staff members as one of the two leading 'actors'[2], and more importantly, as agents of social change. Teachers are the ones who transmit information but, at the same time, they are the ones who create and shape the learners' empowering competencies, attitudes and values for life. They are the ones who offer a pristine social and moral model to the people they educate.

It is widely accepted that teachers as individuals construct their own 'theory' about teaching/learning based on ideas coming from various sources, such as personal beliefs and value system, own experience as learners, received training or education as well as from actual classroom practice and experience. Therefore, if teachers are to become 'cross-cultural', it is obvious that all these areas will be addressed and impacted to a certain extent.

[2] Teachers and learners are often referred to as 'actors' in the educational process.

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Perhaps, the very first principle of an intercultural approach to teaching is that teachers themselves should become learners in the new cultural context. Teaching cross-culturally will require that practitioners should learn to think outside their cultural and contextual expectations and look for solutions beyond their initial training, experience, and expertise. To do this and to be good learners, teachers will certainly need awareness and motivation.

1. Theoretical considerations

Given all the considerations made so far, a first thing which needs to be reassessed is the teachers' understanding of the concept of 'culture' and the role it plays within today's intercultural setting.

Culture is undoubtedly a very complex term. It has been defined either as '*a learned set of shared interpretations about beliefs, values, and norms, which affect the behaviours of a relatively large group of people.*' (Lustig and Koester, 2003), or explained as a medium that touches and alters all aspects of human life, including personality, the way people express themselves, how they display emotion, the way they think, how they move, and how problems are solved (Samovar and Porter, 1991). Obviously, culture goes beyond the immediately visible, tangible aspects, such as food or clothing; that is why it was rightfully compared to an iceberg of which only the top can be seen while the massive part of it remains invisible below the surface of the water. There are researchers who have likened culture to an onion with its many layers (Hofstede, 1991). Both these metaphors significantly point to the complexity of culture, and indirectly to the challenges that are in store for the intercultural practitioner. We feel that one of the greatest challenges ahead of FL (foreign language) teachers is to build an acceptance-conducive understanding of '*otherness*'[3] within the larger framework of foreign language teaching/learning, i.e. in terms of understanding that there may different perspectives, values, and behaviours, others than their own. Certainly, this is no easy task; practitioners will certainly need the driving forces of *awareness*, *motivation* and *competence* to be able to cope with the emerging issues regarding the recognition of cultural diversity, the reasons why they should get involved and finally, of how they are going to deal with it. Therefore, FL teachers will have to rise to a new level of interpersonal ability, personal and professional motivation as well as teaching competence in order to be able to develop the desire, will and empowerment to openly approach 'the cross-cultural' element in their classrooms.

To teachers, the prospective choice of adopting an intercultural approach in their classes raises a twofold challenge. On the one hand, they will have to deal with the culture of their students from a new perspective. Beyond any scientific

[3] *Otherness* is used here to refer to both other cultures, target language culture and teacher's/students' own culture.

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and pedagogic competencies, teachers will have to grow aware of the fact that they model interhuman and intracultural relationships. Each learner in the class is the bearer of a different individual 'culture' in terms of different family and social backgrounds, different learning experiences, etc., even though he/she speaks the same language and shares the same national culture. There is research which endorses the idea that there is no principled difference between *intracultural* communication and *intercultural* communication. Thus, as Ma points out, speaking the same language gives no guarantee that communication is free of misunderstanding or conflicts of cultural origin (2004, p.107). On the other hand, teachers will have to deal with the target language culture which is not their native culture. Thus, before understanding the two sets of culturally diverse values, beliefs and behaviours ahead of them, the precondition of teachers' becoming 'intercultural' is to reflect on and reassess their own values and beliefs. All teachers in the profession nowadays should try to reach a deeper understanding of their own personal motivation for choosing the profession; they should think about their own personal competences, and revisit their own value and belief systems. These aspects, which contribute to 'good teaching' practice, are an essential step towards developing competencies that lie far beyond the knowledge of subjects.

The critical problem is that the teachers' attitudes towards an intercultural dialogue cannot be actually taught – they do not belong to a 'didactic package'. We cannot "copy and paste" them to a subject in the curriculum for teacher training. They form part of a process which the individual teacher must experience when teaching under the pressures exerted by the modern globalized and culturally-diverse societies. The only way of completing this process seems to follow the '*Do it!*' advice given by the TICKLE research team.[4]

Therefore, we dare to state that developing the right amount of intercultural competence takes a lot of motivation to flexibly open and expand one's own cultural mindset, to accept that there are other ways of being, acting or communicating. According to the field literature, one significant prerequisite of intercultural communication competence (ICC) is that teachers should, first of all, develop an appreciation of diversity. They must learn to view difference as the "norm" in society. This entails developing respect for differences, and the willingness to teach from this perspective. Thus, teachers will realize that their views of the world are not the only possible and acceptable ones. But most importantly of all, intercultural competence lies in the ability and wish to communicate with people who are different from you, learners included. This is

[4] The TICKLE project is a member of the Learning Teacher Network - a European network of organisations in the field of Teacher Education, resulting from a former Comenius network. (Teachers Intercultural Competences as Keystones for Learning in Europe 2007-2009 eacea.ec.europa.eu/llp/projects/public.../com_mp_134317_tickle.pdf).

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what 'cross-culturality' should mean for teachers. Andreotti (2010, p. 10) describes this aspect of teachers' intercultural competence by stating that

"*Teachers should raise their awareness and capacity to analyse and see the world from different perspectives, learning to listen and to negotiate in diverse and complex environments, and connecting to the worlds of their students in order to challenge and expand their boundaries*".

In the field literature, the most popular components attributed to intercultural competence are *knowledge, attitudes, behaviours* and *skills*. If knowledge covers the cognitive dimension of the individual, e.g. knowledge of self, of the others, information about the people and culture, etc., attitudes include the emotions and intentions of communication such as empathy and a tolerance for ambiguity. Researchers like Lustig and Koester (1999) or Wiseman (2002) state that attitudes are equal to motivation. Thus, motivation is regarded as "*the set of feelings, intentions, needs and drives associated with the anticipation of actual engagement in intercultural communication"* (R.L. Wiseman, 2002, p. 211). This is in agreement with many researchers' view who place a major focus on the characteristics internal to the individual such as *motivation* and *perception* (Martin and Nakayama, 2004, Wiseman, 2002). Other authors like Hammer, Gudykunst and Wiseman (1978) go even further and suggest that intercultural communication motivation is one of the major criteria of intercultural communication competence. Thus, motivation has always been related to and, therefore, considered a central factor of ICC in communicative interactions (Spitzberg, 2000; Bolten, 2001; Wiseman, 2002).

Furthermore, other authors in the field of intercultural studies, such as Gudykunst (1993) or Wiseman (2002) state that, in order to be perceived as a contextually competent communicator in intercultural interactions, one needs to attain *knowledge*, *motivation*, and *skills* that have to be performed consciously and consistently.

2. Experimental

In this part of the paper we are going to present part of a research study on the technical higher education teachers' motivation, willingness and readiness for adopting an intercultural approach in their current practice. The research, carried out in 2009-2010, was based on a questionnaire of 24 items administered to 102 participants[5] sampled from three main technical universities in Romania, i.e. 'Politehnica' Bucuresti, 'Gh. Asachi' Technical University of Iasi and The Technical University of Cluj-Napoca.).

[5] The target group was formed of teachers of English who teach technical English (75%), business Engish (16%), Genera English (9%). The respondents' age was between 25 and 67 years, with an average of 43 years. Most of the teachers were female (81 people, i.e. 79%).

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The research was intended to test the validity of the proposition according to which the introduction of a deliberate cultural element into FL teaching could enhance the teachers' motivation and provide incentives for their further professional development. Overall, the major purpose of the study was to identify the FL teachers' attitudes in terms of knowledge, perceptions, expectations and behaviour in relation to a prospectively assumed cross-cultural approach.

We examined several teacher's variables of which 2 items have been selected for discussion in this paper. These are the way in which the research subjects understand the concept of 'culture' and their immediate motivation for the introduction of a cross-cultural approach in their teaching.

3. Results and discussions

The research question '*What does culture mean to you?'* is an open-ended item and the subjects' answers were encoded in 6 main categories as shown in Figure 1 below.

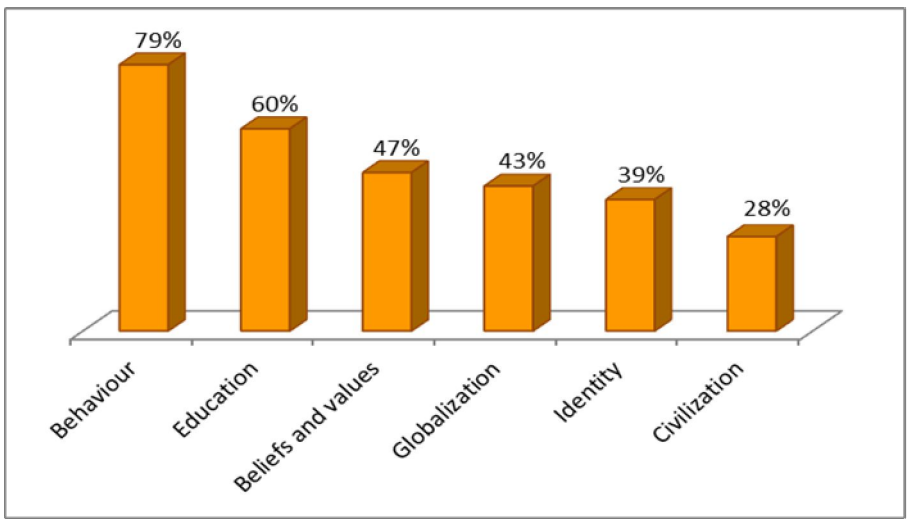


Fig.1 *Meanings given to 'culture'(%)*

The view on 'culture' shapes the actual approach to cross-cultural teaching, e.g. choice of aspects to deal with, but more importantly than that, influences the way in which the teacher educates, behaves or communicates in class, i.e. the 'cultural' model provided by the educator.

The major association of 'culture' with 'behaviour' could be interpreted as the teachers' understanding of culture as a process of social learning. Culture is not inborn but it is acquired through '*enculturation*' in the process of socialization. Therefore, it can be inferred that teachers believe that cultural elements can be

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learned, which obviously means they can be taught. The idea that teaching 'culture' is realizable can foster confidence in achieving the proposed educational goals and the motivation for doing it. Such a presumption is endorsed by the teachers' next choice of 'education' as an equivalent of 'culture'. Both items presuppose the tacit recognition of the formative dimension of cross-cultural teaching: behaviours offer models and education models behaviours. The lowest percentage (28%) shows that most of the respondents do not overlap 'civilization' with 'culture' and make a welcome distinction between the material development of a society, i.e. the visible part of the iceberg, and its system of values and symbols, i.e. the hidden part.

In conclusion, the findings reveal the fact that, far from having the most perfect understanding of the concept of 'culture', the subjects of the research mostly associate the concept of culture with a process of formation and cultivation[6], an understanding which can provide the prerequisite to developing the right motivation for teaching cross-culturally.

As for the main reasons why teachers would actually decide to adopt an intercultural approach in their teaching, more than half of the subjects opted for its relevance to professional life (Fig.2). This result shows that the majority of teachers are aware of the importance of a cross-cultural dimension in teaching English for practical reasons.

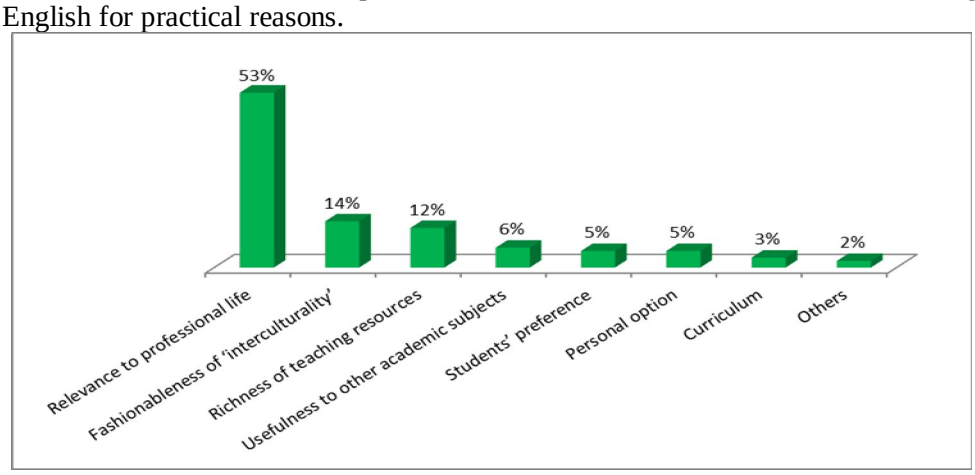


Fig.2 *Motivation for adopting an intercultural approach (%)*

Furthermore, 'professional life' could be interpreted as both the students' (i.e. centering on the learners' needs) and their own professional life (i.e. teachers' professional development). In either significance, the research finding shows a marked awareness of the important role an intercultural approach in teaching could play for both teachers and learners.

[6] Cultivation is understood as the process of development through education and implies social refinement.

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Next, asking respondents to indicate the most motivating factor[7] that would give them the full confidence to tackle an intercultural approach in their classes, we used the ranking technique[8] and obtained the 'Top 3-possible motivating factors'. Then, we associated the first three 'motivation' options (figure 2) with Top3 and tried to determine the teachers' major motivation for adopting an intercultural approach (Table 1 below).

Motivation for an intercultural approach	**Top 3- possibile motivating factors**		
	Rank 1	**Rank 2**	**Rank 3**
Relevance to professional life	Knowledge of intercultural theory	Better trained students	A cross-cultural syllabus
Fashionableness of the idea of 'interculturality'	Knowledge of intercultural theory	Better trained students	A cross-cultural syllabus
Richness of teaching resources	Knowledge of intercultural theory	Better trained students	Wish to learn more about 'cultural' matters

Table 1 – Hierarchy of top 3 ranks

The results show a marked homogeneity of motivating factors for all the three subgroups. '*Knowledge of intercultural theory'* expresses the cognitive 'need' which ensures a strong form of long-term motivation. As Chisholm (1994) points out, a teacher's cultural competency cannot start in an informational vacuum and the theoretical knowledge on the subject can support the experience and the subsequent reflection on practice.

The subjects' perceptions and expectations regarding the prospective '*benefits*' brought by integrating a cross-cultural approach in their everyday practice are surfaced by another question with multiple answers[9]. The 8 variants offered for choice were intended to make up a balanced combination of intrinsic[10] and extrinsic[11] motivations (Figure 3).

[7] Knowledge of intercultural theory, better-trained students, a cross-cultural syllabus, more intercultural teaching practice, wish to learn more about 'cultural' matters, standardization of FL curriculum, professional community interested in cross-cultural teaching.
[8] Of the 7 items, the subjects chose 3, and ranked them from 1 to 3, 1 being the most important.
[9] Respondents were allowed to choose 3 items.
[10] Scientific fame, personal development, better results for students and teaching prestige.
[11] Promotion opportunities, higher competitiveness, brilliant career and better pay.

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The results show the predominance of the respondents' intrinsic motivation over the extrinsic one in relation to the adoption of an intercultural approach in teaching. The main option made for '*professional development'* highlights the teachers' motivation for growth and achievement, the need for self-improvement and the drive for competency, which is truly the basis of internal motivation. The next choice of '*better results for students'* expresses a feeling of anticipated accomplishment and achievement, that is also intrinsic in nature.

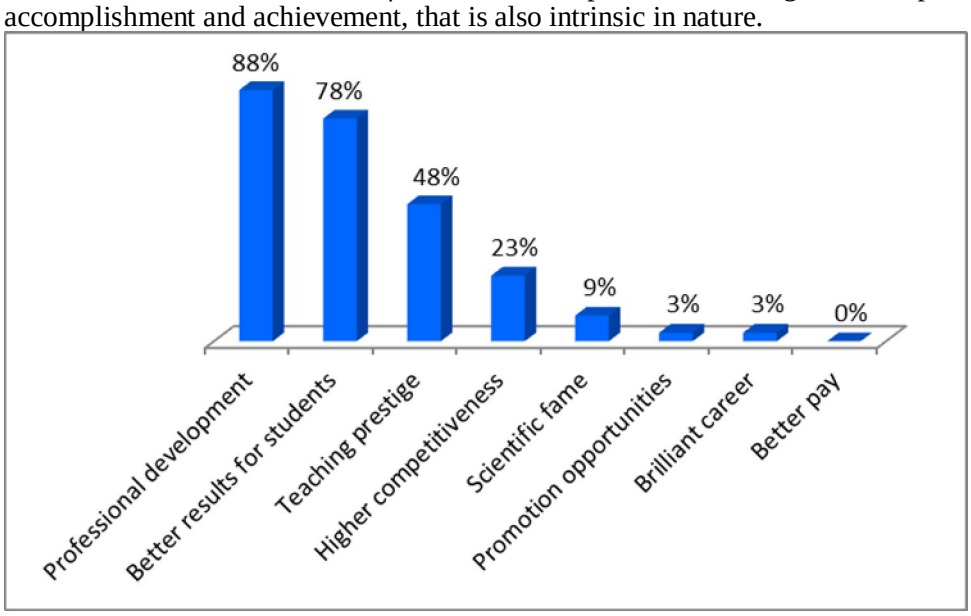


Fig.3 *– Benefits brought by an intercultural approach in teaching (% calculated from N=102 subjects*[12]

The item '*teaching prestige'* could be interpreted either as the recognition given by the teaching community, or as the self-esteem granted by individuals to themselves within a positive identity. Regardless of its meaning, this choice suggests a favourable framework for fostering the teachers' motivation when and if they embark on the path of cross-cultural teaching.

To sum up, the research findings demonstrate that the technical higher education teachers of English, who were the subject of the research, admit and confess to the existence of various forms of motivation for the adoption of a cross-cultural approach to teaching. The answers reveal that the teachers can find the motivational stimuli to support and activate their energy and endeavours for tackling with the challenges of foreign language education in a culturally-diverse world.

[12] *percentages are over 100% because this is a multiple-answer question.*

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Conclusions

The identification of the latent motivations regarding the introduction of a cross-cultural approach is a first step in stimulating teachers to deal with it. The use of an intercultural dimension in teaching is a valuable way of updating and tuning the educational process to the latest demands of the current world. It is also a path for professional growth and increased competency in the field of teaching.

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