

Original Research

Enhancing the development of intercultural communicative competence in business and study environments

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In the world of international education and training, as well as international business, foreigners are increasingly coming to work, study and seek professional training at British universities and in company branches and affiliates around the world. Students and employees don't always find it easy to understand and communicate with their managers, teachers and lecturers, as many make little or no allowance for the language and cultural background of those they are managing, teaching and training. This paper explores the development of intercultural communicative competence in English language and cultural teacher training and management and asks how establishing effective and appropriate behaviour within intercultural communication promotes effective communication in teacher training programmes and in management training. It explores how the concept of intercultural sensitivity is integrated into intercultural communicative competence in training programmes and how it could facilitate the development of overall sensitivity. In doing so it identifies some of the enabling and hindering features that shape the development of intercultural communicative (or communication) competences in English Language and culture in training courses in management or university.

KEYWORDS: culture, communication, language learning, teacher training, cultural awareness, sensitivity



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1. INTRODUCTION

Bennett et al. (2003) wrote, *'The person who learns a language without learning the culture risks becoming a fluent fool and yet the pedagogy for infusing culture into the language curriculum remains elusive and we continue to debate the particulars of this complex learning and teaching*

task' (Bennett et al., 2003, p. 237). This research endeavours to explore how and to what extent current language and management training programmes can incorporate intercultural communicative competences (ICC), in addition to linguistic and communicative competence, and subsequently be seen as interculturally and linguistically com-

petent. Many foreign students and managers criticise native speaker teachers and trainers for the speed and lack of clarity in their delivery as well as lacking sensitivity to student and employee cultures.

For the native speaker trainer, lecturer and teacher trainer the need is to develop intercultural communicative competence; behavioural skills and how to use intercultural sensitivity in English language and management training classes.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

In recent years, questions regarding intercultural communicative competence have emerged as a result of a globalised and multicultural world. Byram (1997) claims that *'teaching for linguistic competence cannot be separated from teaching for intercultural communicative competence'* (Byram, 1997, p. 22). Meanwhile, the Council of Europe Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) for languages promotes 'interculturality' as a fundamental aspect of effective communication in education (CEFR, 2018, p. 25). Intercultural communicative competence is comprised of three dimensions; intercultural awareness (cognitive aspect), intercultural sensitivity (affective aspect), and intercultural effectiveness (the behavioural aspect) (Chen & Starosta, 1996). Chen and Starosta (1996) claim that these are all related yet they have distinct concepts, where intercultural awareness represents the cognitive process a person goes through in his or her own and others' cultures, intercultural sensitivity represents both the ability of an individual to distinguish between the different behaviours, perceptions, and feelings of a culturally different counterpart and the ability to appreciate and respect them as well.

The current understanding of intercultural communicative competence has been shaped by decades of research by anthropologists, scholars, psychologists and educators, in an effort to improve the quality of communication in the classroom. Or training room. In language teaching terms they define ICC as helping *'language learners to interact with speakers of other languages on equal terms, and to be aware of their own identities and those*

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of their interlocutors' (Byram et al., 2002, p. 7). It follows that one of the key aims of teacher and management training should be to encourage intercultural awareness of and sensitivity to the situation of foreign students in the classroom, training room or lecture theatre.

ICC used to be known simply as CC, communicative competence. The concept of communicative competence (CC) can be traced back to Hymes's (1972) criticism of Chomsky's (1969) concept of linguistic competence. For Chomsky (1969), linguistics deals with the language knowledge of a speaker-hearer in an ideally homogeneous community, remaining uninfluenced by performance variables. Labelling Chomsky's assertion reductionist, Hymes (1972) distanced communicative competence from Chomsky's definition, describing linguistic competence as one of the several components of CC (Estaji & Rahimi, 2018). Hymes (1972) said competence is *'integral with attitudes, values and motivations concerning language, its features and uses, and integral with competence for, and attitudes toward, the interrelation of language with the other code of communicative conduct'* (Hymes, 1972, p. 278). Thus, competence involves the practical aspect of capability in using linguistic forms appropriately in the social context of the students, rather than concentrating only on the academic content to be taught.

Byram (1998) and Kramsch and Widdowson (1998) confirmed this by defining CC as socio-linguistics and endorsing the effort to facilitate appropriate communication between cultures in order to improve 'sociopragmatic competence'. In other words, the appropriate use of language should reflect social practice. However, when defining

‘As part of language teaching and learning and management training, socio-linguistic competence is the knowledge of the social-cultural rules of languages. This requires the trainer to understand the position of the participants and to adapt content and delivery accordingly’

communicative competence, Hymes ‘pointed out the lack of consideration for ‘appropriateness’ or the sociocultural significance of an utterance in a given context’ (Lázár et al., 2007, p. 8). Thus, Canale and Swain (1980) extended the concept of CC to include grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, and strategic competence.

Grammatical competence refers to mastering the language. This also helps individuals to reco-

gnise cultural aspects of the language and distinguish between messages conveying negativity and inference. When a person is confident and autonomous they are usually able to observe other intentions via verbal and nonverbal communication. Besides, discourse competence is the ability learners have to connect sentences and to form a meaningful whole from a series of utterances. As part of language teaching and learning and management training, socio-linguistic competence is the knowledge of the social and cultural rules of languages. This requires the trainer to understand the position of the participants and to adapt content and delivery accordingly.

The third concept of Canale and Swain’s (1980) strategic competence refers to the stage that a person is able to use strategies to compensate for imperfect knowledge of the target language and to adapt as needed to ensure comprehension. Later,

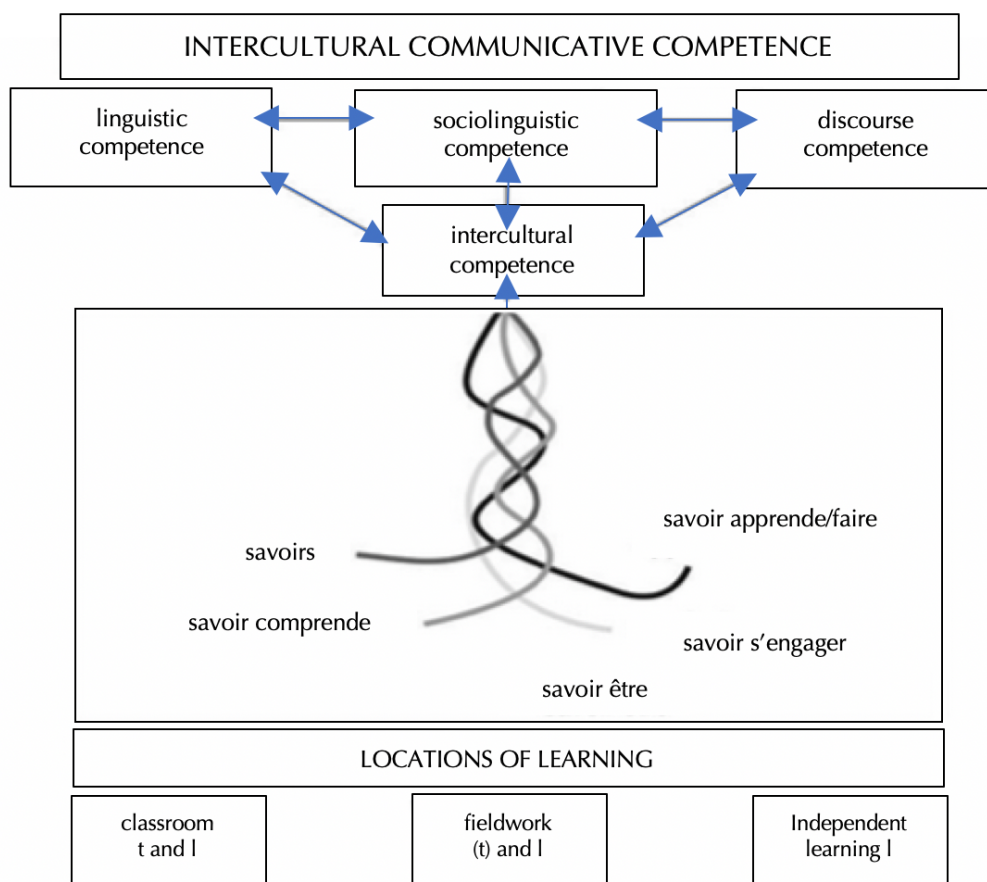


Figure 1. Byram’s model of intercommunicative competence

Van Ek (1986) added two more competences to the list – socio-cultural competence, meaning the ability to function in several cultures, and social competence, meaning familiarity with differences in social customs, and the ability to communicate successfully with others.

Byram (1997) proposed an intercultural communicative competence model encompassing '*linguistic, sociolinguistic and discourse competence which embraces the dimensions of attitudes, skills, and knowledge*' (Byram, 1997, p. 34) (Figure 1).

In his model, Byram (1997) sets up some principles and key dimensions in connection with empathy, cultural identity, cultural relativism, critical awareness, and curiosity and gaining knowledge, which are crucial when comparing cultural and language awareness in one's own and other cultures. Nevertheless, the majority of the population who speak the English language from all over the world cannot reach a stage of critical awareness partly because trainers, teachers and lecturers deliver content to diverse groups using highly sophisticated elements requiring language competence.

Zhu (2018) states that '*in his model, Byram refined the first three dimensions of competence identified in Van Ek's model and added in 'intercultural competence' which consists of sub-components*' (Zhu, 2018, p. 152) so as to fit with current teaching needs:

- linguistic competence: the ability to apply knowledge of the rules of a standard version of the language to produce and interpret spoken and written language;

- sociolinguistic competence: the ability to give to the language produced by an interlocutor – whether native or not – meanings which are taken for granted by the interlocutor or which are negotiated and made explicit by the interlocutor;

- discourse competence: the ability to use, discover and negotiate strategies for the production and interpretation of monologue or dialogue texts which follow the conversations of culture of an interlocutor or are negotiated as intercultural texts for particular purposes.

Sub-components of Byram's model include (Byram, 1997, p. 48):

- attitude *savoirs etre*: curiosity and openness, readiness to suspend disbelief about other cultures and belief about one's own;

- knowledge *savoirs*: knowledge of social groups and their products and practices in one's own and in one's interlocutor's country, and of the general process of societal and individual interaction;

- skills of interpreting and relating *savoir comprendre*: ability to interpret a document or event from another culture, to explain it and relate it to documents from one's own culture;

- skills of discovering and interaction *savoir comprendre/faire*: ability to acquire new knowledge of a culture and cultural practices and the ability to operate knowledge, attitudes and skills under the constraints of real-time communication and interaction;

- critical cultural awareness/political education *savoir s'engager*: ability to acquire new knowledge of a culture and cultural practices and the ability to operate knowledge, attitudes and skills under the constraints of real-time communication and interaction.

Fantini's (2018) intercultural communicative competence model embraced that of Byram's but incorporated four dimensions: awareness, attitudes, skills and knowledge (including language proficiency). In commenting on the model, Jackson (2012) wrote that '*grappling with another language also fosters the development of alternative communication strategies on someone else's terms, a humbling and challenging process*' (Jackson, 2012, p. 274). Students and trainees struggling with the language and speed of the trainer or lecturer face problems of understanding and may experience a degree of cultural alienation and demotivation as a result. It is the job of the trainer or lecturer to avoid that situation.

3. TRAINERS' AND LECTURER'S BEHAVIOUR

Sercu and Bandura (2005) devised a model that divides intercultural communicative competence into three main parts: knowledge, skills/behaviour, and attitude/traits. Each part receives specific explanation from the authors' perspective.

Knowledge: culture-specific and culture-general knowledge; knowledge of self and other; knowledge of interaction (individual and societal); insight regarding the ways in which culture affects language and communication.

Skills/behaviour: ability to interpret and relate; ability to discover and/or interact; ability to acquire new knowledge and to operate knowledge, attitudes and skills under the constraints of real-time communication and interaction; metacognitive strategies to direct own learning.

Attitudes/traits: attitude to relativise self and value others; positive disposition towards learning intercultural competence; general disposition characterized by a critical engagement with the foreign culture under consideration and one's own.

Sercu and Bandura's (2005) research recognises '*two completely opposing groups with regard to their conception of integrating intercultural competence teaching in the classroom, with conflicting perceptions*' (Estaji & Rahimi, 2018, p. 5). Most importantly, Sercu and Bandura (2005) showed there is no clear connection between the teachers' or trainer's beliefs in favour of integrating intercultural communicative competence and their actual teaching or training practices. This is the core of the problem facing international students in monolingual training rooms and lecture theatres.

Wiseman and Koester (1993) pointed out that there is general agreement that the two most critical dimensions of competence for behaviour are effectiveness and appropriateness. They defined effectiveness as the ability of participants (lecturers and students) to achieve their goals of delivering content and understanding the delivery and appropriateness as 'being proper and suitable' in relation to the culture they are in (Wiseman & Koester, 1993, p. 6).

Heisey and Gong (1998) argued that a key focus should be on actual behaviour and that '*the relational focus of regarding intercultural communicative competence study, or the concern with appropriateness, eventually results in effectiveness in communication and relationships*' (Heisey & Gong, 1998, p. 166). It is imperative for trainers to be able to have knowledge of effective and appro-

priate behavioural skills that leads to group harmony for an inclusive environment.

Therefore, in a classroom full of different cultural backgrounds, educators must behave in a manner unaffected by cultural assumptions. According to Scrivener (2012), learners in a classroom often feel rather powerless. Hence, teacher trainers and teachers must be trained to establish and maintain appropriate behavioural skills for a positive classroom climate if they are to overcome the tendency for individuals to feel anxious, self-consciousness and experiencing difficulty in understanding.

The fact remains that language educators ought to consider that each individual has unique characteristics and backgrounds when it comes to adjusting their approach and behaviour towards them. It should not only be categorised as people's behaviour driven by their culture, because if an individual has lived in different locations and is actively in contact with people from various cultural backgrounds, their attitude and behaviour cannot be categorised under one national culture.

According to Harris (2003), nonverbal behaviour, constitutes '*facial expressions, raising an eyebrow, head nods, gestures, and silences also provide very important context cues*' (Harris, 2003, p. 50). Some of these expressions may not make sense for some cultures while for others they may have a true meaning that does not need words. At this point it is important to highlight that 'mutual-facework' to avoid conflict is 'prevalent in collectivistic culture' (Samovar et al., 2012, p. 136). Thus, these elements should be taken into consideration in training educators and helping them create an inclusive neutral environment. Manusov and Patterson (2006) go so far as to suggest that non-verbal communication is a major influence on the development of affect in the training room and that therefore it should be '*a major focus of future instructional and nonverbal communication research*' (Manusov & Patterson, 2006, p. 87).

4. SENSITIVITY

Furthermore, since the beginning of the 21st century, the English language has played a prominent role in the development of language and ma-

nagement training programmes and teaching policies, particularly as the methods used when teaching English have influenced all foreign language classrooms (Bourne & Reid, 2005). Consequently, the English language has become the world's operating system (Anholt, 2009). With this in mind, sensitivity in the classroom, particularly for non-native English speakers, needs to be a key factor in training programmes for teacher development. Chen and Starosta (2000) identify intercultural sensitivity as the affective dimension of ICC, which is '*conceptually distinct from intercultural competence*' (Chen & Starosta, 2000, p. 3). According to Nuñez et al. (2007), '*you are intercultural sensitive if you are able to look at different cultures from their cultural frame-of-reference, rather than from yours. You have cultural empathy. Not only in your thoughts, but you are really able to adjust your behaviour, because you want to. Although you know your limits, you are able to move between multiple frames-of-reference, without losing your identity, with great cultural flexibility and respect*' (Nuñez et al., 2007, p. 69).

According to Chen and Starosta (2000), intercultural sensitivity is one of the indispensable features for communication in diverse environments and entails five abilities and skills: interaction engagement, respect for cultural differences, interaction confidence, interaction enjoyment, and interaction attentiveness. These abilities are part of the dimensions of intercultural sensitivity. Substantially, this study advanced the proposition that individuals '*with high intercultural sensitivity tend to be more attentive, more able to perceive socio-interpersonal relationships in order to adjust their behaviours, to show high self-esteem and self-monitoring, more empathic, and more effective in intercultural interaction*' (Chen & Starosta, 2000, p. 26). This research also had two findings regarding sensitivity when communicating with others: communication traits (ethnocentrism and intercultural communication apprehension) which are primarily help to comprehend individuals' motivation and attitudes in the process of interactions.

Chen and Starosta's (2000) inspiration for their research was to examine the possible effects of in-

tercultural sensitivity on the concepts of intercultural sensitivity that has possible impact on 'ethnocentrism' that makes people bond tightly with their group members and feel '*proud of their own heritages by subjectively using their cultural standards as criteria for interpretations and judgments in intercultural communication*' (Chen & Starosta, 2000, p. 27). Nevertheless, '*for a culture to survive, a certain degree of ethnocentrism from its members is necessary; however, when ethnocentrism grows to a certain level, it will become a barrier for communication among people from different cultures*' (Neuliep & McCroskey, 1997, p. 387). Furthermore, ethnocentrism can cause individuals to use their own identity and group '*as the centre of viewing things, which tends to develop prejudice by judging other groups as inferior to their own*' (Chen, 2010, p. 2). At this point, it is crucial for trainers to be conscious of this danger and create a mutual balance to show sensitivity. Thus, a review by Chen (2010) indicated that '*the study investigated the impact of intercultural sensitivity on ethnocentrism and intercultural communication apprehension. Both hypotheses were supported. The results showed that people with a higher degree of intercultural sensitivity were less ethnocentric and apprehensive in intercultural interaction. The results reinforced the importance of intercultural sensitivity as a necessary element for people to be competent in intercultural communication, in which using one's cultural standards as criteria for interpretations and judgments and communication anxiety are not encouraged*' (Chen, 2010, p. 6).

Chen's opinion is relevant as emotion occurs naturally when a person is in a new environment. This is understood by one's cognitive, affective and behaviour aspects. Chen explains is that there are two points that create confusion and which need to be clarified. The first one is, even though intercultural sensitivity is referred to its cognitive, effective and behavioural aspects regarding the intercultural situation - it mainly deals with effectiveness. Her second point is that emotion is concerned with '*intercultural awareness (cognitive), which is the foundation of intercultural sensitivity*

'It emphasises that individuals ought to have an aspiration to 'motivate themselves to understand, appreciate, and accept differences among cultures, and to produce a positive outcome from intercultural interactions' '

(affective) which, in turn, will lead to intercultural competence (behavioural). In other words, the three are closely related but separate concepts. Thus, intercultural sensitivity can be conceptualised as an individual's ability to develop a positive emotion towards understanding and appreciating cultural differences that promotes an appropriate and effective behaviour in intercultural communication' (Chen, 1997, p. 5). Therefore, Chen concludes that intercultural sensitivity is a dynamic concept. It emphasises that individuals ought to have an aspiration to 'motivate themselves to understand, appreciate, and accept differences among cultures, and produce a positive outcome from intercultural interactions' (Chen, 1997, p. 6).

5. DISCUSSION: LANGUAGE AND CULTURAL TRAINING

Lange and Paige (2003) state that the relationship between Bennett's DMIS and language training compromises much that can be of benefit to language educators, in particular, due to 'its developmental nature and because of the applicability of its central principles to both culture learning and language learning' (Lange & Paige, 2003, p. 252). The model advocates that the core of gaining cultural knowledge is not the acquisition of content, but rather the ability to shift cultural perspectives. Lange and Paige (2003) signpost some advantages of DMIS model for language teaching and training, for instance the concept of enhancing the cultural learning in DMIS model is not the acquisition by the learner of discrete facts, but the development of an intercultural mind – a mindset capable of understanding from within and from without both one's own culture and other cultures. Consequently, cultural learning should comprise communica-

tive competence and 'proficiency-related theories of language learning' (Lange & Paige, 2003, p. 252). The model guides educators on how to adapt cultural-learning into their traditional framework, which very likely provides individuals with the necessary intercultural skills, since 'cultural learning must begin with cultural self-awareness, a notion compatible with views regarding the inter-relatedness of first-language and second-language learning' (Lange & Paige, 2003, p. 252).

Deardorff (2006) developed a process model of intercultural competence that focused on the purpose of assessment of possible intercultural misunderstandings. Starting with the attitudes that the individual should have (respect, openness and curiosity and a sense of discovery) he then stressed the need for knowledge (awareness of one's own culture, awareness of another's culture and sociolinguistic awareness) supported by skills (listening and observation and analysis and interpretation and the ability to relate to the other person or situation you are facing). Deardorff then went on to identify two types of outcome, internal and external (Deardorff & Arasaratnam-Smith, 2017). The internal outcome was the development of empathy, adaptability and flexibility. The external outcome he defined as the adoption of effective and appropriate communication and behaviour to resolve any misunderstanding (Figure 2).

Deardorff's model has itself been criticised as a list of character traits and skills rather than a process of resolution of intercultural misunderstanding. However, it does focus on positive outcomes both internally, for the person perceived to have created the misunderstanding and externally for the person or group who have failed to understand or misunderstood the message conveyed.

This is important in international education, and particularly in higher education, as a trainer or lecturer lacking sociolinguistic or cultural awareness can speak too fast, use idioms without explanation or make cultural references that are perceived as wrong or even insulting by the students and employees. This is why the development of intercultural sensitivity and language sensitivity is vital to the successful teaching of international groups

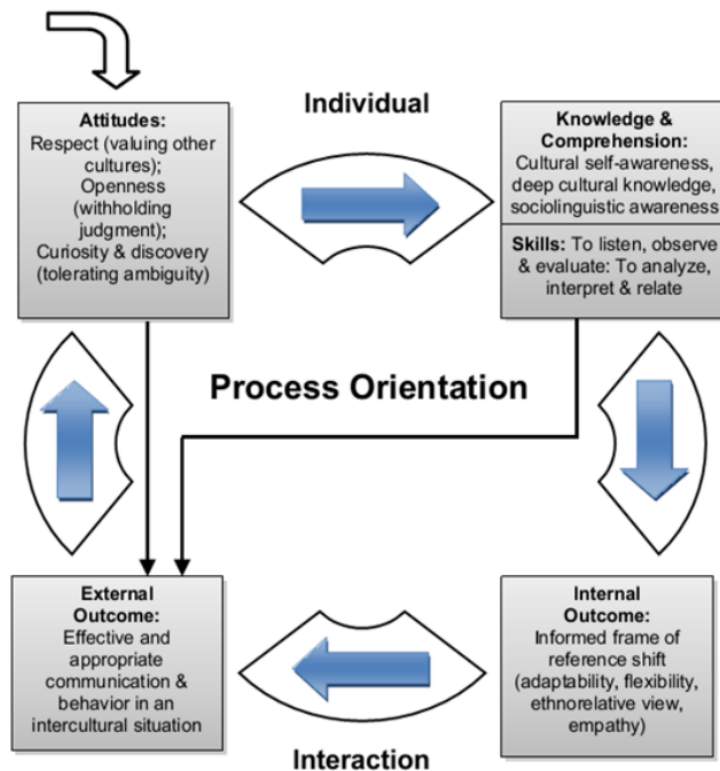


Figure 2. Deardorff's Process Model of Intercultural Competence

and as important and in some respects even more important than the intellectual content. If you can't understand what the teacher is saying or means there is no way you can successfully absorb and understand the content, let alone analyse it. In this respect, the model remains valid.

International students joining a class to develop their business skills in a British or US university also experience social unease. They feel out of place, get lonely, and fail to attend lectures or complete the necessary assignments because quite simply, they get depressed. Overseas assignees in business go through the same process. This process is known as culture shock and has been discussed by Storti (1991) who described culture shock as being separated from friends and family and everyday experiences. Culture shock in business and also in academic studies manifests in depression, demotivation, lower productivity and in some cases illness and, in extreme cases, even suicide. It is therefore something to understand and watch out for. An empathetic teacher or trainer

would be able to recognise the signs and act positively to refer the student to HR (Human Resources), the student liaison officer or even the university pastor and to make allowances within the limits of administrative procedures to support students and expats suffering from culture shock. But the most important thing is to understand the process and this is where Bennett's (1986) DMIS model comes in.

Described as the Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity, Bennett's model has five stages divided into two parts. The two parts are ethnocentric (mainly concerned with oneself) and ethnorelative (mainly concerned with your relations with others). In each area there are three stages of development (Figure 3).

The six stages can be interpreted as follows. First, the three stages of ethnocentrism.

Denial. This can take two forms: denial of your own environment (this place is wonderful; my country is awful); and denial of your new environment (this place is awful; wish I was back home).

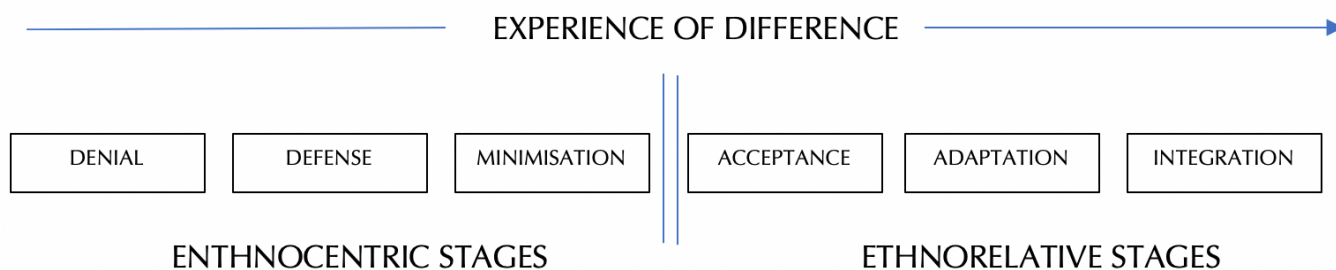


Figure 3. Bennett’s Development Model of Intercultural Sensitivity

Defence. This involves reverting to one’s own culture or community. For managers or workers or students relocating this is often expressed by living in ‘gated communities’ and only associating with people from your or similar communities and failing to adapt to the environment you are in.

Minimisation. This takes the form of insisting that everyone is the same, to the extent that we all are, and rejecting ideas of cultural difference.

The three stages of ethnocentrism can be described as follows.

Acceptance. This refers to the recognition and acceptance of intercultural differences. This is a positive step because it recognises differences and precedes progression to Step 5, adaptation.

Adaptation. This is a gradual process whereby the business assignee or foreign student begins the process of adaptation to the host environment. It takes place over a number of months or even years and may involve a reversion to the culture shock experienced in the first few months of living and working in a new environment. However, as Marx (1999) points out, culture shock experiences affect foreign business people and students throughout their stay at both professional and social levels but the frequency and impact lessen as the stay lengthens until you achieve Bennett’s final stage in his DMIS model, integration.

Integration. This final stage marks the point where you feel part of the host community at both the sociolinguistic and intercultural levels. You may still experience problems and misunderstandings but these are more likely to be at the level that locals experience them. Effectively, and hopefully legally, you become part of the host commu-

nity, at ease with linguistic and intercultural communication. Bennett summarises the characteristics of the six stages as follows.

Denial. My cultural experience is the only one that is real and valid. There is little to no thought of ‘other’.

Defence. ‘We’ are superior and ‘they’ are inferior. One feels threatened and is highly critical. What is strange may be labelled as stupid.

Minimisation. Other cultures are trivialised or romanticised. One tends to deny differences and only seek similarities.

Acceptance. I accept but may not agree with other cultures. I am curious and respectful.

Adaptation. I ‘see’ the world through different eyes and make intentional changes in my own behaviour and values.

Integration. I easily move in and out of different cultural worldviews.

The models discussed in this section make it clear that business people and their families relocating to other countries and students seeking to develop their careers by studying at universities abroad expose themselves to both language and cultural challenges. They also suggest the characteristics that both managers and lecturers need to develop to overcome issues that may arise and ease the process of adaptation which relocates and students abroad are likely to go through in the process of adaptation to living in the new host country. The issues raised in the discussion highlight the importance of business mentors, student liaison officers and religious pastors in helping employees and students integrate their new work and study environments successfully.

6. CONCLUSION

This paper has attempted to outline the main concepts of intercultural communicative competence in training programmes to enhance language educators, trainers and lecturers' intercultural competence in their classrooms, lecture halls and training rooms to develop their language learners' skills by fully integrating a cultural approach to language and recognising the differences in language levels and ability to understand English spoken at speed and using strong idiomatic language by native speaker trainers and lecturers. Bennett et al. (2003) argue that educators nowadays should be competent on 'how to place culture at the core of language teaching by systematically introducing intercultural competence into the classroom' (Bennett et al., 2003, p. 237).

ICC training should 'involve awareness of different values, attitudes and behaviours of 'others' as well as skills to deal with them in a non-judgmental way' (Barany, 2016 p. 267). This will help teacher trainers and teachers to enhance their ability to interact effectively with people of cultures other than one's own which is a vital attribute

for educators when developing their own understanding and sensitivity. Zhu (2011) states that intercultural empathy helps individuals 'to be aware of the barriers that may hinder a student's development' (Zhu, 2011, p. 117). However, she also points out the dangers of stereotyping and prejudice, over reliance on one's own culture or human universals, lack of awareness of students' problems in relating to the content or skills being taught due to language limitations or cultural differences and the assumption that everyone should adopt one's (the trainer or lecturer's) own cultural practice. Finally, 'when people engage in an intercultural dialogue or intercultural trade, they are inevitably facing the challenge from communication barriers such as cultural stereotypes and prejudice, identity conflict, language deficiency, and lack of interaction skills. Only through the acquisition of ICC can these problems be solved in the process of global interaction' (Dai & Chen, 2014, p. 1). By exploring the ICC models, as well as behaviour and sensitivity and the issues presented by limitations in language proficiency, content delivery can be improved and student motivation can be increased.

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