



Salahaddin University Students' Attitudes towards Learning Intercultural Communicative Skills

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Abstract

The relation between communication and culture has attracted the interest of the researchers for centuries. People belonging to different cultures can only communicate effectively if they overcome their communication barriers through realizing their cultural differences and improving their intercultural communicative skills. This study aims at identifying students' attitudes about learning such skills in addition to the techniques they use to improve these skills. The study was conducted on the students of English departments, at College of Education, College of Basic Education, and College of Languages at Salahaddin University-Erbil. A qualitative method has been adopted for this study and the data have been collected through distributing a questionnaire for the second-year students. The findings of the research revealed that the students' attitudes towards learning intercultural communicative skills were relatively positive and they seemed to be interested in learning and gaining more knowledge in this respect.

Keywords: Students' Attitudes, Communicative Skills, Culture.

1. Introduction

In the last few decades many language researchers, teachers, and teacher educators believe that the main aim of learning a second or a foreign language is to be able to communicate with people from different cultural backgrounds and coming from different linguistic backgrounds in a multicultural world. Learners have to deal appropriately and effectively with cultural diversity, and this also helps them to acquire intercultural communicative skills. Therefore, it is recommended that, while teaching linguistic skills a variety of cultural elements in the language lessons should be integrated. Intercultural communicative competence is a number of capabilities that are essential to enhance the ability to maneuver an individual's way in a world that changes by minute. Basically, Intercultural communicative skills require that learners acquire the skills, knowledge, attitudes and critical cultural awareness, which are necessary to communicate intercultural, and not only memorize vocabulary and learn grammar rules. Before preparing the curriculum of a teaching process, teaching cultural aspects of language should be taken into consideration, and it's important to identify the student's attitudes towards learning intercultural communicative skills.

2. Theoretical Background

Language is highly related to culture, therefore studies related to culture are given a great importance in the foreign language teaching process. The main focus of the studies conducted in this area are on the attitudes towards teaching and learning about culture. Intercultural communication is not new and has its origins in ancient times. It has produced its own techniques, methods, procedures, and tools of investigation in the 20th century. After the end of World War II, the world order was changed by introducing a new political geography, when governments realized the need for communicating successfully in a multicultural world.



The process of intercultural communication includes not only sending messages, since its main aim is to help learners to act as cultural mediators. To be a successful communicator, the learner has to step out of their own world views and use empathy as a cognitive and an emotional filter in the communication process. For this reason, many techniques of teaching were refined, employed and devised. These changes had a great impact on the process of second and foreign language teaching (Romanowski, 2017).

The most popular definition among several definitions and descriptions of intercultural communicative skills is Michael Byram's (1997). "He states that it is a cluster of skills requires acquired competence in knowledge, attitudes, and skills related to intercultural competence while using a foreign language" (p.71). Intercultural communicative competence, as it is seen by many language teaching professionals, is an extension of communicative competence. The term "intercultural competence" involves the use of different linguistic codes for contacting between people holding various sets of models and values of the world. It is the ability to cope with one's own cultural background in communication with others (Michaela Čaňková, 2007).

The development of intercultural communicative skills is a process which involves the learners' experiences from their own cultural backgrounds that help them to reflect on their individual cultural assumptions for further skills and knowledge development of the world. The main focus is put on those foreign language teaching methods which help the learners to become successful communicators. Intercultural communicative skills grow from people's understanding of society, culture, and human beings in general. Intercultural communication should be linked to studies of how social or cultural groups, or individuals define themselves and other people (Adriane Holliday, 2004). Preparing students to live in a multicultural society and helping them to interact with different cultural societies are key elements that help the development of their intercultural competence, and it is a part of language teaching process. (Emilia Zylkiewicz-Plonska, 2014).

Intercultural awareness is an important component of intercultural competence and, it includes knowledge of local and regional cultural heritage. Competence is the understanding of one's own culture and a basis for the open attitudes and respect towards cultural diversity. Byram (1997 as cited in Shaules, 2007, p.88) explains his view about intercultural learning through his definition of cultural awareness. He states that it is the 'ability to evaluate critically on the basis of explicit criteria perspectives, products and practices in other cultures, countries or in one's own culture. Intercultural learning becomes a challenge when there are various intercultural interactions".

Drawing on Michael Byram's definition (as cited in Praxmarer, 2009), the components of intercultural competence are skills, knowledge, and attitudes, in addition to the values a person has as a part of belonging to a number of social groups. These values are the representative of one's social identities.

- Intercultural attitudes: openness and curiosity, readiness to gain knowledge about other cultures and belief about their own.
- Knowledge: social groups knowledge and their practices and products in one's own and in a foreign country, and communication with other societies. Knowledge has two major components: knowledge of illustrations of those practices and products and knowledge of social processes.
- Skills of relating and interpreting: ability to interpret an event or document from another culture, then explain it and relate it to one's own culture.
- Skills of interaction and discovery: the ability to gain new knowledge about a culture and cultural practices and the capability to operate attitudes, knowledge and skills in communication in the society.



• Critical cultural awareness: the ability to evaluate, critically and on the basis of explicit criteria, practices, perspectives and products in one's own and other countries and cultures. (Praxmarer, 2009).

2.1. Acquiring Intercultural communicative skills

While investigating the methods of teaching intercultural communicative skills, it can be noticed that they are demanding and more complex than the methods used in teaching and learning other linguistic aspects. The classroom is one of the most important places where students can acquire intercultural communicative skills, it provides space for structured and systematic presentation of knowledge and skills of the better traditions of language teaching. It also provides the opportunity of acquiring knowledge and attitudes that they have experienced under the guidance of the teacher. In addition, the learning in the classroom is a preparation for communicating in the real world, through receiving visitors and occasional visiting, or working and learning in groups with students of other cultures.

Learning process is integrated and structured, the techniques of telecommunications can help in bringing immediate communication into the classroom, through video-referencing, electronic mail and faxes (Byram, 1997).

2.3. Factors influencing student's attitudes towards learning intercultural communicative skills

There are several factors that have influence on people's attitudes in relation to learning a foreign language, one of the most considerable factors is gender. Reasons for learning a foreign language may differ between a male or a female. A female learner may learn for the purpose of interaction and knowledge, whereas male learner may learn a foreign language for getting a job or immigration (Guven, 2015).

English proficiency levels are another important factor that influences the student's attitudes. Students ambition to gain knowledge about the target language culture increases with the increase of proficiency levels. Departments where students are studying is another reason for their attempts to learn about the language, for example; if the students study a subject that does not require English language, the students will not care about learning the language. To have the ability to communicate in the target language, students have to develop knowledge about intercultural awareness, negotiation skills, and target culture for effective interaction. Students desire to interact and develop relationships with members of other cultures also increases their motivation to improve intercultural communicative skills (Wilberschied, 2015).

3. Methodology

Bulmer (2004 as cited in D. K. Bird 2009) states that the questionnaire is a well-established tool within social science research for acquiring information on the participants social characteristics, present and past behavior, standards of behavior or attitudes, and reasons for action with respect to the topic under investigation. The present study is a questionnaire-based data collection research, which has been implemented for the purpose of investigating the aims and answering the research questions. A qualitative method was adopted in analyzing and evaluating the data that was collected via the questionnaire.

3.1 Research Questions

The study aims at addressing the following questions:

1. What are the students' attitudes towards learning intercultural communicative skills?
2. Do the students desire to integrate intercultural skills with the process of teaching/learning English Language?
3. What are the techniques that the students prefer in learning intercultural communicative skills.

3.2 Data Collection Tool

The tool that is used in this study for the purpose of data collection is a questionnaire for the students. A questionnaire of 14 items that are relevant to our topic. The questionnaire was



distributed to 107 second-year students of three English departments of Salahaddin University at College of Basic Education, College of Education, and College of Languages in April 2019.

3.3 Validity and Reliability

Validity and reliability are the two most fundamental and important features in the evaluation of any tool or instrument for a good research. They are the needed concepts in any research to introduce a remarkable setting (Mohajan, 2017).

Validity is the appropriateness of a procedure for measuring the aim of the construct any study intends to investigate. On the other hand, reliability deals with the extent to which data are categorized stably on the same results in different occasions (Gass, 2012). Same items of the questionnaire used in this paper were distributed to a number of jury members for the validity of the tool. Their feedback and comments were taken into consideration. Moreover, a pilot test was implemented to verify the items and to gain better reliability results, because the test is considered reliable if it gives the same results when it is used at different times and by different people.

4. Data Analysis and Discussion

The researchers collected the data through distributing the questionnaire for the students to shed light on their attitudes towards learning intercultural communicative skills. SPSS program was used to classify analyze the data. The questionnaire items and results are explained below.

4.1. Questionnaire for the students

1. I do understand that there is a link between language and culture

Likert	Frequency	Percentage	Mean	Standard Deviation
Never	10	9.3	3.07	1.15
Seldom	19	17.8		
Sometimes	39	36.4		
Often	19	17.8		
Always	14	13.1		
Missing	6	5.6		
Total responses	101	94.4		
Grand total	107			

The highest frequency for this question is “sometimes”. The frequency is 35 and the percentage is 36.4, and the lowest frequency is 10 for never, which is 9.3. The mean for this question is 3.07 and the standard deviation is 1.15, which means that the students’ attitude is relatively positive for this question. It seems that most of the students realize that there is a link between language and culture.

2. I can recognize cultural misconceptions or misunderstanding.

Likert	Frequency	Percentage	Mean	Standard Deviation
Never	5	4.7	3.34	1.09
Seldom	17	15.9		
Sometimes	39	36.4		
Often	25	23.4		
Always	19	17.0		
Missing	2	1.9		



Total responses	105	98.1		
Grand total	107			

The highest frequency is for “sometimes”, namely 39, and its percentage is 36.4, and “never” has the lowest, which is 5, and its percentage is 4.7. The Mean for this question is 3.34 and the Standard deviation is 1.099, which means the students’ attitude is positive for this question. Most of the students think that they can understand cultural misconceptions.

3. I’m open to, curious about and willing to learn from and about people who have different cultural orientations and perspectives from mine.

Likert	Frequency	Percentage	Mean	Standard Deviation
Never	6	5.6	3.44	1.130
Seldom	12	11.2		
Sometimes	37	34.6		
Often	25	23.4		
Always	22	20.6		
Missing	5	4.7		
Total responses	102	95.3		
Grand total	107			

“Sometimes” has the greatest frequency, which is 37, and the percentage is 34.6, and the lowest frequency is for “Never”, namely 6, and the percentage is 5.6. The Mean for this question is 3.44 and the Standard Deviation is 1.130. We can see that most of the students are curious and willing to learn about different cultures.

4. I’m aware of the fact that other peoples’ languages may express shared ideas in a unique way or, express unique ideas difficult to access through one’s own language(s).

Likert	Frequency	Percentage	Mean	Standard Deviation
Never	5	4.7	3.44	1.13
Seldom	18	16.8		
Sometimes	27	25.2		
Often	34	31.8		
Always	20	18.7		
Missing	3	2.8		
Total responses	104	97.2		
Grand total	107			

The highest frequency is for “often”, which is 34, and its percentage is 31.8, and the lowest frequency is for “never”, which is 5, and the percentage is 4. The mean for this question is 3.44 and the standard deviation is 1.13, which indicates that the student’s attitude is high for this question. The students think that peoples’ languages express shared ideas in a unique way.

5. I’m able to discover information about other cultural affiliations and perspectives.

Likert	Frequency	Percentage	Mean	Standard Deviation
Never	6	5.6	3.38	1.16
Seldom	17	15.9		
Sometimes	36	33.6		
Often	23	21.5		



Always	23	21.5		
Missing	2	1.9		
Total responses	105	98.1		
Grand total	107			

The highest frequency is for “sometimes”, which is 36 and the percentage is 33.6. The lowest frequency is for never, which is 6, and the percentage is 5.6. The Mean for this question is 3.38 and the standard deviation is 1.16, which means that the student’s attitude is positive for this question. Most of the students think that they can discover information about cultural affiliations and perspectives.

6. I can understand the internal diversity and heterogeneity of all cultural groups.

Likert	Frequency	Percentage	Mean	Standard Deviation
Never	6	5.6	3.38	1.16
Seldom	19	17.8		
Sometimes	30	28.0		
Often	29	27.1		
Always	21	19.6		
Missing	2	1.9		
Total responses	105	98.1		
Grand total	107			

The highest frequency for this question is for “sometimes”, which is 30 and the percentage is 28.0, and the lowest frequency is for “never”, which is 6, and its percentage is 5.6. The Mean for this question is 3.38 and the standard deviation is 1.16, which means that the students’ attitude is positive for this question. We can realize that a large number of the students think that they are able to understand the internal diversity and heterogeneity of different cultural groups.

7. I can understand and respond to other people’s thoughts, beliefs, values and feelings.

Likert	Frequency	Percentage	Mean	Standard Deviation
Never	2	1.9	3.67	1.03
Seldom	10	9.3		
Sometimes	36	33.6		
Often	29	27.1		
Always	28	26.2		
Missing	2	1.9		
Total responses	105	98.1		
Grand total	107			

The highest frequency is for “sometimes”, which is 36, and the percentage is 33.6. “Never” has the lowest frequency, which is 2, and its percentage is 1.9. The Mean for this question is 3.67 and the standard deviation is 1.03. Most of the students seem to be able to understand and respond to other peoples’ thoughts, values, believes and feelings.

8. I’m able to act as a mediator (facilitator) in intercultural exchanges, and translate, interpret and explain.

Likert	Frequency	Percentage	Mean	Standard Deviation
Never	2	1.9	3.36	1.96
Seldom	16	15.0		
Sometimes	39	36.4		
Often	31	29.0		



Always	13	12.1		
Missing	6	5.6		
Total responses	101	94.4		
Grand total	107			

“Sometimes” has the highest frequency, which is 39 and the percentage is 36.4, and the lowest frequency is for never, which is 2, and its percentage is 1.9. The mean for this question is 3.36 and the standard deviation is 1.96. It seems that students generally think that they can be interpreters and translators in intercultural exchanges.

9. I can interact and communicate appropriately, effectively and respectfully with people who have different cultural affiliations from mine.

Likert	Frequency	Percentage	Mean	Standard Deviation
Never	6	5.6	3.29	1.15
Seldom	22	20.6		
Sometimes	31	29.0		
Often	27	25.2		
Always	19	17.8		
Missing	2	1.9		
Total responses	105	98.1		
Grand total	107			

The highest frequency for this question is for “sometimes”, which is 31, and the percentage is 29.0, and “never” has the lowest frequency, which is 6, and its percentage is 5.6. The Mean for this question is 3.29 and the standard deviation is 1.15. Most of the students think that they are able to communicate and interact with people who have different cultures from them.

10. I use a variety of tools for studying about the English culture, e.g. movies, social media, books, audio visual aids.

Likert	Frequency	Percentage	Mean	Standard Deviation
Never	7	6.5	3.41	1.18
Seldom	16	15.0		
Sometimes	23	21.5		
Often	28	26.2		
Always	31	29.0		
Missing	2	1.9		
Total responses	105	98.1		
Grand total	107			

The highest frequency for this question is for “always”, which is 31 and the percentage is 29.0.4, and the lowest frequency is for “never”, which is 7, and its percentage is 6.5. The Mean for this question is 3.41 and the standard deviation is 1.18 which means that the majority of the students are using different types of tools to improve their intercultural skills.

11. Learning about different cultures makes it easier for me to communicate.

Likert	Frequency	Percentage	Mean	Standard Deviation
Never	8	7.5	3.58	1.22
Seldom	12	11.2		
Sometimes	26	24.3		



Often	31	29.0		
Always	30	28.0		
Missing				
Total responses	107	100.0		

“Often” has the highest frequency, which is 31, and the percentage is 29.0, and the lowest frequency is for “never” which is 8, and its percentage is 7.5. The Mean for this question is 3.58 and the standard deviation is 1.22. This indicates that the students’ attitude is high about learning intercultural communicative skills as they help them to communicate more efficiently.

12. The instructor emphasizes teaching English for communication rather than teaching grammar and vocabulary.

Likert	Frequency	Percentage	Mean	Standard Deviation
Never	5	4.7	3.52	1.13
Seldom	16	15.0		
Sometimes	26	24.3		
Often	35	32.7		
Always	23	21.5		
Missing	2	1.9		
Total responses	105	98.1		
Grand total	107			

The highest frequency for this question is “often”, which is 35, and the percentage is 32.7, and the lowest frequency is for “never”, which is 5, and its percentage is 4.7. The Mean for this question is 3.52 and the standard deviation is 1.13. This indicates that most of the students believe that the instructor teaches them English to be able to communicate rather than only teaching vocabulary and grammar.

13. The instructor allows students to give examples from their own culture, tradition or experience.

Likert	Frequency	Percentage	Mean	Standard Deviation
Never	12	11.2	3.46	1.37
Seldom	16	15.1		
Sometimes	21	19.6		
Often	23	21.5		
Always	33	30.8		
Missing	2	1.9		
Total responses	105	98.1		
Grand total	107			

The highest frequency for this question is “always”, which is 33, and the percentage is 30.8, and the lowest frequency is for “never,” which is 12, and its percentage is 11.2. The Mean for this question is 3.47 and the standard deviation is 1.37. This indicates that the instructor generally gives the students the freedom to give examples about their own culture, tradition or experience.



14. During the class period, the instructor tries to devote time for teaching culturally relevant examples such as wedding, clothes, food and etc.

Likert	Frequency	Percentage	Mean	Standard Deviation
Never	5	4.7	3.35	1.16
Seldom	20	18.7		
Sometimes	36	33.6		
Often	21	19.6		
Always	23	21.5		
Missing	2	1.9		
Total	105	98.1		
Grand total	107			

The highest frequency for this question is “sometimes”, which is 36, and the percentage is 33.6. The lowest frequency is for “never”, which is 5, and its percentage is 4.7. The Mean for this question is 3.35 and the standard deviation is 1.16. It seems that the instructor generally focuses on teaching cultural information and devotes time for giving authentic examples to the students about it.

5. Conclusion

This study presented a theoretical background about teaching language in relation to culture. The aim of the researchers is to shed light on Salahaddin University students’ attitudes towards learning intercultural communicative skills, and to help improve these skills. The findings of this study revealed that students generally have positive attitudes towards learning intercultural communicative skills. The researchers stated that learners’ positive attitudes towards learning about the target culture may also affect their attitudes towards learning the language. The researchers found out that the students prefer integrating intercultural communicative skills with the process of teaching/learning English language. The students also prefer to use a variety of tools to improve their intercultural communicative skills, and they think that the instructor should be a facilitator for them in that respect.

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هەلۆستى قوتايانى زانكو سەلاحەددىن لەبارەى پەيوەندىيە كارامەيە ئۆدەولەتتەكان

فېنوس صابر جامى

سەلام نىعمە ھورمز حەكىم

بەشى ئىنگلىزى - كۆلچى پەرودەى بنەرەتى / زانكو سەلاحەددىن-ھەولتېر بەشى ئىنگلىزى - كۆلچى پەرودەى / زانكو سەلاحەددىن-ھەولتېر

پوختە

چەندەھا سەدەيە پەيوەندى ئىوان پەيوەندىيەكان و كەلتور سەرنجى لېكۆلەرانى پاكىشاو. گەلانى كەلتور جياوازپەيوەندى ئاخوتنى كاريگەرلىك دەيتت، گەر بتوانن بەسەر ئاستەنگى پەيوەندىيەكانى ئاخوتندا زال بن، ئەمەش لەپىگەى دۆزىنەوئى جياوازى ئىوان گەلە كەلتور جياوازەكان و پەرەپىدەنى پەيوەندىيە كارامەيە ئۆ كەلتورپەيوەندىيەكان.

ئامانجى ئەم توپىنەوئى زانىنى ھەلۆستى قوتايانە دەربارەى فېربوونى ئەم پەيوەندىيە كارامەيەكانە گەل ئەم تەكىپەكانەى لە بەھىزكردن و پەرەپىدەنىيان بەكاردىن. ئەم توپىنەوئى لەسەر قوتايانى بەشەكانى ئىنگلىزى لە زانكو سەلاحەددىن ئەنجامدراو لە كۆلچەكانى (پەرودە - پەرودەى بنەرەتى و زمان)، رېگەى جۆرى بە كارھىنراو بۆ ئەم توپىنەوئى بە ، داتاكان لە پىگەى دابەشكردنى پاپرسى (استىيان) بەسەر قوتايانى قۇناغى دووئەمى ئەم سى كۆلچەكانە كۆكراونەتەو.

دەرئەنجامى توپىنەوئى دەريخستوو كە ھەلۆستى قوتايان لەبارەى فېربوونى پەيوەندىيە كارامەيە ئۆ كەلتورپەيوەندىيەكان بەزۆرىنە ئەرئى بوو. وا دەرکەوتوو كە قوتايەكان ئارەزووى فېربوون و بەدەستەپىنانى زانىارى زياتر دەكەن لەم بوارەدا.

دەستەواژە گرنگەكان: ھەلۆستى قوتايان، پەيوەندىيە كارامەيەكان، كەلتور.

اراء طلاب جامعة صلاح الدين حول تعلم مهارات التواصل بين الثقافات

فېنوس صابر جامى

سلام نعمة هرمز حكيمة

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ملخص

جذبت العلاقة بين التواصل والثقافة اهتمام الباحثين على مدى قرون. لا يمكن للأشخاص الذين ينتمون إلى ثقافات مختلفة التواصل بشكل فعال إلا إذا تغلبوا على حواجز التواصل الخاصة بهم من خلال إدراك اختلافاتهم الثقافية وتحسين مهاراتهم الخاصة بالتواصل بين الثقافات. تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى تحديد مواقف الطلاب حول تعلم هذه المهارات بالإضافة إلى التقنيات التي يستخدمونها لتحسين هذه المهارات. أجريت الدراسة على طلاب أقسام اللغة الإنكليزية، في كلية التربية، كلية التربية الأساسية وكلية اللغات في جامعة صلاح الدين-أربيل.

تم تبني الطريقة النوعية لاجراء هذه الدراسة وتم جمع البيانات من خلال توزيع استبيان لطلاب السنة الثانية. كشفت نتائج البحث أن مواقف الطلاب تجاه تعلم مهارات التواصل بين الثقافات كانت إيجابية نسبياً ويبدو أنهم مهتمون بالتعلم واكتساب المزيد من المعرفة في هذا الصدد.

الكلمات الدالة: مواقف الطلاب، مهارات التواصل، الثقافة