



Intercultural Communication in English for Business

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Article Info

Article History:

Received: 17 October 2024

Revised: 19 November 2024

Accepted: 22 December 2024

Keywords:

Intercultural
Competence
Business English
Communication

Abstract

This paper discusses how intercultural competence can be incorporated into the English as a business instruction in Indonesia, where the current methods of teaching still put a great emphasis on grammar and language accuracy. The research, qualitative and based on literature, resorts to sociocultural and sociolinguistic theories to examine the way in which language should be viewed not only as a communicative means, but also as a means of cultural negotiation. The findings confirm three major observations: first, the current curricula lacks sufficient coverage of cultural aspects of communication; second, experiential techniques of learning (role plays and case studies) are necessary to develop the ability to change and be interculturally sensitive; and third, institutional and policy-level support is necessary to maintain a significant change. One of the conclusions of the study is that linguistic proficiency cannot on its own guarantee success in global business situations. Rather, intercultural competence, defined as capacity to decode cultural messages, cope with uncertainty, and relate ethically to divergent thinking, should be made the core of business English teaching in Indonesia.

INTRODUCTION

English has become the key aspect of global business communication in a highly globalized world that has never been globalized as it is now. Indonesia wants to have a greater role on the world economic scene, and it is imperative to understand that business communication is more than linguistic competence. Intercultural communication is based on the necessity of acquiring information about different cultural contexts, values, and communicative norms that determine the manner in which business is carried out (Baker, 2015; Holmes, 2014). However, existing English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) models used in the educational systems of Indonesia are usually inadequate to accommodate these cultural complexities and emphasize linguistic precision and fluency (Kirkpatrick, 2010; Kubota, 2016). Such a lack of connection between linguistic competence and intercultural awareness poses a serious predicament to the practitioners who interact in global business (Alptekin, 2002; Canagarajah, 2007; Nair-Venugopal, 2018; Louhiala-Salminen & Kankaanranta, 2011).

There is an apparent necessity of a more inclusive approach to teaching English as a business lingua franca, particularly in a setting such as Indonesia, where business is becoming more multicultural in terms of both workforce composition and inter-company cooperation (Zaharna, 2016; Ting-Toomey & Kurogi, 1998). Nonetheless, even though the focus on intercultural communication tends to increase, the current pedagogical methods are usually divided because they do not feature a unifying framework that incorporates the intercultural competence in the teaching process of business English. Not only does this gap negatively impact the communicative effectiveness of Indonesian professionals but also it hinders their cross-cultural business negotiation effectiveness (House, 2003; Scollon & Scollon, 2001; Cahya & Semnani, 2024).

In order to fill this void, this paper presents a synthesized model that is based on sociocultural and sociolinguistic theories, especially the Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) by Michael Halliday and the sociocultural theory of Vygotsky (1978). This theoretical approach treats language, culture, and social interaction as interrelated and puts language in the context of socialisation, as a dynamic process in which social relations and cultural identities are negotiated (Gee, 2014; Hymes, 1972; Polo-Perez, 2022; Peng, 2023). Combining the provisions of cultural reflexivity and the critical discourse analysis, the proposed framework seeks to develop a more acute awareness of the cultural dynamics among learners to enable them negotiate and maneuver intercultural encounters in the business context (Kramsch, 2006; Jenkins, 2006; Deardorff, 2006).

The synthesizing of these theories provides a pedagogical framework, which puts language learning into a somewhat larger cultural and social picture and puts traditional conceptions of linguistic competence in perspective and extends the scope to encompass important critical cultural awareness (Byram, 1997; Blommaert, 2010; Baker, 2011). Such theoretical approach is consistent with the current discourse on intercultural communication, which emphasizes the necessity of the combined concept of language and culture to the creation of the effective business communication (Scollon & Scollon, 2001; Risager, 2007; Spencer-Oatey, 2008). Such a strategy not only increases the level of intercultural competence among the learners but also gives them the power to make critical reflections about their cultural assumptions and biases (Gudykunst & Kim, 2003; Holliday, 2013).

Since the interactions between cultures are a complex and multidimensional, this paper will attempt to add to the existing body of literature by providing a broad approach to intercultural communication integration in the English course at business schools. It is an impartial analysis of present-day pedagogical practices and their weaknesses, and the proposed model that is more comprehensive and in line with the facts of global business environment in Indonesia. The framework is supposed to help transition the linguistic competence and the intercultural competence to a subtler perception of the cultural aspects of business communication (Sercu, 2005; Matsuda and Duran, 2012; Mauranten, 2018).

METHODS

The research design that is taken in this study is qualitative research design which is conceptual and literature based. Instead of gathering empirical data on classrooms, the study is based on the critical analysis of the academic literature in the area of intercultural communication, sociolinguistics, and teaching business English. The main sources of data are academic books, peer reviewed journal articles and policy documents.

The process of methodology was in three steps. The theoretical approaches that were important were first identified, namely, Systemic Functional Linguistics (Halliday), sociocultural theory (Vygotsky, 1978), and intercultural competence frameworks

(Byram, 1997; Deardorff, 2006). Secondly, the views were discussed with critical discourse analysis to understand how they deal with the convergence of language, culture, and business communication. Lastly, the paper made a synthesis of these observations to put forward a pedagogical model that focuses on experiential learning, cultural reflexivity and intercultural awareness in English business coursework. This is a suitable approach since it enables one to discover a deep understanding of abstract yet complicated phenomena like intercultural competence. The research is based on a broad pool of theoretical and empirical research and as such presents a highly holistic and context sensitive model that will be useful in teaching and policy making in the Indonesian higher education system.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This research was undertaken on a basis of the increasing pressure on the higher education of the Indonesian education to equip the students to become globalized in their business communication. Even though English usage as lingua franca has become common in international business-related settings, the tendency in pedagogical processes in Indonesia to place more emphasis on grammar and linguistic correctness continues. Consequently, students can become technically competent but not interculturally competent to negotiate culturally varied occupational relationships (House, 2003; Jenkins, 2015). Given the growing engagement of Indonesians into international markets as well as the availability of multicultural workplaces, a framework that would interrelate linguistic ability with intercultural awareness is urgently required.

Instructional Implications and Practical Implications

Business communication particularly intercultural communication is much more than the transfer of information. It is the multidimensionality of social cues, cultural expectation and well-established values that determine the way messages are framed, received and construed. Efficient intercultural communication depends not only on linguistic competence, as House (2003) and Jenkins (2015) suggest but on the skill to overlook the latent assumptions and different worldviews. With such an attitude, we observe the reason why classical pedagogical paradigms based on the narrow understanding of grammar and formal correctness are inefficient. One of the aspects that are commonly at stake in business dealings within the world is the subtle cues that create trust, rapport and understanding, which are context-dependent (Kramsch, 2006; Blommaert, 2010).

The increasing globalization of Indonesia into the business environments highlights the urgency of this challenge. According to Kubota (2016), using pedagogical strategies that view culture as a collection of fixed characteristics, one automatically becomes a perpetrator of stereotypes, which he claims is a barrier to acquiring the true intercultural competence. Rather, the modern view of culture, e.g., presented by Risager (2007) and Blommaert (2010), is that of a dynamic, developing entity, constantly being created and reformed through social interactions. This change of mindset obliges teachers to step out of their traditional conceptualizations of culture and to work towards facilitating the flexibility and reflexivity of the learners within a wide-ranging communicative environment (Gee, 2014; Matsuda and Duran, 2012).

Teachers can be considered the key to actualizing this change. Byram and Feng (2004) suggest that, teachers are not only expected to be the source of linguistic information, but also facilitators of critical cultural awareness. This means the establishment of atmospheres in which the learners are made to challenge their assumptions and seek other views. Spencer-Oatey (2008) reveals that this is a way of developing cultural reflexivity- a vital survival tactic in an intercultural interaction. By challenging the students to consider how their communicative decisions are

informed by bigger cultural constructs, one can enable them to learn more about the socio-cultural aspects of communication (Holmes, 2014; Kramsch, 2006).

Experiential learning thus becomes a strategy that is very necessary. As Jenkins (2015) stresses, simulations, role-plays, and case studies are a chance to give the learner an opportunity to test various communicative strategies under the controlled conditions. Such activities are in line with the sociocultural theory of Vygotsky (1978) that emphasizes the significance of social interaction during the process of higher-order thinking and adaptive behaviors. By these experiences, learners will not only memorize culturally appropriate responses; they are building the reflexive ability to be able to interrelate with uncertainty and revise their strategies on the fly (Lantolf and Thorne, 2006; Baker, 2011).

Nevertheless, experiential learning cannot exist in isolation and educators need to serve as examples of what they want to instill in their students. Deardorff (2006) states that the existence of intercultural competent teachers ensures that their classroom will create the environment of intellectual risk-taking and open discussion. Such modeling means that teachers should be able to engage in on-going professional development and self-reflection as conceived by Byram (1997) in order to maintain a culture of critical engagement in classroom. In addition, the institutional endorsement plays a crucial role in giving teachers the materials and motivation to develop these competencies (Kubota, 2016; Matsuda and Duran, 2012).

Curriculums also need to be fundamentally re thought. Intercultural dimensions are too often considered to be added as an extravagant part of the curriculum as opposed to being incorporated into the core part of the curriculum. In his argument, Kramsch (2006) and House (2003) argue that a successful curriculum should entrench intercultural competence into its goals, evaluation methods, and learning outcomes. This feeling is also shared by Zaharna (2016), according to which such integration is necessary to ensure that learners embed intercultural skills within themselves and use them comfortably in real-life business situations. Intercultural communication is also an essential element of language teaching, as it can not only increase the flexibility of students but also the way it works on a wider social scale (Scollon and Scollon, 2001; Seidlhofer, 2011).

The other important aspect of this transformation has to do with the reconsideration of the traditional modes of evaluation. It is suggested, as Canagarajah (2007) and Spencer-Oatey (2008) opine, by the approach of standard assessments that focus on formal correctness, not being considered to reflect the complexity of intercultural communication. Rather, they ought to be assessed upon how they exhibit adaptability, critical thinking and ability to think thoughtfully with ambiguity. Mauranen (2018) believes that these types of assessments will foster a more comprehensive perception of communication as dynamic and context-specific and equip the learners with the dynamic realities of global business.

Finally, teaching English in business ought not to be limited to linguistic competency but must rather be enhanced to a higher level of acquiring the communication process as a cultural negotiation process. Blommaert (2010) underlines the fact that intercultural competence is not about being aware of the rules of a particular culture, but about the possibility to approach other people in an ethical and considerate way in order to admire their experiences and worldviews. This line of thought can be related to a statement made by Holliday (2013) according to which educators must enable students to move past the surface-level cultural learning and cultivate the ability to critically evaluate their beliefs and communicative behaviors (Scollon and Scollon, 2001).

Redesigning Teacher Training and Institutional Fulfillment

The implementation of the intercultural competence concept into the business communication teaching environment is not only a matter of curricula but it is more of a matter of who is teaching the concept. To be effective role models in shaping the skills and attitudes that their students should develop, teachers themselves, as Deardorff (2006) and Byram (1997) note, need to have a solid degree of intercultural competence. This necessitates a reconsideration of conventional teacher training courses, which in most instances give a major emphasis to linguistic pedagogy. Although linguistic knowledge is important, it is not enough anymore. Teachers should be prepared to work within the cultural aspects of communication and create the conditions in which students feel free to discover new horizons and challenge the established assumptions (Byram and Feng, 2004; Kubota, 2016).

In order to do this, the teacher training programmes ought to focus on providing educators with experiential knowledge just as much as they do students. Similarly to the advantages that role-plays and simulations offer learners, teachers will also gain increased insights into the world of intercultural learning by undergoing systematic experiences, which compel them to challenge their own biases and broaden their cultural perspectives. Such experiences according to Canagarajah, (2007) may be cross-cultural experiences, jointly working on a project with international peers or reflective workshops that involve a teacher examining their own practices in an intercultural context. Once teachers go through such experiences, they will be in a better place to help the students to deal with intercultural communication challenges (Jenkins, 2015; Spencer-Oatey, 2008).

Besides learning through experience, continuous professional learning is a must. According to Byram (1997), intercultural competence does not equate to a given set of skills and dispositions that are fixed and immutable but are a process which involves reflection and constant improvement. Institutions need to, therefore, offer educators the chance to participate in meaningful professional development, be it in form of workshops and conferences or joint research projects (House, 2003; Matsuda and Duran, 2012). In addition, these professional development possibilities are supposed to be oriented towards the local challenges of educators in their contexts, taking into consideration that intercultural competence is context-specific and localized to regions and institutions (Kubota, 2016; Deardorff, 2006).

Nevertheless, they cannot be satisfied with the training of teachers. One of the most important aspects in ensuring that a culture of intercultural competence is developed within educational institutions is institutional support. Zaharna (2016) points out that institutional commitment is the key to the sustainability and effectiveness of the activities aimed at advancing and supporting intercultural awareness. Institutions need to actively be involved in creating an environment where intercultural communication is an important learning objective. It does not only imply investing in professional development, but also putting intercultural values in institutional policy, mission statements, and strategic plans (Mauranen, 2018; Sercu, 2005).

In addition, institutional support is not just classroom but the whole organizational culture. Promoting the development of a culture of openness and inclusion within the institutions makes educators and students more interested in inter cultural learning. According to Deardorff (2006) institutions designing the model of intercultural competence within their practices, including the encouragement of diversity during the hiring process, the encouragement of interdepartmental cooperation, and encouragement of international initiatives, help to create a learning environment, which is more genuine and helpful. The schools and universities can support the relevance of these competencies by aligning the institutional practices with the values of intercultural education and inspiring the students to continue using the values in their professional life (Matsuda and Duran, 2012; Spencer-Oatey, 2008).

Assessment is central to this also. The traditional tests, whose primary aim is to measure the grammatical and structural perfection of the language and memorizing the content, do not correspond well with intercultural competence (Canagarajah, 2007; Seidlhofer, 2011). Rather, new evaluation strategies are to be created to gauge the capacity of students to cope with intercultural experiences and adjust their communicative modalities in relation to the latter. According to Spencer-Oatey (2008) and Jenkins (2015), such assessments might be reflective portfolios, case-based, and collaborative projects that would imitate real-world intercultural challenges. These assessment tools will not only allow taking a more precise measure of the intercultural competence of students, but it will also prompt them to make themselves engage in self-reflection and critical thinking.

The combination of teacher training, institutional support, and assessment practices is a cornerstone of an educational system that will actually lead to intercultural competence. However, it is imperative to note that the above elements do not exist in vacuum. Their success relies on their correlation with each other and forming a unified system that supports intercultural awareness throughout all levels of the educational process (Zaharna, 2016; Kramsch, 2006). As long as the teacher training programs, institutional policies, and assessment methods, in their entirety, are focused on the development of intercultural competence, educators and students, alike, will be enabled to take the business communication with a stronger sense of cultural dimensions that contribute to shaping the latter (House, 2003; Seidlhofer, 2011).

Policy and Educational Practice implications

Application of intercultural competence in business teaching of the English language has far-reaching impacts that go beyond the classroom practices. It requires a reassessment of educational policies, curriculum design and institutional agendas in order to be in line with globalized nature of the world. This section explains how the policy makers and institutions in the field of education can promote intercultural competence at a larger level, by facilitating the environment that will enable both educators and the learners to acquire essential skills that will enable them to navigate the intercultural level of communication.

At a policy level, educational authorities are central in the development of priorities and frameworks that act as guiding factors on business English education. As Zaharna (2016) emphasizes, the intercultural competence should be explicitly mentioned as the core element of language education, and it should be implemented in national and institutional standards. This includes updating curriculum standards to bring into action intercultural learning outcomes, grading standards, and teaching methods that are sensitive to business communication in the global arena (Kramsch, 2006; Byram and Feng, 2004). Through the development of transparent policy guidelines, education authorities can make sure that intercultural competence is no longer the optional complement but a part and parcel of business English courses.

The necessity of being flexible and responsive to varying situations should also see its reflection in curriculum reforms. House (2003) insists that, standardization intercultural education as practiced by different regions or institutions, can be counterproductive, when it does not recognize local cultural and educational facts. Rather, the policymakers ought to embrace the more flexible principle in which institutions should be able to upgrade intercultural frameworks to fit into specific contexts without overlooking the fundamentals. This flexibility is essential in such countries as Indonesia, where diversity in the region and the difference in the intensity of international contacts demand specific educational responses (Kubota, 2016; Jenkins, 2015). Through the encouragement of context-sensitive policies,

educational authorities are able to empower institutions to conduct their own intercultural research when it comes to dealing with intercultural issues that their learners are confronting.

The institution has also to change the institutional priorities to consider the significance of intercultural competence. According to Deardorff (2006), the institutions that truly place a high value in intercultural education, should be ready to invest in professional development, curriculum redesign, and integration of the digital tools that can support the intercultural learning. This entails not only allocating finances to workshops and teacher training programs but also investing in infrastructure that makes it possible to implement collaborative projects and virtual exchanges and conduct cross-cultural research (Mauranen, 2018; Matsuda & Duran, 2012). By making a declaration of intercultural competence culture building, institutions make it known to both teachers and learners that they value the process of intercultural competence development.

In addition, institutions ought to focus on inclusion practices that value and embrace cultural diversity among communities. In her idea of inclusivity, Kubota (2016) states that it is not only a token gesture but a proactive move to foster the idea of representation, equity, and dialogue within various cultural groups. To illustrate, schools can establish cross-cultural mentorship schemes, cross-and intercultural student-led initiatives, and cross-cultural collaborative projects that can unite learners of different backgrounds (Holmes, 2014; Spencer-Oatey, 2008). These initiatives also help not only the intercultural competence but also lead to a more inclusive and cohesive institutional environment.

There is also the problem of Assessment Policies which must be re-examined. Conventional tests that emphasize on correct language use and memorization do not reflect the multifaceted nature of intercultural competence that encompasses critical thinking, adaptability, and conducting ethical interaction (Canagarajah, 2007; Seidlhofer, 2011). Educational policymakers can also promote the creation of new assessment techniques that capture these expanded competencies, including reflective portfolios and case-based assessments and peer feedback systems (Baker, 2015; Spencer-Oatey, 2008). Such techniques do not only give a more precise reading of the intercultural skills of the learners but also promote the self-reflection and shared learning.

And, lastly, the overall consequences of intercultural education require a continued engagement in interdisciplinary cooperation. Intercultural competence overlaps with several disciplines, such as psychology, sociology, business studies, and political science. According to Byram and Feng (2004) and Jenkins (2015), the institutions and policymakers ought to engage in the active facilitation of interdisciplinary conversations and studies to formulate more inclusive platforms of intercultural education. The example is the cooperation between language instructors and representatives of business to develop specialized modules, which can be oriented on cross-cultural negotiation, global management, or international leadership (Holmes, 2014; Mauranen, 2018). The process of crossing the disciplinary limits can provide learning institutions with a more contextually relevant and more enriching experience to their students.

CONCLUSION

As observed in this study, there is a need to change the emphasis of English to business studies in Indonesia to be more of a holistic model that incorporates intercultural competence rather than the focus on linguistic accuracy. The analysis indicates that the prevailing pedagogical approaches tend to overlook cultural aspects and therefore students are not well prepared to face the dynamics of business relationships in the global environment. Through reliance on sociocultural and

sociolinguistic theories, the study highlights the significance of experiential learning techniques, including simulations and case studies, which develop the flexibility and critical cultural awareness in students.

Besides this, the findings also indicate that these transformations cannot be maintained without institutional and policy-level support. The teacher training, curriculum reform and new practices in assessment will have to be synchronized in such a way that intercultural competence is at the center of the business English education. Finally, the world has become global, which makes linguistic proficiency ineffective: to communicate effectively, one should be able to read the cultural signs, deal with ambiguity, and act ethically towards different viewpoints.

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