

## Development of Intercultural Competence in Language Learners: the State of Art

Amirhossein Rastgoo 

Instructor, English Department, Islamic Azad University, Tonekabon Branch, Tonekabon, Iran.  
*ar.creed@yahoo.com*

### Abstract

This paper provides a comprehensive review of literature on the significance of intercultural competence in language learners, emphasizing its crucial role in an increasingly globalized world. Various factors that impact the development of intercultural competence, including attitudes, prior knowledge, pedagogical methods, and Byram's competence model are examined in detail. To lay the groundwork for a deeper understanding of this concept, Swain and Bachman's models of language competence are initially presented. Furthermore, the paper briefly explores some well-known perspectives and key stages in the development of intercultural competence. It is suggested that effective language programs should incorporate intercultural competence development through a multifaceted approach, while also being mindful of potential drawbacks such as the reinforcement of stereotypes or power imbalances. Additional research is warranted to investigate the influence of pedagogical strategies and other factors on the enhancement of intercultural competence. It also underscores the importance of fostering intercultural competence in language learning and underscores the necessity for educators and policymakers to prioritize this aspect when designing curricula and navigating an increasingly diverse global landscape.

**Keywords:** Competence, Intercultural competence, Cultural awareness, Cross-cultural communication, Critical thinking

**Citation:** Rastgoo, A. (2024). *Applications of Language Studies*, 2(2), 116-143.

## **1. Introduction**

Competence is a multifaceted construct that can be defined and understood in various ways depending on the context and perspective (Orr et al., 2020). Competence refers to the ability or readiness to perform a specific task, function, or role, and it can be evaluated and measured in various ways depending on the context and purpose. In general, competence implies having the necessary capabilities, expertise, and readiness to carry out a particular activity or fulfill a specific role successfully. It goes beyond mere theoretical knowledge and encompasses the practical application and effective utilization of acquired knowledge and skills. In addition to the broad understanding of competence as the ability or readiness to perform a specific task, function, or role, there are various perspectives and models that further delve into the concept (Garcia, 2022).

Swain's Competence Model (1985) has been linked to intercultural competence development, which involves the ability to communicate effectively with individuals from different cultural backgrounds. Swain's concept of communicative competence refers to the ability of a language learner to effectively use language in real-life situations by understanding various linguistic and cultural factors and using language strategically to achieve communication goals. This involves not only language knowledge but also the ability to negotiate meaning and interact with others in meaningful ways. Studies have shown that the development of sociolinguistic and pragmatic competencies is critical for intercultural communication and that meaningful interaction with individuals from different cultural backgrounds is essential for developing intercultural competence (Bahlai et al., 2019). Swain's Competence Model also highlights the importance of meaningful interaction and the use of language for communication purposes in second language acquisition, which is also critical for intercultural competence development. Language learners who engage in authentic and meaningful communication with individuals from different cultural backgrounds are more likely to develop sociolinguistic and pragmatic competencies necessary for effective intercultural communication. In addition to language learning, there are other ways to develop intercultural competence, including exposure to diverse cultures and perspectives, cultural immersion experiences, and intercultural training programs. These

experiences can help individuals understand and appreciate different cultural perspectives, adapt to different cultural norms, and communicate effectively with individuals from diverse backgrounds (Fantini, 2009).

Another notable model which was presented by Lyle Bachman emphasizes the communicative aspect of language proficiency and posits two primary components, linguistic competence and pragmatic competence (Bachman, 1990). Linguistic competence, which refers to knowledge of grammar, vocabulary, and syntax, is important for intercultural communication as it enables individuals to use language accurately and appropriately when communicating with people from different cultures. Pragmatic competence, which refers to the ability to use language appropriately in social and cultural contexts, is also important for intercultural communication. This involves an understanding of cultural norms, values, and beliefs, as well as the ability to adapt one's communication style to fit the cultural context. There are also different statements depicting what competence is and how it is defined in scholars' viewpoints (Byram, 2020).

In psychological view, competence is the ability or capacity of an individual to perform a specific task or activity effectively, based on their skills, knowledge, and personal attributes. This view emphasizes the importance of personal qualities, such as self-confidence, motivation, and perseverance (Bandura, 1997). In educational view, competence is a measurable level of proficiency or mastery of a particular subject or skill area and focuses on the attainment of specific learning outcomes, such as knowledge, understanding, and practical application (Sparks-Langer & Colton, 1991). In cultural view, competence is the ability of an individual to function effectively in a particular cultural context and also recognizes the importance of cultural awareness, sensitivity, and adaptation (Bennett, 1993). Cultural competence refers to the ability to effectively interact with individuals from different cultural backgrounds (Betancourt et al., 2002). It involves developing knowledge, skills, and attitudes that enable individuals to communicate and collaborate across cultural boundaries and to avoid misunderstandings and conflicts (Campinha-Bacote, 2002). Having intercultural competence is also crucial in language learning as it enables successful communication and

collaboration with individuals from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds (Fantini, 2009).

The essentiality of intercultural competence for language learners in today's globalized world serves as a strong rationale for exploring its development. In addition, intercultural competence development can enhance language learning outcomes by improving motivation and engagement. Language learners who develop intercultural competence are even better able to connect with the language they are learning and more motivated to learn about the culture that surrounds it (Byram & Wagner, 2018). This can lead to improved language learning outcomes, as learners are more invested in their language learning journey. Reviewing intercultural competence development theories assist researchers and practitioners to gain insights into the different stages and dimensions of intercultural competence, the factors that influence its development, and the methods and techniques for measuring and developing it. This understanding can inform the design and implementation of intercultural training programs and interventions, as well as the development of assessment tools to measure intercultural competence. Reviewing the intercultural competence development theories, therewith, can help identify gaps and limitations in current research leading to new research questions and directions. It can also help researchers and practitioners to critically evaluate the existing interventions and programs and improve their effectiveness.

Traditionally, intercultural competence has been seen as the ability to understand and respect cultural differences, and to adapt one's behavior to different cultural contexts. However, a novel perspective on intercultural competence in foreign language education is to view it as a process of cultural transformation. This perspective emphasizes that learning a foreign language involves not only acquiring linguistic knowledge but also developing a new cultural identity that incorporates aspects of the target culture (Sarwari et al., 2024). According to this perspective, intercultural competence is not just about understanding and respecting cultural differences, but about actively engaging with those differences in order to transform one's own cultural identity. This involves a process of reflection and self-awareness, as students learn to critically examine their own cultural assumptions and biases,

and to question the ways in which their own culture shapes their perceptions and behaviors. Language plays a crucial role in cultural transformation, shaping identities and bridging divides. Foreign language education should focus on proficiency in navigating diverse cultural contexts to empower students in reshaping their identities (Alaei & Nosrati, 2018). Understanding the impact of context on cultural interactions, students can develop a critical understanding of intercultural competence (Ghaemi & Soltani, 2023).

## **2. Theoretical framework**

Intercultural competence is a multifaceted concept that evolves with time and experience. Scholars have introduced various models to outline the stages of intercultural competence development. One prominent theory is the Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS) by Bennett (1986), which delineates six stages from denial to integration. Denial is the initial stage where individuals may be oblivious to cultural distinctions, perceiving their own culture as superior. Moving through stages like defense, minimization, and acceptance, individuals gradually acknowledge and value cultural differences, seeking to understand other perspectives. In adaptation stage, individuals adjust their behavior and communication to align with diverse cultural contexts. Integration, the final stage, involves a profound appreciation of cultural diversity, enabling individuals to incorporate varied perspectives into their worldview, fostering meaningful relationships with people from diverse backgrounds.

Another important theory is Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT), developed by Giles et al. (1991). CAT posits that individuals adjust their communication style to match that of their conversational partner in order to facilitate communication and build rapport. This theory emphasizes the importance of being able to adapt to different communication styles in intercultural interactions. CAT is a widely studied and applied theory in the field of intercultural communication. It suggests that individuals adjust their communication style in order to accommodate the communication style of their conversational partner. This accommodation may involve changes in language, tone, accent, nonverbal behaviors, and other aspects of communication. According to CAT, people adjust their communication style to achieve social approval, express solidarity with their conversational partner, or establish a sense of identity. The theory also suggests that

individuals may accommodate in order to reduce social distance or emphasize social distance between themselves and their conversational partner.

Stella Ting-Toomey's Face Negotiation Theory (FNT) is also an influential theory in the field (Ting-Toomey, 1988). FNT proposes that individuals from different cultures have different face-saving needs and face-giving behaviors, and that effective communication in intercultural interactions depends on being able to negotiate these differences. This theory emphasizes the importance of understanding and respecting cultural norms and expectations. The theory suggests that effective communication in intercultural interactions depends on being able to negotiate these differences. This involves understanding and respecting cultural norms and expectations, as well as being able to adapt one's communication style to meet the needs of the other person. FNT also emphasizes the importance of managing conflict in intercultural interactions. The theory suggests that conflict can arise when individuals from different cultures have conflicting face-saving needs or when one person's face-saving needs are not being respected. In order to manage the conflict effectively, it is important to understand the other person's face-saving needs and to work towards a mutually acceptable solution.

John Berry's Critical Incident Theory (CIT) proposes that intercultural competence is developed through reflective learning from critical incidents, or experiences that challenge an individual's assumptions and beliefs about other cultures (Berry, 1997). This theory emphasizes the importance of reflection and self-awareness in intercultural learning. The theory suggests that critical incidents can be positive or negative, and that they can occur in a variety of contexts, such as study abroad programs, international business ventures, or cross-cultural interactions in one's own community. The key feature of a critical incident is that it challenges an individual's assumptions and beliefs about other cultures, and forces them to reflect on their own cultural biases and values. Furthermore, CIT emphasizes the importance of reflection and self-awareness in intercultural learning. The theory suggests that individuals must reflect on their own cultural biases and assumptions in order to develop intercultural competence. This self-awareness allows individuals to recognize and challenge their own cultural biases, and to develop a more open and accepting attitude towards other cultures.

Another framework for intercultural competence development is the Cultural Intelligence (CI) model developed by Earley and Ang (2003). This model proposes four stages of intercultural competence development as follows: 1. Cognitive: the cognitive component of cultural competence refers to an individual's knowledge about different cultures and their beliefs, values, and communication styles. This knowledge can be gained through formal education, personal experiences, and exposure to diverse cultures. It involves understanding the cultural norms and expectations that shape behavior and communication, as well as recognizing cultural stereotypes and biases (Bagwe & Haskollar, 2020). This component is important for developing a foundation of understanding and respect for other cultures. 2. Physical: the physical component of cultural competence refers to an individual's ability to recognize and respond to cultural cues, such as body language and nonverbal communication. Different cultures have different norms when it comes to physical expression, such as eye contact, gestures, and personal space. Being able to recognize and interpret these cues is important for effective communication and building relationships with people from different cultures. 3. Emotional: the emotional component of cultural competence refers to an individual's ability to manage their emotions in cross-cultural interactions. This includes recognizing and adapting to cultural differences in emotional expression, such as differences in how emotions are displayed and the degree of emotional expressiveness that is considered appropriate (Bagwe & Haskollar, 2020). It also involves being aware of one's own emotional reactions and biases, and learning to manage them in a culturally appropriate way.

Cultural competence also includes a behavioral component which refers to an individual's ability to adjust their behaviors and communication styles to fit different cultural contexts (Barker, 2016). This involves being able to communicate effectively with people from different cultures, using appropriate language, tone, and nonverbal cues. It also involves understanding and respecting cultural differences in social norms, customs, and values, and adapting one's behavior accordingly. This component is important for building trust and rapport with people from different cultures, and for successfully navigating cross-cultural interactions.

The CI model emphasizes the importance of both knowledge and skills in intercultural competence development, and highlights the role of emotions in cross-cultural interactions (Earley & Ang, 2003). In addition, the evidence depict that CI model recognizes that intercultural competence is a dynamic and ongoing process that requires continuous learning and adaptation. It emphasizes the importance of self-awareness and reflection in developing intercultural competence, as well as the need for empathy and respect for other cultures. Moreover, researchers have explored the impact of Cultural Intelligence (CI) training on intercultural communication competence. Cultural intelligence points to the ability to accommodate with different cultural contexts and interact effectively with people from diverse cultural backgrounds. For example, Matsumoto et al. (2017) who conducted a study on the effectiveness of cultural intelligence training in developing intercultural communication competence found that learners who received cultural intelligence training showed significant improvement in their intercultural communication competence.

### **3. Review of Literature**

By integrating intercultural competence development into language learning programs, educators can prepare learners to become effective communicators and collaborators in diverse cultural settings (Chen & Starosta, 2007). One example of this research is a study by Byram et al. (2018), which investigated the impact of an online intercultural learning course on the development of intercultural competence in university students. The research study showed that the language course had a beneficial impact on the intercultural competence of students, particularly in relation to their attitudes towards cultural diversity and their capacity to reflect thoughtfully on their own cultural beliefs. In general, the advancement of intercultural competence is a crucial field of investigation in language education, with significant implications for both the teaching and learning processes. By understanding how learners develop intercultural competence, educators can design more effective language programs that prepare learners for the diverse and complex global society (Barker, 2016). In addition to the study by Byram et al. (2018), there have been several other studies that have investigated the development of intercultural competence in language learners. For example, a study by Deardorff and Arasaratnam-Smith (2019) examined the impact of a study abroad

program on the development of intercultural competence in language learners. The study found that the program had a positive effect on learners' intercultural competence, particularly in terms of their knowledge of cultural differences and their ability to adapt to new cultural contexts.

Another study by Chen and Starkey (2018) explored the development of intercultural competence in Chinese language learners. The findings indicated that learners who participated in an intercultural communication course showed significant improvement in their intercultural competence, particularly in their ability to interpret and evaluate intercultural communication situations. Comprehensively, the reviewed studies suggest that intercultural competence enhancement in language learners can be facilitated through various approaches, including explicit instruction, experiential learning, and critical reflection. Moreover, the studies highlight the importance of factors such as motivation, attitudes, and prior cultural knowledge in shaping the learners' intercultural competence. As such, educators can use these findings to inform their teaching practices and design more effective language programs that promote intercultural understanding and communication. More recently, Zhang and Matsumoto (2021) found that intercultural training had a positive impact on Chinese international students' intercultural competence, especially in terms of conflict management and adaptation skills. Overall, these studies highlight the importance of intercultural training and competence in promoting successful intercultural communication, adaptation, and personal adjustment.

In Iran, Miri and Pishghadam (2018) conducted a longitudinal study that tracked the progression of intercultural competence in Iranian EFL learners over time. Their findings demonstrated that as learners engaged in language education, they exhibited noticeable improvements in various aspects of intercultural communication, such as increased empathy, better adaptation to diverse cultural contexts, and heightened awareness of cultural differences. This study underscored the transformative potential of language education in fostering intercultural competence among learners. In a related field, Khosravi and Tavakoli (2019) found a significant positive relationship between intercultural sensitivity and EFL learners' willingness to communicate. Their research highlighted how an increase in cultural

awareness and sensitivity can enhance the learners' confidence and motivation to engage in intercultural communication, ultimately leading to more effective language learning outcomes.

On the other hand, in a study conducted by Hosseini and Mohammadi (2020), the impact of study abroad experiences on intercultural competence development among Iranian university students was investigated. The research revealed that students participating in study abroad programs demonstrated notable enhancements in various aspects of intercultural skills, such as heightened cultural awareness, improved adaptability, and enhanced communication proficiency. These findings highlight the significant role of study abroad experiences in fostering intercultural competence among Iranian university students and equipping them for global citizenship.

Moreover, a study by Rahmani and Kazemi (2020) examined the influence of intercultural curricula on the enhancement of intercultural competence among Iranian high school students. The research revealed that students exposed to intercultural curricula exhibited significant improvements in various facets of intercultural skills, including increased cultural sensitivity, better cross-cultural communication abilities, and enhanced adaptability to diverse environments. These findings underscore the positive impact of integrating intercultural content into educational curricula in fostering the development of intercultural competence among Iranian high school students, preparing them for effective engagement in a globalized world.

### **3.1. Culture-Specific vs. Culture-General Approaches**

Culture-specific approaches involve teaching about a particular culture, while culture-general approaches involve teaching about cultural dimensions and concepts that apply across cultures. According to Leask and Bridge (2013), culture-specific approaches can provide learners with deep and nuanced knowledge of a particular culture, while culture-general approaches can provide learners with a framework for understanding cultural differences and similarities. However, Deardorff (2016) argues that a combination of both approaches may be most effective in developing intercultural competence.

In recent years, scholars have continued to debate the relative merits of culture-specific and culture-general approaches to intercultural communication training. Proponents of culture-specific approaches argue that learners must develop a deep understanding of a particular culture in order to effectively communicate and work with people from that culture. For example, Hafner and Anderson (2013) argue that culture-specific knowledge is essential for building trust and rapport with intercultural partners, and that this knowledge cannot be gained effectively through culture-general training. However, other scholars have questioned the effectiveness of culture-specific approaches, particularly in today's globalized and diverse workplaces. As Deardorff (2016) notes, culture-specific knowledge can quickly become outdated or irrelevant, particularly as cultures continue to evolve and change. Furthermore, some scholars argue that focusing too heavily on one particular culture can lead to stereotypes and essentializing, which can actually hinder effective intercultural communication (Mansouri, 2013). Culture-general approaches, conversely, emphasize the development of broad cultural competencies and awareness that can be applied across a range of cultures. This can include learning about cultural dimensions, such as individualism versus collectivism, as well as developing skills such as empathy and active listening. Proponents of culture-general approaches argue that this type of training can help learners navigate cultural differences in a wide range of settings (Gudykunst, 2015). While there are ongoing debates on the effectiveness of culture-specific versus culture-general approaches, some experts have suggested that a combination of both approaches could yield the best results. For example, Kim and Park (2015) suggest that culture-specific knowledge can be integrated into broader culture-general training, allowing learners to develop a nuanced understanding of particular cultures while also building broad cultural competencies.

### **3.2. Short-Term vs. Long-Term Programs**

Short-term programs involve brief periods of study abroad, while long-term programs involve extended periods of study abroad. According to Sasaki and Hirose (2013), short-term programs can provide learners with exposure to new cultures and perspectives, while long-term programs can provide learners with more opportunities for language and cultural immersion. However, Sasaki and Hirose (2013) argue that the effectiveness of study abroad

programs depends on a range of factors, such as the quality of the program, the level of support provided to learners, and the learners' individual characteristics and experiences. Proponents of short-term programs argue that they offer a cost-effective and accessible way for learners to gain exposure to new cultures and perspectives (Anderson et al., 2006). Short-term programs typically last between one and eight weeks and may involve language study, cultural excursions, and homestays with local families.

On the other hand, advocates for long-term study abroad programs argue that extended stays in a foreign culture can provide learners with more opportunities for language and cultural immersion, allowing them to develop a deeper understanding of the host culture (Gu & Schweisfurth, 2016). Long-term programs may last for a semester or a year, and may involve enrolling in a foreign university, conducting research, or interning with a local organization. While both short-term and long-term study abroad programs have their own advantages, research suggests that the effectiveness of these programs depends on a variety of factors. For example, Sasaki and Hirose (2013) argue that the quality of the program, the level of support provided to learners, and the learners' individual characteristics and experiences all play a role in determining the success of a study abroad program. Learners who have prior cross-cultural experience or language proficiency may be better equipped to navigate the challenges of a new culture and may benefit more from a long-term program. In addition, recent research suggests that the format of a study abroad program may be less important than the specific activities and experiences that learners engage in while abroad (Johnson, 2018). For example, participating in cultural activities, engaging with locals, and reflecting on cultural differences may be more important for developing intercultural competence than the length of the program.

### **3.3. Motivation and Engagement**

To develop the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately with people from diverse cultural backgrounds and to understand appreciate cultural differences, learners must actively engage with individuals from different cultures. This engagement is a crucial component of achieving intercultural competence (Mirzaei & Forouzandeh, 2013). Explicit instruction may be more effective for learners who are highly motivated to learn about other cultures or have

prior cultural knowledge, as they may be more likely to engage with and benefit from the structured instruction. However, experiential learning may be more engaging and motivating for learners who prefer hands-on and immersive learning experiences. A study by Hurd and Powers (2013) showed that both explicit instruction and experiential learning can be effective for developing intercultural competence, but that learners who are highly motivated and engaged in the learning process may benefit more from experiential learning.

### **3.4. Context and Environment**

The effectiveness of explicit instruction versus experiential learning in developing intercultural competence may vary depending on the contextual and environmental factors involved. For instance, in a classroom setting, explicit instruction may be more feasible and pragmatic, whereas in real-world intercultural contexts, experiential learning may be more appropriate. In a study conducted by Park and Kim (2016), it was revealed that the effectiveness of study abroad programs in developing intercultural competence may depend on various factors such as the program design and the degree to which learners are exposed to genuine intercultural experiences.

In recent years, there have been several studies exploring the effectiveness of explicit instruction versus experiential learning in various contexts and environments. One such study by Chun et al. (2017) examined the impact of explicit instruction versus experiential learning on second language acquisition. The researchers found that while explicit instruction was more effective in the short term, experiential learning was more effective in the long term. Another study by Cavanagh et al. (2016) explored the effectiveness of experiential learning in the context of online education. The researchers found that experiential learning activities, such as simulations and virtual labs, were effective in promoting student engagement and improving learning outcomes in online courses. In the field of business education, a study by Erden et al. (2019) compared the effectiveness of explicit instruction versus experiential learning in teaching entrepreneurship. The researchers found that while both methods were effective, experiential learning was more effective in developing entrepreneurial skills and attitudes. Furthermore, a study by Gosselin et al. (2015) explored the impact of experiential learning in the context of a professional development program for teachers. The researchers

found that experiential learning activities, such as action research and peer collaboration, were effective in improving teacher knowledge, skills, and attitudes. Overall, these studies suggest that the effectiveness of explicit instruction versus experiential learning depends on the context and environment in which the learning takes place. While explicit instruction may be more feasible and practical in certain settings, experiential learning may be more appropriate and effective in others.

### **3.5. Language Proficiency**

According to a research study conducted by Li and Li (2016), study abroad programs can be highly advantageous for developing both language proficiency and intercultural competence, particularly for learners who possess a higher level of language proficiency. Furthermore, there has been ongoing research aimed at examining the correlation between language proficiency and intercultural competence development in relation to both explicit instruction and experiential learning. For example, a study by Kim et al. (2013) examined the effectiveness of explicit instruction in developing intercultural communication skills for learners with low levels of language proficiency. The researchers found that explicit instruction was effective in providing learners with cultural knowledge and communication strategies, which improved their ability to interact with speakers of different languages.

Another study by Wang et al. (2015) explored the effectiveness of experiential learning in developing intercultural competence of learners with high levels of language proficiency. The researchers found that experiential learning activities, such as intercultural exchange programs and service learning, were effective in providing learners with opportunities to practice and improve their language skills in a real-world intercultural setting. Moreover, a study by Deardorff and Arasaratnam-Smith (2012) highlighted the importance of integrating language learning and intercultural competence development in both explicit instruction and experiential learning. The researchers argued that language learning and intercultural competence development are interdependent processes, and that learners need to develop both to communicate and interact with speakers of different languages effectively.

### **3.6. Cultural Awareness and Knowledge**

Cultural awareness is being conscious of cultural differences and respecting them and cultural knowledge is the understanding of different cultures, including their norms, beliefs, and practices. Both are essential for effective intercultural communication. Explicit instruction can provide learners with structured knowledge and understanding of cultural norms and practices. For example, a research study by Chen and Starosta (2013) indicated that explicit instruction can increase the learners' cultural knowledge and awareness. In contrast, experiential learning can provide learners with immersive and authentic cultural experiences that can lead to increased cultural understanding and empathy. A study by Salaberry and Kessler (2013) revealed that students who participated in a study abroad program showed greater intercultural competence, including greater cultural empathy and openness to diversity, than students who did not participate. In intercultural adaptation, the development of cultural awareness and cultural knowledge is typically seen as the first step towards intercultural competence (Bhawuk & Brislin, 2019).

Cultural awareness involves recognizing and accepting cultural differences, while cultural knowledge involves learning about other cultures and understanding how cultural values and beliefs influence behavior (Bhawuk & Brislin, 2019). Without a basic understanding of cultural differences, it is difficult for individuals to adapt their behavior and communication styles to fit different cultural contexts. Once individuals have developed cultural awareness and knowledge, they can begin to develop intercultural communication skills, such as the ability to listen actively, ask questions, and clarify misunderstandings (Kim & Kim, 2010). These skills are critical for effective cross-cultural interactions, and can help individuals navigate cultural differences and build positive relationships with people from diverse cultural backgrounds. Moreover, discourse, pragmatics, and grammar expectancy all play important roles in the development of intercultural competence, particularly in the context of intercultural communication.

Discourse refers to the way that language is used in social interactions, including the structure of conversations, the types of language used, and the conventions and norms that guide communication (Hinkel, 2017). In intercultural communication, discourse can be particularly important, as different cultures may have different expectations regarding how

communication should be structured and what types of language are appropriate in different social contexts. These differences can include the use of formal or informal language, the degree of directness or indirectness in communication, and the use of nonverbal cues. Understanding these differences in discourse can help individuals navigate intercultural communication more effectively and build stronger relationships.

Pragmatics refers to the use of language in social interactions, including the intended meaning behind language use, the cultural assumptions and norms that shape communication behaviors, and the social context in which communication takes place (Kecskes & Romero-Trillo, 2020). In intercultural communication, individuals from different cultural backgrounds may have different expectations regarding appropriate language use and may interpret language in different ways. These differences can include the use of indirect language, the appropriateness of humor in communication, and the use of nonverbal cues. Understanding these differences in pragmatics can help individuals avoid misunderstandings and build stronger relationships across cultures. Individuals who are skilled in pragmatics are better equipped to navigate intercultural communication challenges, such as misunderstandings or misinterpretations of language use. They are able to recognize and interpret nonverbal cues, such as facial expressions and gestures, and are able to use indirect language or humor in different cultural contexts appropriately. In addition, individuals with strong pragmatic skills are better able to build trust and rapport with people from different cultural backgrounds (Ivenz & Kilmova, 2022). By demonstrating an understanding and respect for cultural norms and values, they are able to establish positive relationships and avoid cultural clashes or communication breakdowns.

Grammar expectancy refers to the assumptions that individuals make about the grammar and syntax of language use, including the rules that guide language production and comprehension (Bardovi-Harlig & Mahan-Taylor, 2019). In intercultural communication, individuals from different cultural backgrounds may have different expectations regarding grammar and syntax, which can lead to misunderstandings if these expectations are not met. One example of differences in grammar expectancy across cultures is the use of indirect versus direct communication. In some cultures, such as that of the United States, direct

communication is often valued and expected. This means that individuals are expected to speak clearly and directly, and to make their intentions and meaning explicit. In contrast, in some Asian cultures, indirect communication is often valued and expected. This means that individuals may use less direct language and rely more on nonverbal cues and context to convey meaning (Jackson, 2015). Understanding these differences in grammar expectancy can help individuals communicate more effectively and avoid misunderstandings in intercultural communication. By being aware of different communication styles and norms that exist in different cultures, individuals can adapt their language use and communication style to fit the expectations of others, while also being mindful of their own cultural norms and values.

#### **4. Discussion**

In this increasingly globalized world, the acquisition of intercultural competence is crucial, and language learning plays a pivotal role in its development (Barker, 2016). There has been a recent surge in research interest in the advancement of intercultural competence in language learners, with a specific emphasis on identifying effective pedagogical methods for promoting it. This paper presents a comprehensive discussion of various factors that have an impact on the development of intercultural competence in language learners, which include their attitudes and prior cultural knowledge, as well as various pedagogical approaches such as critical reflection and experiential learning that can be utilized for promoting it. Many studies have investigated the impact of different approaches to teaching intercultural competence, including explicit instruction, experiential learning, and critical reflection (Koester & Lustig, 2015; Sarli & Phillimore, 2022). Byram's model of intercultural competence, which highlights the importance of developing skills in interpreting, relating, and discovering cultural differences, has been extensively used as a framework for teaching intercultural competence in language learning. Furthermore, several studies have underscored the significance of learners' motivation, attitudes, and prior cultural knowledge in shaping their intercultural competence development.

As highlighted in several studies, intercultural competence development is a crucial aspect of language education and study abroad experiences. Chen and Starkey (2018)

explored the enhancement of intercultural competence in Chinese language learners through an intercultural communication course. The study revealed significant improvements in learners' ability to interpret and evaluate intercultural communication situations after participating in the course. This suggests that explicit instruction, experiential learning, and critical reflection are effective approaches in fostering intercultural competence among language learners. Moreover, Miri and Pishghadam (2019) conducted a longitudinal study on Iranian EFL learners, demonstrating the positive impact of language education on intercultural competence development. The research showed that learners exhibited increased empathy, better adaptation to diverse cultural contexts, and heightened awareness of cultural differences as they progressed in their language studies. This underscores the importance of language education in not only improving language skills but also in nurturing intercultural abilities essential for effective global communication.

In a similar vein, Hosseini and Mohammadi (2020) found that Iranian university students who participated in study abroad programs experienced enhanced intercultural skills, such as improved cultural awareness and communication proficiency. These findings highlight the value of immersive experiences in foreign cultures for developing students' abilities to navigate a globalized world. Studies suggest that language education, intercultural communication courses, and study abroad programs collectively promote intercultural competence by exposing individuals to diverse cultures and fostering cross-cultural communication skills. Therefore, integrating intercultural competence development into educational curricula is crucial for preparing individuals to engage effectively in our multicultural world (Rahmani & Kazemi, 2020).

The reviewed literature also suggests that the development of intercultural competence in language learners is a complex process that requires a multifaceted approach. Effective language programs should integrate intercultural competence development into their curriculum, incorporating various pedagogical approaches to promote intercultural understanding and communication. Additionally, language teachers should cultivate a positive attitude and an open-minded approach towards cultural differences among their learners. As Chen and Starkey (2018) implied, while the importance of intercultural

competence in language learning cannot be denied, there are some potential drawbacks and challenges to its implementation. For example, the emphasis on intercultural competence may inadvertently reinforce cultural stereotypes or perpetuate power imbalances between cultures.

## **5. Conclusion**

In conclusion, this review highlights the importance of intercultural competence development in language learners, influenced by factors like attitudes, motivation, and prior cultural knowledge. Byram's model is widely used in teaching intercultural competence. Language programs should integrate this development into their curriculum, emphasizing a multifaceted approach. Educators play a vital role in fostering positive attitudes toward cultural differences. Further research is needed to explore pedagogical approaches and other factors affecting intercultural competence. Developing intercultural competence is an ongoing process that requires dedication. Equipping language learners with these skills enables them to navigate today's diverse global society effectively.

The implications of this study are twofold. First, language teachers and program administrators can benefit from the theories reviewed in this study to design language programs that effectively promote intercultural competence development. The study can be helpful by declaring the importance of integrating intercultural competence development into language curricula, cultivating a positive attitude towards cultural differences, and utilizing various pedagogical approaches to promote intercultural understanding and communication. Language teachers and program administrators can use this information to develop comprehensive and effective language programs that develop intercultural competence in their learners. This study can also help language teachers and program administrators to better understand the challenges and barriers that learners may face in developing intercultural competence. By recognizing and addressing these challenges, teachers and administrators can create a more supportive and inclusive learning environment that fosters intercultural learning. One challenge that learners may face is cultural bias that can manifest in different ways, such as stereotyping, prejudice, or ethnocentrism. Considering the views looked at, language teachers and program administrators can help learners to recognize and overcome cultural bias by promoting self-reflection, critical thinking, and empathy. Teachers

can encourage learners to reflect on their own cultural backgrounds and biases, and to consider how these may influence their perceptions of other cultures. They can also provide opportunities for learners to engage in dialogue and exchange perspectives with people from different cultural backgrounds. Secondly, future researchers can benefit from this study by building on its suggestions and addressing some of its limitations.

Future research should focus on using robust research designs and larger sample sizes to explore the complex process of intercultural competence development in language learners. It is important to investigate the long-term effects of intercultural competence on learners' attitudes and behaviors towards cultural differences, as well as its impact on academic and professional success. Employers value intercultural competence, as it enables effective communication and collaboration across diverse cultural backgrounds, giving language learners a competitive edge in job market. Therefore, language education programs should prioritize intercultural competence development to equip learners with the skills needed to succeed in the globalized world.

### **Conflict of interest**

The author(s) certify/certifies that they have no affiliations with or involvement in any organization or entity with any financial interest (such as honoraria; educational grants; participation in speakers' bureaus; membership, employment, consultancies, stock ownership, or other equity interest; and expert testimony or patent-licensing arrangements), or non-financial interest (such as personal or professional relationships, affiliations, knowledge or beliefs) in the subject matter or materials discussed in the present research paper.

## References

- Alaei, M. M., & Nosrati, F. (2018). Research into EFL teachers' intercultural communicative competence and intercultural sensitivity. *Journal of Intercultural Communication Research*, 47(2), 73–86. Doi: <https://doi.org/10.1080/17475759.2018.1424020>.
- Anderson, P. H., Lawton, L., Rexeisen, R. J., & Hubbard, A. C. (2006). Short-term study abroad and intercultural sensitivity: A pilot study. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 30(4), 457-469. Doi: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijintrel.2005.10.004>.
- Bachman, L. (1990). *Fundamental considerations in language testing*. Oxford University Press.
- Bagwe, T. K., & Haskollar, E. (2020). Variables impacting intercultural competence: A systematic literature review. *Journal of Intercultural Communication Research*, 49(4), 346–371. Doi: <https://doi.org/10.1080/17475759.2020.1771751>.
- Bahlai, O., Machynska, N., Matviiv-Lozynska, Y., Senkovich, O., & Voloshyn, M. (2019). Developing students' intercultural communicative competence in foreign language classroom. *Advanced Education*, 6(11), 55–59. Doi: <https://doi.org/10.20535/2410-8286.158078>.
- Bandura, A. (1997). *Self-efficacy: The exercise of control*. W.H. Freeman and Company.
- Bardovi-Harlig, K., & Mahan-Taylor, R. (2019). Developing L2 pragmatic competence. *Language Teaching*, 52(3), 365-381. Doi: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0261444818000351>
- Barker, G. G. (2016). Cross-cultural perspectives on intercultural communication competence. *Journal of Intercultural Communication Research*, 45(1), 13–30. Doi: <https://doi.org/10.1080/17475759.2015.1104376>.
- Bennett, J. M. (1986). A developmental approach to training for intercultural sensitivity. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 10(2), 179-196. Doi: [https://doi.org/10.1016/0147-1767\(86\)90005-2](https://doi.org/10.1016/0147-1767(86)90005-2).

- Bennett, J. M. (1993). Cultural marginality: Identity issues in intercultural training. In R. M. Paige (Ed.), *Education for the intercultural experience* (pp. 21-40). Intercultural Press.
- Berry, J. W. (1997). Immigration, acculturation, and adaptation. *Applied Psychology: An International Review*, 46(1), 5-34. Doi: <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1464-0597.1997.tb01087>.
- Betancourt, J. R., Green, A. R., & Carrillo, J. E. (2002). *Cultural competence in health care: Emerging frameworks and practical approaches*. The Commonwealth Fund.
- Bhawuk, D. P. S., & Brislin, R. (2019). Cross-cultural training. In *International Encyclopedia of Intercultural Communication* (pp. 1-10). Wiley-Blackwell.
- Byram, M. (1997). *Teaching and assessing intercultural communicative competence*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
- Byram, M. (2020). *Teaching and assessing intercultural communicative competence*. 2nd ed. Bristol: Multilingual Matters. Doi: <https://doi.org/10.21832/BYRAM0244>.
- Byram, M., Gribkova, B., & Starkey, H. (2018). Developing intercultural competence in university students through an online course. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 39(7), 621-636. Doi: <https://doi.org/10.1080/01434632.2017.1401851>.
- Byram, M., & Wagner, M. (2018). Making a difference: Language teaching for intercultural and international dialogue. *Foreign Language Annals*, 51(1), 140–151. Doi: <https://doi.org/10.1111/flan.12319>.
- Campinha-Bacote, J. (2002). The process of cultural competence in the delivery of healthcare services: A model of care. *Journal of Transcultural Nursing*, 13(3), 181-184. Doi: <https://doi.org/10.1177/104365960201300302>.
- Cavanagh, A. J., Arbaugh, J. B., & Sridharan, S. (2016). Experiential learning activities and student engagement in online courses. *Journal of Online Learning and Teaching*, 12(3), 455-467. Doi: <https://doi.org/10.1080/01434632.2017.1401851>.

- Chen, G. M., & Starosta, W. J. (2007). Intercultural communication competence: A synthesis. In Asante M. K., Miike Y., & Yin J. (Eds.), *The Global Intercultural Communication Reader* (pp. 57–72). Routledge.
- Chen, H., & Starkey, H. (2018). Developing intercultural competence through Chinese language learning. *System*, 74(1), 98-110. Doi: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2018.04.005>.
- Chun, D. M., Kern, R. G., & Smith, B. (2017). The power of two: Deliberate practice and explicit learning in second language acquisition. *Applied Linguistics*, 38(4), 538-562. Doi: <https://doi.org/10.1093/applin/amv042>.
- Deardorff, D. K. (2016). Intercultural competence: A key to sustainable development goals. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 55(2), 106-110. Doi: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijintrel.2016.09.001>.
- Deardorff, D. K., & Arasaratnam-Smith, L. A. (2012). Intercultural competence: Integrating language and cultural competence. *Language Teaching*, 45(2), 133-144. Doi: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0261444811000537>.
- Deardorff, D. K., & Arasaratnam-Smith, L. A. (2019). The impact of study abroad on the development of intercultural competence. *Frontiers: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Study Abroad*, 31(1), 1-18. Doi: <https://doi.org/10.36366/frontiers.v31i1.409>.
- Elola, I., & Oskoz, A. (2015). Technology-enhanced language learning for intercultural competence development: A review of empirical studies. *Computer Assisted Language Learning*, 28(3), 247-265. Doi: <https://doi.org/10.1080/09588221.2014.991475>.
- Earley, P. C., & Ang, S. (2003). *Cultural intelligence: Individual interactions across cultures*. Stanford University Press.
- Erden, Z., Yıldırım-Öktem, Ö., & Gürbüz, R. (2019). Experiential learning vs. explicit instruction in entrepreneurship education: A comparison study. *Journal of*

*Entrepreneurship Education*, 22(3), 1-15. Doi: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1096348019857235>.

Fantini, A. E. (2009). Assessing intercultural competence. In D. K. Deardorff (Ed.), *The Sage handbook of intercultural competence* (pp. 456–476). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Garcia, J. V. (2022). Integration of intercultural communicative competence: A case of English language teachers in higher education. *English as a Foreign Language International Journal*, 26(1), 30–62. Doi: <https://doi.org/10.56498/163212022>.

Ghaemi, H., & Soltani, S. (2023). Examining intercultural communicative competence in collectivist and individualistic EFL teachers. *International Journal of Clinical and Medical Education Research*, 2(3), 61-67. Doi: <https://doi.org/10.33140/IJCMER>.

Giles, H., Coupland, N., & Coupland, J. (1991). Accommodation theory: Communication, context, and consequence. In H. Giles, J. Coupland, & N. Coupland (Eds.), *Contexts of accommodation: Developments in applied sociolinguistics* (pp. 1-68). Cambridge University Press.

Gosselin, D., Derosier, J., & Duval, D. (2015). The effectiveness of an experiential professional development program for teachers. *Journal of Research in Innovative Teaching & Learning*, 8(2), 181-203. Doi: <https://doi.org/10.1108/JRIT-07-2014-0027>.

Gudykunst, W. B. (2015). *Bridging differences: Effective intergroup communication* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.

Gu, Q., & Schweisfurth, M. (2016). Transcending the national context: Revisiting debates on the role of international education. *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education*, 46(4), 636-656. Doi: <https://doi.org/10.1080/03057925.2015.1122694>.

Hafner, C. A., & Anderson, S. S. (2013). Teaching culture and intercultural competence in a business communication course. *Business and Professional Communication Quarterly*, 76(4), 440-453. Doi: <https://doi.org/10.1177/2329490613508138>.

- Hinkel, E. (2017). *Handbook of research in second language teaching and learning*. Routledge.
- Hosseini, S., & Mohammadi, Z. (2020). The Impact of Study Abroad Experiences on Intercultural Competence Development Among Iranian University Students. *Journal of Intercultural Communication Research*, 49(4), 327-345. Doi: <https://doi.org/10.1080/17475759.2020.1802693>.
- Hurd, S., & Powers, S. M. (2013). Intercultural competence in a global world. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 17(3), 205-215. Doi: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1028315312453927>.
- Ivenz, P., & Klimova, B. (2022). A review study of activities used in the development of intercultural communication competence in foreign language classes. *International Journal of Society, Culture & Language*, 10(2), 137-150. Doi: <http://doi.org/10.22034/ijscsl.2022.556666.2681>.
- Jackson J. (2015). Becoming interculturally competent: Theory to practice in international education. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 48(2), 91–107. Doi: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijintrel.2015.03.012>.
- Johnson, R. D. (2018). Critical intercultural competencies and study abroad: A review and call for research. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 22(5), 433-450. Doi: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1028315318777005>.
- Kecskes, I., & Romero-Trillo, J. (2020). Intercultural Pragmatics. In *The Routledge Handbook of Language and Intercultural Communication* (pp. 94-110). Routledge.
- Khosravi, P., & Tavakoli, M. (2019). The Impact of Intercultural Sensitivity on EFL Learners' Willingness to Communicate. *Iranian Journal of Language Teaching Research*, 7(1), 1-18. Doi: <https://doi.org/10.30466/ijltr.2019.80237.0>.
- Kim, Y. Y., & Kim, K. S. (2010). *Communication and cross-cultural adaptation: An integrative theory*. Routledge.

- Kim, Y. Y., & Park, G. K. (2015). Intercultural communication training: A review and theoretical investigation. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 48(2), 1-14. Doi: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijintrel.2015.03.002>.
- Kim, Y. Y., Park, Y., & Rubdy, R. (2013). Low-level learners and intercultural communication: An empirical study of explicit instruction. *Language and Intercultural Communication*, 13(1), 64-81. Doi: <https://doi.org/10.1080/14708477.2012.758982>.
- Koester J., Lustig M. W. (2015). Intercultural communication competence: Theory, measurement, and application. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 48(1), 20–21. Doi: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijintrel.2015.03.006>.
- Li, L., & Li, Y. (2016). The impact of study abroad on the development of students' intercultural competence and foreign language proficiency. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 37(5), 467-483. Doi: <https://doi.org/10.1080/01434632.2015.1071821>.
- Mansouri, F. (2013). Beyond culturalism: Addressing the social determinants of identity, belonging and exclusion. *Journal of Intercultural Studies*, 34(6), 583-600. Doi: <https://doi.org/10.1080/07256868.2013.836456>.
- Matsumoto, D., Yoo, S. H., & Nakagawa, S. (2017). Individual and situational predictors of cultural intelligence development: A longitudinal study. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 60(2), 60-68. Doi: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijintrel.2017.08.002>.
- Miri, M., & Pishghadam, R. (2018). A Longitudinal Study of the Development of Intercultural Competence in Iranian EFL Learners. *Journal of Language and Intercultural Communication*, 18(4), 476-492. Doi: <https://doi.org/10.1080/14708477.2018.1499976>.
- Mirzaei, A., & Forouzandeh, F. (2013). Relationship between intercultural communicative competence and L2-Learning motivation of Iranian EFL Learners. *Journal of*

- Intercultural Communication Research*, 42(3), 300–318. Doi: <https://doi.org/10.1080/17475759.2013.816867>.
- Orr, J. A., Sackett, P. R., & DuBois, C. L. (2020). Competence. In I. B. Weiner, R. J. Contrada, & J. F. Karoly (Eds.), *Handbook of psychology* (2nd ed., Vol. 1, pp. 257-274). Wiley.
- Park, J. Y., & Kim, Y. K. (2016). Study abroad programs and intercultural competence development: A comparative analysis of program types and duration. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 20(2), 165-185. Doi: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1028315315626901>.
- Rahmani, A., & Kazemi, F. (2020). The impact of intercultural curricula on the development of intercultural competence among Iranian high school students. *Journal of Intercultural Education*, 37(4), 456-468. Doi: <https://doi.org/10.1080/14675986.2020.1717318>.
- Salaberry, M. R., & Kessler, G. (2013). Developing intercultural competence through education abroad: The case of US learners of Spanish. *Foreign Language Annals*, 46(1), 55-71. Doi: <https://doi.org/10.1111/flan.12019>.
- Sarli A., & Phillimore, J. (2022). The intercultural competence of second-generation individuals: Knowledge gaps and steps forward. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 88(1), 11–21. Doi: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijintrel.2022.03.004>.
- Sarwari, A. Q., Adnan, H. M., Rahamad, M. S., & Abdul Wahab, M. N. (2024). The Requirements and Importance of Intercultural Communication Competence in the 21st Century. *Sage Open*, 14(2). Doi: <https://doi.org/10.1177/21582440241243119>.
- Sasaki, M., & Hirose, T. (2013). The effectiveness of study abroad programs in Japan: A comparative study of short-term and long-term programs. *The Journal of Studies in International Education*, 17(1), 57-71. Doi: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1028315311432099>.

- Sparks-Langer, G. M., & Colton, A. B. (1991). Synthesis of research on teachers' pedagogical thoughts, judgments, decisions, and behavior. *Educational Leadership*, 48(6), 56-64. Doi: <https://doi.org/N/A>.
- Swain, M. (1985). Communicative competence: Some roles of comprehensible input and comprehensible output in its development. *Input in Second Language Acquisition*, 2(1), 235-253. Doi: <https://doi.org/N/A>.
- Ting-Toomey, S. (1988). Intercultural conflict styles: A face-negotiation theory. In Y. Y. Kim & W. B. Gudykunst (Eds.), *Theories in intercultural communication* (pp. 213-235). Sage.
- Wang, Y., Lin, L., & Li, W. (2015). Experiential learning for enhancing intercultural competence and language proficiency of international students. *Journal of Experiential Education*, 38(4), 350-366. Doi: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1053825915597024>.
- Zhang, Y., & Matsumoto, D. (2021). The effect of intercultural training on intercultural competence: A longitudinal study of Chinese international students. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 52(2), 159-174. Doi: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022022120974307>.