**RECOMMEND EFFECTIVE INTERCULTURAL LANGUAGE TEACHING TASKS TO FOSTER LEARNERS’ ICC IN AN ENGLISH SPEAKING CLASSROOM: FILL IN THE GAP**

ĐỀ XUẤT CÁC NHIỆM VỤ GIẢNG DẠY NGÔN NGỮ LIÊN VĂN HOÁ NÂNG CAO NĂNG LỰC LIÊN VĂN HOÁ CỦA NGƯỜI HỌC TRONG LỚP KỸ NĂNG NÓI TIẾNG ANH

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***ABSTRACT:*** *A plethora of research has called for more alternatives and a new pedagogy of appreciation for the changing socio-linguistic reality of English as an international language with some newfound emphasis on developing learners’ intercultural communicative competence (ICC); however, very few practical teaching guidelines have been proposed in the literature. This paper aims to respond to the call for more realistic intercultural language teaching tasks and guidelines to be conducted in actual classrooms. Based on six principles of intercultural communicative language teaching by Newton et al. (2010) and the targets for intercultural language teaching approach by Ge (2004), the author elaborated classroom tasks with specific objectives and procedures in a speaking course in order to provide English language practitioners and educators with effective classroom ideas. The study contributes to the field by raising the awareness of enhancing learners’ ICC in English language teaching and fills the gap by adding more hands-on teaching models.*

***Keywords****: Intercultural communicative competence, intercultural language teaching, tasks*

***TÓM TẮT :*** *Đã có nhiều nghiên cứu quan tâm đến việc tìm hiểu và phát triển thêm các cách tiếp cận và phương pháp giảng dạy mới nhằm đáp ứng yêu cầu của sự thay đổi về mặt ngôn ngữ xã hội của ngôn ngữ tiếng Anh như một ngôn ngữ quốc tế với sự nhấn mạnh vào việc phát triển năng lực liên văn hóa của người học. Tuy nhiên, cho tới nay vẫn có rất ít nghiên cứu đưa ra những đề xuất và hướng dẫn cụ thể cho các hoạt động giảng dạy thực tế trong lớp học. Bài viết đề xuất các mẫu nhiệm vụ giảng dạy ngôn ngữ liên văn hoá nhằm nâng cao năng lực liên văn hoá của người học trong lớp học kĩ năng ngôn ngữ. Dựa trên sáu nguyên tắc giảng dạy ngôn ngữ liên văn hoá của Newton et al. (2010) và các mục tiêu của cách tiếp cận này được phân tích bởi Ge (2004), tác giả xây dựng và phát triển các nhiệm vụ cụ thể có thể thực hiện trong lớp kỹ năng nói tiếng Anh. Bài viết cũng cung cấp thêm các ý tưởng trong lớp học ngôn ngữ để phát triển năng lực giao tiếp liên văn hoá của người học.*

***Từ khoá:*** *Năng lực giao tiếp liên văn hoá, giảng dạy ngôn ngữ liên văn hoá, các nhiệm vụ*

**1. INTRODUCTION**

The trend toward 21st-century education has shed light on the crucial need of being competent in communicating with multilingual and multicultural speakers. Ge (2004) [2] emphasizes that the main goal of English language teaching in the 21st century is to develop learners' intercultural communicative competence (ICC). Therefore, not only does English teaching practice focus on instructing grammar rules, but also enables learners to effectively interact with multicultural interlocutors. It means that language-proficient learners not only master linguistic skills but are also beyond their own cultural boundaries. To fulfil this goal, the cultural dimension must be involved in the curriculum and teaching practice.

In reality, while the increasing demand for English language teaching and learning is obvious, the curriculum contents and textbooks could not meet learners’ communicative needs and goals [6]. The textbooks have been used for the tertiary education level in Vietnam in general and in Quang Binh University in particular, for example, are mainly designed by Western authors whose first language is English; hence, most of the time those textbooks emphasize the language and culture of English-speaking nations rather than those of other English users, or even the learners’ own cultures. In other words, Western cultures seem to dominate in English language classrooms in Vietnam, and many teachers tend to believe that in order to master the target language, learners only need to acquire the target language culture without raising their intercultural awareness in English communications. This leads to the fact that in the classroom promoting productive skills like speaking, learners themselves usually find it difficult to focus on speaking activities or are not interested in doing assigned tasks which are not familiar to them or there is no relation to their life. Moreover, it has caused a true consequence that a large number of Vietnamese learners are not confident enough to participate in intercultural encounters with multilingual speakers or take part in those circumstances unsatisfactorily due to the lack of knowledge in relation to intercultural communication, specific cultures, and their own cultures as well as necessary skills to turn intercultural communication into intercultural relationship. This paper argues that learners’ ICC development needs to be considered as the ultimate goal of the English language teaching and learning process. It, however, cannot be fulfilled by only teachers' awareness but also with carefully-designed tasks in the classroom. In its scope, this paper focuses on proposing hands-on tasks to enhance learners’ ICC in English speaking classrooms, providing a teaching source for English language practitioners.

**2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

**2.1. What is intercultural communicative competence?**

It is a complex task to define intercultural communicative competence. In the very essence, it is the preparation of the individuals to interact appropriately and effectively with other interlocutors from different cultural backgrounds [8]. There is no consensus on a precise definition of intercultural communicative competence existing in the literature. There are, nevertheless, some common themes that emerge from the research literature.

Byram (1997) [1] coins that intercultural communicative competence includes knowledge of one’s own cultures and others, skills to interpret and relate different and similar cultural features as well as to discover and interact appropriately in multi-cultural encounters. According to Byram, ICC also consists of attitudes of respecting and valuing other values, beliefs, and behaviors. The author also emphasizes linguistic competence as a vital element of ICC. In this regard, Moller and Nugent (2014) [4] claim that a foreign language speaker is regarded being intercultural competent when possessing both communication competence in that language and particular attitudes, skills, values, and knowledge about the target language culture. Those interpretations underscore that someone gains an inside view of other interactants’ cultures while also contributing to their understanding of his or her own culture from an insiders’ viewpoint.

**2.2. The intercultural language teaching approach**

In intercultural language teaching (ILT), the teacher has a responsibility to provide opportunities for students to develop their own intermediary place between their own culture and that of the target language community. Ge (2004) [2] elaborates the targets for intercultural language teaching approach, including assisting learners in enhancing knowledge of different cultures through language learning; developing intercultural communicative competence; fostering learners’ awareness of their own cultural values and others; enhancing sympathy and tolerance in intercultural communication; developing mutual cooperation; recognizing barriers in intercultural communication such as ethnocentrism and stereotyping; being aware of the diversity of non-verbal communication and etiquettes in various cultures.

To achieve the ultimate goal of ILT, Newton et al. (2010) [5] elaborates six principles, including integrating language and culture from the beginning, engaging learners in genuine social interaction, encouraging and developing an exploratory and reflective approach to culture and culture-in-language, fostering explicit comparisons and connections between languages and cultures, acknowledging and responding appropriately to diverse learners and learning contexts, emphasizing ICC rather than native-speaker competence. With an appropriate cultural orientation, most learning activities or tasks can take on intercultural aspects, offer obvious opportunities for developing intercultural communicative competence.

**3. PRACTICAL INTERCULTURAL LANGUAGE TEACHING TASKS**

Based on the ICC concept, principles and targets of intercultural language teaching discussed above, the author proposes some hands-on tasks to foster and augment learners’ ICC in actual speaking classrooms.

**Task 1: Discovering and Understanding The Self (Individual Work)**

In the journey of learning and understanding the world around, it is assumed that a person should start at understanding himself or herself. In English language teaching, to fulfil the ultimate goal that learners can use English in international interactions, enabling them to express themselves becomes a primacy and immediacy. Therefore, self-discovery or self-understanding which refers to the process of learning about oneself and their beliefs could become a useful task to warm up the class. It provides learners an opportunity to brainstorm and think of cultural features relating to themselves, scaffolding necessary information so that learners can focus more on the topic in later speaking activities.

This task is based on the principle that intercultural language teaching should involve encouraging and developing an exploratory and reflective approach to culture and culture-in-language. Particularly, exploring culture involves learners in the construction of knowledge from their own experience and reflection by starting exploring their own culture and cultural identity, and raising their self-awareness of using English as a communication tool to express themselves. In line with this, Tomlinson and Matsuhara (2004) [10] propose a practical guide to integrating culture in language instruction that teachers should begin and end each activity “in the minds of the learners” through encouraging them to think about an experience in their own culture before providing them with a similar one in another culture, or getting them to “translate” a new experience in another culture into an equivalent experience in their own culture (p. 4). Maintaining this kind of awareness of culture is a primary goal of intercultural language learning.

**Sample 1.1**

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| **Speaking topic: Food and Eating Styles**  **Level:** Pre-intermediate to Intermediate  **Language focus:** Vocabulary about food, eating styles  **Skill focus:** Brainstorming, self-reflecting, intercultural communicative competence  **Time:** 5 minutes  **Aims:** - After the task, learners are able to understand more about themselves and be ready to share their own cultural features and values relating to food and eating styles in English.  **Procedures:**   * Students have 5 minutes to note down key information in relation to cultural features and values of food and eating styles in their family or their hometown. * Teacher gives some prompts:   + kinds of food  + food decoration  + how to cook  + favourite tastes  + eating styles  + behaviours while having a meal with family/friends  + eating utensils   * Teacher asks students to use an A4-sized paper, write their names and their hometowns in the middle, write down any family values/ regional values shown through food and eating styles, then display information around by drawing pictures, symbols or taking key notes. |

**Sample 1.2**

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| **Speaking topic: Festivals**  **Level:** Pre-intermediate to Intermediate  **Language focus:** Vocabulary about festivals  **Skill focus:** Brainstorming, self-reflecting, intercultural communicative competence  **Aims:** - After the task, learners are able to understand more about themselves and be ready to share their own cultural features and values relating to a festival in English.  **Procedures:**   * Students have 5 minutes to note down key ideas in relation to cultural features and values regarding **“New Year holiday”** celebration in their family or their hometown. * Teacher gives some prompts:   + How do you and your family prepare for the New Year holiday?  + How do you make and cook Chung cake?  + How do you and your family celebrate New Year Eve?  + How significant is New Year holiday to you?   * Teacher asks students to use an A4-sized paper, write their names and their hometowns in the middle, write down any family values/ regional values shown through Tet holiday celebration, then display information around by drawing pictures, symbols or taking key notes. |

**Task 2: Sharing and Understanding the Others (Group Work or Pair Work)**

Through this task, learners have an opportunity to practice using the target language through natural interactions. It aims to fulfil the goals of communicative language teaching when classroom activities are meaningful and involve real communications. In other words, learners create meaningful and purposeful interactions through English. In so doing, they try out and experiment with different ways of expressing things as well as negotiating the meaning as their interlocutors arrive at understanding [7].

In terms of the intercultural dimension, this activity helps learners to enhance mutual understanding that assumes the necessity for effective communications. Importantly, it is based on the principle that English language teaching should acknowledge and respond appropriately to diverse learners and learning contexts. Although in a setting called “mono-cultural” classroom in Vietnam in which learners share many common things, there is still diversity in learners' beliefs, customs, and cultural values. It is, hence, vital for teachers to recognize and embrace learners’ diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds in the classroom. It is advised that “teachers should manage the representation of and participation in cultures that are new to learners, and show an appreciation of and respect for the cultures that learners bring to the classroom” ([5], p. 71).

**Sample 2.1**

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| **Speaking topic: Food and Eating Styles**  **Level:** Pre-intermediate to Intermediate  **Language focus:** Vocabulary about food, eating styles  **Skill focus:** Speaking, intercultural communicative competence  **Time:** 15 minutes  **Aims:** - After the task, learners are able to talk about their cultural features and values relating to food and eating styles in English and understand other friends’ cultures through the target language.  **Procedures:**   * Studentsare asked to work in a group of 4. * Each person will take a turn to share about their daily food, favourite food, eating styles or any cultural features and values shown in their family or their hometown relating to this topic. * Students are encouraged to ask questions during information exchange to get to know more about others. * While students are working, teachers work as a facilitator and a monitor. |

**Sample 2.2**

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| **Speaking topic: Festivals**  **Level:** Pre-intermediate to Intermediate  **Language focus:** Vocabulary about festivals  **Skill focus:** Speaking, intercultural communicative competence  **Time:** 15 minutes  **Aims:** - After the task, learners are able to share with others about their own cultural features and values relating to the New Year holiday in English. They can also get more understanding about other friends' cultures.  **Procedures:**   * Studentsare asked to work with a partner. * They will stand up and find a partner to talk with. * Each person will take a turn to share their cultural features and values regarding the New Year celebration in their family or hometown. * Students are encouraged to ask questions during information exchange to get to know more about the other. * While students are working, teachers work as a facilitator and a monitor. |

**Task 3: Discovering an Exotic Culture (Pair Work)**

Many intercultural and linguistic scholars assert that in addition to the ability to express their own cultures to others, it is very important to make learners aware of the cultural diversity in English communications and in international encounters. It is believed that cultural-specific knowledge constitutes one’s intercultural competence. Exploring the world around them by learning about other cultures of different nations through a reading activity is regarded as an interesting task to fulfil the learning goal and make the classroom more dynamic. Through this task, learners can cultivate their knowledge about other cultures, helping broaden their mind and change their outlook on the world. It also contributes to enhancing learners' range of vocabulary and provide more accurate grammar when making a conversation or a presentation about a particular topic. It is observed that many learners appear very excited about learning the language that they have not paid attention before.

This task is also based on the idea that English language teaching should include an exploratory approach in which the process of exploration of culture involves both teachers and learners. It is because teachers themselves are also learning while allowing their learners to explore and discover aspects of culture, and make comparisons with what they already know, and teachers are not the only source of all knowledge.

**Sample 3.1**

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| **Speaking topic: Food and Eating Styles**  **Level:** Pre-intermediate to Intermediate  **Language focus:** Vocabulary about food, eating styles  **Skill focus:** Reading, intercultural communicative competence  **Time:** 10 minutes  **Aims:**- After the task, learners can enrich their knowledge about other cultures regarding cuisine and eating styles, which helps to broaden their mind and change their outlook on the world through English.  **Procedures:**   * Students are asked to work with a partner for 10 minutes and use an electronic device such as a smartphone, iPad, or laptop at their convenience to search for information about cuisine and eating styles of another country in Asia and a Western country. * Teacher gives some prompts:   + Where is it? What are the main dishes there?  + What are usually included in a meal?  + How do people eat?  + How do they behave in a family meal?  + What are the cultural values of that country shown through cuisine and eating styles?   * These are suggested but not limited to learners’ answers. * Students are asked to note down useful information for later information exchange activity. * While students are working, teachers work as a facilitator and a monitor. |

**Sample 3.2**

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| --- |
| **Speaking topic: Festivals**  **Level:** Pre-intermediate to Intermediate  **Language focus:** Vocabulary about festivals  **Skill focus:** Reading, intercultural communicative communication  **Time:** 15 minutes  **Aims:** - After the task, learners can enrich their knowledge about other cultures regarding festivals, which helps to broaden their mind and change their outlook on the world through English.  **Procedures:**   * Students are asked to work with a partner for 10 minutes and use an electronic device such as a smartphone, iPad, or laptop at their convenience to search for information about New Year celebration of another country in Asia and a Western country. * Teacher gives some prompts:   + What is that country?  + What do people usually prepare for the New Year festival?  + How do people decorate their home?  + What typical colours for the festival in a country?  + How do people celebrate New Year in a country?  + What activities do people usually do?   * These are suggested but not limited to learners’ answers. * Students are asked to note down useful information for later information exchange activity. * While students are working, teachers work as a facilitator and a monitor. |

**Task 4: Information Exchange (Pair Work)**

Information exchange or also called information gap is a communicative activity for two or more learners. In this activity, each learner has a different piece of cultural information and has to exchange to others by oral.Such activity necessitates accurate use of language by the giver of the information and careful listening by the recipient. It is considered as a great way of combining cultural content and language teaching effectively and providing an opportunity for purposeful communication with learners who can provide good models of English. It supports learners with the development of strategies for communication including rewording, requesting clarification, questioning, giving and following simple clear instructions, clarifying and describing.

Importantly, this activity follows the principle that integrates learning about culture and language, rather than treating them as separate strands. It is suggested that every time a person speaks, he or she performs a cultural act. Learners understand each other more through exchanging information and making interactions. They also acquire new knowledge easier when explaining it to others.

**Sample**

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| **Speaking topic: Food and Eating Styles**  **Level:** Pre-intermediate to Intermediate  **Language focus:** Vocabulary about food, eating styles  **Skill focus:** Speaking, intercultural competence  **Time:** 10 minutes  **Aims:** - After the task, learners can enrich their knowledge about other cultures regarding cuisine and eating styles.  **Procedures:**   * Students are asked to work in pairs. * One student keeps notes of information about food types and eating styles of a country. * The other students have to guess what is that country by asking their partner questions, such as:   + Is it an Asian country or a Western country?  + Do they eat rice for daily meals?  + Do they use chopsticks?  + Do they use forks?  + Do they usually have deserts?  + What do they have for dessert?   * These questions are suggested but not limited. * While students are working, teachers work as a facilitator and a monitor. |

**Task 5: Comparing and Contrasting**

When comparing and contrasting cultural customs and values, learners know more about the similarities and differences between them, then becoming more aware of the diversity of cultures in English interactions. Moreover, learners can develop more complex concepts of culture and avoid cross-cultural prejudices. It is also said that the comparison of cultures should be explicit so that language teaching can avoid a negative impact on learners’ intercultural attitudes if they are not explicitly guided [5]. In line with this, Kramsch (2006) [3] maintains that the insights of the self and others can be achieved through guided comparisons between cultures. In the intercultural language teaching classroom, the development of cultural awareness through exploration aims to gradually promote an inner sense of the equality of cultures, an increased understanding of one’s own and other people’s cultures, and a positive interest in how cultures both connect and differ [9].

**Sample**

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| **Speaking topic: Food and Eating Styles**  **Level:** Pre-intermediate to Intermediate  **Language focus:** Vocabulary about food, eating styles  **Skill focus:** Speaking, intercultural communication  **Time:** 10 minutes  **Aims:** - After the task, learners are able to know more about the similarities and differences among cultures. They are aware of the cultural diversity in English communication.  **Procedures:**   * Students are asked to work in a group of 4. * Each group has to identify similarities and differences regarding food and eating styles between:   + the Vietnamese culture and another Asian culture.  + two Western countries.  + the Asian culture and Western culture.   * While students are working, teachers work as a facilitator and a monitor. |

**Task 6: Problem-solving**

It is believed that discussing or solving both non-professional and professional problems and texts containing problems contributes to moving the emphasis from the language task to true communication. It is essential to choose problems to solve which students have background knowledge. While previous tasks focus more on exploring insight into the self and others, this task involves learners in using the language and their acquired knowledge to tackle problems in intercultural encounters.

**Sample**

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| **Speaking topic: Food and Eating Styles**  **Level:** Pre-intermediate to Intermediate  **Language focus:** Vocabulary about food, eating styles  **Skill focus:** Speaking, intercultural communication  **Time:** 10 minutes  **Aims:** - After the task, learners are more aware of the diversity of cultures in English interactions and the importance of enriching their knowledge of other cultures.  **Procedures:**   * Teacher asks students to work in a group of 4 to discuss the given situations. * Teacher gives some situations: * **Situation 1:** Imagine that you are living and working in Japan. A friend invites you to have dinner with his/her family at their house. Think about how you are going to behave towards the invitation.   + What are you going to bring to their house? Should you ask them about that in advance?  + How do you behave during the meal? What to say? How to communicate during the meal?   * **Situation 2:** Imagine that you invite a friend from America who is living and working in Dong Hoi at the moment to have dinner with your family at your home.   + What do you expect him/her when going to your home?  + Will you provide eating utensils such as forks, dishes, napkin as in the American culture or will you serve your guest with chopsticks and bowls?  + What do you think you will speak during the meal?   * **Situation 3:** Imagine that you are living and working in Australia. A friend invites you to have a barbecue party with his/her friends in the park. Think about how you are going to behave towards the invitation.   + Do you need to bring anything to the barbecue?  + What are you going to bring? Should you ask your friend about that in advance?  + How do you behave during the party? What to say? How to communicate during the party? |

**4. CONCLUSION**

It is suggested that the English language teaching should not be limited to teaching linguistic skills, but at the same time, should pay attention to develop learners' knowledge, attitudes, and skills to participate in intercultural communications appropriately and effectively. It is also recommended that carefully-designed tasks can help to develop both learners’ linguistic skills and intercultural communicative competence. It is because intercultural language teaching tasks maximize learners’ classroom time with peer interactions in the target language so that they have more opportunities to use the language meaningfully.

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