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## **INTERCULTURAL AWARENESS IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING**

Culture may be defined as a ‘social heredity’ transmitted from one generation to another generation with the accumulation of individual experiences, or a mode of activities differentiating people of one society from another society. Culture cannot be a biological phenomenon but a learned pattern of social behaviour to be followed. It is a wonderful and unique phenomenon of human society with colourful diversity always changing its patterns which is the greatest beauty of human society. Culture forms beliefs, conveys ideas, and shares knowledge on customs and values. All of these characteristics are communicated through language which is an integral part of culture.

Culture as a social process deals with the use of language and communication experienced by people in given circumstances. They tend to learn more than one language for the satisfaction of communicative needs in their academic and professional career. The process of learning a foreign language not only requires an individual to practice linguistic forms but also necessitates to become familiar with the culture of target language in order to interpret intercultural communication. Therefore, in the learning of foreign languages, it is necessary to provide learners’ cultural context and awareness so as to obtain proficiency in intercultural communication of target language. Research in the field of foreign language teaching has significantly contributed valuable insights on the integration of cultural awareness into foreign language teaching programmes. A range of cultural teaching strategies offer interactive classroom activities to non-native learners for practicing language as a communicative process. These activities also enhance cultural behaviour and attitude of learners as per the patterns of communicating the target language in context. Therefore, teachers need to be competent in cross-cultural communication before its application in classroom context.

The most challenging issues of intercultural communication are cultural differences, unfamiliarity, and incompatibility among the individuals. The status of English as an international and intercultural source of communication raises a number of issues and challenges for teachers and learners of English. No doubt, acquisition of linguistic knowledge is mandatory for effective communication but more attention needs to be paid on cultural context of the target language. It implies the knowledge of cultural patterns, norms, and values of a society communicating specific meaning to its participants. Therefore, intercultural communicative competence cannot be achieved without the development of communicative competence [1, p. 259 – 275].

There are a number of intercultural communicative situations in which participants are expected to behave appropriately as per the cultural context of communication. This behavioural aspect of interaction greatly involves

an individual's mental ability of adjusting to new cultures. An individual's capacity of adapting to new conventions reflect how appropriate actions are added to avoid ambiguity in intercultural communication. The application of cognitive and affective tools for the analysis of communication reveal linguistic and cultural meaning of communication.

Analyzing the characteristics of communication may be considered fundamental for the development of competence in intercultural communication. This leads to an overall aim of effective and meaningful crosscultural interaction among the people tending to adapt to new conventions and behavioural change in cultural context. It is in fact a mental tendency of interactants whose social behaviour and cultural identity come under the influence of cross-cultural communication. Therefore, Martin, attaches importance to three domains, i.e. cognition, affect, and behaviour for the development of intercultural communicative competence [2, p. 9].

According to Emitt & Komesaroff, students need to become efficient in using language for a range of purposes, such as following directions, requesting information, entertainment, and self-expression' [3, p. 45]. These needs or purposes can be fulfilled through classroom activities aiming to enhance communicative competence of the students but the use of traditional teaching methods. However, a pedagogical process may be introduced to integrate cultural awareness about using language through textbooks employed in a language class. Thus, the use of appropriate communicative teaching strategies not only raise learners' efficiency in using language but also enhance cultural awareness in communicating language in cross-cultural context.

Integrating cultural awareness in a foreign language learning programme requires teachers to be efficient communicators of target language. The use of cultural knowledge in communication attaches importance to the ways of negotiating meaning embedded in values, customs, and norms. However, teaching cultural practices in target language has not been the objective of language educators in foreign language settings. The practices followed by them focus on the learning of grammatical structures rather than the development of efficiency in communicating language through context. Therefore, a wide range of traditional teaching strategies fail to develop competence in using a foreign language in given context [3, p. 378].

Teaching culture of a target language is unquestionably important for the development of competence in intercultural communication [4, p. 44]. It requires foreign language teachers to be competent in communicating language and underlying values, attitudes, and behaviours followed by people in their cultural setting or context. The teachers imparting cultural knowledge may consider various issues related to learners' linguistic background, attitude, behaviour, and the learning style. All of these factors contribute learning as a mental process of involvement in achieving competence in intercultural communication. However, some teachers pay less attention to the problems faced by learners in developing linguistic and cultural competence. As a result, many of them lose confidence and ability to perform efficiently in foreign language learning process.

Recent research studies by Schmidt highlight the need and benefits of cross-cultural training programmes focusing on the development of efficiency in intercultural communication. The teachers may also benefit students by introducing cultural specific topics on history, politics, economics, and geography to their respective classroom situations. These strategies to stimulate communication on specific topics may expose learners to raise awareness about target culture. Moreover, the activities on real life situation, such as role plays, and discussion may be integrated as a part of classroom instruction to develop communicative competence in intercultural communication. Therefore, foreign language learning programmes should train learners' identify cultural differences and patterns followed in intercultural communication.

Many foreign language learners come across challenges in intercultural communication, such as anxiety and stress, adjustment, and the lack of cultural awareness. In order to address these issues, teachers need to involve learners in cross-cultural training process which enables them to manage their emotional reactions and responses appropriately and effectively. Intercultural training is an effective and useful measure for providing necessary information about cultural differences followed in cross-cultural communication. The learners come to know how their native culture influence the way of using language in crosscultural context. Therefore, the teacher needs to acknowledge the value of crosscultural training by implementing it in their respective academic and language settings [5, p. 131 – 140].

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