

Intercultural Communication Competence Development: A Key Component of Foreign Language Education

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*“A different language is a different vision of life.”
- Federico Fellini*

AMID THE ACCELERATION of global integration, increasingly improved transportation and advanced information and communications technology have resulted in closer connections and more frequent communication among people from different countries. Consequently, there have been a worldwide broader application of foreign languages. Concomitant with increased communication between individuals from varied cultural backgrounds is the challenge of cultural differences (Han, 2002). In this context, researchers, since 1950s, have endeavored to integrate the findings from anthropological, psychological, linguistic, sociological, philosophical, cultural, and communication studies to establish a distinctive theoretical framework and research methodology for intercultural communication studies. The American anthropologist Edward Hall, with his in-depth research on the relationship between culture and communication, is regarded as the pioneer of the field of intercultural communication. His book *The Silent Language* (Hall, 1959) has been considered the foundational work for this domain. *Intercultural Communication Theory: Current Perspectives*, authored by Gudykunst (1983), further established intercultural communication as an independent and mature discipline.

Intercultural communication competence (ICC) refers to the ability to communicate with persons from different cultures in an effective and appropriate manner, which typically comprises three essential elements: emotional, cognitive, and behavioral. The emotional element is about the emotions or attitudes displayed by the individual during intercultural communication. The cognitive element, also referred to as intercultural awareness, represents the individual's understanding of the diversity of the world based

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on their thorough knowledge about both their own culture and foreign culture. The behavioral element encompasses a wide range of practical skills necessary for successful intercultural communication, such as acquisition and utilization of written information, initiation of conversations, management of dialogue topics, appropriate conclusion of dialogue (Wang, 2012). Spitzberg (1991) argues that knowledge, motivation, and techniques are the three interrelated and interdependent key components of ICC. Concurrent possession of proficient intercultural knowledge, positive motivation, and efficacious communication skills is a prerequisite of successful intercultural communication. According to Kramsch (1998), competent intercultural communicators are those who are flexible in choosing the appropriate forms of expression in specific cultural contexts, rather than rigidly sticking to established norms of a particular social group. Specifically, a person with sound ICC should be able to identify conflicting areas in the relationship between two parties; give explanations of the behaviors and beliefs that lead to the conflicts; resolve conflicts or negotiate unresolvable ones; and evaluate the quality of the explanation mechanisms, and construct effective ones based on information provided by individuals with specific cultural backgrounds.

In effect, ICC in Spitzberg's and Kramsch's argument is ideal competence typically cultivated through systematic foreign language and cultural education. Literally, cultural education is an integral part of foreign language teaching. Nevertheless, awareness of this in the world of foreign language education has been inadequate. Researchers have observed that the number of foreign language graduates who can communicate with foreigners without cultural barriers is small and that the effectiveness and appropriateness of communication in most of them have been affected by multiple cultural factors, including limitations of language, differences in thinking patterns, variations in communication styles, divergences in values, stereotypes, and differences between high-context and low-context cultures (Wang, 2012).

An Appropriate Model of Intercultural Communication Competence Development for Foreign Language Teachers at Guangxi University of Foreign Languages, China in this issue is an investigation of the gaps between the current and expected ICC levels of foreign language teachers at a Chinese private, application-oriented university using questionnaire surveys. Furthermore, drawing on existing ICC theoretical frameworks, it proposes an innovative model of ICC development for these teachers, which integrates the teachers' and students' perspectives, based on rigorous data analysis (Du et al., 2025). It also puts forward relevant recommendations for ICC development of this teacher group. Overall, this article is a valuable contribution to the ICC literature.

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