



# Incorporating Intercultural Communication Skills into Taiwanese University EFL Classrooms

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Received 1 June 2023; accepted 22 June 2023

Published online 26 June 2023

## Abstract

Teaching intercultural communication to Taiwanese university EFL students is crucial in preparing them to navigate the complexities of a globalized world. This article explores the challenges faced by Taiwanese EFL students in developing intercultural communication skills and provides strategies for effectively addressing these challenges. The article begins by discussing the limited exposure to authentic cultural contexts that Taiwanese EFL students often encounter and the implications for their intercultural competence (Chen & Starosta, 2000). It then highlights the tendency to prioritize language proficiency over cultural understanding in EFL programs, emphasizing the importance of integrating cultural content into language lessons (Kramsch, 1993). Additionally, the cultural differences in communication styles between Taiwanese culture and English-speaking countries are examined, underscoring the need for explicit instruction on cultural communication norms and strategies (Hofstede, 1980). The article also provides a theoretical overview, incorporating the Intercultural Communication Competence Model, Cultural Dimensions Framework, Communication Accommodation Theory, and Face Negotiation Theory to inform instructional practices (Byram, 1997; Giles, 1973; Ting-Toomey, 1994). Furthermore, it explores the significance of incorporating self-awareness and reflective practices in fostering intercultural competence (Lustig & Koester, 2013). The article concludes by emphasizing the importance of developing cultural awareness, empathy, and effective communication skills in Taiwanese EFL students to enable them to engage with individuals from diverse cultural

backgrounds. By addressing the challenges and utilizing appropriate teaching strategies, educators can facilitate the development of intercultural communication skills among Taiwanese EFL students, equipping them for successful intercultural interactions in an interconnected world.

**Key words:** Intercultural, Language Teaching, EFL, Taiwan

Matthws, G. (2023). Incorporating Intercultural Communication Skills into Taiwanese University EFL Classrooms. *Studies in Literature and Language*, 26(3), 36-39. Available from: <http://www.cscanada.net/index.php/sll/article/view/13039> DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3968/13039>

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In today's interconnected world, the ability to effectively communicate across cultures has become increasingly important. For Taiwanese university students studying English as a Foreign Language (EFL), developing strong intercultural communication skills is crucial for their future personal and professional success. Intercultural communication goes beyond language proficiency, encompassing an understanding of cultural nuances, norms, and the ability to navigate diverse social contexts. This article explores the significance of teaching intercultural communication to Taiwanese university EFL students and offers practical strategies to enhance their cross-cultural competencies.

By fostering intercultural competence, Taiwanese university EFL students can effectively engage with individuals from different cultures, manage conflicts, and build meaningful connections (Gudykunst & Kim, 2017). In a globalized job market, these skills enhance employability prospects and create opportunities for successful international collaborations. Additionally, intercultural communication cultivates empathy, cultural

sensitivity, and tolerance, contributing to the development of well-rounded individuals (Chen & Starosta, 2000).

Taiwanese EFL students often encounter specific challenges when it comes to intercultural communication. These challenges include limited exposure to authentic cultural contexts, a focus on language proficiency over cultural understanding, and cultural differences in communication styles (Huang & Zou, 2019). Taiwanese culture, while rich and unique, may differ significantly from the cultures of English-speaking countries. Therefore, it is essential to address these challenges through targeted teaching.

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## 2. THEORETICAL OVERVIEW

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To effectively teach intercultural communication to Taiwanese university EFL students, it is essential to have a theoretical framework that guides instructional strategies and objectives. Several prominent theories and frameworks contribute to our understanding of intercultural communication and can inform the teaching practices in the EFL classroom

The Intercultural Communication Competence Model provides a comprehensive framework for understanding and developing intercultural communication skills. The model emphasizes three interrelated components: knowledge, attitudes, and skills (Byram, 1997). Knowledge refers to the understanding of cultural practices, values, beliefs, and communication patterns of different cultures. It involves acquiring factual information about other cultures, including historical, social, and linguistic aspects. Attitudes encompass attitudes of curiosity, open-mindedness, empathy, and respect towards other cultures. It involves developing a positive and receptive mindset towards cultural differences and a willingness to learn from others. Finally, the skills component focuses on the practical application of knowledge and attitudes in intercultural communication situations. It includes skills such as interpreting cultural cues, adapting communication styles, managing conflicts, and building relationships across cultures. By incorporating the knowledge, attitudes, and skills components of the Intercultural Communication Competence Model, educators can design instructional activities that holistically develop students' intercultural communication abilities (Byram, 1997).

The Cultural Dimensions Framework, developed by Hofstede (1980), provides a systematic way to understand and compare cultural differences. This framework identifies several dimensions, such as individualism vs. collectivism, power distance, uncertainty avoidance, and masculinity vs. femininity. By introducing students to the cultural dimensions, educators can help them gain insights into the fundamental values and norms that shape communication styles in different cultures. Students can then analyze

and compare their own cultural dimensions with those of English-speaking countries, allowing for a deeper understanding of intercultural communication challenges.

Communication Accommodation Theory explores how individuals adapt their communication styles to accommodate or converge with others in intercultural interactions. According to this theory, individuals may adopt strategies such as convergence (adapting to match the communication style of the other person) or divergence (emphasizing their cultural distinctiveness) (Giles, 1973). This can help students understand the importance of adapting their communication styles to foster effective intercultural communication. Role-plays and simulations can provide opportunities for students to practice and reflect on their accommodation strategies in various intercultural scenarios.

Ting-Toomey's Face Negotiation Theory focuses on how individuals from different cultures manage and negotiate their public image or "face" in communication. The theory highlights cultural differences in face-saving strategies, conflict management styles, and the negotiation of respect and social harmony (Ting-Toomey, 1994). Understanding of Face Negotiation Theory can guide students in understanding how cultural differences influence conflict resolution and communication strategies. This understanding can help students navigate intercultural conflicts

There has also been a growing awareness in the literature of the importance of integrating context and culture into language teaching (Kramsch, 1993). This can be especially pertinent when the cultures are particularly distinct. This would appear to be the case with Taiwanese students studying a language such as English. It offers insights into how cultural elements can be effectively incorporated into language lessons to enhance intercultural understanding. The Intercultural Communication Sensitivity Scale measures individuals' sensitivity and awareness of intercultural communication. The scale assesses various dimensions of intercultural competence (Chen & Starosta, 2000).

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## 3. PRACTICAL STRATEGIES FOR TEACHING INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION

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### 3.1 Cultural Immersion

Encourage students to engage in cultural immersion experiences, such as studying abroad, participating in cultural exchange programs, or joining international student associations. These experiences provide firsthand exposure to different cultures, allowing students to develop cultural empathy and adaptability (Paige, 1993). Immersion experiences can include activities like living with host families, attending local events, and actively

engaging with the local community. Such experiences help students gain a deeper understanding of cultural practices, traditions, and perspectives.

### 3.2 Cultural Awareness and Sensitivity Training

Incorporate cultural awareness and sensitivity training into the EFL curriculum. This includes exploring cultural dimensions, values, beliefs, and communication styles of different countries, especially English-speaking ones. Comparative cultural analysis can help students understand the differences and similarities between their own culture and others, promoting respectful cross-cultural interactions (Chen & Starosta, 2000). It is important to create a safe and inclusive learning environment where students feel comfortable discussing cultural topics and sharing their perspectives.

To further enhance cultural awareness, invite guest speakers from diverse cultural backgrounds to share their experiences and insights with students. This can include expatriates, diplomats, or professionals who have firsthand experience working in multicultural environments. Their perspectives can offer valuable insights and promote a deeper understanding of intercultural dynamics.

### 3.3 Authentic Materials

Utilize authentic materials, such as videos, articles, and podcasts, that showcase real-life cross-cultural communication situations. These resources expose students to various accents, idiomatic expressions, and cultural references, helping them develop listening comprehension skills and cultural sensitivity (Byram, Gribkova, & Starkey, 2002). Authentic materials provide a window into the target culture's language use, nonverbal cues, and social norms. They can be used for classroom discussions, role-plays, and activities that encourage students to analyze and reflect on intercultural communication challenges.

### 3.4 Role-plays and Simulations

Engage students in role-plays and simulations that simulate intercultural communication scenarios. This practical approach enables students to apply their knowledge of cultural norms and adapt their communication styles according to different cultural contexts. Encourage reflection and debriefing after each activity to facilitate deeper understanding (Huang & Zou, 2019). Role-plays can involve scenarios such as business meetings, social gatherings, or academic presentations where students must navigate intercultural communication challenges. This hands-on approach allows students to practice their language skills while also developing their intercultural competence.

To make role-plays and simulations more effective, provide students with cultural profiles of the characters they will be portraying. This includes information about their cultural background, values, and communication styles. Students can then use this information to inform

their role-playing, fostering a deeper understanding of cultural nuances and perspectives.

### 3.5 Language and Culture Integration

Promote the integration of language and culture by incorporating cultural content into language lessons. Teach language in a cultural context, using authentic materials that reflect the target culture. This approach helps students understand how language is shaped by culture and enhances their communicative competence (Kramsch, 1993). For example, instead of teaching vocabulary and grammar in isolation, incorporate cultural elements into language exercises and assignments. This can involve discussing cultural customs, traditions, and societal norms while learning specific language skills.

In addition to integrating language and culture, encourage students to explore the cultural contexts of English through independent research projects or presentations. This can involve studying the history, literature, and social aspects of English-speaking countries, allowing students to gain a deeper understanding of the cultural factors that influence communication.

### 3.6 Intercultural Communication Workshops

Organize workshops led by professionals in the field of intercultural communication. These workshops can provide students with insights, strategies, and practical advice for navigating cross-cultural interactions. Guest speakers, visiting scholars, or expatriates residing in Taiwan can offer unique perspectives and share their experiences (Gudykunst & Kim, 2017). Workshops can cover topics such as cultural sensitivity, nonverbal communication, overcoming stereotypes, and conflict resolution in intercultural contexts. These interactive sessions provide students with opportunities to engage with experts and ask questions in a supportive environment.

To supplement workshops, provide students with reading materials and resources that delve deeper into intercultural communication theories and frameworks. This can include books, articles, and research papers that explore concepts such as cultural adaptation, intercultural competence, and intercultural communication barriers.

### 3.7 Reflective Practices

Incorporate reflective practices into the curriculum to encourage students to critically analyze their own cultural assumptions, biases, and communication patterns. This can be done through journaling, group discussions, or reflective assignments. Reflection allows students to gain self-awareness, identify areas for improvement, and develop strategies to bridge intercultural gaps (Huang & Zou, 2019). By reflecting on their own cultural background and experiences, students can become more open-minded, adaptable, and empathetic in their interactions with people from different cultures.

To facilitate reflection, provide students with prompts

and guiding questions that encourage them to think critically about their own cultural perspectives and communication styles. This can involve prompts such as “Reflect on a time when you encountered cultural misunderstandings. What did you learn from that experience, and how would you handle it differently now?”

### 3.8 Collaborative Projects

Implement collaborative projects that involve students from different cultural backgrounds working together towards a common goal. Collaborative projects provide opportunities for students to practice intercultural communication skills in a real-life context (Paige, 1993). Working in diverse teams allows students to learn from each other’s perspectives, negotiate cultural differences, and develop effective communication strategies. Such projects can be designed to address real-world issues or explore cross-cultural themes, fostering cooperation and intercultural understanding.

To enhance collaborative projects, encourage students to engage in structured peer feedback and evaluation. This allows students to provide constructive feedback on their peers’ communication and intercultural competence, promoting growth and learning. Additionally, allocate time for team discussions where students can openly discuss challenges, cultural misunderstandings, and conflict resolution strategies.

## 4. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, teaching intercultural communication to Taiwanese university EFL students is essential for equipping them with the skills and knowledge necessary to thrive in an interconnected world. This article has highlighted the challenges faced by Taiwanese EFL students in developing intercultural communication skills, such as limited exposure to authentic cultural contexts and the prioritization of language proficiency over cultural understanding. However, by addressing these challenges and implementing effective teaching strategies, educators can foster the development of intercultural competence among their students.

Integrating cultural content into language lessons and providing opportunities for authentic cultural experiences can enhance students’ understanding of diverse cultures. Explicit instruction on cultural communication norms and strategies, including the exploration of cultural dimensions and communication accommodation, can help students navigate the complexities of intercultural interactions. Additionally, incorporating self-awareness and reflective practices allows students to critically examine their own cultural biases and assumptions, fostering a more empathetic and open-minded approach to intercultural communication.

By emphasizing the importance of developing cultural awareness, empathy, and effective communication skills,

educators can empower Taiwanese EFL students to engage with individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds. This not only enhances their personal and professional lives but also contributes to fostering a more inclusive and harmonious global society.

As the world becomes increasingly interconnected, the ability to navigate cultural differences and communicate effectively across cultures is of utmost importance. By addressing the challenges faced by Taiwanese EFL students and integrating appropriate theoretical frameworks and instructional strategies, educators can help students develop the intercultural communication skills necessary for successful cross-cultural interactions.

In conclusion, teaching intercultural communication to Taiwanese university EFL students requires a holistic approach that encompasses knowledge, attitudes, and skills. By promoting cultural understanding, empathy, and effective communication strategies, educators can empower students to become competent and confident intercultural communicators. With these skills, Taiwanese EFL students can navigate the complexities of a globalized world and contribute to creating a more inclusive and harmonious global community.

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