An Investigation into Kurdish EFL Instructors' Intercultural Communicative Competence in Sulaimani Province Universities

Bahroz Hashim Mawlood , Abbas Mustafa Abbas

English department , Basic Education,U niversity of Sulaimani

Abstract

The present study attempts to investigate intercultural communicative competence (ICC) of Kurdish EFL instructors in Sulaimani Province Universities.

The study hypothesizes that a) Kurdish EFL Sulaimani Province Universities' instructors' knowledge of their own and English cultures affect their level of ICC, b) existing intercultural skills affect Kurdish EFL Sulaimani Province Universities' instructor's level of ICC, c) possession of positive attitudes toward English culture affects how interculturally competent the participants are, d) Kurdish EFL Sulaimani Province Universities' instructors are aware of the differences and similarities between Kurdish and English cultures.

To verify the hypotheses, a questionnaire of thirty items has been arranged and has tested 69 instructors in all Sulaimani Province Universities.

The statistical analysis of the subjects' responses has led to the following conclusions: most Kurdish EFL instructors in Sulaimani Province Universities a) have knowledge of their own and English cultures, b) are aware of the similarities and differences of both cultures, c) can use a combination of attitudes, knowledge, and skills to communicate with culturally-diverse people d) are interested in learning about culturally diverse people's life experiences, e) show tolerance toward English culture, views and behaviors of culturally-different people, f) do not have adequate knowledge of non-verbal interactional behavior and taboos.

Competence

The introduction of the term "competence" goes back to Noam Chomsky (1965) as he first used it in his famous book "Aspects of the Theory of Syntax". Chomsky (1965) refers competence to be knowledge of both a speaker and a hearer of a language. He defines competence in a weak sense and a strong sense. Chomsky's weak claim maintains that competence is grammar knowledge and other features of language while in his strong claim competence refers to "the linguistic system (or grammar) that an ideal native speaker of a given language has internalized" (Canale & Swain, 1980, p. 3). Chomsky in his later publication explicitly elaborates on the concept of competence stating:

A person who has learned a language has acquired a system of rules that relate sound and meaning in a certain specific way. He has, in other words, acquired a certain competence that he puts to use in producing and understanding speech (Chomsky, 1970, p. 184).

Reacting to Chomsky's (1965) claim on competence, Dell Hymes (1972) in his article "On Communicative Competence" contended that Chomsky's notion was too narrow and left no room for the use of language appropriately (performance). To illustrate, Hymes believes that Chomsky defines competence as a form rules.

Communicative Competence

Dell Hymes (1972) coined the term "communicative competence" as a reaction to Chomsky's notion of linguistic competence stating that his distinction was inadequate that could not describe the behavior of language thoroughly. Hymes (1972) states that communicative competence is the knowledge a language learner needs to have to be able to communicate effectively. This claim comes from Hymes's article entitled "On Communicative Competence" (1972) saying:

We have then to account for the fact that a normal child acquires knowledge of sentences not only as grammatical, but also as appropriate. He or she acquires competence as to when to speak, when not, and as to what to talk about with whom, when, where, in what manner. In short, a child becomes able to accomplish a repertoire of speech acts, to take part in speech events, and to evaluate their accomplishment by others. This competence, moreover, is integral with attitudes, values, and motivations concerning language, its features and uses, and integral with competence for, and attitudes toward, the interrelation of language with the other code of communicative conduct (Hymes 1972, p. 277).

It is thought that attention should not only be paid to the way grammatical competence is acquired but also to the ability that is acquired to use language in certain contexts appropriately. Put differently, language users should not only be taught to use language correctly as linguistic competence proposes but also appropriately since communicative competence plays a major role in the appropriateness of its use.

Intercultural Competence

During the process of learning a foreign language, multiple activities and tasks are carried out i.e. activities related to the four skills of language learning. One very important component that is commonly neglected is "intercultural competence". Mastering a foreign language does not only mean possessing the ability to speak it but to communicate and understand it in various cultural and social contexts. Intercultural competence is the ability to communicate and comprehend various areas of that language such as emotions and feelings, beliefs and ideologies, and values and thoughts.

In order to communicate with people of foreign cultures, one needs to have knowledge of themselves and their culture and a better understanding of other cultures (Alred et al., 2003). Furthermore, Hammer, Bennett, and Wiseman (2003) define intercultural competence' as the ability a person has to have to be able to think and behave in interculturally appropriate ways. Likewise, Guzman (2015) quotes from Oliveras (2000) that views intercultural competence as that ability which enables a person to behave properly, particularly, in situations where they encounter unpredicted actions, behaviors and attitudes of members of alien cultural backgrounds. To illustrate, it is necessary for a person to have knowledge of underlying differences between one's culture and those of the target culture. Similarly, Byram, Gribkova and Starkey' (2002) definition gives a more elaborate idea of the concept describing it as a person's ability to insure a mutual understanding by members of dissimilar social background to communicate with people of different identities.

Intercultural Communicative Competence

Coinage and development of "intercultural communicative competence" (ICC) belongs to Byram (1997). He states that ICC is an individual's ability in using a second or foreign language to successfully interact with people of other languages and cultures, that is the ability to understand one's own culture and other cultures and using this understanding to appropriately and successfully communicate with people possessing different cultural backgrounds and languages in an effectively.

Effective communication does not happen with the possession of knowledge of language alone but also with other elements such as skills, attitudes and cultural awareness as they are essential factors needed to communicate and maintain cross-cultural communication whether it is through mother language or foreign language.

Furthermore, as cited in (Jackson, 2014), Byram (1997) explicitly differentiates between intercultural competence (IC) and intercultural communicative competence (ICC). IC being one's ability to appropriately communicate in their mother tongue with the people of different cultural backgrounds, while ICC being one's ability to speak in a second

language about their beliefs, values, acts and norms and those of people of different cultures and languages. IC covering skills and abilities one has to speak in their native language with people of other cultures, while ICC covering one's ability to successfully communicate cross-culturally while using a second or foreign language.
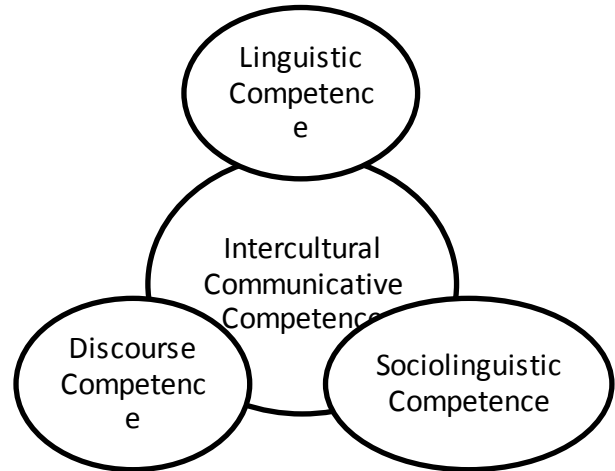
Byram's Model of Intercultural Communicative Competence

One of the most widely known models of intercultural communicative competence is Byram's (1997) which is intended to assist language educators or instructors to understand the concept of intercultural communicative competence. Also, Byram (1997) argues that the model is comprehensive and is beneficial for both teaching and assessment but is not suitable for all communicative situations as teaching varies from one situation to another. The model proposes that intercultural speakers possess the four competencies along with the four savoirs.

Moreover, a part of Byram's (1997) model of intercultural communicative competence identifies three competencies for which he provides the following definitions:

- Linguistic competence: the ability to apply knowledge of the rules of a standard version of the language to produce and interpret spoken and written language.
- Discourse competence: the ability to use, discover and negotiate strategies for the production and interpretation of monologue or dialogue texts that follow the conventions of the culture of an interlocutor or are negotiated as intercultural texts for particular purposes (Byram, 1997).
- Sociolinguistic competence: the ability to give to the language produced by a speaker whether native or not meanings that are taken for granted by the interlocutor or which are negotiated and made explicit with the interlocutor.

In addition to the above three competencies, Byram (1997) adds another one to his model, intercultural competence, which includes five factors, saviors.

Components of ICC (Byram, 1997)

The above factors are sub-components of Byram's fourth element of intercultural communicative competence, intercultural competence. To illustrate, explanation of the factors has been cited in Jackson (2014), Alfred et al. (2003), Hua (2014), and Jackson (2014) as follows:

- Attitudes: curiosity and openness, readiness to suspend disbelief about other cultures and belief about one's own (savoir être).
- Knowledge: of social groups and their products and practices in one's own and in one's interlocutor's country, and of the general processes of societal and individual interaction (savoirs).
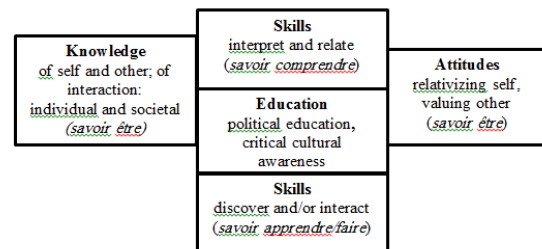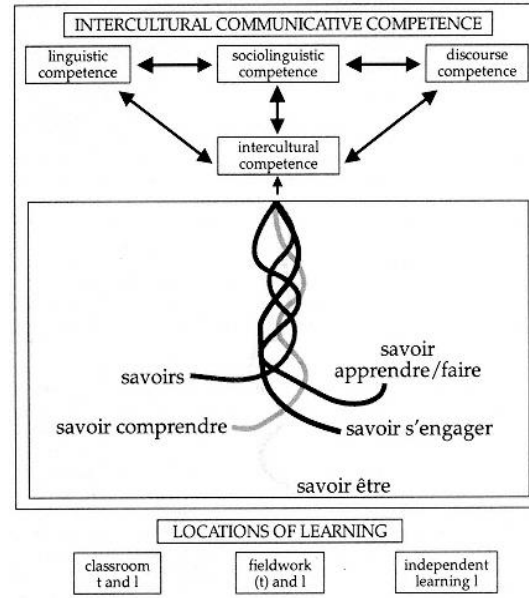

Factors in Intercultural Communication (Byram, 1997)

- Skills of interpreting and relating: ability to interpret a document or event from another culture, to explain it and relate it to documents from one's own culture (savoir comprendre).

- Skills of discovery and interaction: ability to acquire new knowledge of a culture and cultural practices and the ability to operate knowledge, attitudes and skills under the constraints of real-time communication and interaction (savoir apprendre/faire).
- Critical cultural awareness/political education: an ability to evaluate critically and on the basis of explicit criteria perspectives, practices and products in one's own and other cultures and countries (savoirs'engager).

It is necessary to mention that the first two savoirs are considered essential for an effective and successful interlingual/ intercultural communication, while the remaining three elements demonstrate the skills necessary for successful interaction across cultures and languages (Jackson, 2014). The following figure summarizes Byram's (1997) model of ICC and the relationship between ICC and IC.

Byram's model is considered to be a detailed description of ICC and the intercultural speaker, associated to the needs and opportunities of a foreign language learner with personal experience of interaction with people of other cultures with the use of a foreign language. Moreover, it proposes that language instructors should know that developing intercultural competence includes giving learners intercultural competence along with linguistic competence, preparing learners for encounters with people of other cultures and languages, enabling learners to understand and accept people of other cultures as people with different perspectives, values and attitudes, and finally to help them see interactions as such to be fruitful experiences (Byram et al. 2002).

Byram's Model of Intercultural Communicative Competence (1997)

Methodology

A) Data Collection Instrument

To investigate the hypotheses and answer the research questions, the researcher adapted a questionnaire which consisted of three parts. By confirming the hypotheses and providing answers to the research questions, this study will fill the gap which might be seen in the literature on how interculturally competent Kurdish EFL instructors in the Sulaimani Province Universities are during intercultural communication and how their level of intercultural communicative competence affects their English language teaching.

Further, the instrument that was used to collect data for this research work was a questionnaire. It was adapted from multiple theses and dissertations and later revised and organized to meet the needs of the study by the researcher. Concerning the clarity of the items of the questionnaire and their relevance to ICC, the researcher sent the questionnaire to several experts and lecturers in the fields of English language teaching and applied linguistics in different universities, a number of them appointed as jury members for checking. Their feedback was incorporated in the final version of the questionnaire used in this research.

B) Instructor Questionnaire

The questionnaire consisted of three parts. Part one was concerned with the demographic characteristics of the participants and consisted of five items, namely, the participants' age, gender, years of teaching experience, highest academic degree, and years of living abroad. The second part contained thirteen items and aimed at investigating the domains of Attitudes and Cultural Awareness, and the third part included seventeen items which attempted to test both dimensions of Knowledge and Skills of the participants in the light of Byram's (1997) ICC model. A *Likert-Scale* tool was used to measure the participants' responses to the items of the second part and a *yes-no-not sure* scale to measure the responses of the items of the third part.

C) The Participants

The researcher expected to take 100 Kurdish EFL instructors who have a Master or a PhD degree in English Language and/or Literature currently teaching in English Departments of the Universities in Sulaimani Province either public or private, i.e. University of Sulaimani, Charmo University, University of Raparin, Garmian University, Sulaimani Polytechnic University, University of Human Development, Cihan University of Sulaimani, and Komar University of Science and Technology.

D) Method of Data Analysis

The method used in this research is a quantitative method and since this type of approach deals with numbers and numerical data, SPSS is used to analyze the data retrieved from the questionnaire. Further discussion on the process of data analysis is in the next chapter.

Data Analysis and Discussion of Results

The current section is devoted for the analysis and discussion of the results of the test.

Item 1: I'm interested in finding out more about people's experiences of daily life in other cultures.

Table 1 demonstrates Kurdish EFL university instructors' interest in discovering more about daily life experiences of those people who belong to other cultures. It is illustrated that a large number of the respondents (88%) showed interest in having more knowledge about how other people of other cultures spend their daily life. However, approximately 10% of the participants did not seem to find a need in

knowing more about people's daily life experiences whose culture was different.

Based on the answers and the Mean (4.22) the results have provided, it is seen that most of the respondents are interested in knowing and finding out more about culturally diverse people's daily life experiences. Because culture and language are strongly interrelated, EFL instructors can benefit learning more about cross-cultural life experiences since they can share this information with their students whose interactions and communications encounter intercultural breakdowns. Further, school material cannot always be a reliable source of knowledge and information to learn about a culture, but also real life experiences of those people who come from that very culture. Knowing more about people's experiences can broaden one's perspective of the world and help them be creative and critical thinkers.

Item 2: It is important to develop positive attitude and tolerance toward English culture.

Figure 1 emphasizes the importance of developing positive attitude and tolerance toward English culture. It is obvious that 86.9% respondents confirm that one's development of positive attitude and tolerance for English culture is important and a small number (10.1%) show neutrality for so, yet, 2.9% disagree that English culture should be positively treated and tolerated.
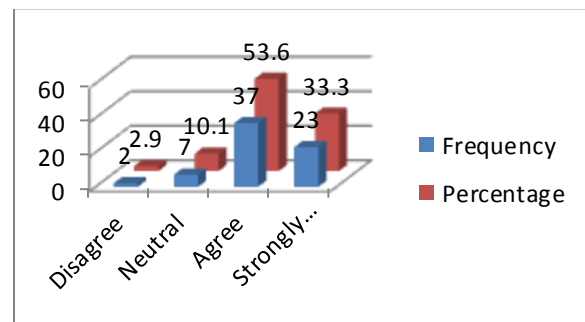

Figure 1: Importance of developing positive attitude & tolerance toward English culture

A large number of the lecturers ensure the significance of developing attitude and tolerance toward English culture through demonstrating agreement with the above statement. When regarding effective domain of learning, it is strongly emphasized that positive attitudes ought to be developed through the process of language learning since such attitudes insure effective communication,

namely, 'curiosity', 'tolerance', 'openness', 'respect', and 'valuing all cultures' (Chen & Le 2018). Additionally, cited in (Ngoc-Tu & Tran, 2018), Prodromou (1992) states that a key component in the process of language learning is a positive attitude toward target language culture, which consequently results in cross-cultural interaction among interlocutors.

Item 3: I know about levels of formality in language and behavior (e.g., different situations that require being formal or informal in verbal or written communications).

Through Table 2, it is clearly stated by most of the instructors (88.4) that they know about levels of formality in language and behavior depending on the context and medium of the communication while 10.1% were unsure of their having such knowledge and 1.4 % stated that they did not know about situations where language use and behavior might be required to change.

It can be observed that the majority of the respondents of this study know about the levels of formality in language and behavior, that is to say, using titles and proper vocabulary form of jargon, and paying more attention to rituals of politeness (Lustig & Koester, 2010). Instructors need to be equipped with knowledge of levels of formality in language use whether written or verbal so that they can appropriately deal with the very situation or event they're present at. Further, EFL instructors ought to have a higher level of informal jargon and formal vernacular in order to pass it on to their students to be interculturally-competent individuals. Likewise, instructors need to carry knowledge of formality of behavior, namely, demonstrating attentiveness via the stance of the body, facial expressions, using eye contact in ways that are culturally acceptable because behavior can be an interpretation of language, that is, if language cannot be utilized in a certain situation, nonverbal behavior replaces it, therefore, it has to be appropriate.

Item 4: I know about regional dialects and varieties and how they are perceived by others.

Concerning knowing about regional dialects and varieties and their perception by others, 4 instructors (5.8%) responded by not knowing about the dialects and language varieties that are region-based. 32 instructors (46.4%) were uncertain if they had

enough knowledge of the language varieties and dialect and how they were perceived by others. The remaining instructors (33) representing 47.8% pointed out that they had knowledge of the regional varieties and dialects and the way others perceived them (See Table 3).

Knowledge of regional dialects and variation is crucial for language educators, yet one is not able to master all the variations and dialects a language owns. To illustrate, Paulston (1992) maintains that there are regional and social dialects which depict variation and difference in pronunciation, grammar and vocabulary, but no single person controls the whole chain of variation. According to the results of the current statement, fewer than half of the participants (47.8%) contended that they sufficiently know about the regional dialects and variations of English language and people's perceptions toward them which seems unsatisfactory as Deardorff (2009) strongly points out that "a skilled communicator is distinguished by his or her knowledge of familiarity with the wide array of regional dialects and ability for what might be viewed as code-switching to strengthen relational bonds" (p.188). To conclude, EFL teachers have to take into account the importance of knowledge of regional dialects and the variation they have so as to able to communicate with those whose dialects are dissimilar from theirs and expose different language varieties during communication.

Item 5: I know of non-verbal behaviors of interactions, and related taboos.

It can be observed that 53.6% instructors claimed to know about non-verbal behaviors of interactions and related taboos. However, 33.3% were impartial and did not seem to have decided. It is also obvious that 13% verified that they were unenlightened with this knowledge (See Figure 2).
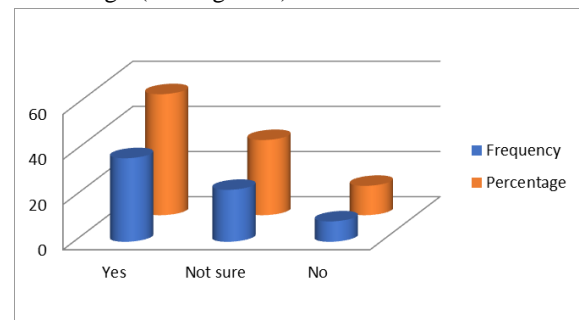

Figure 2: Knowing of non-verbal behaviors of interaction and related taboos

Just over half of the participants (53.6%) stated that they know about non-verbal behaviors and taboos. This is an indication that Kurdish EFL instructors have stayed away from educating themselves about L2 taboos which are part of English language. It is worthy to mention that to know about non-verbal behaviors of interactions and cultural taboos is to identify and be aware of the essential elements of non-verbal communication such as stance, gesture, movement of the eyes and quality of voice (Spencer & Franklin, 2009). Sometimes intercultural speakers do not adopt or imitate the non-verbal conventions of interaction which involve their personality and cultural identity. To demonstrate, there may be instances where they accept that a certain gesture is a way of greeting, but refuse to do it because it is different from their own nonverbal behaviour. In addition, intercultural communicators may stay away from taboos since they have been around for long periods of time but it has to be noted that learning and knowingness of non-verbal behavior and taboos without practicing them is ineffectual, therefore, they have to frequently be implemented in (inter) cultural interaction.

Item 6: I can use a combination of my knowledge, skills and attitudes to interact with people from a different culture while ensuring understanding and avoiding dysfunctions.

It is represented in Table 4 that most of the participants (89.9%) used a combination of their knowledge, skills and attitudes to interact with culturally diverse people while ensuring mutual understanding and avoiding communicative breakdowns. Contrastively, 1.4 % did not seem to have used this coordination of skills, knowledge and attitudes to build successful interactions with culturally diverse people. Between these two answers are 8.7% of the participants who were unsure to have used this combination during their cross-cultural communication.

Intercultural speakers make use of suitable collection of knowledge, skills and attitudes to communicate with people of different countries and cultures and consider the degree of their familiarity with the country, culture and language and the degree of difference between their own and the other (Byram, 1997). Simultaneously, the intercultural speaker has the ability to evaluate the degree of closeness of their culture and language to those of their interacting partner and utilize skills of interpreting, discovering, relating different presuppositions and premises to guarantee understanding and avert dysfunction. Thus, the Mean value (2.88) is an indication that the majority of Kurdish EFL university instructors has the ability of combining more than one ICC domain during intercultural encounters and performs successful and yielding communication.

Conclusions

Based on the test findings, the current study has reached at the following conclusions:

1. The majority of Kurdish EFL instructors in Sulaimani Province Universities has adequate knowledge of many aspects of their own and English culture such as (formality in language and behavior, social distinctions and their markers, conventions of communication and behavior, and processes and institutions of socialization). On the other hand, they lack knowledge of (regional dialects and varieties) and how they are perceived by others.

2. According to the results of the questionnaire, it can be stated that nearly all of the participants were aware of and could identify the cultural similarities and differences of their own and the target culture.

3. Most Kurdish EFL instructors in Sulaimani Province Universities are able to use a combination of their existing skills, knowledge and attitudes to interact with students and people from different cultural backgrounds and ensure successful and effective communications free from breakdown and dysfunctions.

4. A large number of Kurdish EFL instructors in Sulaimani Province Universities show interest in discovering more about culturally diverse people. Also, they have a positive attitude towards learning about the cultures of such countries as The UK, The US, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand where English language is officially spoken.

5. The participants demonstrated to have tolerance toward the views and behaviors of students whose cultural backgrounds are different. Besides, they confirmed to be motivated when they learn new cultural information and they showed to be willing to interact with culturally-diverse students.

6. Just over half of the participants know about non-verbal behaviors and taboos which are essential elements of non-verbal communication such as stance, gesture, movement of the eyes and quality of voice This is believed to be owing to the fact that taboos and non-verbal behavior as two

aspects of English language have been neglected by both university school and university curriculum and by the instructors themselves.

Pedagogical Implications

In the light of the conclusions, the current study recommends the following;

1. It is recommended that culture topics be integrated into the curriculum that is studied in the Sulaimani Province Universities to improve and foster students' intercultural communicative competence.
2. University instructors should improve their knowledge of intercultural communication and develop their competence in order to fill the existing gap about knowledge of regional dialects and dialectal variations of L2 culture.
3. It is important for Kurdish EFL instructors to travel to the countries where English language is spoken to personally experience their cultures and compare the norms, values, perspectives and behaviors to their own.
4. It is recommended that TV shows and movies be incorporated so that students avoid breakdowns and dysfunctions in intercultural encounters and interactions.

Suggestions for Further Research

The following points are suggested for further research in this area:

1. A similar study is needed to investigate the level of intercultural communicative competence of university instructors in other provinces.
2. A study should be carried out to discover the influence of movies and TV series on student's improvement of ICC.
3. A study is suggested on the investigation of intercultural communication competence in the curriculum that is currently studied in English Departments in Kurdistan Universities.
4. A comparative study is needed to compare the level of intercultural communicative competence between private and public Kurdish EFL university students

A study is suggested on the importance and incorporation of culture teaching in EFL classrooms

References

1- Alred, G., Byram, M. and Fleming, M. (eds.) (2003) Intercultural Experience and Education. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
2- Byram, M. Gribkova, B. & Starkey, H. (2002) Developing the Intercultural Dimension in Language Teaching: A practical introduction for teachers. Language Policy Division, Directorate of School, Out-of-School and Higher Education, Council of Europe. Strasbourg.
3- Byram, M. (1997). Teaching and assessing intercultural communicative competence. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
4- Michael Canale, Merrill Swain; Theoretical Bases of Communicative Approaches to Second Language Teaching and Testing, Applied Linguistics, Volume I, Issue 1, 1 March 1980, Pages 1–47, https://doi.org/10.1093/applin/I.1.1
5- Chen, S., & Le, T. T. (2018). Teaching of culture in English as an international language: An integrated model. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge.
6- Chomsky, N. (1970). Remarks on nominalization' in R. A. Jacobs and P. S. Rosenbaum (eds.): Readings in English Transformational Syntax. Waltham, Mass.: Ginn.
7- Chomsky, N. (1965). Aspects of the Theory of Syntax. United States of America. THE MIT PRESS.
8- D. Hymes. (1972). "Models of the Interaction of Language and Social Life," in Directions in Sociolinguistics: The Ethnography of Communication, ed. by J. J. Gumperz and D. Hymes. Holt, Rinehart & Winston.
9- Deardorff, D. (2009). The SAGE Handbook of Intercultural Competence. United States of America. SAGE Publications, Inc.
10- Guzman Arias, A. M. (2015). A Content Analysis Of Intercultural Communicative Competence In A Latin American Efl Textbook (Master's thesis, Pedagógica Nacional, 2015) (pp. 3-4). Bogota, Colombia.
11- Hua, Z. (2014). Exploring Intercultural Communication; Language in Action. Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon, London; Routledge.
12- Jackson, J. (2014). Introducing language and intercultural communication. London: Routledge.
13- Lustig, M. & Koester, J. (2010). Intercultural Competence: Interpersonal Communication across Cultures. Boston: Pearson Education, Inc.
14- Paulston, C. B. (1992). Linguistic and Communicative Competence: Topics in ESL. Bristol. Longdunn Press. Multilingual Matters.

15- Phan Tran, Ngoc-Tu & Tran, Thao. (2018). Attitudes towards the Learning of Culture in English Language Learning among Vietnamese High School Students.

16- Prodromou, L. (1992) What culture? Which culture? Cross-cultural factors in language learning. ELT 46, 39-50.

17- Spencer-Oatey, H., & Franklin, P. (2009). Intercultural interaction: A multidisciplinary approach to intercultural communication. New York: Macmillan.

18- R. Hammer, Mitchell & Bennett, Milton & Wiseman, Richard. (2003). Measuring intercultural sensitivity: The intercultural development inventory. International Journal of Intercultural Relations. 27. 421-443. 10.1016/S0147-1767(03)00032-4.

Table 1: Interest in finding out more about cross-cultural people's daily life experiences

Scale	Frequency	Percentage	Mean	SD
Disagree	1	1.4		
Neutral	7	10.1	4.22	0.68
Agree	37	53.6		
Strongly Agree	24	34.8		
Total	**69**	**100.0**		

Table 2: Knowing about levels of formality in language and behavior

Scale	Frequency	Percentage	Mean	SD
Yes	61	88.4		
Not sure	7	10.1	2.87	0.38
No	1	1.4		
Total	**69**	**100.0**		

Table 3: Knowing about regional dialects and varieties and how others perceive them

Scale	Frequency	Percentage	Mean	SD
Yes	33	47.8		
Not sure	32	46.4	2.42	0.60
No	4	5.8		
Total	**69**	**100.0**		

Table 4: Using a combination of knowledge, skills, and attitude in interaction

Scale	Frequency	Percentage	Mean	SD
Yes	62	89.9		
Not sure	6	8.7	2.88	0.37
No	1	1.4		
Total	**69**	**100.0**		