

Intercultural Competence: A characterization

Leidy Yulieth Gómez Cardona¹

Duván Andrés Ríos Atehortúa²

What does our context need?

The Language Center of the Universidad Católica de Oriente, since the beginning of 2023, has been developing an update in its methodological approach in order to respond to the current needs of education and the constant changes in society. For this reason and in order to develop intercultural competence in students, we take Guilherme (2002) as a reference, who affirms that the teaching of a foreign language implies not only linguistic knowledge but also cultural knowledge since the communicative competence of said language refers to a skill that seeks communication and interaction between people with different linguistic and cultural origins.

Sheets (2009) states that the meaning of teaching English goes beyond focusing on its linguistic characteristics or on an instrument to be competitive, it must be understood and taught as a means to build knowledge, and society, understand and accept differences between oneself and others. Through learning the language, students will be able to know, value and defend their identity, culture, diversity, and that of others.

Byram and Zarate (1997) mention it is important to include intercultural competence in the curriculum in order not only to develop this competence in students but also to ensure that teachers and administrators are adequately prepared and understand

¹Licenciada en Lenguas extranjeras Universidad Católica de Oriente
Estudiante Especialización en Didáctica del Inglés Universidad Católica de Oriente

²Licenciado en Lenguas extranjeras Universidad Católica de Oriente
Estudiante Especialización en Didáctica del Inglés Universidad Católica de Oriente

the concept of interculturality so that they can effectively accompany the processes of students' learning process. Bearing this in mind, in our context, it is necessary to carry out a study that helps to characterize, identify and describe the strategies that promote intercultural competence in the English classes in our Language Center.

Key Concepts

Methodology in English Teaching

Methodology in English teaching refers to the systematic and organized approach that teachers use to plan, carry out and evaluate not only the language lesson but also the whole process of teaching and learning to achieve the desired objectives. In addition, it involves the selection of appropriate teaching materials and activities, techniques, and strategies based on students' needs, abilities, and learning styles.

As described by Richards and Rodgers (2014), the methodology concerns the principles of teaching and learning the language and the procedures and techniques used to teach it in the classroom. However, a methodology in English teaching must also embrace the development of the intercultural competence that allows students to develop the ability to appreciate and value their culture as well as the culture of others (Byram, 2020).

English teaching strategies

By strategies for teaching English, we refer to the various approaches, methods, techniques, and activities used by teachers to facilitate the effective learning and acquisition of the English language by non-native speakers; These strategies must be designed in such a way that they meet the multiple needs of the students as well as their learning styles, allowing them to achieve the necessary skills for effective communication in English.

As Sarode (2018, p.58) affirms, teaching strategies refer to the methods used to help students learn the desired course content and can develop goals that can be achieved in the future. On the other hand, Sarjan and Mardiana (2017, p.151) point out that the teaching strategy is a general plan for the lessons that include the structure, and the behavioral desires of the students, in terms of the objective of the teaching and the schemes of tactics necessary to implement strategies that must be mastered by the English teacher to teach the lesson to the student in the class.

Culture, Interculturality, and Intercultural Competence

In English teaching, culture refers to the beliefs, customs, values, traditions, and practices of a particular group of people; Culture also encompasses lifestyles, attitudes, and behaviors characteristic of a society or community, as stated by Kramersch (2013).

Thus, the integration of culture in the classroom helps students develop intercultural communicative competence, which implies the ability to understand and explore cultural differences, adapt to new contexts and participate in effective intercultural communication. Thus, students need not only knowledge and ability in the grammar of a language but also the ability to use the language in socially and culturally appropriate ways as pointed out by Byram et al (2002). Likewise, intercultural competence recognizes the value and richness of cultural diversity and fosters empathy, curiosity, and a willingness to learn from others.

Intercultural competence seeks for the students to develop an identity that allows them to self-recognize and value themselves. This allows the students to recognize the differences in each other and live harmoniously. Through this competence, the student also acquires the ability to recognize and have a critical vision of the elements of their culture and of other cultures. Therefore, they can understand, live with, and accept

diversity and similarity, and seek social, cultural, and ethnic equality (Odina & María, 1991; MCE, 2018).

Information Gathering

As part of the updating methodology proposed by Idiomas UCO, a qualitative study will be conducted with 5 teachers of English through a case study from an interpretative paradigm using some strategies to generate data such as interviews, direct observation, and document analysis. This approach is selected due to its suitability for exploring a specific phenomenon in depth and understanding its context in detail. Interviews, observations, and document analysis are chosen as data generation strategies because of their ability to capture detailed voices and interactions from our participants.

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