Chapter 4
Critical Intercultural Competence in ESP Course in Algeria:
Research–Informed Essential Instructional Activities

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ABSTRACT

Globalization has brought additional communicative challenges to professionals in work fields. These challenges exist side by side with the process of doing business in a foreign language, especially in a multicultural working environment. By adopting a critical intercultural approach in the ESP context, it is expected that future Algerian engineers will successfully interact with individuals from different cultures and increase their employability. Accordingly, the present paper's aim is to propose a learning paradigm for promoting critical intercultural competence via the medium of ESP course. Contrary to the prevailing assumption that the main purpose of ESP courses is to meet learners' linguistic needs, the author thinks that it may also serve the purpose of promoting critical thinking and intercultural competence. Therefore, drawing on the existing literature, this paper addresses the issues of learners' intellectual and intercultural competences in ESP settings.

INTRODUCTION

Economic growth has become contingent upon hunting the best international talents; therefore, big companies are competitively recruiting skilled engineers from different geographical territories. As a result, companies all over the world are becoming more culturally diverse. This means that a key requirement for an engineer is to display certain capabilities so as to operate at cross-linguistic and cross-cultural levels. Within this very sense, Sercu (2005, p. 1) states that: "employers increasingly want their employees to be interculturally competent. They want them to be skilled negotiators in increasingly intercultural work situations." This indicates that entrepreneurs are aware that "the future belongs to those who can learn to work or team together with other groups without regard to location, heritage, and national and cultural difference" (Grandin & Hedderich, 2009, p. 363). The same idea is echoed by Spitzberg & Changnon (2009) who state: "with ample opportunities for employment overseas, it becomes important for internationally competitive businesses to hire interculturally competent employees, if only for the future success of the business." (p. 4)

Regardless of the outstanding success achieved when culturally diverse engineering teams decide to collaborate, the most obvious problematic situations had to do with the communicative issue. In other words, while the potential for high-level products is enormous, the potential for cultural misunderstanding is equally significant. Therefore, reflections on the available engineering programs have been given as to what knowledge they must allow a future-engineer to acquire, what skills he or she should be equipped with, so-called soft skills should be in the mix and what role they should play. Given that engineers work within teams that include professionals from different countries, scholars agreed that, today more than before, intercultural communicative competence, among other skills, is required in the engineer, especially for those who intend to work in international territories (Grandin & Hedderich, 2009). This being the case, it is assumed that engineer trainers/educators must be aware of their students' communication.

According to Halleck and Coll-Garcia (2015), universities in the US and Spain are responding to the new marketplace realities by changing their engineering education criteria. Specifically, engineering curricula in both countries are being updated in order to equip future engineers with hard and soft skills needed to do business with people who have different opinions, ethnic origins, languages and cultural backgrounds. If the same policy is adapted in the Algerian context, the author believes that the academic and working backgrounds of engineering students can comfortably enough fit into their future professional setting, be it in Algeria or abroad, gathering individuals belonging to many countries and having different political and religious orientations.

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