

Chapter 7

Utilizing Media to Enhance Students' Intercultural Competence: Voices of EFL Teachers

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ABSTRACT

There has been a growing consensus regarding the necessity to alter English language teaching methods to accommodate deeper understanding and respect for other cultures (Richards & Rogers, 2014). Media, with its diverse forms and accessibility, presents a powerful tool for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers in developing students' English language proficiency. This chapter investigates the use of media in improving students' intercultural competence. Drawing upon the Intercultural Communicative Competence model proposed by Byram (1997), this research focuses on how EFL teachers at a university in Vietnam incorporated media into their teaching practices. The study employed in-depth interviews with eight EFL teachers and examined their lesson plans, syllabi, and textbooks. The findings provide valuable insights into the pedagogical approaches employed by EFL teachers, shedding light on their preferred media types, and obstacles they encountered in the process of enhancing students' intercultural competence by using media.

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INTRODUCTION

In recent years, culture has increasingly been recognized as a crucial factor in the process of learning a foreign language. The nature of foreign language learning is undergoing significant changes, shifting from a focus on the ability to use language appropriately in various contexts to an emphasis on “the ability of a person to behave adequately in a flexible manner when confronted with actions, attitudes and expectations of representatives of foreign cultures” (Meyer, 1991, p. 138).

This is more evident in this current interconnected world, both in-person and online, where intercultural competence (IC) facilitates both the enhancement of learners’ communication skills and awareness of cultural diversity. IC is defined as “the capability to shift one’s cultural perspective and appropriately adapt behavior to cultural differences and commonalities” (Hammer, 2015, p. 483). IC serves as a catalyst for connecting individuals from different cultural backgrounds as well as promoting empathy, tolerance, and other positive human emotions (Deardorff, 2015). With an increasingly diverse and connected world, the integration of IC into foreign language classes seems inevitable, especially in EFL classes (Iswandari & Ardi, 2022; Omar, 2024). Questions remain, however, about how to best accomplish this integration.

One way of promoting the connection between IC development and EFL education is the use of various media forms within the EFL classroom, given the technological revolutionizations in recent decades. Media, with diverse genres such as newspapers, radio, TV shows, films, documentaries, etc., is a fruitful source of material to expose learners to diverse linguistic, social and cultural practices, thereby deepening the understanding of various cultures through tailored instructions (Byram, 1997; Sercu, 2005). Given the importance of visual and auditory stimuli from media in transcending learners far beyond the boundaries of EFL classrooms to gain a more multidimensional perspective of targeted cultures, exploring how media-integrated EFL instruction contributes to IC development in various contexts is warranted. However, exploring the crossing point of media and IC also presents challenges. According to Barrett (2018), the ways in which teachers can exploit media materials to promote critical reflection and intercultural dialogue in formal educational settings have remained underexplored.

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