

**MENTAL ENLIGHTENMENT SCIENTIFIC –
METHODOLOGICAL JOURNAL****MENTAL ENLIGHTENMENT SCIENTIFIC –
METHODOLOGICAL JOURNAL**<http://mentaljournal-jspu.uz/index.php/mesmj/index>**THE DEVELOPMENT OF CRITICAL INTERCULTURAL
AWARENESS IN HIGHER EDUCATION****Feruz Kurbanova**

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E-mail: k.feruza22051987@gmail.com**ABOUT ARTICLE**

Key words: critical intercultural awareness, video-assisted clips, pedagogical tasks, intercultural competence components, group discussions, presentations.

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Abstract: This article intends to reveal the ways and methods of developing students' CIA in an EFL classroom. It presents the incorporation of intercultural components into classroom practice and the participation of some students from diverse gender and ethnic backgrounds in the intercultural awareness (IA)-based learning program. This research shows whether and how learners can increase their CIA using culturally relevant video materials with the help of social network platforms and pedagogical tasks. Especially, we try to explore whether there are significant differences in the critical intercultural awareness development of students in terms of gender and ethnicity. Furthermore, this investigation employs intercultural awareness model to study the ongoing development of students' CIA and to identify what can be developed and how. This study also plans to increase a model of IA-based learning using video-assisted intercultural and pedagogical learning tasks to encourage CIA among students. This will stimulate a theoretical and empirical usage of this model, providing its applicability, practicability and effectiveness in the educational context. Video materials that are taken as main part of teaching methodology can be considered as basic tools for enhancing intercultural learning.

Introduction. Supporting learners' CIA can be fulfilled in different ways through a diversity of methods. This research refers to how EFL teachers involve learners in intercultural awareness-based learning by using culturally relevant media in the class. Intercultural learning should be conducted in EFL classrooms in ways that stimulate students' active participation and exploration. This basic principle should be aimed to replace the traditional culture and language education paradigm, in which students learn specifically through memorization and assistance of facts (rote learning), with instructors as the main source of knowledge for learners [4]. These beliefs and practices deprive students of their own learning experiences and discourage them from constructing cultural meanings. EFL teachers should appropriately involve learners to authentic sociocultural issues and relate them to their own life experiences, in order to activate background awareness and motivate them to learn [5;12]. Furthermore, language instructors should organize intercultural tasks that make learners participate actively and provide curiosity, self-directed study and inquiry [11]. In this way, learners can shape their understandings of language and culture learning as a discovery process by carrying out their own research, interpreting and presenting effective, practical and relevant topics to their lives. This investigation of language and culture help learners to develop their discovery and relating skills, making them capable of acquiring an understanding and awareness of various cultural perspectives, practices and values [2]. Another critical paradigm in intercultural learning is to encourage students' interactions and discussions.

Methodology. A number of studies show that most EFL instructors tend to lecture rather than engaging learners in class discussions to learn and evaluate sociocultural issues [6; 7; 18]. Using lectures is not always harmful to learners as they are used to provide an overview of the cultural issues being explored or to equip them with background knowledge and awareness of interculturality [15]. Although, extreme use of this instruction style restricts learners' possibility to collaborate with other groups, making them passive in cultural learning, causing less self-awareness and other learners' learning and an inability to interact with people from diverse backgrounds. To solve this issue, intercultural learning should be focused on learners to promote peer interaction and cooperation. They are encouraged to analyze cultural similarities and differences, exchange perspectives and respect or accept differences through sharing and discussion activities [8]. It helps students to become reflective, critical thinkers, making them able to heighten critical intercultural awareness [8]. Numerous researches suggested ILTL models or strategies to promote students' CIA as part of ICC. For example, Li and Liu examined the use of a cultural research project and used data from PowerPoint presentations on the cultural research project and essays on learners' reflective cultural

comparison [10]. The study revealed that the cultural research projects and presentations positively impacted students' intercultural awareness, widened their language learning experience and increased skills in the target language. Instructors could also use self-directed or structured project-based learning to increase students' ICC, such as through translation projects [17].

Other studies employed different approaches and strategies, such as peer-learning and reflection-based activities, roleplay, drama, critical discourse analysis and problem-based learning. The studies revealed similar findings that these strategies potentially encourage students' active participation and collaboration in the classroom and promote their ICC. Crook emphasized the importance of utilizing culturally appropriate resources such as images, videos, films, written materials and YouTube clips in conjunction with appropriate strategies such as role-play, presentation, and focus group discussions, to promote students' ICC [3]. EFL teachers can utilize information and communication technologies (ICT) to assist students in intercultural learning and foster their CIA. ICT allows EFL teachers to select and incorporate a huge number of resources for students which contain rich and relevant language and cultural content from all over the world. YouTube clips, for example, provide audio, visual, and video materials that can be used to expose authentic English variations and cultural diversities worldwide, allowing the retrieval of quick information, rapid learning and feedback, and global knowledge and connectivity.

Materials and discussion. Technology and digital media enable EFL teachers to use various digital learning platforms to make intercultural learning more attractive and productive. Ribeiro, for example, suggested using digital storytelling to increase students' intercultural awareness [14]. This platform empowered students to construct new personal and collective meanings by engaging them in a dynamic and productive discourse about cultural differences. EFL teachers can also use a blended learning model to help students learn more about other cultures by combining face-to-face and online learning, synchronous and asynchronous modes [1]. They can use telecollaboration to assist students in establishing virtual intercultural exchanges or language partnerships with peers from other cultures or countries via websites or online applications. Ngai et al. found that online social networking was feasible and beneficial in assisting the development of students' intercultural competence. Students could develop a greater awareness of the proper use of social media to obtain information and interact with others on a global scale. Other studies indicated that students positively perceived the inclusion of social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram and that these platforms help them achieve higher ICC scores than students who only received

traditional lecture-based instruction. These virtual interactions with members of the target culture can be as beneficial as studying abroad in terms of fostering a sense of global community.

Digital technology has the potential to accelerate intercultural learning by providing EFL teachers with extensive resources to use in their instruction. The use of YouTube clips as EFL teaching and learning materials has been recognized as beneficial for both language development and cultural knowledge of practices or products. Due to their rich audio and visual information sources, video clips can be used to promote and facilitate intercultural learning in foreign language classrooms [13]. Numerous accessible digital video files are available online, with the majority hosted on popular video repositories like YouTube.com. This site enables EFL teachers to search for cultural resources that will assist them in meeting and enhancing students' intercultural learning needs through films, talks, or conversations about sociocultural realities. YouTube clips serve as potential learning materials to promote students' awareness of sociocultural realities embedded in them. Some studies revealed that the effective use of intercultural film clips contributed to the development of intercultural awareness as students addressed issues and concepts related to intercultural encounters and contained stories that reflect cultural differences. Several classroom-based studies emphasized the critical role of culturally relevant video clips in intercultural learning. For example, using YouTube clips as realia could stimulate cultural lessons and broaden students' exposure to English dialects worldwide [16].

Results. Television documentary series could also promote cultural values and ICC [3]. Accordingly, YouTube clips could motivate students and prompt thoughtful discussions on communication in diverse communities. However, EFL teachers need to consider critically the appropriateness of video content, the length, and ways to most effectively present and utilize the clips [16]. The use of YouTube clips as culturally appropriate learning resources should be in conjunction with interculturally appropriate learning tasks to foster students' critical intercultural awareness. In this vein, the tasks serve as activities that aid learners in communicating or making sense of sociocultural issues [9]. Thus, the tasks are critical in assisting EFL teachers in engaging students in a productive intercultural learning process and scaffolding their critical thinking about the intercultural issues depicted in the clips. Along with teachers' scaffolding, the tasks enable students to identify and describe the cultural values embedded in the YouTube clips, conduct a critical analysis of the sociocultural realities demonstrated in the activities, and evaluate and reflect in small group and/ or class discussions [15].

Reflection is a crucial stage in IA-based learning where students learn how to objectively interpret and evaluate sociocultural issues and values embedded in the YouTube clips. In this reflection stage, the teachers engaged students in group discussions to reflect on the sociocultural issues they noticed in the previous activities. Additionally, each group was asked to analyze critically what was or was not taken for granted to understand diverse cultural perspectives and beliefs. The teachers scaffolded the groups by assisting them in

- a) reflecting on what they observed in the YouTube clips in relation to their notes,
- b) comparing cultural similarities,
- c) contrasting cultural differences, and
- d) engaging in the negotiation process.

Teacher's scaffolding encourages students to participate actively in class, exchange perspectives with their peers, and to retain more information. The reflection activities help students improve their language and intercultural skills. Students have a wide range of opportunities to discuss sociocultural issues while practicing English, enabling them to improve their speaking skills. The reflection activities also assist students in understanding the meanings of the sociocultural issues depicted in the clips and in reflecting on cultural differences within their culturally diverse groups. This process allows them to experience meaningful intercultural interactions with diverse peers and groups, building their intercultural communication skills. Additionally, this process aids students in the development of their perspective on sociocultural issues and hones their ability to respond to the issues critically and nonjudgmentally. When students participate in reflection activities, they engage in meaning negotiation and perspective exchange with their peers.

This student-centered activity, along with the teacher's scaffolding, makes intercultural learning more productive and meaningful, as described in Long's interaction hypothesis. Reflection in language-cultural learning allows students to make connections between their prior experience and the intercultural knowledge, attitudes and skills they learn in the classrooms. Participation in reflection activities helps develop intercultural skills. Students learn how to evaluate critically sociocultural issues in groups by taking into account contextual factors and multiple perspectives. This process shapes their ability to interpret and relate meanings from the target culture to their own. Byram refers to these dual abilities as interpreting and relating skills [2]. These abilities allow students to identify and make sense of sociocultural realities represented in the YouTube clips and connect over similarities and differences within their own culture.

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Conclusion. Drawing from the above findings, IA-based learning is developed by utilizing YouTube clips and intercultural tasks. IA-based learning emphasizes the interrelationship

between communicative and intercultural approaches in foreign language learning, with critical intercultural awareness as the core of the learning process and outcomes. Each activity incorporates specific language-culture elements and CIA attributes that students will learn. It engages students in a learner-centered learning process such as individual noticing activity, small group and peer interactions and in-class discussions, enabling them to experience contextual, meaningful and productive intercultural learning.

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