

**Title: Pluriculturalism in EFL Teaching/ Learning:
A Focus on Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC)**

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Abstract:

The intercultural approach to second and foreign language education is believed to incorporate multidisciplinary initiatives. Making use of this assumption, the linguistic and cultural diversity attempts at developing valuable cultural knowledge and skills to disseminate and foster pluriculturalism among our EFL teachers and learners in their own context, i.e., modify their behaviour patterns to mediate between different cultures. The main purpose of the present paper is, therefore, to expand the current scope of research on the development of intercultural communicative competence (ICC) in foreign language teaching and learning, by sustaining multilingual education. Language education policies would, then, in all probabilities help to build up a broader enculturation and a wider view on merging with different cultures.

Key-words:

Pluriculturalism, cultural and linguistic diversity, Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC), foreign language education.

Résumé en Français:

L'approche interculturelle en langues étrangères est supposée intégrer des initiatives multidisciplinaires. Faisant usage de cette hypothèse, la diversité linguistique et culturelle à pour but de développer les compétences et les connaissances culturelles qui favorisent le pluriculturalisme parmi nos enseignants et apprenants dans leur propre contexte, c'est à dire, de modifier leurs comportements appropriés aux différentes cultures. L'objectif principal du présent article, est donc d'élargir le champ d'application actuel de la recherche sur le développement de la compétence communicative interculturelle (CCI) de l'enseignement et apprentissage d'une langue étrangère, tout en soutenant l'éducation multilingue. Les politiques linguistiques éducatives permettraient, alors, une meilleure inculturation.

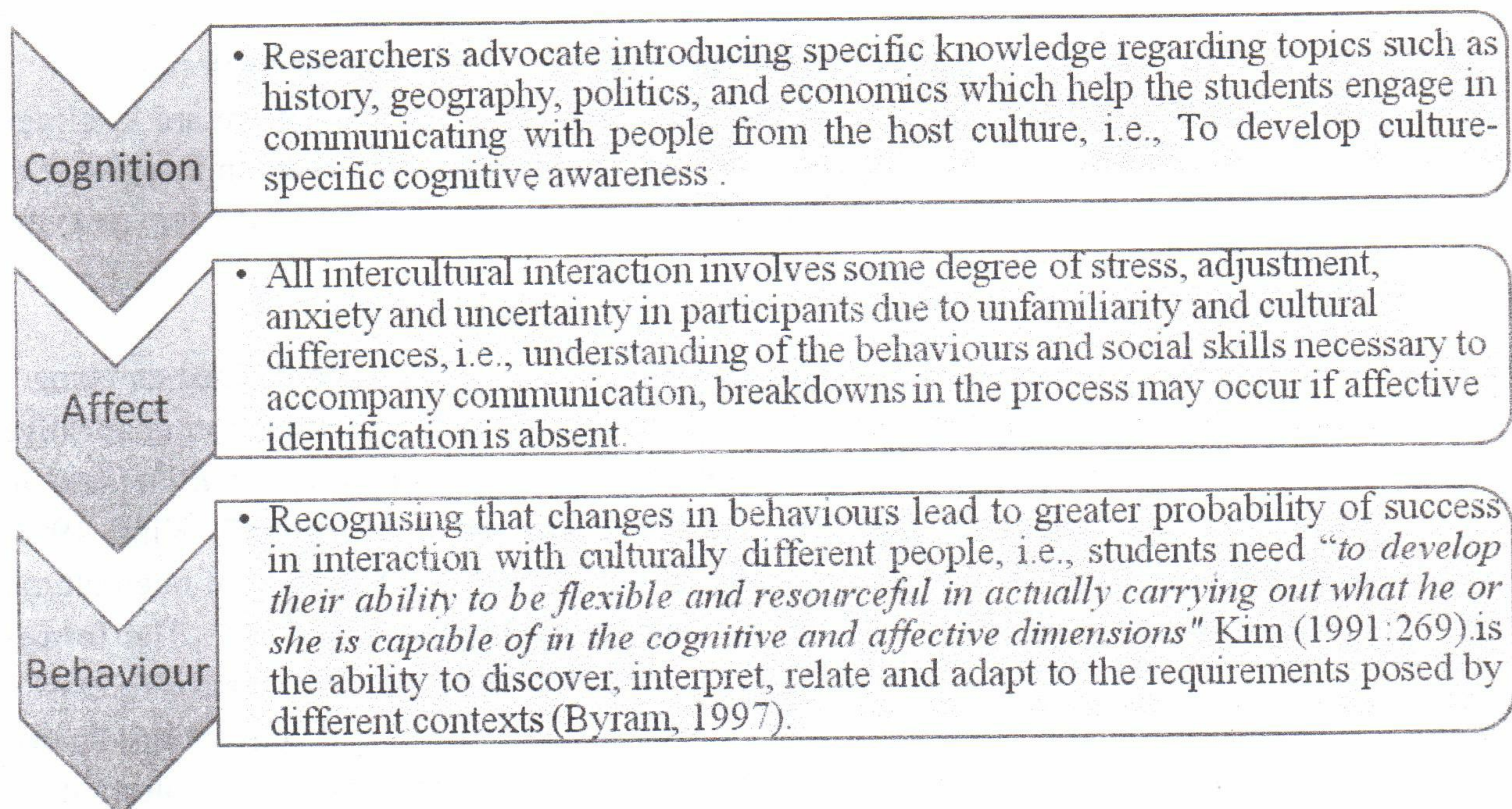
Considering the fact that culture is a constant background to the everyday use of language and that cultures are boundless by virtue, it is fairly difficult to anticipate what features of context will be significant for competent communication. The present article attempts at suggesting to equip the learner with cultural knowledge which led him to acquire intercultural communicative competence (henceforth ICC). It is crucial to posit, here, thus that pluriculturality appears to be one of the buzzing concepts in contemporary educational arena.

Fundamentally, it provides learners with methodologies for exploring both, at the same time, cultural differences and their own culture as well if we are to bridge the gap between our cultural origins and our destinations this needs, in fact, ways of *observing, understanding and interpreting* the cultures we encounter and the differences between them and our own.

It is from this perspective that interculturality needs to be defined as being a critical participation in communication. Hence, the term intercultural communicative competence (ICC) is defined as *"the overall internal capacity of an individual to manage key challenging features of intercultural communication"* (Kim, 1991: 259). In this respect, Oliveras (2000: 35-36) summarises the definition of intercultural competence as *"appropriate behaviour"* and as *"appropriate attitude"*. The former implies the idea of the image of the native speaker which suggests that there exist a homogeneous native community governed by a set of norms and conventions shared by all members of that community. However, the latter definition of interculturality is based on attitudes and it intends to reduce ethnocentrism, to develop a general tolerance and comprehension of the others' cultures and modify and strengthen the learners' attitude towards more positive stances. In this way, language teaching may be said to recover the discourse of humanistic values.

O'Dowd and Ritter's (2006) notion of 'intercultural communicative competence' at the individual level seems to be problematic. Currently, intercultural communicative competence plays a significant value in ELT partly because English takes the role of an international language which is used comprehensively by millions of people outside its original settings and its geographic boundaries to *"convey national and international perceptions of reality which may be quite different from those of English speaking cultures"* (Alptekin, 1984: 17).

On the other hand, I personally assume that intercultural competence represents the development of our cognitive environment motivated by the appreciation of diversity and the recognition of critical awareness and analysis as means of knowledge and communication in a complex society. In this way, to be a interculturally competent learner, one needs to have the following three dimensions:



The most demanding features of intercultural communication can be recognized as *cultural differences*, *unfamiliarity*, and *incompatibility* between language users. The status of English as a means of international and intercultural communication puts across manifold constant challenges to teachers and learners of English. It stands to reason that successful communication seems to be not simply about acquiring a linguistic code; but also about dealing with different cultural values reflected in the language being studied.

Nevertheless, having pluriculturalism seems to be still a novelty in the field of foreign language teaching/ learning. Thus, our contribution in this article is to fill the gap between intercultural theory and practice in foreign language teaching. It is fair to posit that so far there have been more theoretical discussions than practical suggestions.

From another stand point, language teaching, then, has also been affected by pluriculturalism, since it has gradually come to cover up the space which culture has always had in the EFL language curriculum. It appears to be considered as another competence within the teaching/learning process (Trujillo, 2002a). Furthermore, pluriculturalism in the language curriculum corresponds, to a certain extent, with a general shift mainly from linguistic to educational objectives as it is clearly pointed out by Vez (2001:17) "*through the process of learning a new foreign language at school (...) students are also encouraged to get involved in the construction of the world around them*". Besides, "*The language teacher, in guiding the learner to new perspectives and new identities, is tampering with fundamentals of human identity*" Gee (1988: 220).

To sum up, then, implementing the intercultural approach in EFL language classrooms is supposed to be a challenging, demanding task for the language teachers.

This effective intercultural communication enhances one's state of mind by developing his personality; this makes the person more tolerant and capable of exchanging and accepting the others' opinions.

What need not to be overlooked is that interculturality in education may in all probabilities lead to the acceptance of values, beliefs, and behaviours which will avoid any kind of conflict or misunderstanding between one's own and the target cultures. Considering the fact that English has become a means of intercultural communication, integrating intercultural communication learning into English language teaching is both necessary and possible.

Accordingly, the EFL teacher must implement the intercultural approach in a tactful, strategic, and skilful way. In this sense, systematic intercultural training is prerequisite for educating a newly emerging generation of learners who will not only tolerate, but also understand, accept, and respect the others' different world cultures. And this will lead them to communicate successfully. Thus, it is impossible to deny the important role of intercultural communication in ELT in general, and in the context of ELT in Algeria in particular

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