1. **Context and Culture in Language Teaching**

Context and culture are two important aspects in language teaching and learning tasks.

The notion of context is defined as the linguistic environment in which a word is used within a text. DeVito (2005) defines context as the setting in which communication takes place. In fact, Context plays an important role in determining meaning in communication and can influence what is said and how it is said. Therefore, separate words and sentences alone are not sufficient for communication.

According to Kramsch (1993), learners of a foreign language need to concern themselves not only with the linguistics aspects of the language, but also with the contexts in which it can be used. This will help them to develop the ability to interpret the references that are being made in a communication situation. In the same way, the awareness of the relationship between language and its context is also necessary to use the language appropriately in different situations.

Culture is as important as context in teaching and learning a foreign language. Samovar et al. (1998, p. 36) define culture as “ the deposit of knowledge, experience, beliefs, values, actions, atttitudes, meanings, hierarchies, religion, notions of time, roles, spatial relations, concepts of the universe, and artifacts acquired by a group of people in the course of generations…” This definition shows that culture consists of learned and shared knowledge, behaviours, beliefs, values and way of thinking of a group of people which are passed from generation to generation.

In fact, culture is not static; it changes over time as a result of political, economic and historical events and developments, and as a result of interactions with and influences from other cultures. Culture can also change over time because of their members’ contestation of the meanings, nouns and values.

In language teaching, it has been widely recognized that culture is of great importance. Learners of a foreign language need not just knowledge and skills in the grammar of that language but also the ability to use the language in socially and culturally appropriate ways.

Therefore, learning a foreign language means learning and exploring the different cultural meanings embedded in language, the contexts and the cultural references of a language, and the different aspects of situational and cultural contexts that come into play whenever language is used. (Lund, 2006, p.35).

1. **Language, culture and communication**

Language and culture are said to have a close connection between them. In fact, language is the most essential element in any culture since it is the one that describe and interpret the culture (Moran, 2001). It allows people to learn about, share ideas and participate in the development of culture (Duranti, 1997). Language is also a method that facilitate the transmission of culture from generation to generation.

According to (Hsin, 2013), both language and culture have a function of communication since both of them carry meanings. Language is said to carry syntactic, semantic and pragmatic meanings while culture is said to carry cultural meanings that are expressed through patterns of behaviours.

So, teaching and learning English does not mean only teaching grammatical rules but also teaching target culture and the use of the target language in the situated context (Neuner, 1997). This leads to claim that developing language intercultural communicative competence is an absolute must for learners to communicate successfully and effectively across languages and cultures.

1. **Developing Intercultural Competence**
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**3.1 What is Intercultural Competence?**

In order to develop the intercultural dimension in language teaching, the teacher should give learners intercultural competence as well as linguistic competence. This will prepare learners for interaction with people of other cultures, to enable them to understand and accept people from other cultures as individuals with other distinctive perspectives, value and behaviours, and to help them to see that such interactions is an enriching experience. (Byram et al.,2002 )

Intercultural competence can be defined as “ the ability to develop targeted knowledge, skills and attitudes that lead to visible behaviour and communication that are both effective and appropriate in intercultural interactions.” (Deardorff, 2006, p.243)

According Huber and Reynolds (2014) intercultural competence is a combination of attitudes, knowledge, understanding and skills applied through action that enables one to:

* Understand and respect people who are perceived to have different cultural affiliation from oneself
* Respond appropriately when interacting and communicating with such people. That is, being able to show a knowledge of the socially appropriate communicative behaviour in a specific situation.
* Respond effectively when interacting and communicating with such people. In other words, respond in a way that enables all involved to be able to achieve their objectives in the interaction
* Establish positive relationships with such people.

**3.2. The Components of Intercultural Competence**

In language teaching, the role of the teacher is to develop attitudes, skills, and knowledge of a particular culture or country as much as to develop relevant actions needed in any intercultural interaction. Huber and Reynolds (2014, pp. 19-21) explains the four components of intercultural competence which are:

* **Attitudes**: include

-Respecting people who have different cultural affiliations from your own.

-Valuing cultural diversity of views and practices.

-Risk-oriented, i.e. motivated to communicate in unfamiliar contexts, willing to make mistakes and learn from them.

-Being curious and having the desire to learn, to explore, understand and analyse a new culture

-Being open-minded. That is, being receptive to new ideas and having the ability to be open and unprejudiced when meeting people from a different culture.

-Being willing to empathize with people with different cultural affiliations. That is, having the capacity to identify with the feelings, thoughts and behaviours of people from a different culture.

-Being willing to seek out opportunities to engage and cooperate with individuals who have different cultural orientations and perspectives.

* **Knowledge and understanding**:

-Knowledge of self (cultural self-awareness) that is, having the capacity to identify your own cultural patterns

-Knowledge of others (cultural-general and cultural –specific knowledge) that is, having the understanding that people from other culture think and act differently because they value and believe different things and have been socialized to act differently.

-Knowledge of beliefs, values, practices …etc. that may be used by people who have particular cultural orientations

-An understanding of how culture can affect communication and language. For example, people from Nordic countries are often said to speak more directly than native English speakers who tend to use more polite language. Scandinavians in the U.K have reported causing offence to English people by failing to say ‘please’ and ‘thank you’ enough.

-Some knowledge of the cultures, history and general way of living of communities and nations.

* **Skills** include

-Skills in communication: having the ability to transmit information, thoughts or feelings in ways that can be accurately received and understood.

-Active listening: having the ability to focus, show interest, and remain neutral and non-judgemental. In other words, having the ability to listen and respond to another person in ways that improve mutual understanding.

-Interpretation: having the ability to explain accurately the meaning of another’s verbal and non-verbal communication.

-Perspective-taking: having the ability to view a situation or understand a concept from a different point of view.

-Skills in adapting your behaviour to new cultural environments. For example, avoiding verbal and non-verbal behaviours that may be viewed as impolite by people who have different cultural affiliations.

-Analysing: the ability to analyse the hidden meaning of other people’s actions, values and beliefs.

* **Actions**

While attitudes, knowledge, understanding and skills are all necessary components of intercultural competence, they are insufficient for learners. Learners sometimes acquire knowledge and attitudes but they fail to put into practice. In this respect, actions are of great importance.

Some relevant actions are:

-Seeking opportunities to engage with people who have different cultures.

-Co-operating with individuals who have different cultural orientations on shared activities and ventures, and discussing differences in views and perspectives.

**3.3. Methods for the Development of Intercultural Competence**

According to Huber and Reynolds (2014) the methods that are used for development of intercultural competence are:

**\*Cognitive methods:** they can be used to collect knowledge about cultural diversity: behavioural norms, social and political structures, history, religion and so on. This information could be provided, for example, through lectures, seminars and group discussion.

**\*Self-insight methods**: these methods enable students to learn about themselves, for example, for their possible reactions to other people with different cultural backgrounds.

**\*Behavioural methods:** could be considered as an extension of the cognitive method. The main objective of these methods is to help obtain effective behaviours and to replace inappropriate ones.

**\*Experimental methods (learning by doing):** include methods of experience, comparison, analysis, reflection and cooperative activities.

* **Experience:** learning through experience develops attitudes of curiosity, respect and openness, and provides knowledge about other cultures. Best results can be achieved by the use of this method when experience is obtained directly through communicating and acting with people from different cultures.
* **Comparison:** when using this method, the learner may compare what is uncommon with what is common and evaluate the uncommon as different and not as worse. Differences, in this case, could be seen in a non-judgemental manner.

The skill of comparison gives knowledge and understanding of people with different cultures and develops attitudes of respect and openness.

* **Analysis:** the learner may analyse the hidden meaning of other people actions and search for an explanation of the difference between these actions and his actions. This method can applied , for example during the discussions, observations and when questioning one’s own actions.

Analysis can develop curiosity, the skills of analysing and interpreting and provides knowledge about cultural contexts.

* **Reflection**: is a way of allowing students to step back from their learning experience to help them develop critical thinking skills and improve on future performance by analysing their experience.
* **Cooperative activity**: the learner must be involved in cooperative activities with people who have different cultural background. Engaging with others acting together helps in the development of attitudes of respect, develops the skills of listening, observing and analysing, and lead to empathy.

**3.4. Tools for the Development of Intercultural competence**

Huber and Reynolds (ibid) provides some tools that can be used by teachers to develop intercultural competence; they are:

**\*Verbal or written description**: the description must be supplemented by a verbal or written description of the same event or behaviour of others who see these from different perspectives. Teachers need to discuss with learners why people tend to see the same phenomena, events or actions differently and what happens if we misjudge people on the basis of first impression. For example, historical events are often described differently by two historians living in different countries and writing in different languages.

This activity develops the learner’s observation skill and promote his ability to analyse from different perspectives.

**\*Role plays and simulations**: this tool develops learners’ intercultural competence through acting very differently from usual ways and norms, and taking a new identity. The benefits of this tool is that learners can experience what it is like to be different. They can also discover that although people may show differences in every aspect, these differences do not make them less valuable. As a result, these activities build knowledge about similarities and differences, verbal and non-verbal communicative conventions; they can also develop attitudes of openness, curiosity and skills of adapting.

**\*Ethnographic tasks**: the tasks can be given to learners to explore the real life in the real world by using the observation and an interview. These can help to develop deep understanding of culture, skills of observation and listening, and ethno relative view.

Ethnography is a research method where the researcher spends a lengthy period of time within a community, with the purpose of describing the culture of that community from an inside perspective, traditionally through the production of an ethnography.  The tools ethnographers use include participant observations, informal conversations, interviews, photographs, videos, and other visual data.  They then analyze this data to describe the particular culture or cultural practice as it is viewed by members of the community (as opposed to outsiders).

**\*Presentations**: presentations about one’s own country and the countries of others could be helpful for the development of intercultural competence. The aim is to raise interest for the country the learners live in and to increase the motivation to deepen knowledge about other countries. Learners can discover cultural differences between their culture and others cultures by comparing, for instance, an aspect of their culture with that of a foreign culture.

Presentations can be illustrated by using CDs, videos and animations.

**\*Social media and other online tools**: social media like platforms, chat rooms and public forums represent powerful tools for teachers to develop intercultural competence in any learning context. As issues of religion, social class, ethnicity and gender often become salient in these interactions, interculturally competent communication in these contexts must imply both cultural awareness and sensitivity so that the views and comments exchanged are respectful even if they reflect disagreements.

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