

Introduction

Presently, linguistic researchers worldwide are proposing intercultural competence in tandem with the incorporation of culture study in English language education, as both language and culture provide people with frameworks to socialise, communicate and distinguish reality, (Zhao & McDougall, 2008). This essay will shine a light on the missing link of intercultural development as integral in Australian teaching programs. This topic is derived when most graduate teachers are inept when it comes to supporting intercultural engagement and development in English language classroom (Cushner & Mahon, 2009). The research will attempt to define various aspects of the topic, such as what is the place of intercultural competencies in Australian language curriculum; why it is important; what is the link between intercultural competence and teaching programs; and finally, how can teachers' beliefs and mindsets impact intercultural education? All these questions infer to Australian teachers' professional role, competencies, and cultural identification in relation to promoting intercultural competency in English language education. Finally, this essay will aim to predicate the issue's applications in classroom teaching and learning.

What is the place of intercultural competencies in Australian language curriculum?

Dervin, Moloney and Simpson (2020) perceive that intercultural competence is an ideology made up by different ideologemes of policymakers, media, research and global programs. On top of that, this essay also discerns that intercultural competence is a contextualised concept that can be improved through times and experiences. Hence, this research will instead unveil how the concept of intercultural competence is perceived and defined in various contexts and purposes in relation to the research topic.

With the rise of globalization, the world has become a setting for people inter- and intra-mobility. As Australia's population is becoming more culturally diverse and connected transnationally, it is imperative to review and consider the development of intercultural understanding in education (Asia Education Foundation [AEF], 2020). Accredited by the Australian federal government, both public and private institutions have collaborated with ELICOS National Standards and Association to provide English language courses for foreign students. Some other similar courses are English as Additional Language (EAL) and English

as Second Language (ESL) which are offered to Australian immigrants or citizens who originally came from a non-English speaking country. All these English programs are generically grouped under the term of English language teaching. However, English language learners (ELL) from diverse backgrounds have their own purposes for adopting English language as lingua franca (Putra, 2020). Nonetheless, language proficiency would not be the only learning objective as the recognition of promoting intercultural competency in language education is increasingly advocated by researchers and institutions in the field (Moeller & Nugent, 2014).

Intercultural competence is conceptualised as the capability to successfully initiate and sustain intercultural communication in cross-cultural experiences, while intercultural communication is perceived as a function to support global networking without compromising global cultures via the embrace of diversity and intercultural understanding (Soto, Burgos & Burgos, 2015). In intercultural education, the concept of intercultural communication and competence are often considered as the core of interculturality (Dervin & Simpson, 2021). Therefore, all three concepts are correlated and associated with cross-cultural connection, reciprocal communication, semiotic tension and inter-cultural transformation. These are parts of intercultural communication that are based on emotional competency and intercultural sensitivity (Dai & Chen, 2015). Simply put, in this context, an interculturally competent teacher has an attuned perception in terms of feeling, thinking and behaviour that enables them to interface with other individuals from diverse cultures (Soto, Burgos & Burgos, 2015). For instance, teachers' attuned perception enables them to respond timely to students when they feel uncertain or disengaged in cultural experience.

Zahoor, Jumani and Malik (2019) state that teacher competencies are a key driver that underpins pedagogical strategies, practices, and principles in curriculum planning which, consequently, afford teachers with guidelines and means to improve student language development, as well as the quality of cultural experiences. Yet, in the Australian Curriculum, intercultural understanding is incorporated as a relative concept for 21st century education where it is fundamentally inferred by the connection between language and culture in the teaching and learning processes (Diaz, 2013). This accentuates the focus on language proficiency rather than fostering intercultural competency as another learning objective. This is reinforced by Dervin, Moloney and Simpson (2020) that most university teaching programs regard intercultural competence as an elective or add-on unit in a course. As a

result, teachers face the need for specialised professional development not only to support their understanding about the connection of culture in language learning, but also to develop the necessary skills to tackle the concept of intercultural competence in a multicultural environment (Cushner, 2015).

What is the link between intercultural competence and Australian teaching program?

Sinecrope, Norris and Watanabe (2008) assert that intercultural competence is crucial to fostering learners' innovation and competencies to efficaciously mingle with people from diverse cultures. They emphasise that intercultural competence should be perceived as a learning objective that is taught by interculturally competent teachers. This means how teachers perceive and approach cross-cultural interactions between students and with themselves is the keystone to fostering intercultural communication in language classroom (Byram & Wagner, 2018). One of the fundamentals of intercultural competence is that teachers develop the ability to identify and address cultural characteristics in various situations (Hofstede, 2001). For instance, they can differentiate and describe by using Hofstede's cultural dimensions such as masculinity and femininity, power distance, uncertainty avoidance, collectivism and individualism. In addition, Liddicoat and Kohler (2012) conceive that language education should endeavour to concentrate on intercultural development. They also indicate that to do so, teachers need to confront their own ethnocentric worldviews to thoughtfully deem how culture can influence teaching and learning in a multicultural classroom, as well as conceptualise the nature of their task as language teachers (Bennett & Bennett, 2004). Lonner and Hayes (2004) also substantiate that the notion of competence is the capability to decide one's action or behaviour to intelligently respond and find solutions to various prospects and challenges of everyday living, both socially and professionally. Hitherto, to foster students' intercultural development, as well as promote cross-cultural communication in different contexts, teachers themselves need to have a certain degree of intercultural sensitivity and knowledge other than pedagogical skills to develop language proficiency (Dellit, 2005). This corroborates the missing link between teachers' intercultural competence and pedagogical efficiency in language learning.

How can teachers' beliefs and mindset impact intercultural education?

Curriculum, praxis and field experiences are designed to help teachers to develop and demonstrate their knowledges, dispositions and skills in relation to diversity and inclusion (Cushner & Mahon, 2009). Despite numerous efforts, teachers still feel a strong sense of uncertainty about the actual placement of intercultural concept in everyday practice, across languages and in the scope of proficiency (Diaz, 2011). This might be underlined by the lack of clarity or framework and as a result, there is no clear picture of what to teach, how they teach and what the learning objectives are (Kohler, 2010). This can also be contributed to their training where teachers are misinformed or misguided with ideas and concepts that are redundant or catered for the status quo. Moreover, strategies and approaches should be about how each student defines their own learning, rather than letting the learning define them (Llopis, 2017). This elicits that deficient preparation in teacher programs can result in teachers' ineptitude and fixed mindset to address the diverse needs of students, as well as undertake and teach intercultural concepts (Beutel & Tangen, 2018). This leads to one of the compelling criticisms of multicultural education that it is tokenistic, where culture is superficially delivered as tangible and visible notions through artefacts (Harbon & Moloney, 2015). Another is the assessment of students' intercultural competency. Fantini (2005) has put forward that the field of measuring intercultural competence is full of controversy itself where one survey alone has revealed eighty-six assessment tools.

Regrettably, intercultural competence is not inherent and for most people, but acquired through priming and experiences from different situations and times (Salazar & Agüero, 2016). As previously mentioned, it is a prolonged and continual process that is yet to be identifiable as a precise model for intercultural development in Australian teacher training programs (Cushner & Mahon, 2009). This is forewarned by Dervin, Moloney and Simpson (2020) that any perspective and discourse on the concept of intercultural competence incline to relate to personal, sociological, political and glocal ideologies that are influenced by policymakers, research, glocal programs and media. Henceforth, teachers and teacher educators have held disordered interpretations of the term 'intercultural competence' due to its numerous definitions and instruments that claim to appraise the scope of achievement in intercultural competence (Deardorff, 2006; Bennett, 2015).

Which competencies make the difference?

The analysis of this research on intercultural competencies in language learning has inferred the four areas of competencies that are most productive in a multicultural classroom. They are instruction delivery, classroom management, formative assessment and personal competencies in term of soft skills. For a start, teachers need pedagogical proficiency to deliver effective instruction and assessment in language proficiency. While intercultural competence refers to the action of culturally sensitive behaviours within learning contexts, intercultural sensitivity refers to the sophisticated discernments of cultural differences in relation to personal worldviews and others (Cubukcu, 2013; Bennett, 2009). Both relate to classroom management and personal competencies in term of gaining students' attention and participation in meaningful dialogues and experiences. In other words, having intercultural competence means that teachers have acquired a reflective and receptive mindset or intercultural sensitivity that enables them to thoughtfully engage with students from diverse cultures without compromising each other's cultural values. In these encounters, they also cultivate mutual respect and empathy.

The coherence and alignment of intercultural competence between teaching program, pedagogical efficiency and student learning

It is imperative to acknowledge that teachers not only have personal viewpoints, but they also negotiate with multiple identities when engaging with different people and relating them to their personal experiences and contexts they live in. Thus, like contextualised viewpoints, intercultural competence is susceptible and variable (Dervin, 2016). Alongside inquiry and reflection in the training program, teachers examine curriculum, policy and theory to understand practice and develop key skills. During that process, teachers also make their own interpretation of the program that is filtered through their personal beliefs and values to connect their personal and professional identities (Harbon & Moloney, 2017). As their task is to develop student competencies and abilities, it is important to ensure they are trained in programs that match the needs of current educational paradigm and objectives where intercultural competence should be orderly situated as an overarching discipline. Therefore, the research endorses that teachers and decision-makers themselves need to have a growth mindset to renew, revamp and progress by shifting diversity and inclusion into the

centre of curriculum in tandem with intercultural competence. This essay also argues that there should be a tight coherence and alignment between teacher education programs, pedagogical efficiency and student learning to ensure that teachers are well prepared to holistically meet the needs of students in the present and in the future.

Application

Since teachers' intercultural development is also indiscernible, the research recommends the adaptation of Butin's "*four distinct conceptualisations of service-learning – technical, cultural, political, and postmodern*" in relation to Moran's and Hofstede's cultural dimensions (Butin, 2005, p. 90). The technical principle focuses on the teachers' pedagogical efficiency, while the cultural emphasises on the meanings and relevance of practice. This also relates to Moran's (2001) cultural dimensions of products, practices and perspectives. The political element aims to close the gap of power distance and avoid uncertainty by adopting "*the promotion and empowerment of the voices and practices of disempowered and nondominant groups in society*" (Butin, 2005, p. 91; Hofstede, 2001). Finally, the postmodern ensure that teaching and learning processes are generating, sustaining and pushing the margins and standards that people use to make sense of the world around them. The underlying goal is to appraise how culture and language learning can directly affect the success of classroom management and intercultural experiences. Through the four lenses of Butin's conceptualisations, language teachers and educational decision-makers can work together to create a holistic and effective postmodern pedagogy and curriculum for intercultural language learning and teaching programs.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the research has discerned that the concept of intercultural competence is conceptualised and defined accordingly to various contexts and purposes. The essay also attempted to identify the place of intercultural competence in Australian language curriculum, and concluded that intercultural competence should be situated as a cross-curriculum priority. By shedding a light on the missing link of intercultural development in teachers, the research

has revealed the deficiency in teacher training programs in preparing teachers to tackle the concept of intercultural competence and communication in the multicultural environments of language education. As the process of creating more effective teaching programs is gradual, complex and sporadic, to avoid disdain that teacher preparation and program are adulterated and largely contained collections of irrelevant courses, further research is needed to actuate the correlation between research, teachers' training program and student learning in intercultural language learning. This ultimately aims to enhance teachers' pedagogies and praxes to promote students' intercultural competence and communication in English language education. Finally, the research concluded with the proposal of the adaptation of Butin's four lenses in tandem with Moran's and Hofstede's cultural dimensions to enhance teacher competencies and programs.

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