Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences Research
www.horizon-JHSSR.com

BP Services

Improving the Quality of Teaching and Learning English from a Multicultural Perspective

Tran Thi Van Dung[1]* and Nayan Deep Singh Kanwal (Professor)[2]◆

[1]*Hanoi National University of Education, 136 Xuân Thủy, Dịch Vọng Hậu, Cầu Giấy, Hà Nội, Vietnam*
[2]*An Independent Researcher, Austin, Texas, USA*

ARTICLE INFO

*Corresponding Author
Tran Thi Van Dung
E-mail: ttvandung@gmail.com

Co-Author(s):
Author 2: Nayan Deep Singh Kanwal
E-mail: nayan.kanwal@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This article delves into the multifaceted domain of enhancing the quality of teaching and learning English from a multicultural viewpoint. The overarching theme revolves around the pivotal role that cultural diversity plays in shaping educational landscapes, particularly in the context of English language instruction. The article presents three central ideas:

1. *The Relationship Between Language and Culture*: Explores the intricate connections between language and culture (Brown, 2000). It analyses how culture influences language learning and teaching (Kramsch, 1993). It also highlights the significance of cultural sensitivity in language education (Byram, 1997).

2. *Adaptive Teaching-Learning in a Multicultural Environment*: The article discusses the adaptive teaching approach in multicultural classrooms (Chua, 2003). It emphasizes the need to flexibly adjust teaching methods according to the audience's cultural background (Hall, 1976)., and explores the differences between Vietnamese and Western culture and their implications for English language instruction (Hofstede, 1980).

3. *Some Proposals and Recommendations*: It offers practical suggestions for educators and institutions (Jackson, 2002). The authors advocate for the promotion of cultural exchange within classrooms (Deardorff, 2006). The article aims to develop cultural competence among students as a long-term goal (Bennett, 2008).

In summary, this article underscores the significance of embracing cultural diversity in English language education, offering insights and recommendations for educators and institutions to foster inclusive and effective teaching and learning environments.

Keywords: Multicultural perspective; English language education; Language and culture; Adaptive teaching; Cultural sensitivity; Cultural competence; Language learning; Cultural diversity.

◆Kanwal, N.D.S is currently an Independent Researcher, Cyberjaya, Malaysia.

Introduction

International Cooperation for Excellent Training and Research underscores the significance of global collaboration in education and research (Norton & Toohey, 2004). In the realm of English language teaching and learning, this international cooperation is pivotal, especially from a multicultural perspective (Kramsch, 1993). As English continues to solidify its status as the lingua franca of the modern world, educators face the challenge of catering to diverse cultural contexts while ensuring high-quality instruction. In this context, fostering international cooperation becomes imperative, as it allows educators to exchange best practices, leverage diverse perspectives, and adapt teaching methodologies to suit the needs of learners from different cultural backgrounds.

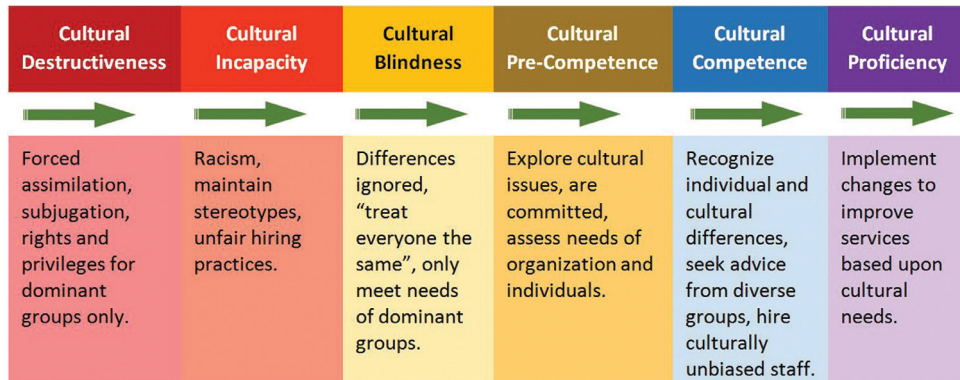This article delves into three central ideas aimed at enhancing the quality of teaching and learning English across diverse cultural landscapes (McKay, 2003), thereby contributing to more effective communication and mutual understanding in our increasingly interconnected world.

Figure 1a. Cultural Continuum Diagram.
Source: *Authors, 2024.*

This diagram attempts to represent the visual representation of a spectrum ranging from individualistic to collectivistic cultures.

Cultural Destructiveness	Cultural Incapacity	Cultural Blindness	Cultural Pre-Competence	Cultural Competence	Cultural Proficiency
Forced assimilation, subjugation, rights and privileges for dominant groups only.	Racism, maintain stereotypes, unfair hiring practices.	Differences ignored, "treat everyone the same", only meet needs of dominant groups.	Explore cultural issues, are committed, assess needs of organization and individuals.	Recognize individual and cultural differences, seek advice from diverse groups, hire culturally unbiased staff.	Implement changes to improve services based upon cultural needs.

Figure 1b. Continuum of Cultural Competency Diagram
Source: *Authors, 2024.*

This flowchart shows on how to reach cultural destructiveness to cultural proficiency and the continuum in-between.

Methodology

With this paper, we employ a comprehensive research methodology (Thanasoulas, 2001), that encompasses analysis-synthesis, compare-contrast, and interview techniques to thoroughly examine the communication dynamics between Vietnamese and Western cultures (Ward & Kennedy, 1993). Through analysis-synthesis, we dissect various aspects of communication, including language use, non-verbal cues, social norms, and cultural values, within both Vietnamese and Western contexts. This approach allows us to gain a nuanced understanding of the fundamental differences and similarities between these two cultural frameworks.

Additionally, we utilize compare-contrast methodology to highlight the distinct communication patterns, etiquette, and behavioural norms observed in Vietnamese and Western cultures. By juxtaposing these differences, we aim to shed light on the unique challenges and opportunities that arise in cross-cultural communication, particularly in the context of English language teaching and learning.

Furthermore, we incorporate interviews with individuals from both Vietnamese and Western backgrounds to gather first-hand insights and perspectives on cultural communication. These interviews provide valuable qualitative data that enriches our analysis and offers

real-world perspectives on the challenges and strategies involved in teaching and learning English within multicultural settings.

Through this multi-faceted methodology, our study aims to identify key communication objects and fundamental differences between Vietnamese and Western cultures. Based on these findings, we intend to formulate practical recommendations and suggestions tailored to enhance the teaching and learning of English from a multicultural perspective. By bridging the gap between theory and practice, our research seeks to facilitate more effective cross-cultural communication and promote cultural sensitivity in English language education.

Figure 2. Communication Styles Infographic
Source: *Authors, 2024.*

An infographic features "Direct Communication" and "Indirect Communication", e.g. Under "Direct Communication", I need your help, while under "Indirect Communication", it could be "It would be nice if someone could assist me.

1. The Relationship Between Language and Culture

Language and culture are intricately intertwined (Byram, 1997), with language serving as a reflection of cultural values, norms, and identity. In the context of teaching and learning English in a multicultural setting, it's imperative to acknowledge and embrace this relationship (Tomalin & Stempleski, 1993). Educators should adopt principles of cultural sensitivity, cultural integration, and awareness of communication styles to foster effective language learning experiences.

Teachers and students should embrace the following principles:

Cultural Sensitivity: Educators should be aware of the cultural diversity within their classrooms (Seidlhofer, 2011). Cultural sensitivity ensures that teaching materials and methods are respectful of all backgrounds, avoiding biases or stereotypes.

Cultural Integration: Integrating cultural elements into language lessons can enhance engagement and relevance (Liddicoat, 2002). This can involve exploring the cultural context of English-language literature, discussing cultural differences and similarities, or incorporating multicultural content into language exercises.

Communication Styles: Recognizing that communication styles may differ across cultures is crucial (Holliday, 2010). In some cultures, direct communication is preferred, while others prioritize indirect or nuanced communication. Teachers should adapt their teaching to these preferences to ensure effective communication.

Figure 3. Multimodal Instruction Chart.
Source: *Authors, 2024.*

This chart could list different instructional modalities (visual, auditory, kinaesthetic). Examples of activities or resources for each modality could be; "Visual Instruction", activities like using flashcards or showing educational videos.

2. Adaptive Teaching-Learning in a Multicultural Environment

2.1 Flexibly Adjust According to the Audience

In a multicultural classroom, flexibility is key (Norton & Toohey, 2004). Teachers need to adapt their teaching approaches based on the audience's diversity. This adaptability may include:

Multimodal Instruction: Utilize various teaching modalities to cater to diverse learning preferences within a multicultural classroom. - *Customized Support*: Provide tailored support and exercises to accommodate students with varying English proficiency levels. - *Individualized Feedback*: Offer personalized feedback and guidance based on each student's specific needs and learning goals.

Multimodal Instruction: Offering instruction through various modalities, such as visual, auditory, and kinaesthetic, to accommodate diverse learning preferences.

Customized Support: Providing additional support for students with varying English proficiency levels. Tailored exercises and activities can help bridge language gaps.

Individualized Feedback: Offering personalized feedback and support based on each student's unique needs and goals (Thanasoulas, 2001).

Figure 4. Cultural Integration Illustration.
Source: *Authors, 2024.*

This illustration depicts a classroom setting with diverse students engaging in activities that incorporate cultural elements. For example, students discussing a piece of literature from their own cultural background or participating in a cultural exchange event.

## 2.2 Differences Between Vietnamese and Western Culture

Teaching English to students from Vietnamese and Western cultures presents distinct challenges and opportunities (Kramsch, 1993). Understanding these differences can lead to more effective teaching. Key differences include:

Collectivism vs. Individualism: Recognize the contrast between Vietnamese collectivism and Western individualism, adapting teaching approaches to respect both cultural norms. - *Hierarchy and Authority*: Navigate differences in attitudes towards hierarchy and authority between Vietnamese and Western cultures, fostering an environment that encourages critical thinking while respecting cultural values. - *Politeness and Directness*: Address disparities in communication styles, emphasizing the importance of effective communication skills in both indirect and direct contexts

Collectivism vs. Individualism: Vietnamese culture often emphasizes collectivism and group harmony (Ward & Kennedy, 1993), while Western cultures tend to prioritize individualism. Teachers can foster a supportive classroom environment while also encouraging individual expression.

Hierarchy and Authority: Vietnamese culture typically respects hierarchy and authority figures. Western education may encourage more open discussions and critical thinking. Teachers should find a balance that respects both cultural norms.

Politeness and Directness: Vietnamese communication often values politeness and indirectness (Seidlhofer, 2011), while Western culture may favour more direct communication. Teachers can help students navigate these differences and develop effective communication skills in both contexts.
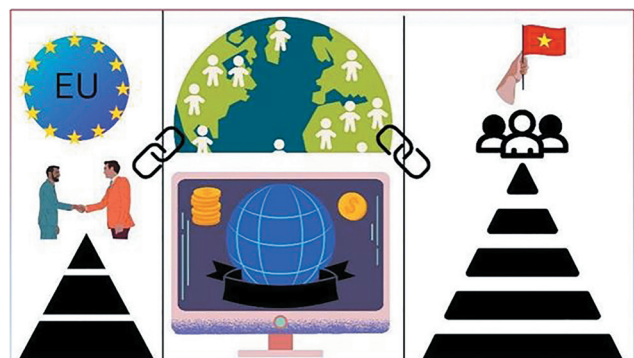
Figure 5. Hierarchy and Authority Visualization.
Source: *Authors, 2024.*

This visualization feature two hierarchical structures side by side, one representing Western culture and the other representing Vietnamese culture.

3. Some Proposals and Recommendations

To enhance the quality of teaching and learning English in multicultural settings, consider the following proposals and recommendations:

Faculty Development: Invest in training and professional development for educators to equip them with the skills needed to teach in diverse classrooms (McKay, 2003). This includes cultural competence training and pedagogical strategies for multicultural environments.

Cultural Exchange Programs: Foster student and faculty exchange programs with institutions from different cultural backgrounds. These exchanges provide valuable exposure and first-hand experience in different linguistic and cultural contexts.

Curriculum Diversification: Review and diversify the English language curriculum to include multicultural perspectives and voices (Liddicoat, 2002). Incorporate materials from various cultural backgrounds to reflect the diversity of the English-speaking world.

Support Systems: Establish support systems, such as language centers or cultural adjustment programs, to assist international students in adapting to a new linguistic and cultural environment (Tomalin & Stempleski, 1993).

Research and Assessment: Encourage research into effective teaching strategies for multicultural classrooms (Byram, 1997) and regularly assess the impact of teaching practices on students from different backgrounds.

By incorporating these points into the methodology, we aim to provide a comprehensive framework for investigating and addressing the challenges and opportunities of teaching and learning English from a multicultural perspective.

language and culture (Holliday, 2010). This interplay underscores the importance of adaptability, cultural sensitivity, and flexibility in achieving success in this endeavour (Norton & Toohey, 2004). By embracing these fundamental principles and implementing the proposed recommendations, we have the potential to significantly enhance the quality of English language education and research in an international and multicultural context (Kramsch, 1993).

The significance of international cooperation cannot be overstated, as it serves as both a catalyst for excellent training and research and a bridge to greater cultural understanding and unity in diversity. Through collaborative efforts and mutual respect for diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds, educators and learners alike can cultivate an environment that fosters cross-cultural communication, empathy, and appreciation.

Figure 7. Faculty Development Workshop Photo
Source: *Authors, 2024.*

This figure illustrates a group of educators in a conference room, participating in a workshop led by a facilitator. It captures the collaborative atmosphere of the workshop, with participants engaged in discussions and group activities.

Figure 6. Politeness and Directness Comparison.
Source: *Authors, 2024.*

This illustration indicates Vietnamese and Western cultures, showing different communication scenarios providing polite and direct responses for each scenario.

Conclusion

In conclusion, teaching and learning English from a multicultural perspective necessitate a profound comprehension of the intricate relationship between

Figure 8a. Cultural Exchange Program Image
Source: *Authors, 2024.*

This image depicts students from different cultural backgrounds interacting with each other during a cultural exchange event engaged in group discussions about their respective cultures.

Figure 8b. Cultural Exchange: Teachers and Students Embark on Language Practice trip
Source: *Authors, 2024.*

Exploring Language and Culture: Teachers and Students from different ethnic background engage in Language practice during a trip to Vietnam's Hue City.

Figure 9. Curriculum Diversification Example
Source: *Authors, 2024.*

This image shows a selection of teaching materials. The materials here refer to resources from diverse cultural backgrounds, demonstrating the variety of content available for use in language lessons.

Figure 10. Support Systems Infographic
Source: *Authors, 2024.*

This infographic features icons representing different support systems, such as language centers, counseling services, and cultural orientation programs.

As we navigate the complexities of teaching and learning English across diverse cultural landscapes, let us remain steadfast in our commitment to promoting inclusivity, respect, and cultural exchange. Together, we can harness the power of international cooperation to create a more interconnected and harmonious world, where language serves as a conduit for building bridges and fostering meaningful connections across borders.

Acknowledgments

Funding

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

References

Bennett, M. J. (2008). Basic concepts of intercultural communication: Selected readings. Intercultural Press.

Brown, H. D. (2000). Principles of language learning and teaching. Pearson Education.

Byram, M. (1997). Teaching and assessing intercultural communicative competence. Multilingual Matters.

Chua, R. Y. J. (2003). Teaching and learning in a multicultural school: The ethnic dimension. Routledge.

Deardorff, D. K. (2006). Identification and assessment of intercultural competence as a student outcome of internationalization. Journal of Studies in International Education, 10(3), 241-266.

Hall, E. T. (1976). Beyond culture. Anchor.

Hofstede, G. (1980). Culture's consequences: International differences in work-related values. Sage Publications.

Holliday, A. (2010). Intercultural communication & ideology. Sage Publications.

Jackson, J. (2002). Rethinking language in EFL contexts: Why the mother tongue? TESOL Quarterly, 36(1), 109-127.

Kramsch, C. (1993). Context and culture in language teaching. Oxford University Press.

Liddicoat, A. J. (2002). Static views of culture and intercultural language teaching. Babel, 37(2), 4-9.

McKay, S. L. (2003). Teaching English as an international language: Rethinking goals and approaches. Oxford University Press.

Norton, B., & Toohey, K. (2004). Critical pedagogies and language learning. Cambridge University Press.

Seidlhofer, B. (2011). Understanding English as a lingua franca. Oxford University Press.

Thanasoulas, D. (2001). The importance of teaching culture in the foreign language classroom. Radical Pedagogy, 3(3), 1-25.

Tomalin, B., & Stempleski, S. (1993). Cultural awareness. Oxford University Press.

Ward, C., & Kennedy, A. (1993). Where's the culture in cross-cultural pragmatics? Applied Linguistics, 14(1), 1-23.

Biographical Statement of Author(s)

Tran Thi Van Dung, born in Vietnam in 1978, holds a Bachelor of Pedagogy in Linguistics from Hue University, earned in 2006. In 2013, she achieved a Master's degree in Vietnamese Literature from the University of Sciences, Hue University. In 2024, she completed her Doctorate. in Vietnamese Literature from Hanoi National University of Education, Vietnam.

Since 2020, she has served as the main lecturer at Thua Thien Hue Pedagogical College. She is also a valued editorial board member of the Horizon Journal of Humanities & Social Sciences Research, a distinguished peer-reviewed scholarly journal. She also holds the position as the Vice Chairman of Thua Thien Hue Writers Association, Vietnam.

Dr. Tran Thi Van Dung
Hanoi National University of Education
Cau Giay District, Hanoi
Vietnam
E-mail: ttvandung@gmail.com

Nayan Deep S. Kanwal, born in 1958, earned his BAG and M.Sc. degrees from UPNG in 1982 and 1984, respectively. In 2005, he was awarded a French government scholarship to pursue his Ph.D. in France. His academic journey led him to University Putra Malaysia (UPM) in 1996, where he served as a Lecturer until 2018. During this time, he also held the role of Chief Executive Editor for several prestigious academic journals.

In 2018, he was invited to work as a visiting Professor at BINUS University in Indonesia. Currently, he is a consultant in research publications in the U.S., where he is also actively involved in training and educating numerous students on a freelance basis. His primary research interests encompass environmental issues and English language studies.

Professor Kanwal holds esteemed memberships, including being a Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts (FRSA) in the United Kingdom, a Life Member of the British Institute of Management (BIM) in the United Kingdom, an Associate Member of the Marketing Institute of Singapore (AMIS), and an Associate Member of the Australian Institute of Agricultural Science and Technology (AIAST).

Professor Dr. Nayan Deep S. Kanwal
Independent Researcher
Austin, Texas
TX 78705
USA
E-mail: nayan.kanwal@gmail.com