



HOW CAN ACQUIRING PROFICIENCY IN FOREIGN LANGUAGES ENHANCE STUDENTS' INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCY?

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the significance of acquiring diverse language skills for fostering intercultural competence and enhancing social abilities.

Introduction

All facets of human progress should be supported by individuals, drawing from their experiences, professional endeavors, educational attainment, and competence. Competence stands out as a crucial aspect of any advancement, be it within the business sector or the realm of education.

What is competence? The quality or state of having sufficient knowledge, judgment, skill, or strength (as for a particular duty or in a particular respect). According to Oxford Languages Dictionary: competence is the ability to do something successfully or efficiently. Do we need just competence? Or are there specific types of the competence, some of which we can use in self development? Competence, as defined by the Oxford Languages Dictionary, refers to the capability to accomplish something effectively or proficiently. While competence is undoubtedly valuable, there are indeed various types of competence that can be utilized for self-development. These include:

1. Technical Competence: Proficiency in specific skills, techniques, or procedures relevant to one's field of work or interest.
2. Interpersonal Competence: The ability to communicate effectively, build relationships, and collaborate with others.
3. Cultural Competence: Understanding and effectively interacting with people from different cultural backgrounds.
4. Emotional Competence: The capacity to recognize, understand, and manage one's emotions, as well as to empathize with others.
5. Leadership Competence: Skills and qualities necessary for leading and motivating individuals or teams towards achieving common goals.
6. Critical Thinking Competence: The ability to analyze information objectively, evaluate arguments, and make informed decisions.



7. Adaptability Competence: Being flexible and resilient in the face of change, and being able to adjust to new circumstances or challenges.

Each type of competence contributes uniquely to personal and professional growth, and developing a balance of these competencies can lead to holistic self-improvement.

Main part

3 types of competence can be analyzed as the main ones: linguistic competence, communicative competence and intercultural competence.

1. Linguistic Competence: This refers to the ability to effectively understand and use language, including vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation, within a particular language or languages.

2. Communicative Competence: This encompasses the ability to use language appropriately and effectively in various social contexts to achieve communication goals. It involves not only linguistic skills but also pragmatic understanding, such as knowing when and how to use language appropriately in different situations.

3. Intercultural Competence: This involves the ability to effectively communicate and interact with individuals from different cultural backgrounds. It includes understanding cultural differences, adapting behavior and communication styles accordingly, and demonstrating respect and empathy towards cultural diversity.

Developing proficiency in these three types of competence can significantly enhance one's ability to navigate diverse linguistic and cultural environments, fostering effective communication and collaboration across borders.

- Linguistic competence

Linguistic competence entails the ability to utilize a variety of grammatical structures and vocabulary effectively, while ensuring coherence and cohesion in communication, whether in one's native language or a language being learned. Additionally, the capacity to teach a language to others is also regarded as a component of linguistic competence.

- Communicative competence Communicative competence refers to the capability to appropriately employ various forms of oral and written communication, including formal and informal speech and writing, in appropriate contexts and situations as needed.

- Intercultural competence

Conversely, communicative competence emerges as the most crucial form of competence. It serves as a cornerstone for intercultural competence, as it necessitates proficiency in language (linguistic competence) and the adept application of language in various contexts. This competency encompasses and integrates other essential competencies. Specifically, the acquisition and refinement of different foreign languages broaden students' perspectives on life. But how does this process unfold?

Indeed, a primary factor driving this phenomenon is the type of information individuals consume. Consider a student proficient in two languages - their native tongue and a foreign language. This student has access to a broader range of content, including videos, movies, and talk shows in both languages. Additionally, they can explore entertaining and educational content in their second language. Consequently, this student is exposed to a wealth of information, spanning entertainment to professional domains, surpassing the scope available to a monolingual student.



Conversely, this student also gains access to literature, history, and cultural nuances specific to the countries where each language is spoken. This exposure enriches their breadth of knowledge, fosters intellectual growth, and cultivates critical thinking skills. For instance, in the case of learning Korean, students delve into the intricacies of Korean culture, traditions, and history, thereby expanding their understanding of a distinct cultural heritage.

As an illustration, in Korean culture, specific customs dictate behavior. For instance, when greeting, younger individuals traditionally bow slightly lower than their elders as a sign of respect. Similarly, cultural taboos exist, such as avoiding placing chopsticks vertically in food, as this is believed to bring misfortune according to Korean beliefs.

Koreans respect their elders very much, this can be learned while learning the Korean language in contexts and different social networks, since when you are with elders, you cannot sit with your legs bent and you cannot use your index finger while talking to them. Knowing the Korean language, students will be ready for different situations when working with Koreans, for example. But those who do not know the Korean language will not actually know such features of Korean culture. So this is why knowledge of a language is closely related to culture. In such a way as to understand the world from different perspectives one need to know many foreign languages.

Moreover, as the proverb goes, "One language sets you in a corridor for life, two languages open you all the doors along the way." This insightful saying underscores the profound impact of multilingualism. Mastering foreign languages not only facilitates understanding but also unlocks a multitude of opportunities, contributing significantly to one's competence and versatility.

Conclusion

When learning a new language, individuals inevitably delve into the associated traditions, customs, and broader cultural contexts. Understanding the culture intertwined with the language being learned is essential, as culture shapes language and vice versa. Consequently, a person proficient in three languages is not merely acquainted with linguistic diversity but also gains insights into three distinct cultures, thereby expanding their perspectives on life. This foundation of multicultural awareness forms the bedrock of intercultural competence.

Indeed, possessing intercultural competence is instrumental in navigating and averting various intercultural misunderstandings, which can lead to discomfort and may even be perceived as impolite in certain situations. The language learning journey plays a pivotal role in developing intercultural competence, as it fosters not only linguistic proficiency but also cultural awareness and sensitivity. Embracing this process enables individuals to engage with diverse cultural perspectives effectively, thereby fostering harmonious intercultural interactions.

All in all, upon acquiring proficiency in a foreign language, we naturally find ourselves engaging with its literature, mass media, and film industry, sometimes even without conscious awareness.

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