

Intensive reading with literature text in the EFL classroom for developing the Intercultural Competence

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to develop the Intercultural Competence (IC) through intensive reading using literature texts. It was developed in the School of Language Teaching of the Faculty of Philosophy, Literature and Sciences of the Education at Universidad Técnica de Manabí, concretely with the students of the first semester. The study consisted of including an intensive reading technique to reading a literature masterpiece from William Shakespeare called *The Tempest* to analyse the cultural context of the story and contrast it with the local culture. With this, it was intended that students can establish similarities and differences between the local culture and the context of the story. Also, students clarified stereotypes that had formed throughout the reading. In conclusion, the students' interest in differentiating the facts of the story with everyday situations within the Ecuadorian context could be observed. Likewise, the stories could be related to events that occurred in other regions of Latin America. On the other hand, this process helped to increase the vocabulary and fluency to talk about daily situations related to the stories read in the classroom and therefore, to develop intercultural competence.

Keywords: INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE, LITERATURE, INTENSIVE READING, FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING.

RESUMEN

Lectura intensiva con texto de literatura en la aula EFL para desarrollar la Competencia intercultural

Este estudio tiene como objetivo desarrollar la competencia intercultural (CI) a través de la lectura intensiva utilizando textos de literatura. La investigación fue desarrollada en la Carrera de Pedagogía de los Idiomas Nacionales y Extranjeros de la Facultad de Filosofía, Letras y Ciencias de la Educación de la Universidad Técnica de Manabí, concretamente con los alumnos del primer semestre. El estudio consistió en incluir en el programa de estudios la lectura *The Tempest* escrita por William Shakespeare para aplicar la técnica de lectura intensiva para analizar el contexto cultural de la historia y contrastarla con la cultura local. Con esto, se pretendía que los estudiantes pudieran establecer similitudes y diferencias entre la cultura local y el contexto de la historia. En conclusión, se pudo observar el interés de los estudiantes en diferenciar los hechos de la historia con situaciones cotidianas dentro del contexto ecuatoriano. Asimismo, las historias podrían estar relacionadas con eventos que ocurrieron en otras regiones de América Latina. Por otro lado, este proceso ayudó a aumentar el vocabulario y la fluidez para hablar sobre situaciones cotidianas relacionadas con las historias leídas en el aula y, por lo tanto, para desarrollar la competencia intercultural.

Palabras clave: COMPETENCIA INTERCULTURAL, LITERATURA, LECTURA INTENSIVA, ENSEÑANZA DE LENGUA EXTRANJERA

Introducción

In the field of Teaching English as Foreign Languages (TEFL), the development of IC can be part of the teaching-learning process in different cultural contexts (Alonso-Belmonte & Fernández-Agüero, 2013; Alsina, 1999). The IC allows empathy in communication processes to mediate between two or more intercultural encounters. Thus, people would be able to avoid misunderstandings and stereotypes in society. Therefore, the IC, within a globalized world, is necessary to strengthen relations between different cultures.

The IC refers to the communication process “between people from different national cultures, and many scholars limit it to face to face communication” (Gudykunst, 2002, p. 79). It develops in the process of personal interaction, where the most characteristic features of cultures are expressed through gestures and actions of each person. Similarly, Arasaratnam and Doerfel (2005) suggest that IC takes place in a communicative process where people from different ethnic groups associate to share ideas and opinions, despite not having the same culture and in some cases, the same language. Likewise, Holmes and O’Neill (2012) consider that IC arises in a context of assimilation, respect, empathy and tolerance among interlocutors of var-

ious cultures.

Additionally, the Council of Europe (2001) points out that IC is the ability to bring the culture of an interlocutor to another cultural context to interact, developing a sensitive culture and the ability to overcome stereotypes in intercultural relationships. On the other hand, Dervin (2010) prefers to call IC as a set of proteophilic competences, which refers to the appreciation that we have for the diversity of our context and the context of others.

Among the models applied in the educational context for developing the IC is Byram’s model (1997) - called Intercultural Communicative Competence. It was part of the document for language teaching proposed by the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). This author establishes five dimensions for the development of IC: (1) knowledge, (2) attitudes, (3) skills of interpreting and relating, (4) skills of discovery and interaction, and (5) critical cultural awareness. These dimensions aim to develop the communicative process of interaction between people of different cultural background.

The Knowledge dimension is about the amount of information somebody has from other cultures in order to contrast the information with the interlocutor (Alonso-Belmonte & Fernández-Agüero,

2013). The attitude dimension is about people's curiosity about other cultures (Alptekin, 2002). The skills of interpreting and relating refer to the contrast of information that interlocutors have to know each other culture (Barrett, 2013). Similar, the skills of discovery and interaction is the ability to acquire new knowledge for getting more knowledge from other cultures (Boye, 2016). Moreover, the skills of cultural awareness represent the values that are involved in an intercultural interaction to face cultural exchanges (Fernández-Agüero & Chancay-Cedeño, 2018).

Within the TEFL classroom, the development of the CI can be carried out through the implementation of literary readings graduated by levels of complexity according to MCERL, where the student can decipher intercultural sites of each era and contrast them with the surrounding context. Therefore, the literature represents a scenario full of cultural contexts from different eras and countries that allow the student through intensive reading to contrast the local context (C1) with the cultures of Anglo-Saxon countries (C2) and those where the English are used as a means of international communication (C3) (Chancay-Cedeño & Fernández-Agüero, 2016). In general, the inclusion of literature in the study programs helps to understand stereotypes that have been forming in society. It also provides values to respect the diverse cultural manifestations of other countries.

Studies about the use of literature text in the classroom showed that students enhance their vision about intercultural aspects because of the cultural moments that are represented through literature stories and how they can influence for student's perception about other cultures (Aly, 2003; Feng & Byram, 2002; Lazar, 1993; Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013; Shelton-Strong, 2012; Vourdanou, 2017). Thus, the IC is developed through the analysis of the most critical moments that the reading show to the student (Schewe, 1998). On the other hand, it facilitates the process

of being more conscious about how other cultures are different and why society needs to respect and be tolerant of other intercultural manifestations.

The power of literature text helps to construct artistic images in students. Through the analysis of stories in the classroom, the reflection of cultural differences can develop the understanding of the local culture and be more tolerant and open mind with people from other cultures. Corbett (2010) expresses that literature is a form of expression to enhancing tolerance for diversity empathy. Kuusisto, Kuusisto, Rissanen, Holm, and Tirri (2015) remark that literature contributes to the emotional development of the students by fostering interpersonal and intercultural attitudes. Thus, cultural images become part of the IC development as a result of the thinking of how the local culture is similar to the foreign culture. Also, the student can reflect on why the authors of the texts represent cultural situations for expressing social behaviour.

For having a better analysis of getting this process, intensive reading contributes to developing a better understanding of literature texts. With this reading strategy, teachers and students can read the message deeply that the writer wants to transmit and how it could be related to the intercultural environment of the students (Carrell & Carson, 1997). Intensive reading contributes to the analysis of literary texts to understand and describe intercultural contexts to develop IC (Bamford & Day, 2004; Lazar, 1993; Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013; Maley, 2012). Among the main advantages of this reading, the technique is the emphasis on the meaning of the cultural context that encompasses literary work and the habit of reading for pleasure. To achieve this, the reader must go through a training process that leads to the practice of reading daily (Infanti, 2012).

Methodology

This study aims to develop the IC applying intensive reading with literature text in the EFL classroom. For this, an action research design was selected in order to diagnose, apply and evaluate the study. In the educational area, action research permits to contribute to solutions for pedagogical problems in the classroom (Glanz, 1998). Open interviews and observational guide were the instruments selected for gathering information. The questions focus on: How did you feel reading the text? Do you like literature texts? Which cultural aspect did you like? Which part of the story was similar to the Ecuadorian context? Which are not? The interview reaches to determine the effects that this study had in the students after the experimentation. The observation guide helps to collect the daily aspects observed during this investigation. Experts in the field of TEFL validated the instruments. The data provided by the instruments were analyzed with ATLAS.ti 8.5. A group of 30 students were the participants in this study from the School of Language Teaching from Universidad Técnica de Manabí. The participant's age was around 17-21 years old. As a part of the action-research study, this investigation had three phases: (1) diagnostic, (2) application and (3) evaluation of the process which are explained in the result section. The study lasts ten weeks.

Results and discussion

Diagnostic phase

For the diagnostic phase, a placement test was applied to determine the English level of the students. KET sample exam from Cambridge University Press was selected to measure that level. The results suggest that students were in level A1 with some problems in the reading skill. The majority of them reached 13 points of 20, which is the minimum. For help them to improve this skill and also to develop the

IC was selected a story called *The Tempest* written by William Shakespeare because of the adaptation of the story for an elementary level. Also, a set of activities were planned base on dimensions of Byram (1997) theory about Intercultural Communicative Competence.

Application phase

During the application phase, an observational guide was applied to collect the essential details from the study. The researcher coded the information creating two categories following the guidelines of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014). The coding process gave two categories: (1) intensive reading phase, and (2) sociocultural context analysis phase.

Intensive reading phase helped the reader to form the habit of reading by applying strategies such as identifying specific information, making inferences of the facts read and contrasting cultural scenarios. The steps applied for enhancing the reading skill were: (1) previewing, (2) contextualizing, (3) visualizing, (4) asking and answering questions, and (5) summarizing.

With the previewing, the students learned to predict what the story is about. It also gave them a general perception of the kind of story they read and the importance of knowing the masterpieces of the English literature. The contextualizing was focused on recognizing the content where the story took place, and similar it is with the Ecuadorian context. With the visualizing, all students analyze in groups the picture of the story to tell what happens in each one. Also, they describe the characters and the way they dress up at that moment. The asking and answering questions were related to understanding the most critical moments of the story. Furthermore, the students summarize what they remember from the story and how they would like to change the ending.

As students progress in reading, they were selecting those words that were new

to find the meaning through tabs called detective words (which consisted of writing on paper on one side the word in English and on the other side a graph representing that word). At the fifth weeks of this study, students better understood the literary text. They could comment on the events that occurred in the story.

The sociocultural context focused on how to develop the IC through the analysis of the story from a cultural perspective (Alonso-Belmonte & Fernández-Agüero, 2017; Fernández-Agüero, 2017). For having a better understanding of the story, a set of questions based on Byram's model of intercultural communicative competence was applied. The meaning of each chapter of the work to analyze the socio-cultural context was deepened. At the end of the work, an exercise of written questions and answers was carried out based on the five dimensions of the Byram IC model (1997) such as (1) knowledge: What essential facts do you remember from the story and which are similar in our cultural context?, (2) attitude: What values does the story transmit to you and how can you apply them in relationships with people from other cultural contexts? (3) Interpretation and relation skills: What events from the story are similar in our country? (4) Discovery and interaction skills: What have you learned from the cultural environment of the story? (5) Critical cultural awareness: Do you consider that the events described in the story occur in Ecuador?

Table 1

Students answer from the socio-cultural context of the story

Dimension	Questions	Students answers
Knowledge	What essential facts do you remember from the story and which are similar in our cultural context?	<p>Sts_1: I remember that Prospero was a lovely person who died when his son was young and gave him the kingdom. It happens nowadays for example; our parents want the best for us</p> <p>-</p> <p>Sts_4: Similar, for example, with the Ecuadorian context, when we face problems, and we don't know how to solve them. This is what I remember from the story.</p> <p>Sts_9: Ecuadorian people need to know more about our magical stories to learn more about our culture. The Tempest is a beautiful story, but we need to know other stories from our country.</p>
Attitude	What values does the story transmit to you, and how can you apply them in relationships with people from other cultural contexts?	<p>Sts_23: Respect, tolerance from the baby who grows up without grudge. Some people transmit it when they meet with foreigners.</p> <p>Sts_30: I could see that this story presents encourage us to get our goals even if there are some adversities. For example, when people come from another country to Ecuador looking for new opportunities.</p>
Interpretation and relation skill	What are events from the story similar in our country?	<p>Sts_10: I think our context is similar when there are problems, and you can have friends who help you to solve the problems.</p> <p>Sts_11: I don't know, but I think when Prospero becomes a king, he finally changes his mind.</p>
Discovery and Interaction	What have you learned from the cultural environment of the story?	<p>Sts_2: I learn that there are always people who help you when there are problems.</p> <p>Sts_6: Respect and love because the story shows me that people can change for positive reasons to improve.</p> <p>Sts_7: loyalty for that person who is always with you never leave you alone.</p>
Critical cultural awareness	Do you consider that the events described in the story occur in Ecuador?	<p>Sts_13: No, because, in Ecuador, we don't have this kind of situation. However, I liked to analyze cultural aspects of the story.</p> <p>Sts_16: Not the same situation but values because this story is presented and these values are that Ecuadorian people have: honesty, compassion and respect for others.</p>

The answers above indicate how students were interested in relating cultural aspects from the story with their local context. About the knowledge dimension, learners could realize the importance of knowing and analyze intercultural issues in a text. They do not just remember the most important part of the story. However, they showed an intercultural attitude to value magical stories that are retold in Ecuador, but sometimes young people do not know. Learners also interpret, contrast and discover believes and the most relevant aspects which can influence in their lives. In general, their cultural awareness from the story motivates them to generate ideas about how Ecuadorian people are. Maley (2012) says that students feel confidence when there are classic stories which help them to construct an open-mind perception of the cultural context of people from other regions. That is the purpose of the inclusion of literature text in the EFL classroom for developing IC.

On the other hand, the answers from the questions based on Byram's dimension suggest that students may acknowledge that literature text contributes to developing IC because at the beginning they just read the text and answer some questions for reading comprehension. They did not use to contrast socio-cultural information to analyze and contrast aspect from the local culture. Step by step, they were contrasting the cultural context and related to the Ecuadorian. Thus, intercultural aspects start to be part of the reading as an activity where learners express their perceptions of other realities of people who have a different cultural background (Deardorff & Arasaratnam, 2017). Also, the learner becomes more tolerant of believes and behaviour of other people for not creating stereotypes which could cause misunderstandings from the literature text (Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013).

Evaluation phase

The evaluation of this action research

study was conducted with interviews applied to the participants. About the question related to how they felt reading the text, students expressed that they feel happy with the results obtained. It seems to be that they learned the importance of going beyond the text and analyze critically a different cultural background showed in the story.

Feliz porque fue la primera vez que leí una obra de William Shakespeare y aprendí como hacerlo de una forma muy motivadora. Adoro analizar otras culturas a través de este tipo de texto. / happy because it is the first time, I read a William Shakespeare story and I learned how to read in a better way a text. I loved to analyze other cultural contexts (sts_3).

Al principio me sentía nerviosa porque creía que leer una obra de Shakespeare era para estudiantes de un nivel avanzado de inglés y creía que no lo iba a entender, pero no fue así. Me sentí muy sastifecho con los resultados. / I felt very nervous at the beginning because I thought William Shakespeare text were difficult to understand but it wasn't, I feel comfortable with the results (sts_7).

About the culture aspect, they remember the story of the Ecuadorian aborigine cultures because, at that time, kingdoms and magic stories appeared. They also express that it was the first time they can extract values from characters of a story in an English literature text. It motivates them to continue reading more classic stories to learn new cultural aspects.

Puedo relacionar la historia con la información que nos enseñaron sobre los reinos de las culturas locales que nos enseñaban en la escuela. / I remember my history classes from school because kingdoms of our local cultures and things like that happen at that time. (sts_15).

Estuve muy motivado durante la lectura. Me gustaría seguir aprendiendo más obras de la literatura clásica para adquirir má vocabulario y poder entender otros contextos culturales/ I am motivated to continue reading more classic text to learn

new vocabulary to contrast with my culture. (sts_14).

At the end of the study, the reading section of the KET exam from Cambridge examination was retaken in order to determine if the students improve their reading skill. The result was 15 points above 16, which is the minimum to pass the reading section. It means students improve this skill because of the analysis of the text through the intensive reading technique using the story *The Tempest*.

Conclusions

Literature for enhancing the IC through intensive reading was the aim of this study. The results suggest that students can express their feelings and emotions to describe their own culture by comparing real situations which those come from the literature readers. Also, they develop the reading indirectly for pleasure because they encourage themselves to continue reading outside the school. Likewise, indirectly, the skills of speaking and writing are strengthened through the description of the intercultural contexts analyzed. As it was showed in this action-research study, literature in the EFL not just provide a wide range of vocabulary and im-

provement of the reading skill but also a new perception about how to contrast the local culture with the foreign cultures by analyzing key part of a literature text. As a suggestion on the part of the students, in a second edition, evening reading clubs will be included as part of the extracurricular activities they can develop. Also, students can race for those students who need a space to reinforce reading skills to improve the level of comprehension of the books they read.

To sum up, learning a foreign language is not just getting linguistics skill but also culture to develop the IC in the classroom. In addition to this, literature is the path to connect language and culture because it provides a real experience of facts and opinions from different literature genres which represent important moments of people from other cultures (Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013; Vourdanou, 2017). Thus, the literature is a way to know the characteristics of other cultures to contrast information between one culture and another (Savvidou, 2004; Shelton-Strong, 2012). Getting the IC while a learner is getting a language is essential to obtain an excellent communication between different interlocutors but at the same time.

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