Oksana Chugai

National Technical University of Ukraine

Igor Sikorsky Kyiv Polytechnic Institute

OChugai@meta.ua

Intercultural Competence Formation of ESL Teachers in a Global Educational Environment

ABSTRACT

Objective: The aim of the paper is to explore existing and emerging opportunities for academic mobility and ESL teachers' professional development, to present the review of theoretical assumptions about intercultural competence, to provide recommendations on using effective strategies at group and individual levels to increase the effectiveness of ESL teachers training in general and intercultural competence formation in particular.

Methodology: This paper explores existing and emerging opportunities for academic mobility and ESL teachers' professional development, presents the review of theoretical assumptions about intercultural competence.

Findings: Effective strategies of intercultural competence formation at group and the individual level were examined.

Value Added: The use of theoretical and practical conclusions of this paper would enhance the effectiveness of ESL teachers' training in general and intercultural competence formation in particular.

Recommendations: This paper provides recommendations on using effective strategies to achieve successful intercultural communication at group and individual levels.

Key words: academic mobility, ESL teachers, culture, intercultural competence (IC), professional development, reflection.

JEL codes: O15, M53, I21

Globalization in education is not an abstract notion anymore, with rapid advances in technology it has become a reality. It explains the fact that foreign language teaching is seen as an opportunity to open "international channels of communication" (Wallace, 2001, p. 2). One of the most important challenges teachers of English as a Second Language (ESL) face is ensuring active participation in global educational processes, academic mobility in particular, and their students' success in intercultural communication, which all require intercultural competence formation as a part of teacher professional development programs.

The issue of culture and communication between cultures has a long history and is still the object of many investigations all over the world. Hall (1959) is considered to be the founder of the theory of intercultural communication; Gudykunst (1980) developed the notion of the "stranger" as a representative of another culture, the categorization of various influences or layers connected with different cultures; Scollon (2012) investigated formal professional contexts based on the notion of discourse systems; Andersen (2012) focused on cultural differences in nonverbal communication; Samovar (2013) presented an overview of existing intercultural theories, developed definitions of basic terms providing foresight for future studies. However, the issue of intercultural competence formation of ESL teachers was not in the focus of the investigations.

The aim of the paper is to explore existing and emerging opportunities for academic mobility and ESL teachers' professional development, to present

the review of theoretical assumptions about intercultural competence, to provide recommendations on using effective strategies at group and individual levels to increase the effectiveness of ESL teachers training in general and intercultural competence formation in particular. One should remember that the strategies suggested for ESL teachers to use in their classrooms should first of all be tried and experienced by them during professional training which may be teacher education or in-service training, staff development as well as self-development programs.

Globalization in education created favorable conditions for academic mobility which may be understood as an opportunity to study, teach, conduct research or participate in professional training abroad. Academic mobility for students, postgraduates and faculty of National Technical University of Ukraine "Igor Sikorsky Kyiv Polytechnic Institute" (NTUU "KPI") is presented mainly by educational or research programs, double diplomas, individual grants, and may serve as the evidence of global changes in Ukrainian educational system [kpi.ua/ru/node/7139]. The participants of the programs have opportunities to compare other systems of higher education with the Ukrainian one, develop foreign language skills, get professional experience communicating with experts in different fields, learn more about the culture of another country and receive a diploma or certificate from a foreign university. Each year more and more Ukrainian students study at European universities, bringing back their experience of surviving in a new environment, sharing international educational standards and academic culture with others. At the same time more and more foreign students come to Ukraine, which means that ESL teachers should be qualified enough to manage successful intercultural communication in their classrooms. As a matter of fact, there are plenty of existing and emerging opportunities for ESL teachers' professional development.

First of all, the ability to speak English fluently allows ESL teachers to participate in any international event where English is used as a working language. Secondly, they may get international grants designed especially for

ESL teachers aimed at mastering innovative methodology. The requirements to ESL teachers, especially those who work at universities, include doing research, taking part in international projects, publishing in foreign academic journals and doing presentations at scientific conferences abroad. In order to participate in international programs, for example, programs of academic mobility, ESL teachers should present the certificate like Aptis, CAE, IELTS and others, which prove the language proficiency to meet CEFR requirements. In addition, publishing houses such as Pearson, Oxford, Macmillan, often in cooperation with America House or British Council, organize seminars and workshops where native speakers, teacher trainers and textbook writers share their best strategies in teaching English. By communicating with guest speakers, who usually are native speakers of English, ESL teachers acquire understanding not only of the most important issues in teaching, but of the intricacies connected with verbal and non-verbal intercultural communication.

Moreover, such NGOs as TESOL-Ukraine, SOVA and UERA organize various local events like conferences, series of seminars, trainings, summer and winter schools where the participants, often chosen on a competitive basis, get intercultural experience presenting and learning from native speakers. Online courses and webinars are also the ways to join international community of those who teach and learn.

Programs like TEA Program (Teaching Excellence and Achievement Program), Fulbright Scholar Program, MELTA Teacher Development Program and others require going abroad where the participants fully merge into multicultural community which consists of educators from many countries. One of the main requirements of participation in such programs is dissemination of the experience which means sharing the ideas and training others after the program is over.

While there is no use in denying the importance of professional training, Wallace (2001, p. 2) claims that foreign language teaching professionals should take full responsibility for their own professional development which may be understood as expanding knowledge in the area of education and

developing skills necessary for effective teaching. Defining the teacher as "reflective practitioner", Wallace (2001, p. 2) emphasizes the importance of experience which is one of the ways to connect theory and practice. The participants of Claremont Graduate University TEA Program (2012) indeed had to conduct reflection practice on daily basis, reconsidering what they had learned while attending classes at the university, completing their home assignments, observing classes of American teachers, experiencing everyday life in an international community, microteaching, solving problems together with their room mates, group mates and university trainers. Reflection may be defined as regular practice of looking back on the experience, thinking about the reasons of failures and successes, analyzing one's own actions and reactions of other people, drawing conclusions which will be used in the future as moral lessons. One of the tasks for TEA-Fellows was to complete the so-called "Onion Project" and present the results of the investigation which allowed teachers to analyze the education system of their home countries, compare and contrast them with others through the lenses of their experience abroad, in this way developing intercultural competence.

There are many theoretical assumptions about culture and intercultural competence made by the prominent researchers from different countries. However, there is no agreement about what culture is. A culture may be defined as a system of values, beliefs and material products like music, food, clothing (Suneetha & Sundarava, 2011, p. 124). Cargile claims that it is impossible to define culture, but possible to describe its general characteristics: culture is symbolic, possible to learn and transmit; culture is ethnocentric, it is constantly changing, it is dialectical in nature (2006, p. 17). Analyzing the differences between the Hofstede's Dimensions of Individualism on the example of the USA and Collectivism on the example of Japan, Cargile reasons that the American culture may be collectivistic to a certain degree, while the Japanese culture may be also individualistic, thus making a conclusion about contradictory nature of culture (2006, pp. 17–18).

Intercultural competence is "the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations based on one's intercultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes" (Deardorff, 2004, p. 194). Intercultural experience is something which, once acquired, remains with a person up to the moment when it is needed. Holliday claims that connecting previous experience with a new one allows those, who encounter obstacles communicating with people from other cultures, overcome them (Holliday, 2011, p. 1). Instead of focusing on blocks, concentrating on similarities or threads is beneficial for intercultural communication, as far as threads are associated with small culture presenting common people and their experiences (Holliday, 2011, p. 1). According to Holliday, it is important to keep cultural threads activated and blocks inhibited by means of choice, action and responsibility: there is always a choice to take action of speaking or not, and responsibility for communication being successful (2011, p. 7). First of all, people should be interested in communicating so that it is purposeful. If there is a need to communicate, the participants of communication will definitely try to find the ways of overcoming difficulties as they arise focusing on positive and ignoring the negative.

It is possible to reach the awareness of individual variation and the dynamic nature of culture by ruining stereotypes teachers possibly have about their teaching contexts, by broadening their outlook and learning more about multinational society (Suneetha & Sundavara, 2011, p. 127). Therefore, teachers should carefully consider their students' socio-cultural background before designing and conducting any activities in ESL classroom: knowledge of cultural differences considerably improves intercultural communication (Suneetha & Sundavara, 2011, p. 129). It is important to remember that there are several approaches for ESL teachers to improve intercultural communication in the classroom at the group level:

- information approach suggests providing information about different cultures aimed at better understanding of beliefs and values of people all over the world;

• simulation approach promotes using situations which recreate real life episodes typical for different cultures;

• group discussions are means of revealing students' views on cultural issues and reaching agreement;

• games create a friendly atmosphere for all participants who have fun and at the same time develop such characteristics as tolerance, patience and empathy; besides, games are highly motivational breaking the routine of the lesson and engaging all the participants;

• other activities include completing questionnaires and watching videos, which may provoke further discussions (Suneetha & Sundarava, 2011, p. 130).

Let us explore some of the approaches more closely. First of all, it is necessary to mention that in practice these approaches are difficult to separate, they are usually combined. Information approach focuses on reading, listening or watching videos about different cultural aspects, intercultural communication etc. For these activities to be productive, there should be pre-reading, pre-listening or pre-watching exercises which prepare students for a better understanding of the information; during and after exercises which, finally, check the comprehension, give space for questions or discussion of the most interesting issues from the material introduced by reading, listening or watching videos. Various activities may be used in simulation approach like conducting an interview with a foreigner, inviting a guest speaker, role plays, using realia in a classroom, mobile applications, online platforms or Skype, which are also informative and interactional. Brookfield (2011) suggests using short videos as starting points for developing guidelines of discussions: students watch short excerpts of people discussing different cultural issues and make a list of dos and don'ts; it is also possible to use questions like "Which contributions to the discussion were most useful? Why?", "Which contributions to the discussion were irrelevant? Why?" (Brookfield, 2011, p. 10). The guidelines developed by the participants of this activity are likely to be followed when they have discussions in class.

The art of discussion requires careful preparation and guidance. Some activities may be used to master the basics and overcome the difficulties which usually arise while discussing controversial cultural issues. One of them is called "The Circle of Voices". The procedure is as follows: all participants are divided into small groups of 4-5. Students choose one of the topics or questions like "Should you give presents to your university hosts when you study abroad?" and think about the issue for 1-2 minutes. Then each participant takes turns and speaks on the topic for about 1 minute without interruptions. After that there may be an open discussion, but on one condition: each person should comment on the contribution of the previous speaker, which makes the comments more relevant and discussion more coherent. This activity gives everyone equal opportunities to participate, it teaches the participants to be tolerant, listen carefully and respect opinions of others (Brookfield, 2011, p. 11).

As we can see, information and simulation approach, discussion and watching videos are combined with the aim to engage all the participants and create the environment favorable for successful intercultural communication.

While conducting discussions and watching educational videos may be challenging for some participants, games are familiar to anyone regardless of their educational background, nationality, age or other features. Games may also be considered as combination of information, simulation, sometimes discussions or questionnaires. In fact, games have existed in all cultures accumulating human experience in all its diversity. Being meaningful, structured, purposeful and fun, games are closely connected with the future of education (Gamification and the Future of Education, 2016, pp. 3–4). It is possible to choose any popular game and adapt it to the needs of the class focusing on certain cultural issues.

A game called "When in Rome" may serve as a perfect illustration of using games to improve intercultural communication of all participants. Needless to say that the name of the game speaks for itself hinting at the proverb "When in Rome, do as the Romans do" which means to follow the

customs of the people who live in the country you visit. All players are divided into teams and given the task of choosing any country or place. Then the players should provide some advice for a visitor to this country by completing the sentences which start with "Make sure you…; you need to…; be careful…; don't…" thinking about crime, transport, health issues, food and drink, time, etc. The focus of this game is on functional language of giving advice or warnings; the content, which is information about different countries or places in a certain country, is provided by students themselves; fun part is for each team to guess the name of the place according to the pieces of advice presented by another team. While playing this game, the participants practice using modal patterns in a foreign language, learn more about dos and don'ts in different geographical locations, as well as of each other's background and interests, which promotes tolerance and better understanding of customs, traditions, norms of behavior in different countries (Damian, 2011, p. 174).

In addition, everything said or written in the classroom provides valuable material for reflection conducted by both teachers and students. Again, there may be questions, prompts or free writing responses, followed by discussion if necessary. Reflection practice promotes creating the atmosphere of trust and establishes friendly relationships between the participants.

At the individual level there are some strategies which may be helpful for people who use a foreign language to prevent and solve problems connected with international communication:

• being mindful means to be open to new information, ready to listen actively, to be as attentive as possible, because your response depends on what you hear;

• controlling speech rate which means adjusting the rate of the speech to that of other people you talk to in order to make yourself clear which prevents misunderstanding;

• focusing on vocabulary by choosing the words carefully, avoiding professional terms, technical words, acronyms, metaphors, idioms, slang, etc.;

- checking comprehension by rephrasing or even writing the keywords if possible, because some people are better at reading than listening when they have to use a foreign language (Samovar, Porter, McDaniel & Roy, 2013, pp. 261–262).

Besides verbal communication, one should remember about non-verbal behavior: the expression of the face, keeping eye contact, controlling gestures, the distance between interlocutors, which, harmless in one country, may be offensive in others (Samovar et al., 2013, p. 262).

Globalization has created various opportunities for academic mobility and ESL teachers' professional development. Effective strategies of intercultural competence formation at group level include: learning more about socio-cultural background and experience of the learners, using this information to design and conduct any activities in ESL classroom; applying information approach, using simulation, group discussions, games, videos, reflection, questionnaires, which are usually combined and aimed at engaging all the students. Strategies at the individual level include mindfulness, speech rate control, vocabulary choice, checking comprehension. It is also important to keep non-verbal behavior under control, using it to increase the effectiveness of intercultural communication. The strategies are also recommended to use in teacher education, in-service training, staff development, self-development programs. Future studies may include conducting surveys among teachers and students who participated in academic mobility programs aimed at establishing problem areas in intercultural competence formation.

References

Academic mobility official site, **kpi.ua/ru/node/7139, access:** 14 December 2017.

Brookfield, S. (2011). *Discussion as a way of teaching* [online], http://www.stephen-brookfield.com/Dr._Stephen_D._Brookfield/Workshop_Materials_files/Discussion_as_a_Way_of_Teaching_Packet.pdf. Last, access 15 December 2017.

Cargile, A.C. (2006). Imagining Culture with a Little Help from the PushmiPullyu. In L.A. Samovar, R.E. Porter, E.R. McDaniel, *Intercultural Communication: A Reader* (16–21) 11th ed. Boston: Thomson Wardsworth.

Claremont Graduate University TEA Program 2012 Handbook (2012). Claremont: CGU.

Damian, W. (2011). *Speakout Intermediate. Teacher's Resource Book.* London: Pearson Education Limited, p. 205.

Deardorff, D.K. (2004). The identification and assessment of intercultural competence as a student outcome of international education at institutions of higher education in the United States. (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). North Carolina State University, Raleigh, NC.

Gamification and the Future of Education (2016). World Government Summit. Oxford Analytica, viewed 14 October 2017, <https://www.worldgovernmentsummit.org/api/publications/document?id=2b0d6ac4-e97c-6578-b2f8-ff0000a7ddb6>.

Holliday, A. (2011). Revisiting Intercultural Competence: Small Culture Formation on the Go through Threads of Experience. *International Journal of Bias, Identity and Diversities in Education,* 1 (2), pp. 1–12.

Samovar, L.A., Porter, R.E., McDaniel, E.R., Roy, C.S. (2013). *Communication between cultures.* 8th ed. Boston: MA Wadsworth/Cengage Learning, pp. 261–262.

Suneetha, V., Sundarava, G.M. (2011). Incorporating Cross-Cultural Communication in ELT: A Pedagogical Approach. In R. Jaidev, M.L.S. Sadorra, W.J. Onn, L.M. Cherk, B.P. Lorente, *Global perspectives, local initiatives* (123–132). Singapore: CELC.

Wallace, M.J. (2001). *Training foreign language teachers: a reflective approach*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 2.