



Developing intercultural communicative competence in the ClerKing telecollaborative project

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Abstract. Living in the 21st century means living in an era that is increasingly globalising where cross-cultural communication is essential; thus, students should be given opportunities to cultivate their Intercultural Communicative Competences (ICC). This paper reports on Phase 3 of ClerKing, a Franco-Jamaican telecollaborative project, which involved Applied Foreign Languages (AFL) students of English from Clermont Auvergne University (UCA), France, and students of French from the University of the West Indies (UWI), Mona, Jamaica. WhatsApp and videoconferencing were used to facilitate the interactions. Using the exploratory approach, we seek to identify different parameters of ICC, relying on Byram's (1997) and Deardorff's (2006) models. Preliminary findings show that students demonstrated and developed ICC such as openness and curiosity, culture-specific knowledge, an understanding of worldviews, sociolinguistic awareness, flexibility and adaptability, and negotiation of meaning. However, time difference, personal and academic schedules, connectivity issues, and misjudged/misinterpreted communication can lead to intercultural conflict.

Keywords: intercultural communicative competence, global competence, ClerKing, WhatsApp.

1. Introduction

The perpetual rise in globalisation, migration, and, more recently, an increase in constant online interactions across cultures, suggest that the education system needs to be more proactive and deliberate in introducing and implementing curricula that

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How to cite this article: Madden, O., & Ashby, S. (2021). Developing intercultural communicative competence in the ClerKing telecollaborative project. In N. Zoghalmi, C. Bruderer, C. Sarré, M. Grosbois, L. Bradley, & S. Thouésny (Eds), *CALL and professionalisation: short papers from EUROCALL 2021* (pp. 200-206). Research-publishing.net. <https://doi.org/10.14705/rpnet.2021.54.1333>

will help foster ICC of students – the current and future citizens. Telecollaboration offers the potential to cultivate these skills (O’Dowd, 2006).

Definitions of ICC vary, and alternative terms include cross-cultural adaptation, intercultural sensitivity, multicultural competence, etc. (Sinicrope, Norris, & Watanabe, 2007). However, several experts in the field agreed that ICC involves communicating effectively in the foreign language and demonstrating specific skills, values, attitudes, and knowledge about a culture (Deardorff, 2006; Moeller & Nugent, 2014).

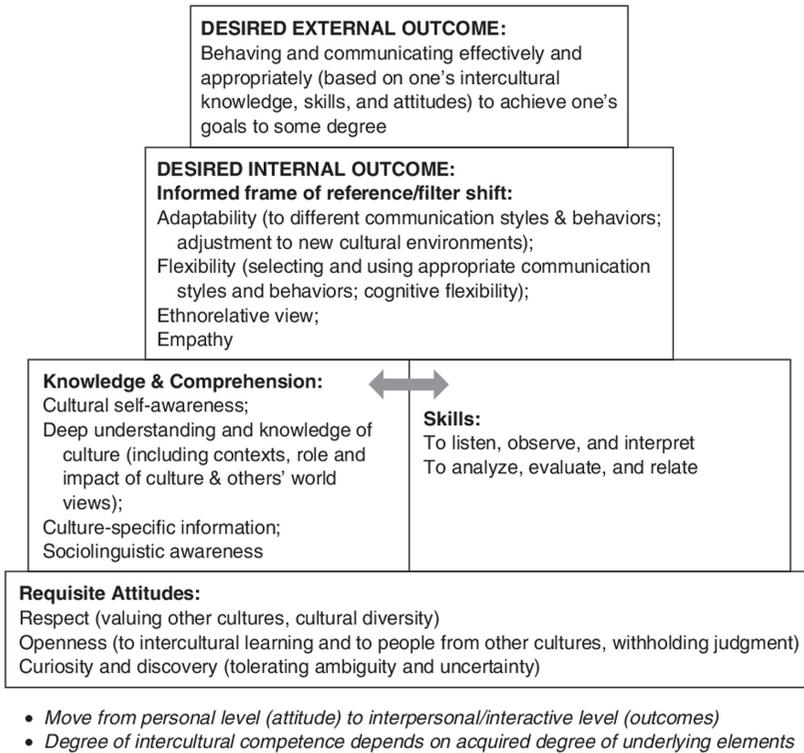
Given the nature of ICC, understanding culture is of utmost importance, though this concept is equally complex. Nieto (1999) suggests that culture constitutes “the ever-changing values, traditions, social and political relationships, and worldview created, shared, and transformed by a group of people” (p. 48). It generally includes products, ideas, and behaviours that are all interrelated and vary based on family, generation, region, ethnic group, and industry, to name a few.

2. Models of ICC

Byram’s (1997) model of ICC comprises five elements or *savoirs*: (1) *savoirs* (knowledge): knowledge of self and other and of interactions, individual and societal; (2) *savoir-être*: attitudes, relativising self, and valuing others; (3) *savoir comprendre/communiquer*: skills of interpreting and relating; (4) *savoir apprendre/faire*: skills of discovering and/or interacting; and (5) *savoir s’engager*: political education and critical cultural awareness.

Deardorff’s (2006) pyramid of ICC (see Figure 1) starts with the requisite attitudes (respect, openness, curiosity) that an individual needs to cultivate and demonstrate in order to communicate effectively in intercultural contexts. The next tier of the pyramid is shared between knowledge and comprehension and skills. The former encapsulates cultural self-awareness, deep understanding and knowledge of culture, culture-specific information, and sociolinguistic awareness, while the latter includes listening, observing, interpreting, analysing, evaluating, and relating. Both aspects are interdependent to achieve the desired internal and external outcomes that are the two final tiers of the pyramid. Internal outcome refers to being adaptable and flexible, engaging in ethnorelativism, and demonstrating empathy. External outcome entails comporting oneself appropriately to achieve one’s goals to a certain degree.

Figure 1. Deardorff's (2006, p. 254) Pyramid of ICC³



Both Byram's (1997) and Deardorff's (2006) models use such words as openness and curiosity to explain their belief that an individual must remain open to learning about new beliefs, values, and worldviews in order to participate in relationships of equality. Using the exploratory approach, we seek to identify and examine different parameters of ICC, specifically how students express these competences in Phase 3 of the ClerKing telecollaborative project.

3. Method

Building on the work of Madden and Foucher (2019, 2020), this study reports on Phase 3 of the Franco-Jamaican telecollaborative project, ClerKing (Clermont-Kingston), between AFL students of English from UCA and modern languages

3. Deardorff, D. K. Journal Studies in International Education, 10(3), pp. 241-266, copyright © 2006 by SAGE, Reprinted by Permission of SAGE Publications

students of French from UWI, Mona. The project occurred during a ten-week period between 26 students (21 female, 5 male), who were paired equally (one Clermontois to one Jamaican), according to their profiles submitted prior to the start of the project. The main objectives of this project were for students to practise the target language studied and to develop and/or improve their linguistic (all skills), cultural, and intercultural competences in said language, based on their respective language levels. Clermontois students were B2-C2 in English on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, while Jamaican students were B1-B2 in French. Students discussed different intercultural topics weekly with the help of a discussion guide (for example, education systems, stereotypes, peer pressure, multiculturalism, cultural taboos) via WhatsApp and different videoconferencing platforms (Skype, Zoom).

The data collection for this study comprised all the interactions that occurred within ClerKing, including the individual tasks done, such as learning and reflective journals, as well as two questionnaires – one completed at the start of the project, and the other at the end. The former gathered data on the participants' biographies, linguistic competences, usage of communication tools, and elements related to intercultural communication, while the latter examined the same elements, but within the context of the project at the end.

4. Preliminary findings and discussion

In the post-project questionnaire, 68% of the respondents declared that they had gained linguistic knowledge, while everyone noted that they had obtained cultural knowledge (see Excerpt 1, [supplementary materials](#)). Both the linguistic and cultural gains mainly fall under two categories common to both [Byram's \(1997\)](#) and [Deardorff's \(2006\)](#) models of ICC: *savoir-être*/requisite attitude and *savoir*/knowledge and comprehension. The examples cited are from the students' learning and reflective journals.

4.1. *Savoir-être*: requisite attitude

It was observed in the journal entries and WhatsApp interactions that having the right attitude, skills, and posture contributed to students demonstrating and cultivating ICC. Being open and curious has allowed students to embrace others' and develop their own perspectives of the world, show empathy, evolve in their personal development, and learn more about their own culture (see Excerpt 2, [supplementary materials](#)).

4.2. *Savoir*: knowledge and comprehension

A brief analysis of the WhatsApp interactions and journal entries confirms the students' own statements in the post-questionnaire that they gained a lot of culture-specific information, thanks to the topics discussed, but also due to the fact that they were from distinctive cultural and linguistic backgrounds. The new insights garnered included information relating to mentality, traditions, celebrations, holidays, icons, geography, economy, cuisine, social behaviours, and religious beliefs, among others. There were also opportunities to confirm or clarify stereotypes (see Excerpt 3, [supplementary materials](#)).

Additionally, students gained more consciousness regarding cultural self-awareness and understood, to some extent, why people of the opposite culture behave how they do (see Excerpt 4, [supplementary materials](#)). Furthermore, there was the development of sociolinguistic awareness, in the form of slang expressions, exposure to regional language(s) and different language variations (Jamaican Creole and broken English) and specific vocabulary used in one's local culture. Moreover, there was also the struggle to use the appropriate language register (for example, 'vous' versus 'tu' in French) (see Excerpt 5, [supplementary materials](#)).

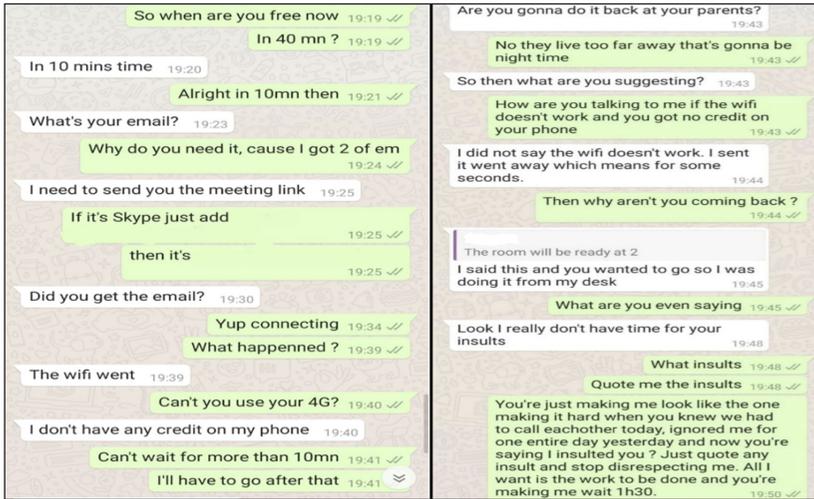
Additionally, we observed an interplay among the attitudes, knowledge, and the desired internal outcome displayed by some of the participants. For example, in Excerpt 3a, openness ("I found it very interesting to learn") seemed to lead to evaluating ("I knew very little") which apparently increased knowledge and produced some cognitive flexibility ("allowed me to remove the clichés").

There were also opportunities for students to negotiate meaning (see Excerpt 6, [supplementary materials](#)). However, the interactions also allowed for personal stereotypes of an individual's own culture to be transferred to interlocutors of the target culture (see Excerpt 7, [supplementary materials](#)). This could influence the latter's perception of the people and culture.

4.3. Challenges

Despite the gains declared by the students in their reflective journal entries and the post-project questionnaire, the project was affected by a six-hour time difference, personal and institutional timetables, and poor internet connectivity. Additionally, there were instances of misjudged/misinterpreted communication, which can lead to intercultural friction (see [Figure 2](#)).

Figure 2. Example of misjudged communication



5. Conclusions

Our study suggests that there is an interconnection between students' attitudes and their engagement and takeaway from this intercultural project. Similarly, the attitudes and skills noted in both Byram's and Deardorff's models of ICC are interdependent to achieve meaningful output. Additionally, we have noted that the use of journaling helped the students to engage in metacognition, as they acquired new knowledge and experiences. Conversely, challenges related to the time difference, internet connectivity, schedules, and misunderstanding can negatively affect a telecollaborative project.

6. Supplementary materials

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7. Acknowledgements

We would like to thank Open Learning Project students from UCA, and French students and staff from the Department of Modern Languages and Literatures from the UWI, Mona for their participation.

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Published by Research-publishing.net, a not-for-profit association
Contact: info@research-publishing.net

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CALL and professionalisation: short papers from EUROCALL 2021

Edited by Naouel Zoghلامي, Cédric Bruderemann, Cedric Sarré, Muriel Grosbois, Linda Bradley, and Sylvie Thouéšny

Publication date: 2021/12/13

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ISBN13: 978-2-490057-97-9 (PDF, colour)

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data.
A cataloguing record for this book is available from the British Library.

Legal deposit, France: Bibliothèque Nationale de France - Dépôt légal: décembre 2021.