

Multicultural Literature: A Tool To Enhance Business Students' Intercultural Communicative Competence

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Abstract

Globalization and computer-mediated technologies bridged the gap between nations and altered the role of culture in language teaching. They also denationalized English and turned it into a lingua franca. This phenomenon resulted in adjustments in EFL classrooms such as the change in teaching goals and the re-evaluation of cultural awareness especially with the rising tone of hate speech today. Business English teaching is not an exception to all these changes. In fact, it is no longer considered as a mere transmission of infinite lists of vocabulary, diagrams, tables, and figures. In their future career business students will need business jargon as well as intercultural communicative competence (ICC) to cope with multicultural situations. This article reports back a pedagogical experiment on a class of Tunisian MA business students. It was a qualitative action research intended to explore whether multicultural literature, specifically short stories, together with inquiry-based learning (IBL) can enhance their ICC. Data were collected through class observations, journals and semi-structured interviews. Findings showed that using multicultural literature may improve business students' ICC, the short story may be a motivating material for them to read, and inquiry-based learning being enjoyable and autonomous can be an effective approach to teaching literature.

Keywords: Business English- Culture- Intercultural Communicative Competence- Multicultural Literature

Introduction:

The beginning of the twenty first century brought about changes to the humanity such as globalization and computer-mediated technologies, which bridged the gap between nations and altered the nature and the role of culture in language teaching (Risager, 2006). Those changes de-nationalized English and turned it into a lingua franca (Van Essen, 2004). In fact, a

variety of Englishes are now used to speak of any pattern of any culture (Alpetkin, 2005).

This phenomenon resulted in adjustments in EFL classrooms. Among them is the acknowledgement of the role of learners' cultures (Clouet, 2005). Learners should learn how to be aware of cultural differences, accept them, and avoid stereotypes (Kramersch, 2013). This dialogue among members of different national cultures is called intercultural communication which necessitates mastering intercultural communicative competence. Teachers are becoming aware that one of the main goals of language teaching is to enable learners to communicate effectively with people from diverse cultural backgrounds. In the same vein, this article reports back a pedagogical experiment on a class of Tunisian MA business students. It was a qualitative action research intended to explore whether multicultural literature, specifically short stories, together with inquiry-based learning (IBL) can enhance their Intercultural Communicative Competence.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Over the last few years there has been a general belief that business and economics English are boring, dull and dry because of the rigid scientific nature of economics, finance and business. Therefore, a considerable research body has been carried to show the relevance of teaching literature to business students to enhance realism in the classroom (i.e. matching theory and practice) and, therefore, motivate them to be enthusiastically involved in class assignments (J. Ruder, 2010).

However, not all literature genres are applicable to business and economics studies due to students' general reluctance to read long literary works and also the limited time dedicated to language learning. Therefore, being brief, intense and ambiguous, short stories may be used as a motivating asset in teaching business concepts. Moreover, emotional and personal involvement that short stories offer can help students grasp the importance and complexity of economic issues after being distant and abstract to them (J. Ruder, 2010).

Equally necessary is the belief that teaching business English is not only transmitting infinite lists of business vocabulary, charts, diagrams and technical terms. Teachers should rather bear in mind that intercultural communicative competence may be a decisive factor in business students' future employability. They should be both knowledgeable (i.e. culture and business knowledge) and skilful (i.e. language and business skills) (Liu, 2013).

Since intercultural encounters are very rare in the Tunisian educational context, teachers should prepare and provide opportunities for encounters with other cultures through authentic materials (Le Baron-Earle, 2013; Han

& Song, 2011; Liaw, 2006; Schenker, 2012). Indeed, Dogancay-Aktuna (2005) assures that when a material is “transported from its context of origin, and presented to different learner groups, it becomes an example of an intercultural encounter” (Dogancay Aktuna, 2005: 100).

Diversity of students’ cultural backgrounds necessitates the inclusion of ICC in educational curricula. Nevertheless, students who do not belong to a diverse setting may still need openness to other cultures in order to survive future intercultural encounters (Arellano, 2011; Barletta Manjarrés, 2009; Dewey, 2007). In fact, Tunisian students are not only members of a mono-cultural educational context, but also have little chance to go abroad to acquire other cultural experiences.

Much research drew the attention to the fact that the absence of intercultural perspective constitutes a serious problem to EFL students (Barletta Manjarrés, 2009; Dogancay-Aktuna, 2005; Klein, 2004; Mohammadzadeh, 2009). However, to my knowledge little research has been made within the context of enhancing Tunisian business students’ intercultural communicative competence through multicultural short stories. Furthermore, the field of culture in English language teaching needs further contribution on the level of research.

1.2 Purpose of the Study

The general purpose of this study is to examine whether multicultural literature, precisely short stories can enhance business students’ intercultural communicative competence (ICC). More specifically, the study aims at exploring the effectiveness of the short story in motivating business students to read literature, and of inquiry-based learning (IBL) in teaching multicultural literature.

1.3 Research Questions

- 1- To what extent does the use of multicultural literature, enhance Tunisian business students’ intercultural communicative competence?
- 2- How far can the short story be a motivating material for business students to read literature?
- 3- How effective is the IBL approach in teaching multicultural literature?

2 Literature Review:

2.1 Culture

Culture is a particularly difficult term to define. According to Spencer-Oatey (2008) “culture is a fuzzy set of basic assumptions and

values, orientations to life, beliefs, policies, procedures and behavioural conventions that are shared by a group of people” (Spencer-Oatey, 2008:3).

Culture manifests itself in three fundamental layers; artefacts, values, and assumptions (Patil, 2014). Different basic assumptions can lead to different values across cultures and, consequently, to different artefacts and creations (Spencer-Oatey, 2012).

Moreover, culture is not a homogeneous entity due to intra-cultural variation (Spencer-Oatey, 2012) and is also not static because of the gradual change resulting from discovery, invention, and diffusion (Patil, 2014). Therefore, any static perspective to culture may lead to stereotypes (Gómez R, 2013).

Furthermore, the inseparability between culture and language results from the fact that language is simultaneously a product and a vehicle of culture. Indeed, without language, culture cannot be transmitted or understood. Thus, it is imperative to investigate the socio-cultural context when studying language (Patil, 2014).

By mid 1980s, the benefits of teaching culture in L2 classes were acknowledged. Nevertheless, questions like what and how culture should be taught did not emerge until the 1990s (Kitao, 2000).

Afterwards, a postmodernist perspective won the ground; both target and host cultures need to be highlighted in order to achieve cross cultural understanding (Kramsch, 2001; Patil, 2014). Therefore, culture classes play a humanizing role in the language learning process in which learners are able to draw on similarities and differences among various cultural groups (Genc & Bada, 2005).

2.2 Intercultural Communicative Competence

Intercultural communicative competence (ICC) is the concept that gave Hymes’ ‘communicative competence’ its intercultural dimension. According to Byram, Gribkova and Strakey (2002) ICC “aims to develop learners as intercultural speakers or mediators who are able to engage with complexity and multiple identities and to avoid stereotyping which accompanies perceiving someone through a single identity” (Byram, et al, 2002: 9).

The need for intercultural communicative competence comes from the “accelerated interconnectedness” (Dewey, 2007) among cultures and the necessity of communication between them (Patil, 2014). ICC requires that students acquire the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary to communicate interculturally (Parmenter, 2003).

The importance of developing ICC alongside linguistic competence has resulted from learners’ need to acquire intercultural skills for cross-cultural communication in which they may encounter linguistic and cultural barriers. That is to become interculturally as well as linguistically

competent. EFL teachers, therefore, need to shift from a traditional stance to an intercultural one in order to develop both linguistic and intercultural competences of learners (Kiet Ho, 2009).

2.3 Literature

There has been a constant rejection of the use of literature in EFL (Bobkina & Dominguez, 2014). Stern (2001) states three factors for the lack of interest in teaching literature to EFL students. These factors are: the scarcity of resources and materials, the lack of preparation in the area of literature teaching in ESL/EFL programs, and the absence of precise objectives defining the role of literature in ESL/ EFL.

Despite its complicated syntax and vocabulary (Bobkina, 2014; McKay, 2001; Savvidou, 2004), literature has several benefits to language learning (Tayebipour, 2009). According to Richards and Schmidt (2002) linguistic competence has to be complemented by communicative competence. In this respect literature offers various types of ideas to EFL learners through exposing them to authentic wide range of styles, text types and registers (Bobkina & Dominguez, 2014; Tayebipour, 2009).

Moreover, literature should be taught as one type of instructional materials not as an object of inquiry or an end in itself (Tayebipour, 2009). Thus, literature can be utilized as a motivating resource for language learning because of its authenticity, ambiguity, intimacy, and originality (Bobkina & Dominguez, 2014; Tayebipour, 2009; Van, 2009).

Most importantly, EFL learners may be accustomed with various cultural aspects of language via reading literary texts. Indeed, literature is a genuine “cultural artefact” by excellence (Bobkina & Dominguez, 2014; McKay, 2001). It is one of the codes which embody culture (Patil, 2014).

2.4 Multicultural Literature

The disagreement over how many and which cultures does multicultural literature encompass made it difficult to find a unique definition. However, according to Harris and Hodges (1995) multicultural literature mirrors the traditions, principles, and practices of people of different nationalities and races (Harris & Hodges, 1995 cited in Oswald & Atkinson Smolen, 2011). In fact, multicultural literature is not only what differs from the mainstream but it may emerge from any culture (Henderson & Young, 2011).

Multicultural writers write about their belonging to their host country while retaining the uniqueness of their heritages. They have what W.E.B. Du Bois called a “double-consciousness” and Richard Wright, “a double vision” (Arana, 2009). What unites these writers is the use of English as a medium to express thoughts and to speak about heritages and identities (Dewey, 2007). However, their use of English does not erase the influence

of their original languages (Ansary, 2009; Zepeda, 2009). Carpio (2009) drew the attention to the importance of using original languages in multicultural literature. They are important in the way they tell a lot about other cultures.

The benefits of multicultural literature are too numerous to be tackled all at once. Still, they can be summarized in one broad role. According to Nguyen (2009) multicultural literature bridges the gap between cultures toward a deeper understanding of the human and literary experiences. Consequently, through the use of multicultural literature in EFL classrooms, students learn to accept each other and one's identity. They also can reach cultural awareness and openness to diverse cultures (Arellano, 2011; M. Landt, 2006).

2.5 Short Stories

Scholars agree on specific characteristics to define the short story. M. H. Abrams and Galt Harpham (2009) state that it is a "brief work of prose fiction." It only requires "from half an hour to one or two hours in its perusal" (Poe, 1954 cited in Kirkgöz, 2012). The short story is based on a single event with only one or two characters, which creates its single effect (Kirkgöz, 2012).

The aforementioned characteristics give the short story its practicality and, therefore, suitability to ELT (Hişmanoğlu, 2013; Kirkgöz, 2012; Gómez R, 2013). By being short, brief, and concise, short stories help students to learn autonomously and independently (Hişmanoğlu, 2005; Kirkgöz, 2012; Rocha Erkaya, 2005). This is considered as one of the motivating factors that the short story offers besides its authenticity, universality, and ambiguity (Hişmanoğlu, 2005)

Similarly, short stories can be used as a tool to develop the linguistic four skills- listening, speaking, reading and writing- as well as proficiency in the three language areas- vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation (Aldersi, 2013, Kirkgöz, 2012; Pourkalhor & Kohan, 2013; Rocha Erkeya, 2005).

Most importantly, short stories can be seen as a cultural enrichment tool as they broaden the students' worldviews through exposing them to different cultures and universal experiences (Hişmanoğlu, 2005; Pourkalhor & Kohan, 2013).

2.6 Inquiry-Based Learning as a teaching approach

Inquiry-based learning (IBL) is an educational approach which, unlike traditional learning, is based on students' questions rather than teacher's lessons. As opposed to conventional instruction approaches

IBL distributes teacher-student roles and transforms learning into student-centred active and interactive learning (James et al, 2014).

According to Kuhlthau (2004), during IBL projects learners go through cognitive and affective experiences as well as actions of looking for information (Kuhlthau, 2004). Then, knowledge reached is usually presented to others (Branch & Oberg, 2004). The teacher is only responsible for modelling the inquiry strategies and scaffolding its steps. Consequently, assuming an active role enables the students to improve the quality of their learning (Branch & Oberg, 2004; James et al, 2014).

IBL is one of the constructivist approaches which rely on collaborative learning in order to reach higher cognitive development (Beheshti, et al, 2013; Branch & Oberg, 2004; James, et al, 2014). Indeed, when students collaborate in small groups to solve problems, they can reach a variety of methods and a multitude of solutions (Branch & Oberg, 2004).

Although IBL proved to be an effective instructional model, it seems uncommon in EFL classrooms. This resistance to introduce IBL stems in parents', students', and administrators' belief that lecture-based teaching methods are better (James, et al, 2014).

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

Since there is no fixed attainable goal in ICC proficiency and because there is no perfect intercultural speaker, ICC components cannot be entirely measured in a quantitative way (Byram, 1997; Karwacka-Vogele, 2012). Qualitative methods are rather advisable for the evaluation (i.e. the observation and the measurement of the effectiveness of the pedagogical intervention) and the assessment (i.e. the measurement or the description of learner's progress) of ICC proficiency. This type of research looks for people's points of view, perceptions, and understanding (Stake, 2010). It also takes verbal forms, including qualitative judgements and meaningful communicative patterns (Candlin & Hall, 2002). Therefore, data generated are primarily words not numbers. Qualitative methods may vary from class observations, portfolios and learner diaries to reflexive papers and interviews (Karwacka-Vogele, 2012).

Therefore, bearing in mind the preceding theoretical framework and didactic attitudes, I implemented a qualitative research in order to find out how a group of Tunisian business students could enhance intercultural communicative competence through multicultural literature. This was fundamentally an action research in which I examined a small group of learners and drew conclusions about that group within that precise context. Hence, what I intended to do was only to observe the results that emerged

from the implementation of my pedagogical proposition. Therefore, the ultimate goal was not to test any hypothesis or theory.

3.2 Data collection

3.2.1 Data collection instruments

To answer the research questions, I resorted to three methods of assessment of the experiment and of the intercultural communicative competence enhanced in the students.

- First, before the pedagogical intervention, I employed class observation in order to identify the extent to which students are interculturally aware. Then, after the pedagogical intervention I used class observation as an instrument for assessing the level of students' involvement and learning by means of monitoring their participation in class and their interaction with the literary selections. Field notes allow for the collection of qualitative data and the assessment of students' learning progress.
- Second, students submitted journals in which they reflected on their experience during the different phases of the course. They also reflected on the significance of these activities to promote their intercultural awareness.
- Third, at the end of the pedagogical intervention a semi-structured interview was carried out. It contained an enquiry about the intercultural knowledge acquired by students and the skills developed through the whole experience as well as their opinions about reading the short stories and learning by the inquiry-based approach.

3.2.2 Ethical Considerations

Because of the importance of ethical issues in qualitative research, participants provided informed consent. In order to guarantee privacy and anonymity no identifying information about the participants was revealed. Therefore, students were given fictitious names to protect their identities. They were also guaranteed a fair and objective analysis of the information provided.

3.3 Participants

The study involved business MA students of the Higher Institute of Technological Studies. They were 20 adults, aged 20 to 32. They developed their linguistic and grammatical competences via different courses throughout their primary, secondary and tertiary levels of education. They were never provided with authentic multicultural literature.

3.3.1 Business Students' Reluctance to Read Literature

In the first part of the semi-structured interview students were asked about their relation to reading literature. The following were their opinions. I grouped them within three categories.

- Testing as an ultimate goal

Students admitted that they are oriented towards examination and that everything they read is for the sake of success. For them, reading literature is a waste of time and a distraction from their original focus. They also attributed their lack of enthusiasm to their teachers' reluctance to include reading literature as a learning resource.

- Literary language

Others find literary works hard to understand because of their ambiguous and philosophical language. They also insist on the difficulty of vocabulary which obliges them to excessively use the dictionary in order to understand the long literary sentences.

- Modernity

Most of them affirmed that there are other more modern means of entertainment such as the internet and television. Without them, they would be bored.

3.3.2 Business Students' ICC level

Prior to reading the multicultural short stories, two activities were assigned to students.

- First, they were introduced to the theme through reading a text entitled "culture Shock" from the intermediate student's book New English File. As a title for the text, students chose either "The English have very good manners", "English people are too polite, but insincere" or "The Russians are very rude and unfriendly". I had to draw their attention to the fact that the significance of politeness and good manners vary from one culture to another. Students, therefore, need to suspend disbelief and abandon value-laden judgements about other cultures.

- During class discussions, students showed that they already know some facts about cultures. When asked: where did you know all these facts? They answered: from series, films, media and internet. However, most of the information students produced is about the visible sides of cultures; customs, rituals, practices, clothes, food, festivals and monuments. No one evoked the values and beliefs which lie behind them. Additionally, they showed little knowledge of other cultures'

communication styles and their origins. In addition, there were negative comments like “Americans are very violent” and “Mexicans are drug addict”. Through such comments students demonstrated attitudes towards other cultures. They need to change them into more positive, open and empathetic attitudes. Similarly, the students who were told to speak about Tunisian culture used phrases like “Tunisian people are very friendly”, “we have amazing customs”. Students showed evidence that they have an ethnocentric view. They need to adopt an ethno-relative one and look to other cultures through different eyes. They also need to see the limitations of living in one cultural context.

3.4 Course design

After an introductory session, two short stories (see table1.) were examined over 4 weeks. Once the stories were read, students prepared for presentations in groups with the help of teacher’s guiding questions. The presentations consisted of the different aspects of ICC in relation to business domain. In fact, the ultimate goal of the course was not to study the literary characteristics of the short stories, but to examine the different components of ICC which will be needed in the students’ professional career.

After delivering presentations, class discussions took place. Then, students submitted journals in which they reflected on the pedagogical experience. Journals were immediately written after the discussion in order to obtain the immediate impression and feedback.

Table1. Multicultural Short Stories Read in the Business English Course

Short Story	Everyday Use
Author	Alice Walker
Ethnicity	African- American
Characters/ Intercultural Themes	Dee the educated girl goes back home to visit her mother and sister in the countryside. She wants to get the quilts, symbols of African American cultural heritage. The mother has to decide who deserves the quilts; Dee or Maggie. A dilemma is set; should the quilts be preserved through everyday use or display?
Short Story	Interpreter of Maladies
Author	Jhumpa Lahiri
Ethnicity	Indian-American
Characters/ Intercultural Themes	Mr Kapasi, the Indian who has never left India served as a tourist guide for the Das, the Indian family who has never been to India. Mr Kapasi works as an interpreter of maladies, a result of Indian cultural and linguistic diversity. Differences of communication styles and gender roles in Indian and American cultures are depicted.

3.4.1 Criteria for the Selection of the Short Stories

In the selection of the multicultural short stories, I took into consideration the unequal levels of students’ English language mastery. Therefore, the two selected multicultural short stories rarely present difficult or unknown vocabulary. In fact, both of them are generally taught to pre-intermediary and intermediary levels in native speaking settings.

Students' orientation towards business studies was also a determining factor in the selection process. The themes existing in the short stories are essentially relevant to business field.

While choosing the short stories, I tried, to some extent, to respect the "desired internal outcome" described in the Handbook of Methodology for Development of Intercultural Competence. Indeed, among the intended instructional goals in developing business students' ICC is leading them to:

- "adaptability to different communication styles and behaviours; adjustment to new cultural environments
- flexibility by selecting and using appropriate communication styles and behaviours; also cognitive flexibility
- ethno-relative view
- empathy"

(The Handbook of Methodology for Development of Intercultural Competence: 22).

3.5 Data analysis

After the pedagogical intervention, I did a thematic qualitative analysis of the data gathered from the participants and class observations. Data emerged from participants' comments, class contributions and opinions of their awareness to develop ICC in business English classrooms, reading the short stories and IBL.

I analysed data according to a coding process (Patton, 2002), a technique used to identify the common issues that recur during the pedagogical experience, and categorize the themes that summarise all the views collected. The purpose of this process was to find recurrent information produced by all participants involved in the research. I used Byram's (1997) model of intercultural communicative competence- learning objectives to develop ICC (especially those which apply to FL class not to situations abroad) as a checklist through the analysis process. Then, I formulated a theme out of participants' reflections on each ICC component as well as on reading the short stories and IBL approach to teaching literature.

4 Results and Discussions:

The first research question was: to what extent does the use of multicultural literature, enhance Tunisian business students' intercultural communicative competence?

According to business students' opinions, these are the themes related to the development of ICC in business English classroom through the study of multicultural short stories. Bearing in mind that ICC has three fundamental aspects; knowledge, skill, and attitudes I formulated themes according to them. (See table 2).

4.1 Themes Related to the Aspect of Knowledge

4.1.1 Through Multicultural Literature Students Acquired Knowledge about Cultural Heritages and Culture-specific Products

Class observations which are divided into presentations and in-class discussions showed that students acquired knowledge about culture-specific products and the marking cultural heritages of ethnic groups.

In each presentation students included a description of the knowledge they attained through the literary readings. They displayed pictures of the quilt and of African American women quilting. They also provided information about the material, the procedure, and the uses of the quilt in African American community.

Similarly, during interviews students pointed out to the fact that multicultural literature opened a window for them to see the specificities of cultures such as the job of interpreter of maladies which is the result of linguistic and cultural diversity in India.

4.2 Themes Related to the Aspect of Skills

4.2.1 Through Multicultural Literature Students were Able to Discover the Mechanisms of Interaction in Cultures (Skill of Discovery and Interaction)

Students showed that they were able to read literary texts to extract useful information about cultures. Throughout Interpreter of Maladies presentations students dedicated a part in which they displayed the differences in greetings in Indian and American cultures in the short story.

During Everyday Use presentations students discovered that education plays an important role in African-American interaction. They said that being educated made Dee sophisticated and articulate. She knew how to manipulate the arguments in her favour as opposed to her uneducated sister.

Salwa wrote:

“The uneducated daughter Maggie was afraid of facing her educated articulate sister. She did not speak to her till the end of the story. Even when she spoke, she addressed her words to her mother who was uneducated too.”

In interviews students' responses were in favour of the act of discovering. They said that multicultural literature presents characters and events as they are, and it was their role to discover what the author does not overtly say. Somehow, they felt themselves active not mere passive readers.

4.2.2 Through Multicultural Literature Students were Able to Interpret the Cultural Origins behind Communication Styles: Collectivism Vs Individualism (Skill of Interpreting)

Through an internet research students were able to answer the teacher's guiding question: Why do Indians and Americans communicate differently?

They reached the conclusion that Indian and American communication styles differ because of cultural origins. Indian culture is collectivist, whereas American culture is individualist. Being collectivist, Indians like doing things, celebrating events, taking decisions and living together in communities. However, every American is valued for what he/she is. Individuals are, therefore, responsible for their own deeds and decisions.

Thus, multicultural literature enhanced students' logical interpretation of literary language by triggering their schemata and pushing them to make liaisons between what they read and what they already know.

When interviewed, one of the students extended the idea of collectivist Vs individualist communication style on the short story *Everyday Use*. She said:

“Because the three women in Everyday Use were living in an individualist society, each one of them assumed her responsibility. Maggie decided to quilt, Dee chose to be the educated arrogant woman and Mama decided to give the quilt to Maggie.”

4.2.3 Through Discussions over Multicultural Literature Students were Able to Interpret the Drawbacks of Ignoring Other Cultures' Communication Styles (Skill of Interpreting)

In their discussions, students showed that they were able to broaden the knowledge they acquired about differences of communication styles and their cultural origins. When answering the teacher's question: what if we don't know our interlocutor's communication style? a multitude of answers were given such as: “communication will break down”, “there will be a misunderstanding”, and “conflicts and hate will appear”.

I further extended the same question into “what if we don't know our interlocutor's communication style while doing business?” The following were the students' answers: “meetings will be called off”, “deals will be signed off”, “contracts will be cancelled”, “negotiations will be cut off” “business will fail”, and “companies can go bankrupt”.

4.2.4 Students Interpreted the Importance of Reinserting Cultural Heritage in the Economic Cycle (Skill of Interpreting)

During class discussions over the short story *Everyday Use* students showed the capability of interpreting suggestions to reschedule cultural heritages in the economic agenda. Most of them were inspired by the title and the main idea of the short story. They insisted on the importance of everyday use to preserve cultural heritages. Some of them provided useful ideas to reinsert the cultural heritage within the economic cycle. Amira wrote:

“Cultural heritage does not end at monuments and collections of objects. It can be alive through letting more people know about it. It can also be promoted through modernization. Nowadays, designers are using ideas from their cultural heritages in the modern outfits they design.”

When interviewed, Salwa further extended this idea on the short story *Interpreter of Maladies*. She said that Indians knew how to use their cultural heritage to promote their tourism.

4.2.5 Discussions over Multicultural Literature Helped the Students to Compare Cultural Heritages, Products and Communication Styles to those in their Culture (Skill of Relating)

Class observations showed that students were able to relate to other cultures by comparing products and communication styles in other cultures to those in their own. For instance, during *Everyday Use* presentations students managed to compare the quilt in the short story to the ‘kleem’ in the Tunisian culture. They did not only state the similarities but also the differences between both products.

During the discussion about *Interpreter of Maladies* I asked the students: “Is Tunisian communication style similar to Indian or American one?” they managed to conclude that although collectivist, Tunisians do not interact and behave identically as Indians because of differences in religions, customs and beliefs.

4.3 Themes Related to the Aspect of Attitudes

4.3.1 Students Became Open to Other Communication Styles

Class observations showed that students were able to give practical suggestions for cross cultural communication when answering my question: “How do we have to communicate with people from other cultures in business contexts?”

They gave suggestions like “we have to be open to other cultures” and “we have to learn about other cultures”.

When interviewed, Amira stretched the idea of knowing each other's culture by giving a practical suggestion to owners of companies.

I think that in order to have a successful business, companies should train their employees on how they should communicate with partners and customers from different cultures.

Ahmad pointed out to the fact that employers should select their employees according to their intercultural competence.

In job interviews employers have to test the ability of the candidates to communicate with people from other cultural backgrounds in addition to their professional competences.

4.3.2 Through Multicultural Literature Students were Able to Appreciate and Respect other People's Cultural Heritage

Class discussions over the African-American short story Everyday Use showed that students were able to decentre and admit that cultural heritages other than theirs are worth respect and appreciation. Students understood that intercultural communication is a reciprocal act.

4.4 Themes Related to Reading the Short Stories

To answer the third research question; how effective is assigning short stories in motivating students to read? These are the themes tackled.

4.4.1 The Short Stories were Easy to Read

When asked about their experience with reading the short stories, students affirmed that it did not take a long time. As its name suggests, the short story is a short genre of literature. It can be read in one sitting. This was a motivating factor for the students to continue reading.

Most of the students noticed that in addition to their brief form, the short stories contained familiar vocabulary. Thus, they did not encounter any major difficulty in understanding the language and therefore getting the morale from each short story.

Students affirmed that understanding the language helped them understand the sequencing of events, the relationships between characters and most of all the cultural elements present in the short stories.

Students confirmed that because they understood the thread of events, they felt encouraged to continue reading in order to accomplish the assignments related to the short stories. Therefore, the easiness of the vocabulary was a source of motivation and consolidation during the preparation for the presentations.

4.4.2 Reading the Short Stories was Fun and Interesting

During the interviews, students showed interest in reading the short stories. They agreed upon having fun while guessing the coming events. Indeed suspense was a motivating factor for the students to continue reading.

Similarly, students affirmed that while reading, they tried to discover the meanings hidden behind the language. This proves that the ambiguity of the literary language urges the students to look at the short stories with a critical eye. They also learnt how to produce different explanations for the same sentences.

This multitude of ideas was also observable during class discussions. Some of the students compared learning business English with multicultural short stories to a regular English business class.

Safwen said:

“We used to read short and unrelated texts and do boring activities such as fill in the gaps and circle the right option. This semester was different. We read two short stories by ourselves. I personally enjoyed reading them. It was a new and funny way of learning English.”

4.4.3 Students Related to and Identified with the Characters of the Short Stories

In interviews, students affirmed that they found common points with the characters in the short stories. They related to their lives and identified with their problems although they belong to different cultures. Finding affinities with the characters motivated them to carry on reading. Thus, seeing themselves in the learning material may be a motivating factor for the students to be more involved in the learning process.

4.5 Themes Related to Inquiry-Based Learning Approach

To answer the third research question; how effective is IBL approach in teaching multicultural literature? I classified students' opinions into two themes.

4.5.1 During Inquiry-based Tasks Students Enjoyed Learning

In the semi-structured interviews students expressed their satisfaction of the inquiry-based tasks. Most of them declared that they enjoyed working together in the classroom and outside it.

4.5.2 IBL Made Students Responsible for Their Learning

Class observations and students' opinions in interviews showed that students managed to deliver presentations in front of the whole class after going through an inquiry-based work. Most of them admitted that they were

able to discover the unsaid in the short stories with the teacher’s guidance. They stated that the help of the instructor was valuable in the sense that it showed them how to deal with information in the short stories.

However, some of them said that although the teacher’s help was valuable, they did the whole task alone. The teacher only framed their assignments in order not to feel lost with too much information.

Furthermore, learners stressed the importance of distributing roles in order to accomplish the inquiry-based tasks. As a result, everyone contributed to the success of their work. At last students expressed pride of what they produced and some of them felt responsible for informing their classmates.

Table2. Themes that Emerged From Data Analysis

Knowledge	Through multicultural literature students acquired knowledge about cultural heritages and culture-specific products.	
Skills	Skill of discovery and interaction	Through multicultural literature students were able to discover the mechanisms of interaction in cultures.
	Skill of interpreting and relating	Through multicultural literature students were able to interpret the cultural origins behind communication styles (i.e. collectivism Vs individualism) (skill of interpreting)
		Through discussions over multicultural literature students were able to interpret the drawbacks of ignoring other cultures’ communication styles (skill of interpreting)
		Through discussions over multicultural literature students interpreted the possibility of reinserting cultural heritage in the economic cycle (skill of interpreting)
		Discussions over multicultural literature helped students to compare cultural heritages, products and communication styles to those in their culture (skill of relating)
Attitudes	Students were able to be open to other communication styles.	
	Through multicultural literature students were able to appreciate and respect other people’s cultural heritage.	
The short stories	The short stories were easy to read.	
	Reading the short stories was fun and interesting.	
	Students related to and identified with the characters	
Inquiry-based Learning (IBL)	During inquiry-based tasks students enjoyed learning	
	IBL made students responsible for their learning	

Conclusion

Under the light of our qualitative results, we conclude that multicultural literature may be a resource to help students develop intercultural communicative competence. The findings support our initial idea that the use of multicultural literature in a business English classroom can enrich

students' intercultural communicative competence. Indeed, focus on the three fundamental aspects of ICC when dealing with multicultural short stories may be a systematic and planned guideline for the teacher. By exploring, then exploiting the cultural elements in relevance to business, instructors may provide students with a rich motivating learning material.

This qualitative research has also validated the rationale of using multicultural short stories as a motivating instrument for students to read literature. The results achieved from students' views and class observations demonstrated that they developed into critical readers. They went beyond reading literature to interpreting and discussing it with a critical stance. This supports the theory of combining the three aspects of ICC in order to establish critical cultural awareness (Byram, 1997). Furthermore, the familiarity of vocabulary in the short stories may turn students into independent readers and therefore into autonomous learners. This statement is already evoked in the literature review.

Similarly, engaging students in inquiry-based learning makes them feel responsible for their own learning process. They interact, disagree and ultimately settle their conflicts for the sake of their group. In IBL students go through an emotional and cognitive journey towards growth and maturity. Eventually they become owners of their learning process.

Limitations

5.2.1 Limitations in Relation to Reading the Short Stories

Not having the habit of reading literary selections, students showed a difficulty in sitting to read the short stories. However, most of them confirmed that once they read the first pages, they were eager to finish the story. In fact, this eagerness to know what comes next motivated them to read literature.

Although carefully selected, the short stories presented some unfamiliar vocabulary. Students admitted that while reading, they resorted several times to the dictionary. However, this did not hinder their overall understanding of the stories. It was a challenge for them to understand a language which is slightly beyond their level.

Moreover, some of the cultural elements depicted in the short stories such as the quilt, the butter churn and the interpreter of maladies did not trigger familiar representations in the students' schemata because of the absence of these elements in the Tunisian culture. However, drawing their attention to similar known components helped them interiorize new knowledge.

5.2.2 Limitations in Relation to IBL

Coming from various universities, students did not previously know each other. At the beginning, it was hard for them to cooperate. However, most of them affirmed that they managed to collaborate, and the preparation for the presentation was an opportunity for them to be acquainted with each other.

Furthermore, students acknowledged that several conflicts and disagreements emerged while preparing for the presentations. This was caused by the presence of more than one strong leading student within the same group. However, none of these conflicts appeared during class presentations. Students knew how to settle their conflicts for the sake of the whole group.

5.3 Recommendations

5.3.1 Policy recommendations

- (i) More attention should be paid to culture and its importance in business field. However, language teachers should not be teaching facts about other cultures but equipping students with a life-long competence that enables them to cope with multicultural situations in their future career.
- (ii) The planning and the implementation of intercultural communicative competence in business English classrooms need serious attention from all stakeholders. Therefore, translating the components of ICC into practical familiar pedagogical steps can be useful to facilitate the implementation of ICC.
- (iii) Since teachers are the first intercultural mediators and are responsible for making their students culturally aware, a special training of teachers and pre-service teachers may facilitate the implementation of ICC in various curricula.
- (iv) The implementation of practical assessment methods and clear cut examination guidelines is seriously needed to evaluate students ICC level.

5.3.1 Recommendations for Research

- (i) Further research on more modern and up-to-date techniques to enhance business students' ICC is suggested.
- (ii) The absence of efficient methods to assess ICC for educational purposes such as examinations and certification urges for further research.
- (iii) Since a special training in ICC is imperative to prepare teachers for more mature pedagogical decisions, further research on effective methods to enhance teacher trainees' ICC is recommended.

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