37.091.3:811.111
316.644-057.875:316.71]:640.4
https://doi.org/10.18485/zivjez.2024.44.1.8
Original scientific article
Received 14/06/2024
Accepted 20/10/2024

Jovana Nikolić
Academy of Applied Studies
College of Hotel Management

TEACHING CULTURE AND ICC IN ESP IN THE CONTEXT OF THE HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY – STUDENTS' PERSPECTIVE

This paper aims to explore the attitudes of hospitality industry students towards the significance of cultural elements and Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC). It also examines the necessity of incorporating cultural elements into the English for Specific Purposes (ESP) curriculum and assesses the intercultural sensitivity of the students of the College of Hotel Management in Belgrade. ICC is crucial for effective business communication in the hospitality sector. Therefore, the research seeks to enhance the ESP curriculum by considering students' attitudes and needs related to ICC in a business setting. The survey results indicate that students are interested in integrating cultural elements into ESP courses and recognize the importance of intercultural aspects. Additionally, they tend to adopt an ethnorelativistic perspective towards other cultures. Improving the curriculum to emphasize intercultural competence can better prepare students for the challenges they will face in their future careers.

Keywords: ICC, ESP, hospitality industry, intercultural sensitivity

* Akademija strukovnih studija Beograd, Bulevar Zorana Đinđića 152A;
jovananikolic.va@gmail.com

1. Introduction

The hospitality and tourism industries constitute economic sectors that are fundamentally intercultural. Often described as a "people industry" (Kim and Spears 2022: 304), these sectors involve services provided by individuals (i.e., employees) to other individuals (i.e., customers) (Piasta 2007: 326, as cited in Grobelna 2015: 104). This highlights the essential role of communication in the hospitality industry and the overall success of hospitality enterprises. Studies show that communication is a critical component of managerial roles, with managers dedicating approximately 80% of their working hours to interactions with guests, superiors, and subordinates (Grobelna 2015: 106).

The hospitality and tourism industries have long been acknowledged for their inherent cultural diversity (Lee-Ross and Pryce 2010: 190). Effective management within the hospitality sector necessitates the implementation of flexible and inclusive management approaches. These approaches are crucial for ensuring employee satisfaction and fostering harmonious relationships among employees from diverse cultural backgrounds, as well as with guests.

Despite the emphasis on interculturality across various disciplines, Taylor and McArthur's (2013: 13) study indicates that students training to become hospitality managers frequently exhibit insufficient knowledge of cultural differences, including customs and cuisine. Considering the importance of intercultural competence in this industry, it is essential to address English for Specific Purposes (ESP) within the hospitality sector from an intercultural perspective. This approach should equip students with pertinent cultural knowledge, enabling them to navigate unfamiliar environments effectively and enhance their intercultural competence.

Despite the increasing interest in the concept of interculturality and the recognized importance of the connection between language and culture (Kramsch 1993; Byram 1997; Deardorff (2006), English for Specific Purposes (ESP) teaching has traditionally been perceived as lacking cultural input. Incorporating cultural elements into ESP courses is deemed essential to adequately prepare students for contemporary business environments, particularly in fields such as the hospitality industry, where intercultural encounters are frequent.

Accordingly, the objective of this study is to ascertain whether students in the hospitality industry regard culture and intercultural competence as critical to their future professions and believe these elements should be integrated into the ESP curriculum. Furthermore, the study aims to examine students' intercultural sensitivity from their own perspectives and to explore their understanding of the concepts of culture and cultural differences in general.

2. Culture and Intercultural Competence (ICC) in English for Specific Purposes (ESP)

Culture is a complex and multifaceted concept that various disciplines have attempted to define. Williams (1984: 87) describes it as "one of the three most complicated words in the English language." Among the numerous definitions and classifications, culture can be understood as a part of the human-created environment, encompassing both material and subjective aspects (Triandis 2002: 3). Material culture includes tangible elements such as food, clothing, and tools, while subjective culture pertains to the way a specific community experiences its social environment. Additionally, Martyn Barrett (2013: 149–150) identifies a further category of culture, termed social culture. This category encompasses shared knowledge, beliefs, common memories, identities, attitudes, values, and practices that provide a collective framework through which a group connects with and comprehends the world.

Avramović (2008: 22) points out that cultural identity, which represents a form of collective and individual consciousness, behavior, and feelings of members of a particular community, manifests in three forms: the everyday, which includes food, housing, entertainment, clothing, etc.; the creative, which pertains to art and science; and the historical-political, which encompasses religion and power. The feeling of belonging to a particular community, as well as the awareness of differences, is shaped by religion, which plays a significant role in connecting members of a community (Avramović 2008: 65).

In the context of service industries such as the hospitality industry, for example, the religious aspect of an individual can shape the gastronomic offer of a hotel, which is why it is important to recognize and respect this part of the guest's identity.

Šušnjić (2015: 202) emphasizes that culture as a whole has been dialogical since its inception: "A person converses with themselves, with God, with nature, with other people, with powerful ancestors, with foreign cultures... Conversation is a live/ly play of questions and answers." Through prayer, historical research, scientific inquiry, and so on, a person arrives at new insights as well as new questions. Therefore, communication, language, and culture intertwine on a deep and profoundly complex, inseparable level.

The complex conceptualization of culture evokes the well-known iceberg metaphor, indicating that much of culture is hidden beneath the surface, revealing its inherent depth and complexity. Contemporary interpretations of culture, influenced by postmodern and poststructuralist theories, advocate for a non-essen-

tialist perspective. This perspective views culture as a heterogeneous and fluid entity that transcends national and ethnic boundaries. Non-essentialist views perceive culture as a multifaceted social force with characteristics that are difficult to define and distinguish. Cultures are dynamic and constantly interacting, and individuals may simultaneously belong to multiple cultures. Moreover, culture is intricately linked to discourse and can pertain to groups of any size (Holliday, Hyde and Kullman 2004: 4–5).

Given the complexity of culture, it is crucial to carefully and meaningfully focus on advancing students' intercultural competence skills within the context of ESP. ESP emphasizes target terminology and the development of communicative competence, typically through task-based activities and collaborative work. In the context of ESP teaching, one of the most important steps in course planning is to validate students' needs regarding the specific skills necessary for their future careers, with intercultural communicative competence (ICC) being one of them. Therefore, language educators should consider students' perspectives on language courses and specific aspects, such as the integration of cultural elements and the promotion of intercultural competence within the classroom.

Intercultural competence involves the ability to interact effectively with people from different cultures. It is "the appropriate and effective management of interaction between people who, to some degree or another, represent different or divergent affective, cognitive, and behavioral orientations to the world" (Spitzberg and Chagnon 2009: 7).

Numerous models aim to assess intercultural communicative competence (ICC). In an effort to systematize this complex topic and establish a common normative definition, Darla Deardorff (2006: 247) conducted research that provides a consensus definition of ICC as "communication and behavior that is both effective and appropriate when interacting across differences." This intricate competence enables individuals to employ various strategies in intercultural exchanges, respecting cultural differences while maintaining an awareness of their own cultural background.

Through cultural exchange during the interaction of individuals from different cultural backgrounds, a specific space is created, where equality among participants and mutual understanding is facilitated. In the context of the classroom, the goal is to create this specific space, a kind of "third place" (Kramsch 1993) where linguistic and intercultural learning takes place. It is located "between and beyond the social order of their native culture and that of the target culture" (Kramsch 1993: 238). In this space, new subjective perspectives on culture, belonging,

and the world around us are created. The third place emerges from a dialogical process, during which the student creates their own meanings "that grow at the interstices between the cultures the learner grew up with and the cultures he or she is being introduced to" (Kramsch 1993: 236). For each and every student, this dynamic place that constantly changes "will be differently located, and will make different sense out at different times" (Kramsch 1999: 257). As House (2007: 19) exemplifies, "the intercultural speaker is the person who has managed to develop his or her own third way, in between the other cultures he or she is familiar with" and "who knows and can perform in both his and her native culture and in another one acquired at some later date."

Intercultural communicative competence (ICC) is created through interaction and relationships with others. Concurrently, students should strive towards ethnorelativism, a phase in the development of intercultural sensitivity. According to Hammer, Bennett and Wiseman (2003), the *Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity* delineates the stages individuals undergo in accepting other cultures. This progression moves from the stage of denying the existence of cultural differences (ethnocentrism) to recognizing and accepting these differences (ethnorelativism). Ideally, one reaches the integration phase within ethnorelativism, the final stage, where an individual has adopted multiple worldviews and can fluidly navigate different cultural perspectives (Hammer, Bennett and Wiseman 2003: 425). Before reaching the phase of integration, an individual goes through the phases of acceptance and adaptation within the scope of ethnorelativism. The former represents a phase in which people are willing to perceive others as different yet equally respected. However, it is important to emphasize that acceptance of differences is not the same as agreement with cultural differences. Certain differences may still be perceived as negative or undesirable. The latter (i.e., adaption) implies that the individual is willing to take on the perspective of the Other with empathy. Finally, the phase of integration allows for a profound understanding of cultural differences (Hammer, Bennett, and Wiseman 2003: 424–425).

In the context of intercultural education, creating conditions for comparing and contrasting cultures with mandatory reflection is crucial. Understanding culture at a deeper level is essential, moving beyond surface-level elements. However, research on cultural elements, ICC, and related concepts in the context of ESP in the hospitality industry is still limited, despite the necessity of studying and developing ICC in ESP classes due to contemporary needs.

3. Methodology

The participants of the study were students from the College of Hotel Management in Belgrade. A two-part questionnaire was administered to investigate their perception of the importance of intercultural competence (ICC) for their careers and whether they consider ICC an important part of the ESP curriculum. The first part of the questionnaire covered demographic information and the participants' background in English language learning and usage, such as years of study and opportunities to speak English daily. The second part assessed students' perceptions of ICC and intercultural sensitivity using a Likert scale. Students expressed their opinions on various statements from 1 (I do not agree at all) to 5 (I completely agree). Descriptive statistics was used to analyze the students' responses.

4. Results and Discussion

The sample consists of 99 students, including 56 male participants and 43 female participants. The respondents are students of the College of Hotel Management, with 77 first-year students and 22 second-year students. The average age of the students is 20.02 years.

Regarding the number of years that they have spent learning English, the majority of respondents (67) have been learning English for longer than 10 years; 27 respondents reported learning English for between 5 and 10 years, while only 5 respondents have been learning English for less than 5 years. The questionnaire demonstrated acceptable reliability with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.712.

Based on the data obtained through descriptive statistics, it could be concluded that students consider intercultural communicative competence (ICC) to be an important and necessary skill for their chosen career and that it should be addressed in classes through cultural elements. Jhaiyanuntana and Singhanat (2020: 229) and Yang et al. (2015: 108) reached comparable findings, highlighting participants' favorable perspectives on ICC.

This emphasizes the significance of intercultural communicative competence (ICC) within the hospitality industry and its integration into ESP classes, showing the need for more comprehensive and in-depth research on this pertinent yet currently underexplored subject. Based on the questionnaire, it could be concluded that there is an indication of awareness among students regarding the importance of ICC in this sector, as well as in the ESP curriculum. Moreover, only 3% of respondents believe that the introduction of cultural elements is unnecessary,

while 4% find it somewhat useful. The majority of respondents consider the introduction of cultural elements in ESP to be useful (49.5%), significant (27.3%), and extremely significant (16.2%), which further implies the recognition of the importance of ICC by hospitality students (Table 1).

Table 1. The Necessity of Introducing Cultural Elements into ESP Classes

	Frequency	Percent	Mean	Std. Deviation
Unnecessary	3	3.0	3.49	.919
Slightly necessary	4	4.0		
Necessary	49	49.5		
Very necessary	27	27.3		
Extremely necessary	16	16.2		

As shown in Table 2, besides the belief that the aspect of culture should be covered in class, the importance of ICC for students of the College of Hotel Management is especially reflected in the statements: (1) "It is extremely important for hospitality managers and hospitality professionals in general to respect the cultures of other nations," which has a mean value of 4.48, and (2) "It is very important for hospitality students to study the culture of the language they are learning to ensure successful communication in intercultural (business) contacts" with a mean value of 4.37.

Similarly, Yang et al. (2015: 108) concluded in their study that respondents in the hospitality field are aware of the significance of ICC, with a mean value of 6.58.

The item from Table 2, "Comparing other cultures with my own helps me realize that there are differences that teach us to be more tolerant," with a mean of 4.06, suggests that students have the capacity to respect other cultures by recognizing and accepting differences.

Yang et al. (2015: 108) reached a similar conclusion in their research, finding that the statement "understanding other cultures helps understand one's own better" (M= 4.123) indicates that students develop respect for other cultures as well as their own. This view relies on the belief that the process of reflection is of the utmost importance for individuals in order to compare cultures thoroughly. Namely, in order for students to develop awareness of intercultural issues, they must acquire knowledge of the target culture and target language community and

then reflect this knowledge onto their own culture for comparison (McKay 2002: 83). Students should reflect on their own culture in addition to reflecting on other cultures (Byram 1995: 272). By doing so, students gain diverse perspectives that enhance their understanding and appreciation of each culture, along with their differences and similarities.

The items stated in Table 2, "I can notice differences between my culture and the target culture," and the somewhat more complex item, "I can notice both good and bad aspects of my culture and the target culture," which relativizes ethnocentrism and nationalism by highlighting both the good and bad aspects of the target and native cultures, also indicate students' intercultural awareness, since the results might be interpreted as the students being aware that there are no superior or inferior cultures. These positive answers might correspond to the phase called *Minimization* from the abovementioned *Inventory*, which involves the belief that cultures are similar and universal. A person acknowledges the existence of cultural differences but also accepts the fact that, fundamentally, all people are the same (Hammer, Bennett and Wiseman 2003: 424–425). Although this phase still belongs to the spectrum of ethnocentrism, it is a great transition towards a deeper appreciation of differences, which could be found in ethnorelativistic phases. Another item that also indicates that students do appreciate different cultures and do not feel superior or inferior in relation to them is the item "I can learn a lot from members of other cultures" as well as "cultural differences are acceptable and normal". These statements indicate that there might be respect for others and appreciation towards cultural differences. It could be concluded that students have demonstrated intercultural sensitivity based on their self-assessment. Furthermore, items indicating ethnocentrism have a lower mean compared to the items that promote ethnorelativism and tolerance. It is especially seen in items such as "I feel superior in the company of people from other cultures" and "I don't feel comfortable in the company of people from other cultures," with the lowest means of 2.28 and 1.81, respectively.

However, it is interesting that the mediation skill was rated as underdeveloped, with a mean of 2.48. The reason for this may be seen in the belief that the students have not sufficiently developed this skill, or there might be a lack of understanding of the concept itself.

Table 2. Significant ICC Items

Item	Mean	Std. Deviation
It is extremely important for hospitality managers and hospitality professionals in general to respect the cultures of other nations	4.48	.747
It is very important for hospitality students to study the culture of the language they are learning to ensure successful communication in intercultural (business) contacts	4.37	.708
I can learn a lot from members of other cultures	4.30	.721
Cultural differences are acceptable and normal	4.29	.918
I can notice differences between my culture and the target culture	4.28	.783
I can notice both good and bad aspects of my culture and the target culture	4.09	.784
Comparing other cultures with my own helps me realize that there are differences that teach us to be more tolerant	4.06	.913
I prefer cultural content over grammar and vocabulary	3.73	1.067
Often when I talk to someone from another culture, I feel like a mediator	2.48	1.014
I feel superior in the company of people from other cultures	2.28	1.213
I don't feel comfortable in the company of people from other cultures	1.81	1.037

Furthermore, cultural elements can be considered motivating in acquiring the necessary skills, as well as grammatical and linguistic aspects. Namely, "… the cultural context is expected to shape motivation (i.e., cultural specificity). Values and beliefs shared by a cultural group will affect students' motivation to learn and educational outcomes" (Maehr and Nicholls 1980, as cited in Guay 2016: 157). In this regard, the item "I prefer cultural content over grammar and vocabulary" (Table 3) may indicate its interesting and stimulating nature and the curiosity it arouses in students. Essential factors in developing intercultural competence should include openness, respect for diversity, curiosity, and discovery. Only 2% of students completely disagree with the aforementioned statement, 10.1% disagree, 31.3% are undecided, while 26.3% agree and 30.3% completely agree (Table 3). However, this does not mean that students find the lexical and grammatical aspects to be unnecessary, but culture just might be associated with more interesting and stimulating content. Lexical and grammatical skills, on the one hand, and intercultural skills, on the other, are equally important. They are inseparable since culture is not considered simply a fifth skill. On the contrary, it is ever present in language teaching (Kramsh 1993: 1).

Table 3. Preference for Cultural Context over Grammar and Vocabulary

	Frequency	Percent	Mean	Std. Deviation
I strongly disagree	2	2.0	3.73	1.067
I disagree	10	10.1		
I'm not sure	31	31.3		
I agree	26	26.3		
I strongly agree	30	30.3		

The data obtained from the t-test (Table 4) of independent samples indicate that, at the overall test level, there are no significant differences between the genders of the respondents. However, a significant difference between genders is observed in the item "I can learn a lot from members of another culture" in favor of the female respondents (M = 4.53, SD = 0.550, p = 0.003), as well as in the item "Comparing other cultures with my own helps me realize that there are differences that teach us to be more tolerant," also in favor of women (M = 4.28, SD = 0.882, p = 0.36), as could be seen in both Table 4 and Table 5. Eta squared for both items is 0.08, which indicates a small effect.

Table 4. T-test of Independent Samples – Gender Differences and Intercultural Sensitivity

Item	Gender	F	Sig.	T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% confidence of the difference	
									Lower	Upper
"Comparing other cultures with my own helps me realize that there are differences that teach us to be more tolerant."	M F	.481	.490	-2.124 -2.132	97 91.784	.036 .036	-386 -386	.182 .181	-747 -746	-0.25 -0.26
"I can learn a lot from members of another culture."	M F	1.977	.163	-2.910	97	.004 .003	-410 -410	.141 .135	-689 -677	-130 -143

Table 5. Gender Differences and Intercultural Sensitivity

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
"Comparing other cultures with my own helps me realize that there are differences that teach us to be more tolerant."	M F	56 43	3.89 4.28	.908 .882	.121 .134
"I can learn a lot from members of another culture."	M F	56 43	4.13 4.53	.788 .550	.105 .084

Despite the small effect, the abovementioned items might be seen from the perspective of empathy. Certain research indicates that women are more empathetic than men (Hoffman 1977; Eisenberg and Lennon 1983; Davis 1983). Namely, reflection on emotions and emotions of others is one of the key aspects of intercultural competence, which could be understood as "the ability to put yourself into someone else's shoes, see the world the way they see it, and give it the meaning they give it based on the shared human experience" (Kramsch and Zhu 2016: 42). If a person is ready to learn from members of other cultures it means they are open towards newness and are ready for some reflection. Furthermore, understanding other people's emotions might influence higher tolerance in individuals.

5. Conclusion and Limitations

It could be said that communication implies "the transition from the individual to the collective" and represents "the central phenomenon of culture," while language in connection with culture could be interpreted as the "identity of a particular cultural group" (Šušnjić 2015: 144–145), since human language is a unique system of symbols that the members of a given culture adopt through the process of learning, which influences both culture and the process of thinking (Bojović 2020: 144). In order to better understand the thinking process of a given community and thereby avoid misunderstandings, conflicts, and disagreements, it is important, in the context of foreign language classes, to first familiarize students with the complexity of culture. In today's world, interculturality is unavoidable, making it crucial to incorporate this aspect into education. This concept refers to the interaction of cultures where equality is maintained, allowing each culture to retain its uniqueness while coexisting (Šušnjić 2015: 444), which represents a crucial factor in promoting tolerance and mutual understanding among individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds.

The study investigates the perceptions of hospitality industry students regarding intercultural communicative competence (ICC). The findings indicate that students consider cultural elements crucial both for their future profession and

as integral content in ESP classrooms. Moreover, hospitality students exhibit a heightened level of intercultural sensitivity, as indicated by the self-assessment questionnaire, suggesting a need for ICC to be actively cultivated through the incorporation of cultural content in ESP courses.

The limitation of this research lies in the subjective nature of assessing intercultural competence solely through students' self-reports. To gain a more comprehensive understanding of students' attitudes and perceptions, future studies could expand by incorporating interviews to delve deeper into their viewpoints on ICC-related topics. Nonetheless, this study serves as a foundational step for further research, addressing a notable gap particularly in the context of Serbia and contributing to the broader discourse on ICC in educational settings.

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Jovana Nikolić

PODUČAVANJE KULTURE I IKK U NASTAVI ENGLESKOG ZA POSEBNE NAMENE U KONTEKSTU UGOSTITELJSTVA IZ PERSPEKTIVE STUDENATA

Sažetak

Rad ima za cilj da ispita stavove studenata ugostiteljstva o značaju elemenata kulture i interkulturne komunikativne kompetencije (IKK). Takođe ispituje potrebu za uključivanjem kulturnih elemenata u nastavu Engleskog jezika za posebne namene (ESP) i procenjuje interkulturnu osetljivost studenata odseka Visoka hotelijerska škola u Beogradu. IKK je ključna za efikasnu poslovnu komunikaciju u sektoru ugostiteljstva. Stoga ovo istraživanje teži unapređenju nastavnog plana i programa Engleskog jezika za posebne namene uzimajući u obzir stavove i potrebe studenata u vezi sa IKK u poslovnom okruženju. Rezultati ankete pokazuju da su studenti zainteresovani za uvođenje elemenata kulture u ESP nastavu i prepoznaju važnost interkulturnih aspekata. Takođe, pokazuju sklonost studenata ka etnorelativističkom pogledu na druge kulture. Unapređenje kurikuluma aspektima interkulturne kompetencije može uticati na podrobniju pripremu studenata za izazove sa kojima će se suočavati u svom budućem zanimanju.

Ključne reči: IKK, ESP, ugostiteljstvo , interkulturna osetljivost