

**The Role of Sociocultural Factors in Second Language Acquisition: From the Perspective of Developing Intercultural Communicative Competence in Pre-Service English Teachers**

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**Abstract**

This article analyzes sociocultural factors influencing the process of second language acquisition from the perspective of shaping intercultural communicative competence in pre-service English teachers. In particular, it addresses the interrelationship between language and culture, the formation of stereotypes and attitudes, the acculturation process, culture shock, social distance, and mechanisms for developing intercultural competence in classroom settings. Drawing on the theoretical frameworks of Gardner and Lambert (1972), Schumann (1978), Acton (1979), Brown (2000), and Hofstede (2011), the article argues that the integration of affective and cognitive processes constitutes a crucial condition for successful foreign language learning. The findings highlight the necessity of systematically incorporating an intercultural approach into teacher education programs for future English teachers.

**Keywords:** second language acquisition, sociocultural factors, acculturation, culture shock, social distance, stereotypes, language and culture, motivation, intercultural communicative competence, pre-service English teachers.

**Introduction**

The contemporary paradigm of foreign language education is no longer confined to the development of linguistic competence alone; rather, it places the cultivation of intercultural communicative competence (ICC) in pre-service English teachers at the center of instructional priorities (Byram, 1997; Deardorff, 2006). Teachers are expected not only to transmit linguistic knowledge but also to function as mediators between representatives of different cultures.

For this reason, in-depth analysis of sociocultural factors in second language acquisition plays a significant methodological role in the professional preparation of future English teachers. The aim of this article is to examine key sociocultural mechanisms affecting second language learning and to elucidate their practical implications for teacher education.

### **1. The Inseparable Relationship Between Language and Culture**

Language and culture are intrinsically interconnected social phenomena that shape individuals' perceptions of the world, evaluative judgments, and communicative strategies (Kramsch, 1993). Acquiring a second language frequently entails engagement with a second culture and adaptation to it, which brings about transformations in learners' cognitive schemata and affective dispositions (Brown, 2000). For pre-service English teachers, this dimension is particularly salient, as they must develop into intercultural mediators capable of explaining not only linguistic forms but also their cultural meanings (Byram, 1997).

### **2. The Impact of Stereotypes and Attitudes**

In intercultural communication, stereotypes constitute one of the psychological factors that can impede communicative success. Overgeneralized representations restrict empathy and flexibility in interaction (Kramsch, 1993).

Gardner and Lambert's integrative motivation model demonstrates that positive attitudes toward the target language community are a crucial prerequisite for successful language learning (Gardner & Lambert, 1972). Studies by Oller and colleagues further confirm that affective variables exert a substantial influence on language proficiency (Oller et al., 1977). In preparing future English teachers, reflective tasks aimed at critically examining stereotypes may therefore serve as an important pedagogical tool.

### **3. Acquiring a Second Culture: Acculturation and Culture Shock**

Acculturation refers to the process through which individuals adapt to a new cultural environment (Schumann, 1978). Researchers note that this process typically unfolds through stages of euphoria, culture shock, recovery, and adjustment (Brown, 2000). The state of anomie described by Lambert reflects situations in which learners feel suspended between two cultures (Lambert, 1974). By understanding these dynamics, pre-service English teachers become better equipped to manage learners' affective difficulties in pedagogically appropriate ways.

### **4. Social Distance and the Optimal Distance Model**

Schumann's social distance model posits that psychological proximity between two cultures directly affects the efficiency of second language acquisition (Schumann, 1978). Acton's concept of perceived social distance suggests that learners' interpretations of cultural differences may be more influential than objective disparities (Acton, 1979). Brown's optimal distance model further maintains that deep second

language acquisition occurs when learners reach a balance between affective tension and adaptation during acculturation (Brown, 2000). Together, these models provide a theoretical foundation for developing pedagogical approaches in teacher education that take sociopsychological processes into account.

### **5. Developing Intercultural Competence in the Classroom**

An intercultural approach to language education entails the use of role plays, problem-based tasks, simulations, authentic materials, video analysis, and reflective journals (Byram, 1997; Deardorff, 2006). Such techniques foster empathy, tolerance, and intercultural sensitivity in pre-service English teachers.

Hofstede's cultural dimensions—individualism—collectivism, power distance, uncertainty avoidance, and gender roles—serve as valuable methodological tools for anticipating and preventing communicative conflicts in classroom contexts (Hofstede et al., 2011).

### **Conclusion**

The analysis demonstrates that second language acquisition is closely intertwined with complex sociocultural adaptation mechanisms, the consideration of which is decisive for developing the professional competence of pre-service English teachers. While stereotypes and negative attitudes tend to undermine motivation, a positive affective environment and rich intercultural experiences accelerate language learning. Consequently, awareness of acculturation stages, the cultivation of optimal social distance, and the deliberate development of intercultural communicative competence in classroom practice should form an integral component of teacher education programs.

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