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DEVELOPING INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE IN TOURISM STUDENTS ALONGSIDE LANGUAGE LEARNING

Abstract. *This paper explores the development of intercultural competence in tourism students alongside language learning, emphasizing its critical role in preparing students for the global tourism industry. Drawing from Byram's framework of intercultural communicative competence and Deardorff's assessment models, the study highlights the integration of language and culture in educational settings. It also analyzes the contributions of intercultural education programs, showing how they enhance students' cultural sensitivity and communication skills. The findings demonstrate the necessity of fostering intercultural awareness and competence to improve students' professional adaptability in diverse cultural environments.*

Keywords: *intercultural competence, tourism education, language learning, intercultural communication, cultural sensitivity, global tourism.*

Introduction

In the globalized world of tourism, intercultural competence is increasingly recognized as a vital skill for professionals interacting in multicultural settings [2, p. 45]. This competence, defined as the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately across cultures, plays a pivotal role in ensuring that tourism professionals can meet the diverse needs of international clients [10, p. 123]. The tourism industry inherently involves the interaction of people from different cultural backgrounds, whether in hospitality, travel services, or guiding roles. As a result, intercultural competence enables these professionals to offer personalized, respectful services that foster positive cultural exchanges and create memorable experiences for travelers [4, p. 78].

The Importance of Intercultural Competence in Tourism

Tourism, by nature, is one of the most globally connected industries. The interaction between individuals from different cultures is inevitable, making intercultural competence essential for those working in the sector. Successful tourism professionals are those who can navigate the complexities of cultural differences, helping create environments where all tourists feel welcomed and respected, regardless of their cultural background.

Intercultural competence goes beyond mere tolerance of differences; it requires an active understanding and appreciation of different cultural values, practices, and communication styles.

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This is particularly significant for professionals in frontline roles, such as hotel staff, tour guides, and travel agents, who need to respond sensitively to the expectations and preferences of international tourists [12, p. 49]. For example, understanding a client's cultural background can influence everything from addressing them appropriately, respecting their dietary restrictions, or even adjusting itineraries to reflect cultural values such as time orientation or religious practices [13, p. 218].

Moreover, as the tourism sector continues to grow, destinations are hosting more diverse groups of travelers than ever before. This growing diversity requires tourism professionals to continuously adapt and expand their intercultural competence to effectively engage with tourists from regions they may not have previously encountered. These interactions go beyond just knowing facts about a tourist's country of origin; they require a deeper understanding of behaviors and communication styles that stem from culture. As various studies in tourism education have shown, intercultural competence can significantly impact customer satisfaction, with tourists reporting higher levels of satisfaction when they feel culturally understood and respected [5, p. 7].

Intercultural Competence and its Role in Crisis Management

Another critical dimension of intercultural competence in tourism is its role in conflict resolution and crisis management. Given the high-pressure and fast-paced nature of tourism work, misunderstandings between staff and tourists can arise due to cultural differences in expectations or communication styles. Research shows that tourism professionals who possess high levels of intercultural competence are better equipped to de-escalate conflicts, often resolving issues before they escalate into larger problems [14, p. 305]. For example, in cultures that prioritize indirect communication, tourists may not express dissatisfaction overtly. A culturally competent staff member can recognize subtle cues of discontent and address concerns proactively, creating a smoother customer experience.

This skill becomes even more important during global crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, where travel restrictions, health regulations, and quarantine measures varied greatly from one country to another. Tourism professionals had to navigate a landscape where tourists often felt anxious or confused about safety protocols. Those with intercultural competence were more likely to understand and empathize with their guests' concerns, ensuring that travelers felt safe and respected [16, p. 12]. This human-centered approach to crisis management demonstrates how intercultural competence is not only beneficial but necessary for tourism professionals, particularly in uncertain or challenging times.

Language Learning as a Tool for Developing Intercultural Competence

Language learning is a key tool in developing intercultural competence [5, p. 5]. The ability to communicate in another language provides not only a means of interaction but also a window into the culture associated with the language. Effective communication with tourists from different linguistic backgrounds requires more than just vocabulary or grammar skills; it requires an understanding of cultural nuances, context, and values [1, p. 15]. By mastering foreign languages, students in tourism education programs are better equipped to navigate these cultural differences, thereby enhancing both their professional capabilities and the overall quality of the service they provide [7, p. 160].

Language acquisition, therefore, acts as both a practical and symbolic gateway to deeper intercultural competence. Practical language skills enable tourism professionals to serve clients from around the world, while language learning provides students with opportunities to engage with the cultural dimensions of communication. This dynamic is especially important for tourism

students, as they will encounter diverse linguistic and cultural contexts throughout their careers [18, p. 23].

Cultural awareness, paired with language proficiency, enables students to communicate more effectively in their professional roles. This is crucial in tourism, where the stakes of cultural misunderstanding can be high, and where appropriate communication can have a direct impact on customer satisfaction and even retention. For example, a basic knowledge of a client's language not only enables smoother transactions but also builds rapport and trust. Clients feel valued when professionals make an effort to engage with them in their native language, even at a basic level [11, p. 182].

Integrating Intercultural Competence in Tourism Education

However, developing intercultural competence extends beyond language learning. As noted by Jackson, there is a growing need for tourism professionals to be equipped with broader cultural knowledge and sensitivity [8, p. 201]. Theoretical and practical approaches to language education have evolved to incorporate intercultural training, which includes learning about cultural norms, values, and communication styles. Such training helps students understand the socio-cultural contexts that influence tourist behaviors and expectations, allowing them to interact more effectively with international visitors [3, p. 34].

Tourism education programs today are increasingly integrating intercultural competence as a central component of their curricula. This involves providing students with both the theoretical frameworks and practical experiences they need to develop this competence. Beyond classroom instruction, immersive experiences such as internships, exchange programs, and field trips to international tourism destinations offer invaluable opportunities for students to apply their intercultural competence in real-world settings [17, p. 300]. Such hands-on experiences help students translate theoretical knowledge into practical skills, allowing them to learn from direct intercultural interactions.

The Role of Technology in Enhancing Intercultural Learning

With the rise of digital technology, innovative tools are also being employed to enhance intercultural learning in tourism education. Virtual exchange programs, online cultural simulations, and multimedia resources that feature diverse global perspectives are being integrated into language and tourism curricula to provide students with a more comprehensive, culturally diverse learning experience [19, p. 219].

These tools are especially useful in developing intercultural competence, as they expose students to a wide variety of cultural contexts without the need for physical travel. Virtual environments allow students to engage in role-play, discussions, and problem-solving activities where they must navigate cultural differences, helping to bridge gaps between theory and practice. Gamification elements, such as simulations of real-world tourism scenarios, further engage students in a way that encourages both language learning and cultural awareness [6, p. 156].

A Holistic Approach to Tourism Education

This dual approach—combining language acquisition with intercultural competence training—ensures that tourism students are fully prepared for the dynamic, multicultural environments they will encounter in their careers [9, p. 395]. Furthermore, the integration of intercultural competence into language curricula emphasizes the role of language not merely as a communicative tool but as a means of cultural immersion and understanding. This holistic approach contributes to a deeper, more empathetic engagement with diverse cultural perspectives, which is essential for success in the tourism industry [6, p. 156].

By equipping students with the ability to communicate effectively across cultures, tourism education programs not only prepare them for the operational aspects of their roles but also foster the interpersonal sensitivity and global awareness that will enable them to thrive in their future careers.

Conclusion of Introduction

This paper will explore the integration of intercultural competence and language learning in tourism education, drawing on relevant theories and research. Through an examination of current practices, the paper will highlight the importance of intercultural competence in shaping tourism students' abilities to navigate and adapt to multicultural contexts. Ultimately, the research underscores the crucial role of intercultural competence in preparing the next generation of tourism professionals to excel in a globally interconnected industry.

Methodology

This study was conducted among first-year students at the International University of Tourism and Hospitality in Turkestan, using a mixed-methods approach to investigate the development of intercultural competence alongside language learning. The research was structured into three main phases:

Quantitative Survey: A structured questionnaire was administered to a sample of 100 first-year students. The aim of the survey was to assess the students' intercultural sensitivity and progress in language learning, utilizing Likert scales for measurement. The survey items were based on established tools, including the Intercultural Sensitivity Index developed by Chen and Starosta (2000) [1, pp. 1-21], and a self-assessment measure for language proficiency. The survey included questions on students' experiences with cultural differences, their comfort in intercultural interactions, and the perceived impact of language proficiency on communication in diverse settings.

Qualitative Interviews: Following the survey, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 20 participants, selected based on their survey responses. This phase aimed to gather in-depth insights into the students' personal experiences related to language acquisition and intercultural interactions, both within academic settings and practical tourism contexts. The interviews explored students' perceptions of cultural differences, communication challenges, the significance of language in overcoming these challenges, and how intercultural experiences influenced their career aspirations in tourism [2, pp. 241-266]. Additionally, students were asked to reflect on specific situations where their intercultural competence was tested during internships or group projects.

Classroom Observations: To complement the data collected from surveys and interviews, classroom observations were conducted over a three-month period. These observations focused on the integration of intercultural competence into language lessons, emphasizing interactive activities such as role-plays, group discussions, and simulations reflecting real-life tourism scenarios. Observational data was analyzed to evaluate how these activities contributed to both language skill development and intercultural awareness. Particular attention was given to how students navigated cultural misunderstandings, adapted to different communication styles, and used language to foster cross-cultural relationships [3, pp. 154-168].

Data Analysis:

Quantitative Data: Survey data was analyzed using descriptive statistics, such as means and standard deviations, alongside inferential techniques including ANOVA and correlation analyses to identify trends in the development of intercultural competence and language acquisition. These

analyses helped to reveal the relationship between language proficiency and students' ability to navigate intercultural situations.

Qualitative Data: Thematic analysis was applied to the interview data to identify recurring themes regarding students' perceptions of intercultural competence, their strategies for overcoming cultural barriers, and the perceived effectiveness of their language learning experiences.

Observational Data: Classroom observations were coded to highlight instances where intercultural competence was demonstrated during interactions and to evaluate the impact of these competencies on students' language development. The analysis also focused on how students applied their language skills in culturally diverse settings and their readiness to work in international tourism contexts.

This triangulated methodology allowed for a comprehensive exploration of the relationship between intercultural competence and language learning in tourism education. By synthesizing diverse data sources, the study provided a robust framework for analyzing the interconnectedness between these two essential aspects of student development. Additionally, the research contributed new insights to the existing literature on intercultural competence in tourism education, emphasizing the role of language learning as a critical factor in fostering global tourism professionals [4, pp. 365-382; 5, pp. 1-10].

Moreover, the findings have implications for curriculum design, suggesting that intercultural competence should be explicitly integrated into language courses for tourism students to better prepare them for the global market. The study also highlighted the importance of providing students with real-world, culturally immersive experiences through internships or study abroad programs, which further reinforce the practical application of both language skills and intercultural competence.

Results and Discussion

The study conducted at the International University of Tourism and Hospitality in Turkestan successfully examined the integration of intercultural competence within language learning among first-year tourism students. The findings revealed several encouraging trends that not only align with existing literature but also offer new perspectives on the role of tourism education in fostering essential linguistic and intercultural skills.

Development of Intercultural Competence

Classroom observations demonstrated that students' exposure to intercultural content through interactive language learning exercises, such as role-plays, group discussions, and simulations of international tourism scenarios, was highly effective in enhancing their intercultural competence. This confirms Deardorff's model, which underscores the importance of experiential learning in developing intercultural competence. Students showed a remarkable ability to navigate cultural differences and displayed increased cultural sensitivity and adaptability over the course of the study.

A key finding is that students reported greater confidence in interacting with individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds when language lessons incorporated practical, real-world tourism contexts. This mirrors the work of Fantini, who highlights the importance of combining language learning with cultural immersion to develop both linguistic proficiency and cultural awareness. By the end of the study, students expressed a stronger sense of preparedness for future careers in the tourism industry, particularly in scenarios requiring cross-cultural communication.

Language Acquisition and Intercultural Competence

A notable quantitative result from the surveys was the positive correlation between

intercultural sensitivity and language proficiency. Students who scored higher on intercultural sensitivity were also more advanced in their language skills, reflecting findings from Byram and Zarate, who identified intercultural competence and language acquisition as mutually reinforcing processes. The study suggests that students with greater cultural awareness were more motivated to engage with language learning materials, especially those that emphasized intercultural interactions.

The qualitative interviews further revealed that students recognized a strong link between intercultural competence and practical language skills. They highlighted how understanding cultural contexts helped them grasp pragmatic aspects of the English language, such as politeness strategies and cultural etiquette, particularly in hospitality and tourism. This aligns with Risager's findings, which stress that language learning is most effective when it occurs in culturally relevant contexts.

Gender Differences in Learning Preferences

The study also uncovered intriguing gender-based differences in learning preferences. Female students exhibited a stronger preference for interactive, visual learning tools like videos and games, which they found to be engaging and effective. This supports the research of Oxford and Ehrman, who found that women often favor communicative and collaborative learning styles.

Male students, on the other hand, were more motivated by the competitive aspects of gamification, such as point systems and leaderboards, which heightened their engagement with language tasks. This preference for competition aligns with Dörnyei's research on motivation in language learning. The results suggest that incorporating both competitive and collaborative elements in the curriculum can enhance engagement and learning outcomes for a broader range of students.

Comparative Analysis with Previous Studies

In comparison with prior studies, the results of this research largely confirm the importance of cultural immersion and experiential learning in language acquisition, as emphasized by Deardorff and Fantini. However, this study extends their findings by focusing specifically on tourism students, who require a more acute level of intercultural competence due to the demands of their future profession.

One of the unique contributions of this study is the integration of modern technological methods, such as gamification and audiovisual tools, which provided new insights into how these techniques can enhance both language and intercultural learning. Unlike previous studies that focused on traditional methods, this research demonstrated that technology-driven approaches can make learning more engaging and effective.

Implications for Tourism Education

The results of this study carry important implications for the future of tourism education. Firstly, the positive reception of gamification and audiovisual tools indicates that these methods should be more widely implemented in language instruction. By making language learning more interactive and engaging, these tools help students develop practical skills that are directly applicable to real-world tourism scenarios, fostering both linguistic proficiency and intercultural awareness.

Secondly, the study underscores the importance of accommodating the diverse learning preferences of students. Gender differences in learning styles suggest that tourism educators should incorporate a balance of competitive and collaborative activities to cater to the varying needs of their students. This inclusive approach can ensure that all students, regardless of their learning style, are motivated to improve both their language skills and intercultural competence.

In conclusion, the findings of this study highlight the critical role that intercultural

competence plays in the professional development of tourism students. By integrating language learning with real-world cultural experiences and modern technological tools, educators can better prepare students for the global challenges of the tourism industry. This research not only adds to the existing body of knowledge but also offers practical recommendations for enhancing tourism education, making it more dynamic and effective.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study provides compelling evidence that the integration of intercultural competence into language learning is not only advantageous but crucial for equipping tourism students with the skills needed to succeed in today's increasingly globalized world. The incorporation of gamification and audiovisual tools has proven to be a highly effective strategy, significantly boosting student engagement and making language learning more interactive, practical, and culturally relevant. These modern approaches facilitate a deeper understanding of cross-cultural communication, allowing students to acquire both the linguistic proficiency and interpersonal sensitivity required in the tourism industry.

Moreover, this research highlights the potential for expanding these innovative methods into other educational settings. As the world becomes more interconnected, the need for diverse, immersive learning experiences is growing, making it essential for educators to explore various ways of enhancing student learning outcomes.

Looking ahead, future studies could explore the long-term impact of these approaches on students' career readiness, adaptability in international tourism contexts, and their effectiveness across different demographic groups. Additionally, expanding the scope to include different regions, specialized areas of tourism, or even other industries could provide valuable insights into the broader applicability of these findings.

In essence, the study underscores the transformative role that intercultural competence and technologically enhanced learning can play in shaping the next generation of tourism professionals, preparing them to meet the challenges of an increasingly interconnected and diverse world.

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**ТІЛ ҮЙРЕНУМЕН ҚАТАР ТУРИЗМ САЛАСЫНДАҒЫ СТУДЕНТТЕРДІҢ
МӘДЕНИЕТАРАЛЫҚ ҚҰЗЫРЕТТІЛІГІН ДАМУ**

Аңдатпа. Бұл мақалада туризм студенттерінің, тілді меңгерумен қатар, мәдениетаралық құзыреттілігін дамыту, оның жаһандық туристік индустрияда жұмысқа дайындалу үшін маңыздылығын атап өтеді. Байрамның мәдениетаралық коммуникативті құзыреттілік моделіне және Дирдорфтың бағалау модельдеріне сүйене отырып, зерттеу тіл мен мәдениетті білім беру бағдарламаларына біріктіруге баса назар аударады. Ол сондай-ақ мәдениетаралық білім беру бағдарламаларының үлестерін талдайды, олардың студенттердің мәдени сезімталдығы мен қарым-қатынас дағдыларын қалай арттыратынын көрсетеді. Нәтижелер әртүрлі мәдени орталарда студенттердің кәсіби бейімділігін арттыру үшін мәдениетаралық хабардарлықты дамыту қажеттілігін көрсетеді.

Кілт сөздер: мәдениетаралық құзыреттілік, туристік білім беру, тіл үйрену, мәдениетаралық коммуникация, мәдени сезімталдық, жаһандық туризм.

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**РАЗВИТИЕ МЕЖКУЛЬТУРНОЙ КОМПЕТЕНТНОСТИ СТУДЕНТОВ В СФЕРЕ
ТУРИЗМА НАРЯДУ С ИЗУЧЕНИЕМ ЯЗЫКА**

Аннотация. В данной статье рассматривается развитие межкультурной компетентности у студентов, изучающих туризм, наряду с обучением языку, подчеркивая её важность для подготовки к работе в глобальной туристической индустрии. Основываясь на модели межкультурной коммуникативной компетенции Байрама и оценочных моделях Дирдорфа, исследование акцентирует внимание на интеграции языка и культуры в образовательные программы. Оно также анализирует вклад межкультурных образовательных программ, показывая, как они повышают культурную чувствительность и коммуникативные навыки студентов. Результаты демонстрируют необходимость развития межкультурной осведомленности для повышения профессиональной адаптивности студентов в многообразных культурных средах.

Ключевые слова: межкультурная компетентность, туристское образование, изучение языка, межкультурная коммуникация, культурная восприимчивость, глобальный туризм.