



Strategies for Enhancing Intercultural Communication Competence for German Learners

Audrey Titaley¹, Tri Lestari¹, Ajeng Kartika¹, Silvy Adelia¹, and Muhammad Ardani¹

¹ Universitas Negeri Surabaya, Surabaya, Indonesia
audreytitaley@unesa.ac.id

Abstract. This study explored the integration of intercultural communication competence into B1-level German language education for future teachers, utilizing Byram's Model of Intercultural Communicative Competence and Hymes' Theory of Communicative Competence as theoretical frameworks. Recognizing that language learning involves not just mastering grammar and vocabulary but also understanding cultural contexts, the research addressed how to prepare students to navigate cultural diversity. Through a literature review, effective strategies such as cultural immersion, authentic materials, role-playing, reflective journals, collaborative projects, and intercultural communication workshops were identified. Each strategy was analyzed through concrete examples, focusing on developing both linguistic and intercultural competence. The results showed that these approaches significantly enhance students' ability to communicate effectively and with cultural sensitivity, aligning with the theories' emphasis on sociolinguistic competence and critical cultural awareness. The study concluded with recommendations for deeper cultural engagement and technology use to ensure well-rounded teacher preparation in multicultural environments.

Keywords: Pre-Service-Teachers, German Language Education Study Program, Intercultural Communication, Communication Competence, German Culture

1 Introduction

Language learning is a multifaceted process that goes beyond the simple acquisition of grammatical structures and vocabulary. It entails a deep understanding of the cultural context in which the language is spoken [1, 2]. In the context of German learning at the university level, particularly for students who are preparing to become German teachers, this cultural component is indispensable [3, 4].

In essence, culture is a set of values and norms that are shared among varying groups of people and passed down through generations. This influences the way people think, act, and communicate within a given society.

Intercultural communication involves the exchange of ideas and experiences between individuals from different cultures, as well as their attempts to make sense of each other [5]. It is necessary to acknowledge cultural diversity and show consideration for it in the process. Intercultural communication skills are crucial for successful and mutually respectful communication across cultural boundaries.

At the B1 level of German proficiency, students should be able to use German in everyday situations with ease [6, 7] and demonstrate an awareness and sensitivity to cultural differences. Preparing to become German teachers, proficiency in cross-cultural communication is not only an academic requirement but also a professional necessity. Future teachers must be equipped to teach German in diverse and multicultural classrooms [8, 9] where students come from diverse cultural backgrounds with different perspectives and experiences [10, 11].

This need for intercultural competence poses a number of challenges that students must overcome during their training. Students must develop the ability to understand and respect the cultural perspectives of their future students. This involves recognizing that cultural norms and values influence how individuals perceive and interact with the world. Future German teachers must be aware of these differences and learn to appreciate the diversity they will encounter in their classrooms. They must also develop intercultural awareness in six ways, as shown in Figure 1 below.



Figure 1. 6 Ways to develop intercultural awareness [12].

Future German teachers who lack intercultural skills may face several significant challenges. They may struggle to create inclusive and respectful learning environments, which can lead to misunderstandings and conflicts in multicultural classrooms. Without a deep understanding of cultural contexts, these teachers may struggle to communicate effectively with students from diverse backgrounds, hindering student engagement and learning. Additionally, they may lack the skills to teach cultural nuances and intercultural communication, which are essential for students to navigate a globalized world. As a result, their ability to prepare students for real-world interactions and foster cultural sensitivity will be compromised.

Despite the recognized importance of cultural understanding in language learning, there is often a gap in how intercultural communication competence is integrated into the curriculum, particularly at the B1 level in university settings where students are training to become German teachers. The specific problems addressed by this research were:

1. What are effective strategies for implementing intercultural communication competence in German language learning at the B1 level? And
2. What are concrete examples of applying these strategies in learning?

This study's main goal was to investigate and pinpoint practical methods for integrating intercultural communication competency into B1 German language instruction, particularly in university courses that train future German teachers. By addressing these questions, this study hoped to improve German language teaching by ensuring that students acquire the cultural competence and sensitivity necessary for successful intercultural communication in addition to language proficiency. By providing educators with useful strategies and ideas that can be implemented in the classroom, we hoped to advance the field of language teaching and better prepare future German teachers for the challenges of a multicultural teaching profession.

This study draws on major theories relating language competence, especially grammar and vocabulary, to the development of intercultural competence. Michael Byram's model emphasizes the importance of integrating language competence with intercultural awareness [13]. According to Byram, effective communication in a foreign language requires not only grammatical accuracy and a rich vocabulary but also the ability to understand and navigate cultural contexts. The model identifies five main components: linguistic competence, sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence, intercultural attitudes, and critical cultural awareness. Integrating these elements enables students to engage in meaningful and culturally appropriate communication.

Dell Hymes introduced the concept of communicative competence, which goes beyond grammatical accuracy to include the ability to use language appropriately in different cultural and social contexts [14]. Hymes' theory emphasizes the role of sociolinguistic competence in understanding cultural norms that influence language use. This theory is particularly suitable for analyzing how grammar and vocabulary are applied in intercultural communication, as it emphasizes the importance of cultural knowledge in language use.

Concurrently, these theories inform an analysis of how grammatical and lexical knowledge can be integrated with intercultural communication skills in the teaching of B1-level German. Applying these frameworks, this study examines the extent to which students' language skills support their ability to engage in culturally sensitive communicative activities, an essential skill for future German teachers.

2 Research Method

The research methodology employed in this study is a literature review. This method involves systematically searching, analyzing, and synthesizing existing research on intercultural communication competence and strategies using Byram's Model of Intercultural Communicative Competence and Hymes' Theory of Communicative Competence for implementing it in language learning, specifically at the B1 level for students training to become German teachers.

3 Results and Discussion

3.1 Results

The literature study has identified several strategies that are particularly relevant and effective for B1-level students in a German language study program. These strategies are tailored to enhance both language proficiency and intercultural communication competence. Below, each strategy is elaborated upon in the context of B1-level German language learners, with the addition of interactive activities and technology integration to enhance their effectiveness:

Table 1. Strategies to Enhance Intercultural Communication Competence.

No	Strategy	Application for B1-Level	Interactive Activities	Technology Integration
1	Cultural Immersion Activities [15, 16]	Virtual exchanges with native speakers, cultural workshops, and participation in local German cultural events.	Group discussions or debates on cultural topics and student presentations on cultural experiences.	Online platforms for virtual exchanges (e.g., Skype, Tandem), cultural workshops via Zoom, apps/websites, providing cultural insights and interactions.
2	Incorporating Authentic Materials [17, 18, 19]	Use German films, literature, music, news articles, and social media content to enhance language learning and cultural understanding.	Film discussions, music appreciation sessions, social media analysis projects, and creating student-generated content such as blogs or vlogs.	Streaming services for films/music, digital newsstands for German newspapers, social media platforms for real-time cultural interactions, and language learning apps with authentic content.
3	Role-Playing and Simulations [20, 21, 22]	Practice practical language skills through scenarios such as ordering food, asking for directions, and handling transactions, simulating cultural misunderstandings.	Regular role-playing sessions, feedback discussions, and analysis of cultural scenarios.	Virtual reality (VR) and simulation software, online role-playing games, and apps simulating real-life scenarios.
4	Reflective Journals and	Document learning experiences and	Peer review sessions, group	Digital journaling platforms (e.g.,

	Discussions [23, 24]	cultural observations in journals, discuss reflections in class to foster critical thinking and cultural awareness.	discussions comparing reflections, sharing insights.	Penzu), blogs, online discussion boards, and forums for extended engagement.
5	Collaborative Projects with a Cultural Focus [25, 26, 27]	Group projects exploring cultural topics such as German traditions, festivals, and etiquette, promoting teamwork and presentation skills.	Group brainstorming sessions, peer teaching opportunities, student presentations to the class.	Collaborative tools like Google Docs, Padlet, or Trello, multimedia elements like video presentations, digital posters, and interactive websites.
6	Intercultural Communication Workshops [28, 29]	Workshops focused on non-verbal communication, cultural norms, and conflict resolution, tailored to B1 proficiency.	Interactive role-plays, group discussions, case study analyses, active participation, and real-time problem-solving	Online platforms (e.g., Zoom, Teams) for virtual workshops, digital tools like Mentimeter or Kahoot for quizzes and polls, intercultural training apps for simulated interactions.

The following table provides concrete examples of how various strategies can be implemented in the classroom to enhance intercultural communication competence and German language proficiency at the B1 level. Each strategy is designed to address the unique needs and challenges faced by students in a German language study program, preparing them to become effective German teachers.

Table 2. Examples for Strategies.

No	Strategy	Concrete Examples
1	Cultural Immersion Activities [15, 16]	• Virtual Exchanges: Partner students with native German speakers through online platforms like Tandem. Students engage in regular video calls to discuss everyday topics and cultural differences. • Cultural Workshops: Organize virtual workshops where students learn about German customs, traditions, and holidays, such as Oktoberfest, and then discuss their findings in class. • Local Cultural Events: Facilitate virtual participation in events like a German film festival or a live-streamed concert by a German band.
2	Incorporating Authentic Materials [17, 18, 19]	• Films: Show a German film like "Good Bye Lenin!" with subtitles. Students discuss themes, cultural contexts, and language used in the film. • Literature: Read a short story by a German author, such as "Das Brot" by Wolfgang Borchert. Students

		analyze the story and discuss its cultural implications. • Music: Analyze the lyrics of a popular German song, such as "99 Luftballons" by Nena, discussing vocabulary, themes, and cultural context. • News Articles: Read and discuss simplified news articles from websites like Deutsche Welle.
3	Role-Playing and Simulations [20, 21, 22]	• Restaurant Scenario: Students role-play ordering food in a German restaurant, practicing polite phrases and cultural etiquette. • Travel Scenario: Simulate asking for directions in a German city, using maps and role-play to practice giving and receiving directions. • Business Scenario: Conduct a role-play of a simple business meeting, discussing a fictional product or service, practicing formal language and cultural business norms.
4	Reflective Journals and Discussions [23, 24]	• Reflective Journals: Have students keep weekly digital journals where they reflect on their experiences learning about German culture, including virtual exchanges, film viewings, or cultural events. • Class Discussions: Organize weekly discussions where students share their reflections and insights from their journals, encouraging peer learning and deeper understanding.
5	Collaborative Projects with a Cultural Focus [25, 26, 27]	• Cultural Presentation: In groups, students create and present a project on a specific aspect of German culture, such as traditional German cuisine, regional dialects, or historical events. • Cultural Etiquette Guide: Develop a guide for tourists visiting Germany, highlighting important cultural norms and etiquette, and present it to the class. • Festival Research: Research and present on a German festival, such as Karneval, explaining its origins, traditions, and significance.
6	Intercultural Communication Workshops [28, 29]	• Non-Verbal Communication: Conduct a workshop on non-verbal communication differences between German culture and the students' native cultures. Include activities where students practice gestures, eye contact, and body language. • Cultural Norms: Facilitate a workshop on key cultural norms in German-speaking countries, using case studies to illustrate points. • Conflict Resolution: Role-play common intercultural misunderstandings and practice conflict resolution strategies, discussing the cultural reasons behind different reactions.

By integrating cultural immersion activities, authentic materials, role-playing, reflective journals, collaborative projects, and intercultural communication workshops into the curriculum, educators can create a dynamic and engaging learning environment. These strategies are further enriched by incorporating interactive

activities and leveraging technology, ensuring that students not only develop their language skills but also gain a deep understanding of the cultural contexts in which the German language is used. The table 2 outlines specific examples of how each strategy can be practically applied, providing educators with a clear roadmap to foster both linguistic proficiency and cultural sensitivity among their students.

3.2 Discussion

The strategies and examples outlined in this study demonstrate a clear alignment with Byram's Model of Intercultural Communicative Competence and Hymes' Theory of Communicative Competence. These strategies not only aim to enhance linguistic proficiency but also to develop intercultural sensitivity, which is crucial for effective communication in diverse settings—an essential skill for future German teachers.

Byram's Model of Intercultural Communicative Competence. Byram's model places a strong emphasis on the integration of intercultural understanding and linguistic competence, and this is evident in the strategies used. Cultural immersion exercises and authentic materials, for instance, expose students to language use in real-world situations while also encouraging intercultural attitudes and critical cultural awareness, which directly contributes to linguistic competence. By interacting with the language in its cultural context through these activities, students can see beyond vocabulary and grammar to the cultural connotations that underlie communication.

Because role-playing and simulations require students to apply appropriate language use in culturally nuanced scenarios, they are especially effective in helping students develop sociolinguistic competence. Byram's emphasis on the interconnectedness of culture and communication is fulfilled by this practical application of language within particular social contexts, which aids students in understanding the significance of cultural norms in communication.

By encouraging students to critically evaluate their cross-cultural experiences, reflective journals and discussions improve critical cultural awareness. By encouraging in-depth contemplation on cultural differences and the students' own cultural presumptions, these activities complement Byram's model and are essential to cultivating the capacity for deliberate and successful intercultural communication. Students develop their discourse competence through collaborative projects with a cultural focus, which demands that they arrange and present information in a way that is sensitive to cultural differences. As they collaborate to investigate and present challenging cultural subjects, this not only strengthens their language proficiency but also broadens their comprehension of cultural contexts.

Intercultural communication workshops address nonverbal communication and conflict resolution with an emphasis on sociolinguistic competence and intercultural attitudes. These workshops equip students with the skills necessary to handle cross-cultural relationships more skillfully, improving their capacity to negotiate communication differences between cultures.

Hymes' theory broadens the emphasis to encompass the capacity to utilize language appropriately in diverse social and cultural contexts, in addition to

grammatical accuracy. The methods described in this research give support to this expanded understanding of communicative competence.

Due to their ability to expose students to language in its natural context, cultural immersion, and authentic materials are essential for the development of grammatical competence. By illustrating how language functions within its cultural context, these strategies also assist students in developing sociolinguistic competence, thereby equipping them to use German appropriately in a variety of social settings.

According to Hymes, role-playing and simulations are especially useful for improving strategic competence. Through these exercises, students are forced to deal with communication breakdowns and modify their language use to suit various cultural contexts. Students gain experience applying their grammatical knowledge in appropriate, culturally, and contextually based ways through these simulated experiences.

Students' ability to articulate their ideas and experiences in a coherent and appropriate manner is further developed through reflective journals and discussions. The emphasis on structured communication emphasizes the value of cultural awareness in communication by teaching students how to organize their language use in a variety of cultural contexts.

In addition to supporting sociolinguistic competence as students learn to communicate their findings with cultural sensitivity, collaborative projects improve grammatical competence by encouraging accurate language use in research and presentations. These projects combine linguistic proficiency with an awareness of cultural contexts, offering a real-world implementation of Hymes' theory.

Workshops on intercultural communication tackle strategic competence by giving students the tools they need to handle challenging cross-cultural situations. These workshops support Hymes' emphasis on the practical application of language skills in social contexts by ensuring that students are equipped to handle cultural differences in communication.

The methods and techniques used in this study show a thorough method for helping B1-level German language learners develop their linguistic and intercultural competency. By examining these strategies via the prisms of Byram's Model of Intercultural Communicative Competence and Hymes' Theory of Communicative Competence, it becomes clear that they do more than just improve students' vocabulary and grammar; they also equip them with the skills they need to communicate tactfully and successfully in multicultural settings. Future German educators must adopt this all-encompassing strategy to make sure they are prepared to create inclusive and culturally sensitive learning environments.

4 Conclusion

This study demonstrated how significantly improving linguistic and cultural skills—which are essential for preparing future German teachers—can be achieved by integrating intercultural communication techniques into B1 German language instruction. As evidenced by the examination of the strategies used utilizing Byram's Model of Intercultural Communicative Competence and Hymes' Theory of Communicative Competence, a thorough approach to language acquisition is

necessary. Byram's idea emphasizes how important it is to combine language proficiency, intercultural attitudes, and critical cultural awareness. This integration helps students communicate with different cultures in meaningful and sensitive ways, which is important in a variety of learning environments.

Hymes' Theory of Communicative Competence, which emphasizes the importance of using language appropriately in a variety of social and cultural contexts, lends additional support to this tactic. Engaging in role-playing, reflective journaling, and cultural immersion are some of the strategies used to encourage students to apply their grammar and vocabulary knowledge in context- and culture-relevant ways. When combined, these frameworks ensure that students possess not only language proficiency but also the intercultural competencies needed to navigate complex multicultural situations. With this dual focus, students are better prepared to become culturally aware educators who can foster inclusive and diverse learning environments as well as competent communicators.

Acknowledgements. The author would like to thank the Faculty of Languages and Arts (FBS) Universitas Negeri Surabaya (Unesa) for funding this Research with a grand number: 364/UN38/HK/PP/2024.

References

1. Kramsch, C.: The cultural component of language teaching. *Language, culture and curriculum* 8(2), 83-92 (1995)
2. Günthner, S.: Interkulturelle Kommunikation und Fremdsprachenunterricht. *Informationen Deutsch als Fremdsprache* 16(4), 47-63 (1989)
3. Jaritz, G.: Developing a Culture of (Inter) national Mobility in Initial Teacher Training Expectations, Limitations and Ways Forward. In *Pains and gains of international mobility in teacher education*, 7-24 Brill (2011)
4. Erdmenger, M.: *Landeskunde im Fremdsprachenunterricht*. Hueber Verlag (1996)
5. Maheshwari, S.: Intercultural Communication and Its Challenges. *International Multidisciplinary Research Journal* 7(4), 42-48 (2018)
6. Junker, R. S.: *ZwischenSprachen Zum Potenzial exophonischer Literatur für eine Didaktik der Literarizität im universitären DaF-Unterricht in Südafrika*. Doctoral dissertation. Stellenbosch: Stellenbosch University (2015)
7. Svyrydjuk, V. P.: AUSTRIAZISMeN IM DeUTSchUNTeRRICHT fÜR Die eNTWICKLUNG DeR SPRACHKOMPeTeNZ Bel DeN STUDeNTeN-PHILOLOGeN. *ВЧЕИ ЗАПИСКИ*, 22020232 (2020)
8. Hachfeld, A., Hahn, A., Schroeder, S., Anders, Y., & Kunter, M. Should teachers be colorblind? How multicultural and egalitarian beliefs differentially relate to aspects of teachers' professional competence for teaching in diverse classrooms. *Teaching and Teacher Education* 48, 44-55 (2015)
9. Sliwka, A.: From homogeneity to diversity in German education (2010)
10. Krajewski, S.: Developing intercultural competence in multilingual and multicultural student groups. *Journal of Research in International Education* 10(2), 137-153 (2011)
11. Maria, Y., & Ekaterina, P. Teaching languages in multicultural surroundings: New tendencies. *Russian journal of linguistics* 25(2), 546-568 (2021)
12. Maheshwari, S.: Intercultural Communication and Its Challenges. *International Multidisciplinary Research Journal* 7(4), 42-48 (2018)

13. Byram, M.: *Teaching and assessing intercultural communicative competence: Revisited*. Multilingual matters (2020)
14. Hymes, Dell.: "On communicative competence." *Sociolinguistics/Penguin* (1972)
15. Zhang, X., & Zhou, M.: Interventions to promote learners' intercultural competence: A meta-analysis. *International journal of intercultural relations* 71, 31-47 (2019)
16. Ceo-DiFrancesco, D., Dunn, L. S., & Solorio, N.: Transforming through reflection: Use of student-led reflections in the development of intercultural competence during a short-term international immersion experience. *Internet Journal of Allied Health Sciences and Practice* 18(2), 8 (2020)
17. Jain, P. Authentic Materials for Intercultural Communication: Develop Speaking Materials That Encourage Learners to Engage in Authentic Cross-Cultural Communication Effectively in Diverse Global Contexts. *Creative Saplings* 3(4), 1-14 9 (2024)
18. Hussein, N. O.: The effect of using authentic materials on developing undergraduate EFL students' communicative competence. *Language and Literature* 47(2422-843), 4 (2018). Retrieved October 34, 2019
19. Gómez, R., & Fernando, L.: Fostering intercultural communicative competence through reading authentic literary texts in an advanced Colombian EFL classroom: A constructivist perspective. *Profile Issues in Teachers Professional Development* 14(1), 49-66 (2012)
20. Meltzoff, N., & Lenssen, J.: Enhancing cultural competence through simulation activities. *Multicultural Perspectives*, 2(1), 29-34 (2000)
21. Markey, K., Doody, O., Kingston, L., Moloney, M., & Murphy, L.: Cultural competence development: The importance of incorporating culturally responsive simulation in nurse education. *Nurse Education in Practice* 52, 103021 (2021)
22. Léon-Henri, D. D. P., & Jain, B. Role play: A practical way to teach intercultural communication. *Recherche et pratiques pédagogiques en langues. Cahiers de l'Aplut* 36(2), (2017)
23. Larson, K. L., Melissa Ott, M. S., & Miles, J. M. International cultural immersion: En vivo reflections in cultural competence. *Journal of cultural diversity* 17(2), 44 (2010)
24. Ely, E.: Cultural Competence in Libraries: Utilizing the Critical Incident Technique and Reflective Journaling to Encourage Reflective Practice. *Journal of Education for Library and Information Science* 64(4), 458-475 (2023)
25. Syzenko, A., & Diachkova, Y.: Building cross-cultural competence in a foreign language through technology-enhanced project-based learning. *Amazonia Investiga* 9(27), 411-418 (2020)
26. Casañ-Pitarch, R., Candel-Mora, M. Á., Carrió-Pastor, M. L., Demydenko, O., & Tikan, I.: Enhancing language and cross-cultural competence through telecollaboration. *Advanced Education*, 78-87 (2020).
27. Swartz, S., Barbosa, B., & Crawford, I. Building intercultural through virtual team collaboration across global classrooms. *Business and professional communication quarterly* 83(1), 57-79 (2020)
28. Kratzke, C., & Bertolo, M.: Enhancing Students' cultural Competence Using Cross-Cultural Experiential Learning. *Journal of cultural diversity* 20(3), (2013)
29. Carter, M. M., Lewis, E. L., Sbrocco, T., Tanenbaum, R., Oswald, J. C., Sykora, W., Williams, P., Hill, L. D.: Cultural competency training for third-year clerkship students: effects of an interactive workshop on student attitudes. *Journal of the National Medical Association* 98(11), 1772 (2006)

Open Access This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>), which permits any noncommercial use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.

