



Language Acquisition Concerning Intercultural and International Dialogue

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ABSTRACT

This paper aimed to systematically review the literature on language acquisition concerning intercultural and international dialogue. Using Google Scholar and PRISMA screening, 27 papers could be selected for this review.

Due to the inherent and inseparable nature of culture with language, learning language alone will not achieve intercultural awareness, essential for intercultural and international dialogue. Second Language Acquisition theory needs to be integrated with the dialogue theory of Bhaktin and operationalised through Byram's intercultural citizenship theory using tools such as telecollaboration for the effective development of both language and intercultural awareness for intercultural and international dialogue. From a practical standpoint, the most appropriate way to build competency in the language-culture nexus is to raise awareness of both language and intercultural aspects; this can lead to effective intercultural and international dialogue.

Keywords: Culture, Intercultural and International Dialogue, Language Acquisition, Review.



Introduction

Language is inherently cultural. Many expressions in a language follow the norms and factors of culture subtly and explicitly. For example, sayings, slang and syntax in a language reflect cultural norms, trends, and beliefs.

The term 'culture' refers to learned norms around values, beliefs, and behaviour in a community ranging from two people to the population of an entire continent. It also includes ethnic background, nationality, religion and gender.

Learning a language is easier when it is done through cultural knowledge, engaged in a culturally rich environment, and exposed to the culturally basic material, as their background knowledge about the second-language culture will render its comprehension less difficult. According to the socio-cultural theory of Vygotsky, language "comes out from the cultural and social activity and only later becomes reconstructed as an individual, psychological phenomenon." That means language acquisition takes place within a cultural context. Therefore, if teaching a second language is embedded in its cultural context, it will be more effective.

Learning a second language through its culture can be expected to help in situations of intercultural and international dialogue. This paper aims to review the available literature to test this theory.

The specific research question that the research aims to address is: *What are the issues surrounding language acquisition in the context of intercultural and international dialogue?*

Methodology

Google Scholar searched for relevant literature on the topic using the title of the paper as keywords. The papers identified were screened through the PRISMA process to select the papers for this review. The PRISMA flow diagramme is shown in Figure 1.

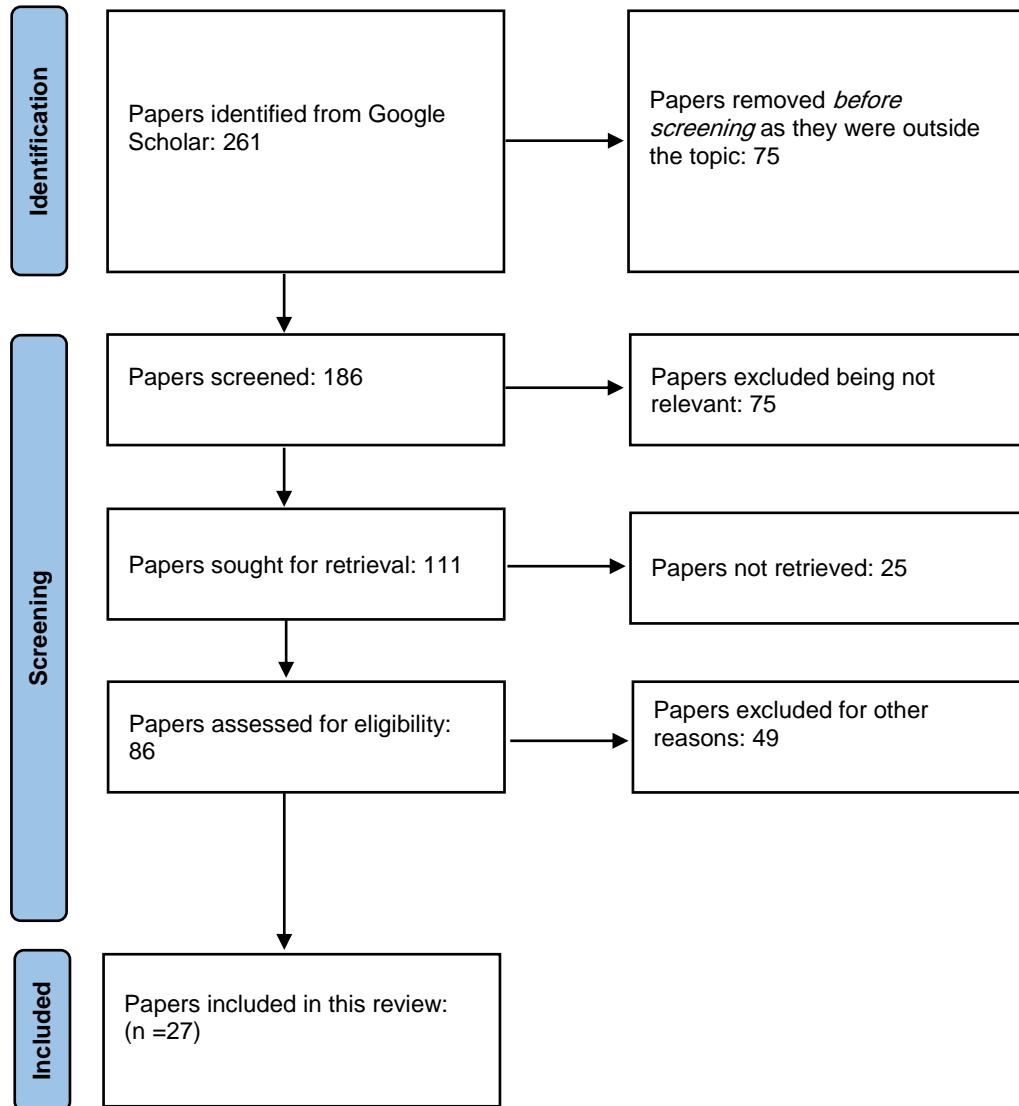


Figure 1: PRISMA flowchart

Review

The inadequacy of language acquisition from its native country was pointed out by Byram and Wagner (2018). In the current global situation, language teaching should aim at preparing learners for interaction with people of other cultural backgrounds, with the required knowledge, skills and attitudes. This view represents the notion of culture, the language-culture nexus and intercultural competence. Language teaching should be linked to other disciplines with an integrated approach towards citizenship education. Going one step further, Jenkins (2017) showed the way to understand other



countries without formal language learning, contending, “Germany is Europe’s most important country of our day. Teach its history, revel in its culture, and analyse the strength of its economy. Visit its cities and countryside – and see how much better they are planned and protected than ours. In comparison, learning Germany’s language is not that important” (p 7). However, the global lingua franca status of English does not match this assertion, as a knowledge of English alone can also help to know about any country as most information are available in English. Many times, language educators think that teaching a language automatically teaches its culture also. However, this may not always be the case because learners often import meanings from their current language into the second language being learned. The topic is dispersed across the two languages affected by translation processes. Immigrants carry their language and culture along with their discourses and ways of thinking. Thus, language teaching needs to be shifted from linguistic system orientation to language-culture nexus. Limitations of the application of classroom-learned language in the outside real world support the above ideas about the language-culture nexus as a learning requirement for effective intercultural and international dialogue.

Kramersch (2011) (p 366) discussed the complexity of intercultural exchanges, stressing the need for a symbolic mentality consisting of the past and present subjective experience, which is equally important to the social convention in interpreting other people’s ways of communicating and interacting. According to the author, intercultural competence involves knowledge of the person involved in the exchange, factors that contributed to the words used and not used, positioning of the speaker, framing of the events by the speaker and the prior discourses used by the speaker.

Linking Mikhail Bakhtin’s theory of dialogue to the second language acquisition (SLA) theory can help to interpret dialogue in second language (L2) learning. Language, culture, and identity are three factors, which position the theory of dialogue and explains interpersonal and intercultural communication. Bakhtin’s approach consists of the dialogic understanding of language, culture, and the self. The theory also supplements many existing second language learning perspectives and facilitates the development of an approach to language, culture, and identity as emerging in interactive discursive and intercultural practices. Bakhtin considers language and social interaction and social relations as inherently dialogic (Marchenkova, 2005). Otherwise, teaching programmes may not increase the intercultural awareness of learners (Korzilius, van Hooft, & Planken, 2007).

A lack of learner opportunities for beyond-the-classroom interaction exists in school foreign language programs. Due to this lack of opportunity, learners experience many difficulties in second-language communication when confronted with the inevitable psychological, linguistic, and sociocultural obstacles in second-language communication. To solve this problem, a study was conducted by Savignon and Sysoyev (2002) to operationalize the concept of sociocultural competence for classroom learners and the usefulness of explicit training in strategies for coping with certain social and cultural situations. The study aimed to promote learners’



sociocultural competence to prepare them for a dialogue of cultures required in intercultural communications.

Grounded in a theory of language inseparable from culture, the ability in both a first language (L1) and subsequent languages as the result of socialization, in which, the language classroom acts as a site of exploration in the development of communicative competence was considered in another paper of the same authors (Savignon & Sysoyev, 2005). The authors proposed a set of strategies to develop the sociocultural competence of language learners. These strategies included the notion of coping strategies, or strategic competence and included the intercultural dimension articulated in current goals for U.S. world language education. They also adopted the integrative, communicative perspective of language development reflected in the Standards for Foreign Language Learning in the 21st Century, prescribed by the National Standards of 1999. The classroom strategies offered for teaching and learning have been offered with particular reference to the goal areas of “cultures” and “comparisons” in the US policies on teaching and learning world languages.

In the current environment, the capabilities approach provides an effective tool to measure the complexities and challenges of intercultural dialogue. The approach was developed by Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum. It involves a set of humanistic goals recognising that in the national development process, the freedom of people is expanded to increase the capabilities of individuals to lead valuable lives. An insider-practitioner study by Crosbie (2014) showed that cosmopolitan citizenship learning has an important place in an ESOL multicultural classroom fostering intercultural dialogue. The capabilities approach can be used here as a normative framework for social justice in the field of foreign language and intercultural education.

A qualitative study by Helm, Guth, and Farrah (2012) explored the impact of potential linguistic, technical and educational hegemonies on the learning outcomes for English language students in Hebron, Palestine, and Padova, Italy of the Soliya Connect Program, a telecollaboration project aimed to explore critical issues that divide the ‘West’ and the ‘predominantly Arab and Muslim world’. Weekly synchronous moderated video discussions between students from the U.S., Europe, the Middle East and North Africa were used. The hegemonies involved in this project were related to the specific power imbalances on the macro-, meso and micro-levels that students in Hebron and Padova might experience. The data from learner diaries and reflective papers, facilitator reports, and questionnaires showed the emergence of a third space conceptualised as a site of struggle and conflict, dialogic, fluid and evolving. The third space was created by the factors related to the role of trained facilitators in addressing power imbalances, the dialogic approach to conflict that the program was based on, and the use of audio-video conferencing which humanised the experience and increases empathy among students.

A case study by van der Kroon, Jauregi, and Jan (2015) showed that task-based telecollaboration sessions for learners led to the achievement of mutual understanding as they used many meta-communicative devices to compare their cultures concerning time, space and habits, verifying the meaning and clarify utterances. This could enhance the intercultural dialogue among them.



There are many benefits and challenges of synchronous computer-mediated communication (SCMC). When setting for learner dialogue through telecollaboration (virtual exchange, or online) intracultural and intercultural dialogues happen among learners of different languages and cultures, usually in different geographic locations, as they meet online to engage in learning otherwise impossible dialogue. Such synchronous-mediated communication support interpersonal, interlingual, and intercultural encounters. In virtual exchanges, the practice of international professional collaboration, training in intercultural communication; and intercultural courses, happen as one element in blended language. International understanding is promoted through projects like Soliya, to empower young people for more effective, cooperative, and compassionate relations within and between their societies through high-quality global education combining the power of dialogue with the reach of new media technologies and the Sharing Perspectives Foundation to initiate, stimulate and facilitate international cross-cultural dialogue and collaboration to enhance knowledge and understanding by utilizing new online communication platforms (O'Rourke & Stickler, 2017).

The factors affecting teachers' decisions to implement telecollaboration projects to develop intercultural communication competence among learners were discussed by Godwin-Jones (2019). The identified factors were local support in terms of technological, pedagogical, and practical suitability based on course content and delivery and available partners. Teachers may be rewarded more personally than professionally for their efforts. The main tool of instruction delivery is the learning management system (LMS) in the tertiary education stage, its use outside the university will be limited. LMS is only a generic tool not designed for telecollaboration.

A case study was conducted by Kohn and Hoffstaedter (2017) aimed at exploring the pedagogical potential of lingua franca exchanges using telecollaboration for authentic intercultural communication practice and foreign language competence development beyond the face-to-face classroom. The study involved non-native English and German lingua franca conversations between pairs of 14-16 years old students of B1 level from schools in France, Germany, the Netherlands and Spain. Telecollaboration support included the BigBlueButton video communication platform and Moodle chat. Qualitative and quantitative analyses of oral and written lingua franca conversations and corresponding reflective feedback interviews were done. Intercultural communicative competence significantly improved by transcending the foreign language classroom with real-life elements leading to a tangible experience for both the students and teachers.

Telecollaboration of shorter durations can fail to develop the cultural awareness necessary to engage in intercultural exchanges with peers and teachers. The development of intercultural communication competence has become common for both offline and online intercultural learning, for which Byram's model of intercultural communication competence has become popular. According to Byram, ICC comprises five components. He explains them using the French word *savoirs*, capturing knowledge, attitudes, skills and awareness. The entry point to intercultural



learning is *savoir être*, an attitude that looks at one's cultural self relatively with valuing others. This is curiosity and openness towards other cultures, referred to by some as, 'decentring.' Secondly, the term *savoirs* itself refers to sociocultural knowledge about the behaviour of self and others. *Savoir comprendre* is the skill of interpreting and relating texts, events and behaviours. *Savoir apprendre/faire* denotes the skills of discovery and interaction involving an ability to acquire and operationalise new knowledge of cultural practices along with the acquisition of intercultural pragmatic strategies. The apex point is *savoir s'engager*, the critical cultural awareness similar to political education. Many factors affect the completeness of operations of these five components. Joint telecollaboration projects involving multiple agencies and learners from different geographical regions have been used for developing intercultural communication competence aimed at intercultural exchanges. Newer technologies help to avoid cultural misunderstandings in intercultural dialogues. A third space culture may exist when the telecollaborative participants neither stick to their own cultures nor transcend to the other cultures. Online identities and allegiances can outweigh current adherence to one's own culture (Lewis & O'Dowd, 2016).

A transnational intercultural citizenship project in the foreign language classroom in Argentina and the UK aimed to answer the research question: does an intercultural citizenship project lead to language learning? Findings from the Argentinean data showed that students developed procedural knowledge by using a foreign language with a genuine need. They were engaged in multiliteracies practices and developed their plurilingual competence within a translingual orientation (Porto, 2019).

The use of online intercultural exchange within foreign language education and the use of virtual intercultural dialogue in non-language-focused, discipline-specific content courses, were found to provide a broad and systematic integration of language education with other realms of activity, including academic disciplines (the LIKE project) to the internationally distributed communities via virtual internationalization through an online intercultural exchange (Thorne, 2013). Although three projects with different objectives have been mentioned, the methods of collection and analysis of data and results obtained from these projects have not been given in the paper. Thus, what would have been a good research paper became a mere conceptual paper.

Willingness to communicate (WTC) in another language is essential for developing intercultural and international dialogue. To study this effect, in the first part of the study, Yashima, Zenuk-Nishide, and Shimizu (2004) constructed a model with a survey of 160 students, assuming that WTC results in more frequent communication in the L2 and that the attitudinal construct international posture leads to WTC and communication behaviour. In the second part, this model was tested and validated using a pre-departure/post-departure survey of 60 students to the USA for a one-year study programme.

An overview of the papers presented at the International Association of Languages and Intercultural Communication (IALIC) conference in Durham in December 2012, Holmes (2014) made several observations regarding intercultural dialogue. The Conference theme was 'Intercultural dialogue: Current challenges; future directions.



One paper by Gao Yihong dealt with how intercultural dialogue is played out among Chinese youths' linguistic identities through their learning of English. She used a historical examination of approaches to second language acquisition and identified four prototypes of these learners as faithful imitators, legitimate speakers, playful creators and dialogical communicators. The fourth type, the dialogue communicators, is the most desirable type for intercultural dialogue. Riitaoja and Derwin used an ethnographic study of interreligious dialogue in two Finnish schools. Drawing on postcolonial, poststructural and related feminist theories, the constructions of self and others in the everyday encounters among teachers and students were evaluated. The resultant othering of individuals and their religious groups was also studied. Now a question arises whether the aims of interreligious dialogue in schools offer a viable method to learn about each other and to increase mutual understanding in multicultural classrooms. To achieve competence in intercultural dialogue and to build capability in language learners, Crosbie provided a set of pedagogic strategies by foregrounding social justice and agency using a content and language-integrated learning approach in the language classrooms. There were three papers on the pedagogical approaches to operationalise intercultural dialogue using intercultural pedagogies. Wang highlighted the facilitation of intercultural communication and competence through General Education programmes in China. The courses within these general education programmes enabled students to develop interdisciplinary knowledge alongside intercultural perspectives and the competence necessary for communication with others in an intercultural world. Teachers needed to develop intercultural competence to teach in these classes. Jaidev visualised the need to prepare international and local students in Singapore to manage intercultural dialogic encounters in increasingly globalised workplaces. The students used reflective blog posts on their own and their peers' intercultural interactions in group learning tasks and assignments. Blogs provided a non-threatening, low-stress environment for students to openly and freely discuss and learn about intercultural communication with cultural others, which could help them to handle similar scenarios in their workplace later. Santos, Araújo e Sá and Simões, using a large collaborative project in Aveiro, Portugal, presented a model for intercultural education, developed within a partnership involving two primary schools (largely monocultural), an immigrants' association, a cultural association, an institution working with disabled people, the City Hall and its library. There were several practical activities in the model integrating the various partners, thus facilitating opportunities for intercultural dialogue and the development of intercultural awareness and competence. The participants demonstrated increased knowledge of different countries and cultures, and developed their critical thinking and attitudes on increased curiosity and awareness of linguistic and cultural diversity, respect for others and working in partnership.

Tajeddin and Teimournezhad (2015) studied the representation of culture in dialogues and reading passages in international and localised textbooks used in Iran. In Iran, localisation is favoured as the language education policy. A content analysis of the local and international textbooks was done to examine which cultures and which



aspects of the cultures were associated with the first language and associated with the target language (TL), or other cultures in these textbooks. Most of the cultural elements embodied in the localised textbooks were culturally neutral as they did not refer to any particular culture and only a few were based on the TL and other cultures. Also, in these localised textbooks, first language/local culture did not feature at all but highlighted the sociological values more than the aesthetic aspects of culture. On the other hand, the international textbooks focused more on the aesthetic (two-thirds) types of intercultural elements. TL cultural elements were more evident in the international textbooks with very few representations of culturally neutral types. On the other hand, Pishghadam and Navari (2009) found that exposing students to English culture in Iran led to cultural derichment. This means, students, distanced themselves and even alienated from their own culture as they were exposed to the English culture. The need for syllabus designers, materials developers and educators to consider the age, location, and attitude of the learners was stressed.

Enhanced intercultural communication competence was noted among new learners of Portuguese learning through communication and culture, in an action research study by Mitchell, Pardino, Yermakova-Aguiar, and Meshkov (2015).

A proposal to integrate two models related to language and cultural education- the Methodological Model of Intercultural Competence (MetMIC) and the Teaching Unit Model (TUM) was made by Borghetti (2013). MetMIC deals with intercultural education and TUM deals with foreign language education. The proposed integration between these two was to be carried out at three levels: general and educational, macro or curricular, and micro or methodological. This three-level integration permits coherent implementation of intercultural and communicative objectives using theoretically-informed methodological choices related to curriculum structure and teaching.

Among the World Englishes (WE), both English as lingua franca (ELF) and the sociolinguistics of globalization has reduced some scope of World Englishes. If language acquisition is a dynamic process both within and between speakers, then it is likely that speakers will come across new linguistic forms and structures that need to be acquired. Speakers should be able to recognize that within each interaction there is potential for miscommunication based solely on cultural factors. One pedagogical solution in WE is to raise learners' awareness of as many varieties of English as possible during lessons. Instead of simple exposure to SLA, explicit instruction on pragmatics is required to acquire symbolic competence as an ability to choose which style to speak with whom, about what, and for what effect. Variations in L2 English acquisition among learners reflect the context of acquisition and the dynamic nature of the language. Interculturality stresses the pedagogical need to provide learners with the tools needed to recognize how similarities and differences between language and culture occur. From this point of view, it is essential to strike a balance between intercultural awareness and linguistic proficiency. Four ways to incorporate intercultural awareness in language learning programmes have been proposed: exploring the complexity of local cultures, exploring cultural representations in both language learning materials and the media and arts, making use of cultural



informants; and engaging in both face-to-face and electronically-mediated intercultural communication (ICC). Task-based language teaching (TBLT) can promote language learning concerning real-world contexts and the introduction of cultural topics with critical dimensions in second language learning contexts, where learners do not share an L1 (De Costa & Crowther, 2018).

Using a young American individual's vlog on YouTube sharing his experiences of learning French, Combe and Codreanu (2016) discussed the potential use of vlogs for developing language speaking skills and intercultural exchanges between users. While vlogs provide opportunities for speaking skills, digital literacy skills, multilingual peer learning, and opinion conflicts through cultural stereotypes, and intercultural skills, the ethical aspects of social networks and the linguistic skills of social network users are also important.

The principle of intercultural dialogue in foreign language teaching methodology is officially regulated by the Federal Educational Standards and accepted by the professional community in Russia. But these principles are not practised adequately. In this respect, the relevance of implementing the intercultural approach in foreign language education in Russia arises from its proven innovative status and high linguistic, methodological and axiological potential, and its role in the current geopolitical situation in the world (Yazykova, 2020).

An evaluation of the long-term impact of four intercultural citizenship projects in university foreign language classrooms was done by Porto (2021). Argentinian students' recollections of experiences in four intercultural citizenship projects undertaken with students in the UK and Italy between two and four years after the event were analysed. Curricular developments based on Byram's intercultural citizenship theory showed short-term impacts like the development of self and intercultural awareness, criticality, social justice responsibility, language learning, and the emergence of a sense of community and bonding among transnational peers. The students remembered their experiences as valuable in terms of their emotional engagement with critical content and with their transnational peers. There were different and conflicting views on the contribution of the project to their language learning. The mid-and long-term civic engagement occurred mostly at Michael Byram's 'pre-political' level in terms of thought, awareness and personal development, but not action at that level.

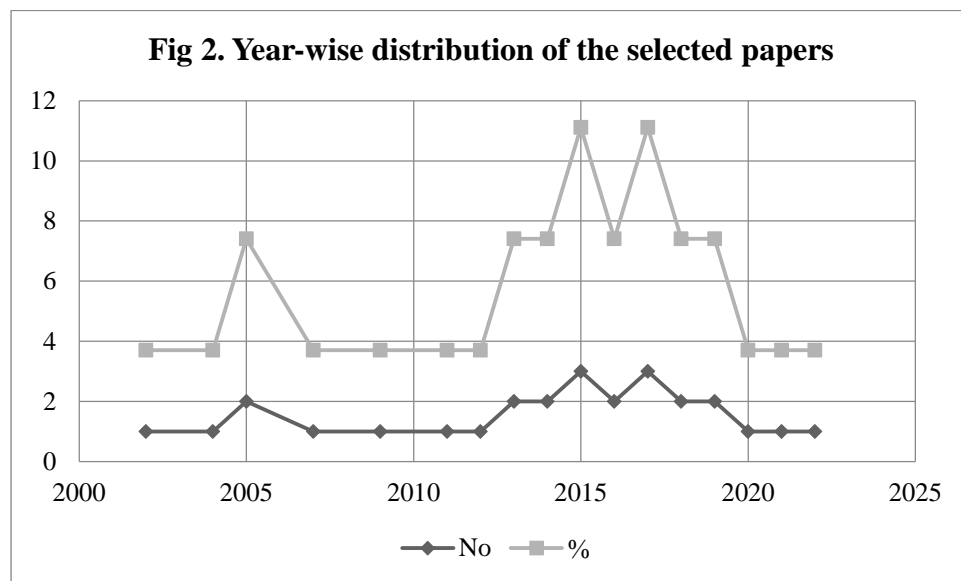
Complementing the textbook analysis with survey data from native speakers and L2 learners, Kiaer, Driggs, Brown, and Choi (2022) noted that the simplified patterns of address terms in Korean match, to some extent, the perceptions of methods to use these culturally infused markers of intimacy and hierarchy in cross-cultural interactions, even as there is a move towards multiculturalism. These perceptions are varied depending on the ethnonational identity and are co-constructed by the L2 learners themselves.



Notable Trends

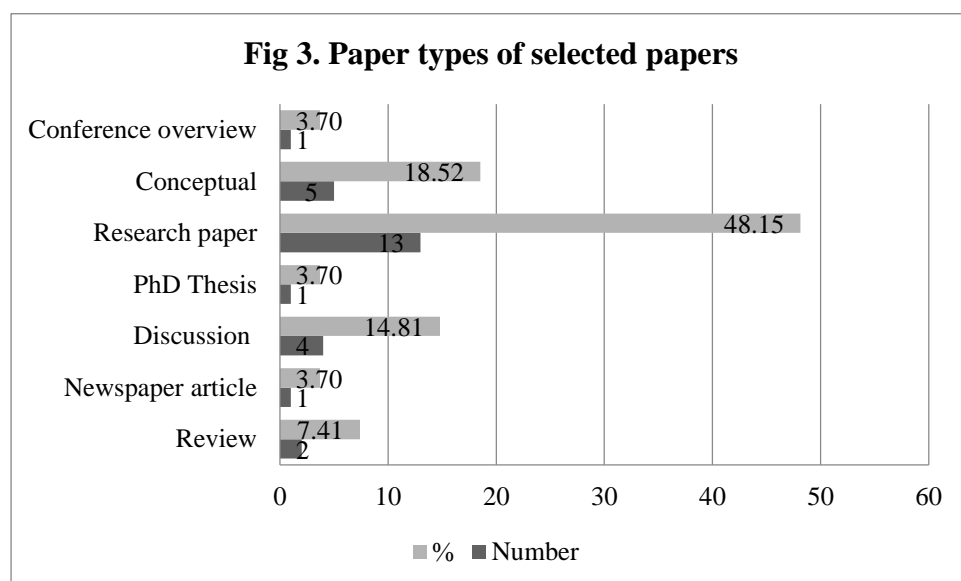
Some notable trends of the above-reviewed papers are discussed below.

Out of the available papers, 27 were selected for this review, as they were considered to be the closest to the topic yielding useful points. The distribution of these papers by their years of publication is given in Figure 2.



Between 2002 and 2022, the only notable trend was three papers each published in 2015 and 2017. A much larger number of papers might have shown a more definite trend. No papers could be selected for 2003, 2006, 2008 and 2010.

The distribution of papers based on the type of paper is shown in Figure 3.





Research papers dominated with about 48.5% of 27 belonging to this type. About 18.5% of the papers were conceptual and about 14.8% were discussion types. Methodology-wise, only the research papers and the thesis were based on qualitative and quantitative methods of collection and analysis of data. A Survey of literature was the basis of conceptual and discussion papers.

Discussion

Overall, the review showed the importance of the language-culture nexus in any discourse related to language acquisition facilitating intercultural and international dialogue. This does not mean that formal language learning is necessary for this facilitation. Foreign language acquisition without intercultural awareness can also happen.

In situations of learning more than one language with learners from different cultures, the classroom acts as the platform for intercultural exchanges and thus, promotes intercultural dialogue. Learners may develop a cosmopolitan citizenship culture making it an ideal place for intercultural dialogue. However, if power imbalances occur in the classrooms (like racism), the effectiveness of multicultural classrooms in fostering intercultural dialogue is limited. Multiliteracies practices are useful to develop plurilingual competence within a translanguing orientation.

Many personal, contextual, technological and social factors determine the exact way in which language acquisition with cultural learning can lead to developing intercultural communication competencies, which can help in international dialogue also. Mainly, language, culture and identity determine interpersonal and intercultural communication. Willingness to communicate and to do it more frequently are some mechanisms to make these factors more effective in intercultural dialogue.

Local or localised textbooks contain fewer transcultural elements than international textbooks. In the former case, sociological values, rather than language or culture, are stressed. The aesthetic aspects of intercultural elements are given more importance in the case of international textbooks.

There is good evidence for the beneficial effects of telecollaboration to promote intercultural and international dialogue. However, online interactions can lead to conflicts between learners of different cultures. The development of coping mechanisms with sociocultural competence has been suggested to overcome this problem. In the case of telecollaboration, virtual exchange, or online intercultural exchange, learners of different languages and cultures, usually in different geographic locations, meet online to engage in learning dialogue, which was otherwise impossible.

Developing L2 abilities can either complement or contradict the L1 skills of intercultural dialogue. The development of linguistic capabilities should not affect the development of intercultural awareness. Some theories have been offered to explain the situations in which these can happen. These include second language acquisition (SLA) theories, Bakhtin's theory of dialogue and Byram's intercultural citizenship theory.



Exposure to an alien language and culture should not derichment of own culture, as was noted in the case of Iranian students.

Conclusion

The aim of this research was to gain insights into the issues surrounding language acquisition in the context of intercultural and international dialogue. The research has found that due to the inherent and inseparable nature of culture with language, learning language alone will not achieve intercultural awareness, essential for intercultural and international dialogue. Second Language Acquisition theory needs to be integrated with the dialogue theory of Bhaktin and operationalised through Byram's intercultural citizenship theory using tools such as telecollaboration for the effective development of both language and intercultural awareness for intercultural and international dialogue. The most appropriate use of the language-culture nexus to develop competencies both in language and intercultural awareness can lead to effective intercultural and international dialogue. Modern tools like telecollaboration can facilitate this. However, the factors affecting these need to be considered and challenges to be overcome to achieve the full potential of simultaneous second language acquisition and intercultural dialogue competencies.

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