Impact of Integrating Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) into Undergraduate English for Academic Purposes (EAP) Classrooms

G.G.K. Vindika*, P.K. Karunarathne

University of Peradeniya, Peradeniya, 20400, Sri Lanka
**kasung@sci.pdn.ac.lk*

In Sri Lankan University system, the medium of instruction of many disciplines is English. To assist with the language for undergraduates from various ethnic and cultural backgrounds, universities have introduced special English Language courses such as English for Academic Purposes (EAP), English for Special Purposes (ESP) through English Language Teaching Departments. Despite their strong focus on the subject content, it is dubious whether sufficient attention is paid to learner cultural and linguistic background, individual behaviors, expectations and attitudes. Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) — individual's ability to interact effectively and appropriately with people from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds, responding flexibly to differing behaviors, attitudes, and expectations is largely overlooked in the language classroom. Despite the growing theoretical emphasis on ICC, its practical integration into EAP classrooms in Sri Lankan university settings remains underexplored. The main objective of this study was to assess the current knowledge of the instructors as well as the learners on ICC, and impact of ICC in improving learner EAP skills. Further, the study aimed to identify the perceptions of the learners on integrating ICC into the curricula. Another objective of the study was to identify the challenges faced by the instructors as well as institutions in integrating ICC into the curricula. The study was conducted using the secondary qualitative research method focusing on undergraduates and English instructors from international and local universities, employing data gathered from numerous research articles. It examined EAP instructors' understanding of ICC, the extent to which ICC components knowledge, skills, attitudes, and critical cultural awareness are embedded in curricula and teaching practices, and the institutional and pedagogical challenges affecting its implementation. Further, learner perceptions of the ICC usage in the classroom were also examined. The findings exhibited that majority of the instructors do not focus on ICC due to constraints such as insufficient training, lack of curricular guidance, and limited exposure to intercultural experiences. Furthermore, it was observed that a substantial proportion of undergraduates demonstrated increased engagement, cultural awareness, and communicative confidence while following EAP courses when ICC informed practices were incorporated into classroom interaction. This study contributes to aligning language teaching with global communicative needs through vitalizing curriculum design, teacher education, and professional development via structured ICC training. Integrating ICC into EAP classrooms is proved to enhance both language proficiency and students' ability to navigate diverse academic and professional contexts, ultimately improving academic success and employability in a globalized world.

Keywords: ICC, EAP, ESP