UNIVERSIDAD PEDAGÓGICA NACIONAL

UNIDAD AJUSCO

PROPUESTA DE INTERVENCIÓN EDUCATIVA

La cultura y su integración con las habilidades lingüísticas en la enseñanza del Inglés

TRABAJO RECEPCIONAL

QUE PARA OBTENER EL DIPLOMA DE:

ESPECIALIZACIÓN EN ENSEÑANZA Y APRENDIZAJE DE INGLÉS COMO LENGUA EXTRANJERA, MODALIDAD EN LÍNEA

PRESENTA:

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UNIVERSIDAD PEDAGÓGICA NACIONAL

Specialization in Teaching and Learning English as a Foreign Language

EDUCATIONAL INTERVENTION PROPOSAL

DISSERTATION PAPER

'Culture and its integration with the linguistic skills in English teaching.'

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Content Table

Introduction

No matter how old a teacher is, or how much we think we know, every project we start is a new journey; an opportunity to thoroughly reflect about our prior knowledge and reshape the way we think. Throughout the contents of each module seen in this Specialization, much was discussed about different elements that surround the foundations of English language teaching and learning such as: both teaching and learning theories, approaches, strategies, techniques and the like. But we also got to dig into something whose importance underlies not only English, but also any other language teaching and yet, is sometimes shrugged off, either consciously or unconsciously, when it comes to its application: Interculturalism, which at the same time, involves many other well-known concepts.

We teachers have always been told about the importance of conveying meaning trough language instead of merely knowing the language itself, and that is what we know as 'communicative competence', a concept coined as the result of much linguistic research and a model of language acquisition that seeks to foster, to acknowledge and to use the sociolinguistic conventions of the target language. This shift in English teaching and curricula led us all to focus on language in use and know its social context. An evidence of this can be found in recently published English textbooks for different education levels in which 'Social practices of the language' are now included and intend to be a depiction of a real-life situation, thus contextualizing the use of language rather than isolating its grammar components (Linguistic competence).

One may think that having both linguistic and social knowledge of the target language, English in this specific case, makes us proficient language users, but turns out it does not. It might had been enough for an EFL years ago, when world was less interconnected and chances for multicultural exchanges could scarcely happen but, for the

society we live in nowadays, it takes more than being aware of grammatical structures and how they work in context; knowledge of cross-cultural contexts is a must know.

If I stop for a few seconds and ponder my own experience as an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learner in the different stages of my life, I can say without hesitation that little was taught about culture in English speaking countries. Yet, the score in a language certificate exam said I was a 'proficient' language user. Was I? Back then, the results did not reveal my lack of knowledge towards the target language culture but my linguistic, and sometimes sociolinguistic, skills. It is said that each person chooses the language certification that suits them best, according to their learning or personal objectives or even budget and, at that moment of my life, not knowing much about my second language (L2) culture did not feel as something terrible. But time proved me wrong, especially when I decided to become a teacher and the need of culture knowledge arose.

Why 'culture' matters in a classroom? As a teacher, what strategies do I apply to foster culture awareness in my students? Is culture even important when it comes to language learning? …Are some of the inquiries I strive to answer as I develop this document.

In the first chapter, the philosophy and theory underlying my teaching practice and identity will be stated, being these the elements that have undoubtedly shaped both the teaching beliefs and practices that I now apply.

As for the second chapter, a detailed lesson plan, reflection of my teaching philosophy, pedagogy and theoretical approaches to both teaching and learning a second language, will be provided as I strive to merge them to successfully fulfill the contents established as well as to develop in students the linguistic, communicative and sociocultural competence, being the later the core part of the dissertation paper.

Having implemented the designed lesson plan, in the third chapter a thorough description of every single activity will shed some light on the discoveries, outcomes and struggles I (and the students) encountered while applying it thus being analyzed in the last chapter of this document.

Chapter 1: Philosophy and theory
1.01 Teaching identity and philosophy

"Teaching and learning should bring joy. How powerful would our world be if we had kids who were not afraid to take risks, who were not afraid to think, and who had a champion? Every child deserves a champion, an adult who will never give up on them, who understands the power of connection, and insists that they become the best that they can possibly be."

-Rita Pierson, 2013

For me, as for many other people, teaching has always represented one of the most important foundations of each society for it shapes citizens' life in innumerable ways. Either you decided to become a doctor or a lawyer; you surely had a memorable teacher. Though not noticed by some, the indisputably impact of we teachers, either it is good or bad, will highly influence our students' for years to come. Not only do we have the chance to be knowledge carriers of a particular subject matter, but also to inspire and touch people's lives by providing learning experiences in such a way that they may fall in love with the idea of both learning and sharing one's knowledge and life experiences, if not by becoming a teacher, by making substantial contributions in their own particular way.

The way I see it, meaningful teaching is pretty much like a cascade: an unstoppable flow of knowledge that, when consistent enough, shapes the rocks in its path as it rushes forward.

"Who dares to teach, must never cease to learn", that was the enlightening inscription craved at the entrance of one of the lecture halls at New Mexico State University. Back in the day, I never really thought of the underlying significance of that phrase which, though quite easy to understand, had a much important meaning once I started my teaching career for I experienced it in the flesh. As a matter of fact, I did not even know who the author of that phrase was, but now I know that it was John Cotton Dana, a librarian whose greatest concern was to spread culture, another reason to feel familiarized with him and his quote. This profession has shown me the importance of

being an unstoppable learner without assuming at one point that we know it all, for there is always something new to learn or to master.

My background both as a student and a teacher of English as a Second Language (ESL), coupled with my teaching experience with various-age groups and non-English speakers, has shaped my teaching philosophy and risen my awareness towards the importance of learning a second language, being the latter my major reason for keeping myself motivated at all times. Most of the teachers are unaware of their own way of instruction, even after having years of experience in front of a classroom, and find themselves unable to define their teaching philosophy (that is to say, the set of beliefs that rule their pedagogical practice on a daily basis) as well as the components of language that matter the most for them when teaching English.

As a part of this guild, I dare say this is not an easy thing to do since it takes a lot of self-awareness of one's way of teaching. With only four years of being an in-service teacher, I would be lying if I said that I am fully aware of what my teaching philosophy is. No way. On the contrary, I am not ashamed of saying that day after day I learn something completely new and thus change my teaching perspective. I rewrite myself every single day, whenever I get to learn something new that can enhance my teaching practice. Sometimes it may take more than this, like the opinion of an outsider. And who if not a student of ours can make us ponder on this subject matter? If not by giving an opinion or feedback about our teaching performance, we can get to know how suitable is our teaching approach by seeing how engaged students are and their willingness when it comes to participating in either written or oral exchanges. But something even more difficult than being fully aware of the aspects of language that we focus on while teaching is realizing what is that our students need (or want to achieve) when learning English. Is this the real reason why students decide not to study second language? Because of their unfulfilled expectations?

Well, I am a Bachelor of Arts in English Teaching as a Second Language and I know there is a long way to go before I could answer these questions. I first gained some experience in this work field while doing my internship in the last year of my bachelor's in 2016. Long before that, I had already devoted myself to the daily work of being a committed teacher so as to successfully fulfill my learners' needs and expectations.

During this internship year, I had the opportunity to work with middle school students. My work there was similar to a teaching assistant for I was not supposed to be all alone in the classroom without my tutor's supervision, that is to say: the head teacher. However, she eventually gave me a lot of freedom and independence when working with her students and always encouraged me to keep on using that enthusiasm of mine as my best ally when trying to engage students in my lessons. She even offered me to occupy her position for she was about to retire, I was flattered but deep inside me I knew (and I still know) that I had a lot of things to work on. Along with my internship, during this year I was supposed to write my dissertation paper which turned out to be quite challenging; I barely had time to concentrate on both things. However, I managed to pull them off.

I remember myself thinking about my dissertation proposal; I wanted it to be an innovative research, a fertile and (almost) unexplored field. Suddenly, I remembered that some weeks ago I had read an article written by Scott Thornbury and Luke Meddings, *The roaring in the chimney (or: what coursebooks are good for*) (2011), in it, they maintained a position against the use of textbooks in English language courses. They claimed that their inappropriateness was due to the lack of real-life situations which was replaced by an overuse of digested and processed language contents. According to them, other subjects – like geography, history, or mathematics – do need textbooks. Therefore, since language is not a subject, but a medium, we cannot base its instruction around books for we would be restraining and paralyzing its capacity to convey messages.

First time I read this I was thrilled by such a brand new perspective in language teaching, whose main premise was avoiding the use of textbooks and replacing them with much more meaningful and authentic materials. Why was I surprised? My English knowledge, and even my way of teaching, was mostly based on what I had learned from textbooks and that represented a paradigm shift for me. Having read several articles with a focus similar to this one, I decided to do my research about the Simulated Immersion of the language. A communicative language approach which mainly consists in simulating the conditions of a native-speaker environment inside the classroom by exposing students to large amounts of language input through the use of authentic materials so as to enhance their language acquisition process. Why did I ever choose to try this out? I noticed that students had little exposure to the language both inside and outside the classroom; that teachers would rather give them the instructions in Spanish than wait for them to guess what they had to do.

As an ELF teacher, I am highly aware of the importance of providing my students a significant amount of language for they have no other opportunity to practice it outside the classroom, or even if they had (and of that I am sure of) they probably would not be willing to make use of it but in the classroom. So I have to seize every opportunity I have to take the best out of it, either it is by using a song's lyrics or a book extract so as to broaden their language knowledge.

Using materials that support our pedagogical practice also requires, or should involve, a thorough selection of these in order to make sure that they will fulfill both the expected outcomes established on the syllabus and most importantly, our learners' expectations. There may not be a tailor-made material for each teaching purpose, but what teachers do have is the ability of adapting materials and creating some of their own according to their needs.

For many, since there is no way to change neither the school's infrastructure nor their students' background, the only thing they can always take advantage of is the use of resources that can enhance their teaching such as textbooks and authentic material. One of the perks of using the former is the easiness with which all kind of teachers can use them for they are not complex and, in most of the cases, the instructions for its use are crystal clear whereas a common disadvantage is the lack of articulation between the contents and the way in which they can be applied in real life. On the other hand, the latter provide a much more rich learning and teaching experience due to its "authentic" nature, that is to say, an opportunity to be exposed to natural input of the language rather than being given tremendous amounts of digested vocabulary set in unnatural communication exchanges.

On the other hand, having the opportunity to work with young adults, which are almost my age, has encouraged me to keep on being a non-stopping learner, to constantly update my teaching strategies and to not to forget my own experience as an ESL student so as to always be sympathetic with the struggles they face when being exposed to the target language and so I strive to empower students by broadening their horizon. It is always important to put in our students' shoes as well as to remind one's learning experiences in order to better understand how challenging is for them carrying out certain tasks for this is the only way in which we can adapt our instruction method and suitably address their needs.

By being a highly-aware teacher towards our students, we can identify their needs and assets, provide opportune and relevant guidance and articulate both the contents and the language itself. Thus creating a learning environment that build up students' confidence in learning a second language.

Before joining UAM's language center, I had the opportunity to work at the Instituto Politecnico Nacional where I learned and got to work with different teaching methodologies that highly influenced my teaching philosophy. I had always wanted to be part of a Language Center so it was like a dream came true and thus I entered there all bright-eyed and bushy-tailed and that is how I felt during my entire stay.

I met the most amazing work team led by a professor with a high sense of responsibility, cooperative work and commitment. Those were factors that always kept me and the rest of the teachers extremely motivated despite the multiple factors that we may face within our classrooms.

Here I had my first approach to the Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) which mainly focuses and encourages the use of the second language to complete and attain specific tasks by carrying out communicative exchanges in the target language. Thus focusing on meaning rather than on isolated grammatical structures, that is to say, students would eventually notice the way in which language can be used for communicative purposes and for conveying thoughts which, on my own teaching and learning experience, has been proven quite effective for it is much more meaningful to students. To do so, the exposure to the target language through authentic materials is essential to make headway in one's learning process.

According to this teaching approach, the language contents are to be covered in three major sections: *Pre-task Phase* (this part mainly consists in introducing the language content by using leading-in activities or by recalling language that would be useful for them to attain the expected task), *Task Cycle Phase* (having been given the necessary input, students complete and report their results regarding the required task either individually or in pairs) and *Language Focus Phase* (once students used language in a free practice, both the students and the teacher highlight the outstanding points of each of contribution made by students so as to decide which aspects have to be practiced) .

To have an evidence of students' academic development and language improvement by using this approach, at the end of the course they had to present an "integrative task" that is to say, a specific project according to the communicative competences established by the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) either it was by presenting a video, role-playing, performing a play/movie clip, among others.

This entire journey started right after finishing my degree and coming back from a Pedagogical Professional Development Program sponsored by the Fulbright Commission in Mexico (COMEXUS). During one month and a half we were taught the foundations of an instruction method called Biography-Driven Culturally Responsive Teaching; a socio-constructivist approach which strives to address the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse learners. Due to its sociocultural nature, Lev Vygotsky's sociocultural theory was constantly remarked during this course. Mainly focused on both cognitive and social interactions, in this theory he claimed that by fostering an interactive learning environment, students would be able to make headway in improving their current knowledge and in using the language instead.

Little did I know that immediately afterwards I would have the privilege to contribute in some significant way to the institution that taught me everything I know. Though this professional development program lasted only two months, the things I learned and the wonderful experiences I had both academically and culturally still linger in me and will last a lifetime.

I have witnessed the awesomeness of having the opportunity not only to use a second language, but also to get to know its culture in itself. Being able to spread the learned things with my colleagues, acquaintances and students was, and still is, undoubtedly the best part of it, for there is no better way to create a learning community than sharing one's knowledge. I consider myself a person with sheer passion towards my profession and nothing delights me more than sharing this with my students.

This philosophy leaded me here, to a brand-new journey full of ups and downs; trying to achieve something even bigger and of greater importance than the sole fact of receiving an academic degree: the opportunity to learn something that would impact my teaching thus benefitting my students' language learning.

1.02 Theory underlying the teaching practice and identity

Let's think of a tapestry made by several threads where, in spite of its being different to the others, every single thread helps to create a marvelous pattern. Now, think of every thread as a language/teaching theory and of the depicted pattern as the whole picture of one's teaching practice.

By deepening into the theoretical foundations, principles, hypothesis, approaches, methods and techniques regarding English language learning and teaching, we can notice the several tiers, or threads, involved in it, starting by the schools of thought that, though not specifically created to explain language phenomena but rather to make contributions to the field of psychology, lead to the creation of language learning and teaching theories, approaches, methods and techniques, in that corresponding order. The interesting thing about each language acquisition theory is that, in most of the cases, they share few things in common and disagree with what is claimed by a different theoretical point of view for they all focus in a different aspect of language acquisition. However, they all have made important contributions to the field of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) research and provided interesting perspectives according to their particular variables.

At one point, it might seem as an overwhelming amount of factors involved in the language process and thus, a lot of information to digest or to dismiss. Actually I think that a complete dissertation paper should be devoted to the thorough explanation of how these foundations shape our way of teaching. Nonetheless, the important thing is to identify which of the "opinions" given by each of the theorists can be useful or suitable according to our own teaching environment and most importantly, to our students' variables: age, cognition, native language, affective domain and educational background.

A clear example of the substantial differences between the schools of thought, as seen in the first Module of the Specialization, which highly influenced SLA theories, has been briefed in the following chart:

BEHAVIORISM AND STRUCTURALISM	GENERATIVE LINGUISTICS	SOCIOCULTURAL THEORY
• Does not consider the user as a creative generator of language.	• Considers the underlying principles of language performance of each	• Both social and cognitive factors play an important role within language

• Language phenomena is merely conceived in objective terms (language structures). • Language is acquired through the formation habits and associations between a stimuli and the corresponding response.	individual.	development. • Language is acquired through practice and exposure to the language.

Evidently, this is nothing remotely similar to the extensive research that had to be made in order to draw these conclusions. However, by taking a close look at the different focus in each school of thought it is possible for us to trace back some of the SLA theories that were developed and influenced by their assumptions as well as the applications that they still have in today's language classrooms and their impact on one's teaching practice.

That is the case of the behaviorist approach, whose conception of learning as a stimulus-response association led many teachers to implement activities aimed to developed language through a **reiterative process** which involved constant repetition of language patterns and the corresponding feedback. In my own teaching experience, I can say that it actually works. Why is that so? Because language learning is a process and processes commonly require reinforcement of linguistic practices. However, in some cases behaviorism turns out to be a great challenge for English as foreign language (EFL) teachers when we find out that our students already possess a significant amount of habits in their mother tongue (L1), thus hindering the second language (L2) learning. This process is better known as first language interference and refers to the (mostly negative) effects produced when learning an L2 due to the differences encountered in both language systems. Selinker (1983 in Derakhshan and Kkarimi, 2005) points out that there are two types of transfer in learning a second language: positive and negative transfer. In the former, L1 facilitates the acquisition of second language, whereas the latter refers to the first language negative impacts on L2 and interferes in L1. If it is true that this can prevent students from learning a L2, it is also possible to take advantage of this students' L1 prior knowledge as they also have similarities regarding word order in simple language structures.

Even though behaviorism offers relevant information towards language learning, it does not consider the underlying aspects that take place in such process. Unlike it, the perspective offered by the Generative Linguistics attempt to unfold the mysteries of language acquisition by analyzing the principles that are invisible to the naked eye, that is to say, one's predisposition to innately acquire a language. Of all the theories influenced by this premise, I dare say Chomsky's is still one of the most significant for EFL teachers and scholars. For him, language acquisition was what for a child meant learning how to walk, i.e. a biologically programmed function that requires little, or none, intervention for they all own a special ability to discover by themselves the underlying rules within their L1 system. I am fond of this theory because for me it is as if Chomsky was trying to say: 'every human being can develop a series of linguistic skill both in their L1 and L2'.

Nonetheless, it takes more than just having language knowledge (*performance),* there also has to be a manifestation of it (*competence).* According to Mitchell and Miles (1998) "*It is not about performance, about how language is used real life […] performance is the domain of a theory of language use, in which linguistic competence is only one aspect."* (p. 45)

While it is true that Chomsky's definitions are one of the first discussions in the literature about competence, much of the applied linguistics research refers to Hymes' work as being seminal to the *Communicative Competence*. Hymes reacts against Chomsky's definition, because he feels that Chomsky 'omits almost everything of sociocultural significance' (Tarvin, 2015), which is exactly what happened throughout my learning process for during my school years I was much familiarized with the tacit knowledge of the language and its use in concrete situations but lacked of sociocultural knowledge. According to Hymes (1972), though the definition of performance used by Chomsky seemed to include some sort of sociocultural content, it lacked of something way more substantial: 'social interaction'.

Let's not forget something important: language changes, it is dynamic and though Chomsky overlooked the sociocultural role of language in use, Hymes got to foresee its importance and developed a theory for understanding communicative competence and lay the groundwork for further researches in SLA contexts. However, that is not it, Hymes' theory involves two cultures: one's own and the one that is being learned, for example, in my own teaching context that would be: Mexican culture and that of English speaking countries correspondingly. As mentioned before,

language is dynamic and goes on changing, that means that an English as a second language learner (ESL) from the eighties may not have had the need for a sociocultural exchange that involved more knowledge of a culture than his very own, but society as we know it nowadays push ourselves to be interculturally competent, that is to say, to communicate effectively in a range of cross-cultural context. By saying 'effectively' we refer to something more than just language proficiency, we talk about a set of skills that will enable us to accept cultural differences trough language and hold communication exchanges with people from diverse cultural backgrounds and whose medium of communication happens to be English for it is the 'lingua franca'.

To easily remember and better understand what each competence is about, the following comparative chart outlines the most important features of each all:

LINGUISTIC COMPETENCE	COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE	INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE
Refers to the linguistic knowledge possessed by *native* speakers of a language	Refers to, not only grammar, but also social knowledge of when and how to use it appropriately.	Refers to effective communication in a range of cross-cultural contexts. Acknowledgment of English as a *lingua franca* thus encouraging particular attitudes, knowledge and skills.
Knowledge of language	Language in use	
NOT knowing the social context on the language	*KNOWING* the social context of the language	
Also referred as "*grammatical competence*"	Involves verbal and non-verbal communication	
	Involves knowledge of two cultures: one's own and the one learnt	Involves cultural awareness (one's identity and values) to function well in intercultural interactions.

The interaction between the existent knowledge and its application within a real-life setting is exactly what lead us to the Sociocultural Theory. Also known as a part of the Interactionist Approach (Lightbown y Spada, 1999), this learning theory was developed thanks to the contributions made by Lev Vygotsky which were mainly focused on both cognitive and social interactions. He claimed that

by fostering an interactive learning environment, students would be able to make headway in improving their current knowledge and in using the language instead. Thus, the concept of "Zone of Proximal Development" (ZPD) was coined and described by Vygotsky in 1987 as the difference between the child's developmental level as determined by independent problem solving, and the higher level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers (Mitchell and Miles, 1998). When it comes to language learning, interaction is one of the most important factors. Language cannot be mastered in a vacuum. Therefore, in language classrooms, mediation and guided participation in social interactions with peers is key to guarantee its learning.

A similar concept referring to this kind of assistance provided by either a teacher or a peer was later developed under the name of "Scaffolding", first used by Wood, Bruner and Ross in *The Role of Tutoring in Problem Solving* (1976) when describing the interaction between a teacher and his students to aid them solving a problem. That is why EFL teachers are nowadays considered as language "facilitators". Our role is not to give students a plethora of information, but rather to ease their learning process by designing lessons that allow them to discover by themselves the existent relationship between small amounts of language content.

To sum up, the methodologies that shape the way I teach and the things I believe in were learnt both theoretically and empirically. Why is that so? Well, I took the best out of some books and my best teachers' performances to develop my own way of teaching.

Chapter 2: Methodology and Practice

The lesson plan I designed for this document was based on the undergraduate English language programs for Escuelas Normales and the course program for 2nd semester: "English II – Developing Elementary Conversations". I am currently teaching undergraduate students on his second semester at Escuela Normal Superior de México, a school that is well known for its 'tradition' in training future teachers of basic education. The age range is from 18 to 30 or more years old. Due to a strategy specifically designed for Escuelas Normales and launched by the Ministry of Education, since 2018 a new language course for Escuelas Normales was designed to develop students' ability to communicate effectively in English in contexts that will be important for them. As future teachers in a society where English is increasingly important for engaging successfully with professional and social activities, it is essential that all students develop a good level of proficiency in English (SEP, 2018). In previous years, English was only taught to those students whose bachelor was English teaching, meaning that students that belonged to different specialties such as: Biology, Geography, History, Mathematics and the like, did not get the chance to take English classes as part of their specific curricula. The document is based in some theoretical and even political foundations, but the one that is tightly tied to the subject matter of this document is the following: 'As UNESCO has said: Linguistic competencies are fundamental for the empowerment of the individual in democratic and plural societies, as they condition school achievement, promote access to other cultures and encourage openness to cultural exchange (UNESCO 2007:13). English is particularly important for students because of its role in multinational communicative settings (Hyland 2011)'.

According to the syllabus and general mapping, the English course name description for second semester students is 'English II: Developing Elementary Conversations' and the textbook to use is Interchange Intro Units 9 – 16, published by Cambridge University Press.

The lesson was developed based on the eleventh unit of their textbook named: 'I'm going to have a party', which includes discussion and comparison of holidays, special occasions and festivals of one's country and around the world. Thus, the outcoming competences of this unit can be divided and described as follows:

• *Linguistic/grammatical competence*: Student can use the future with 'be going to'; yes/no and WH- questions with 'be going to'; and future time expressions.

• *Communicative competence:* Student use 'be going to' and the present continuous to express future actions; ask about birthdays and special occasions.

• *Intercultural competence:* Student effectively communicates with his/her peers to socialize and compare holidays, special occasions and festivals of his/her country and well-known festivities from other countries by fostering cultural differences acceptance and respect.

As for the academic/linguistic setting of my group and the contents, this is it. However, I consider important to mention the context in which this lesson plan was developed. The social-distancing period we are going through due to the quarantine we are in, have pushed us to make significant breakthroughs in teaching by using and acquainting ourselves with digital tools (which some months ago were unknown for us) that allow us to take the best out of this situation and humanize something that is commonly regarded as mere technology and turn it into an invaluable medium of instruction.

Before describing the overall lesson planning, I would like to mention some of the digital tools/resources used to attain the objectives of this Unit and make the sessions as interactive as possible:

- *BigBlueButton:* web conferencing system designed for online learning. Features include: real-time sharing of audio, video, slides, chat and screen. Students are engaged through sharing of emoji icons, polling, and breakout rooms (for freer practice).

- *Canvas by Instructure:* a cloud-based education technology platform with advanced Learning Management System (LMS) functionality

- *Mentimeter*: presentation software with interactive presentations, real-time voting and word cloud generator.

Merging the four main skills in distance learning is complex and yet, it is possible. The strategies can also be divided in two: Productive and Receptive Skills Strategies.

Reading and Listening comprehension involves bottom-up and top-down processing. Bottom-up processing means understanding the letters the reader sees or the sounds the listener hears. We recognize letters or sounds, which enables us to recognize words. From there, we need to understand how the words fit together. For this, we need top-down processing. Top-down processing uses the background knowledge that we have of the world and what we are reading or listening to. Top-down processing helps us to select the most probable interpretation of what we are reading or listening to (Koda, 2005; Yeldman & Gruba, 2016).

The more that a reader or listener knows about the topic that is being discussed, the easier it will be to understand. If a person is familiar with the type of reading passage (for example, an email is not written like a scientific article), he or she will know what to expect and will understand it more easily.

Because of this, several activities were carried out before the students tackled the reading or listening task:

• Discuss the topic with the class. Find out what the students know. Fill any important knowledge gaps that they might have that would help them to understand the text.
• Solicit from the class, or present to the class, key vocabulary that they can expect to encounter in the text.
• Preview a written text by looking at the title, headings, charts, images, and captions. Or if it is a video, watch part of the video with the sound off.

Eventually, in some of the cases, this receptive skill would directly impact student's written and spoken production. In other words, Reading and Listening acted in students as the "input" or the trigger and, consequently, Writing and Speaking were the "output", that is to say, the result of many hours devoted to the many joys of being exposed to the language, for being given a great amount of linguistic elements is essential to respond either orally or in writing.

1. LESSON PLAN IDENTIFICATION CELL.	
Author	Karla Joana Hernandez Perez
Educational stage	B.A. students. Second semester.
Title of your Lesson plan	**I'm Going To Have A Party**

Learning Objective of the plan/Competency	**Language Purpose**
	  o Develop in the students the ability of both share and compare information about special occasions and holidays celebrated in Mexico and in other countries by talking about future plans, discussing plans a particular date or time and asking/answering questions about details.
	
	Formative/Intercultural Purpose
	
	  o Lead students to reflect about the importance of acknowledging cultural differences and foster respect towards national and international traditions and holidays.

Communicative skill considered	Speaking/Reading/Writing/Listening/Culture.
Functions	-Talk about future plans. -Discuss plans a particular date or time. -Ask and answer questions about plans.
Main Grammar structure	-Be going to and Present Continuous for future plans. -Information questions (WH- question words).
Other Grammar structures	
Brief description of the plan	According to the undergraduate English language programs for Escuelas Normales and the course program for 2ⁿᵈ semester: "English II – Developing Elementary Conversations", one of the Learning Unit Objectives is to talk about future plans.

2. INTRODUCTION TO THE LESSON.

STEP OF THE LESSON	TEACHER ACTIVITIES	STUDENTS ACTIVITIES	SESSION NUMBER
Activation Before the lesson	• Demonstration of the online tools and platforms (Big Blue Button and Canvas) to be used during the unit. • Show how to answer, upload assignments, participate in discussion forums and access contents in the online platform. • Skype video session and PPT about Special Occasions.	• Join to the Skype video session and make contributions. • Students socialize with their classmates about what activities they have missed the most as well as some of the special occasions that they celebrated before the quarantine.	00
During the lesson	• Welcome students to the class. • Briefly review the vocabulary previously learned by students (Holidays). • Set the context by naming different special occasions or holidays and posing some lead-in questions. How do you usually celebrate it?	• Greet the class and express briefly how they feel that day. • Practice the vocabulary previously seen. • Students talk about how the quarantine have prevented them from carrying out certain activities or celebrating some special occasions with their beloved ones.	01

Set the objective or competencies of the lesson [Describe how you will present the objective or competencies of the lesson]	• Overall presentation of the online activities scheduled for the first session. • Unit presentation and online learning/teaching framework.	• Read the framework and pose questions regarding the lesson contents or the platform use.	01		

SESSION	LEARNING UNIT	CONTENTS	LANGUAGE SKILL	ACTIVITIES	EVIDENCES
1	**Unit 11**	**Special Occasions** **Holidays**	**Listening** **(Listening for gist)**	BigBlueButton video session and Unit Presentation PPT. **-CANVAS Listening Activity.** *SONG 'I JUST CALLED TO SAY I LOVE YOU'.* Ss. listen to the song as they try to figure out what the song is about.	Participation in BigBlueButton video session. **-CANVAS Listening/ Brainstorming Activity.** **-CANVAS Listening/ Gap-fill Activity.**
			Listening **(Listening for detail)**	**-CANVAS Listening/ Brainstorming Activity.** *SONG 'I JUST CALLED TO SAY I LOVE YOU'.* Ss. share on Mentimeter the key vocabulary they found in the song. **(Image 1.1)**	
			Listening **(Listening for detail)**	**-CANVAS Listening/ Gap-fill Activity.** *SONG 'I JUST CALLED TO SAY I LOVE YOU'.* **(Image 1.2)**	

			Speaking (Using Interactive Strategies)	-**CANVAS Discussion/ Breakout room Activity.** *MY FAVORITE HOLIDAY.* Ss. are divided in breakout videoconference rooms so that they can discuss with their classmates the following questions: *What is your favorite holiday/ month/ season of the year and why?* *How do you usually celebrate it?*	
2	**Unit 11**	**Special Occasions** **Holidays**	**Writing**	BigBlueButton video session about Holidays in Mexico. -**CANVAS Discussion Forum.** *PLANS AND ACTIVITIES IN MEXICO CITY.* Ss. make a post about popular activities that can be done in Mexico City. After Ss. make their own contribution, they will have to reply at least one of their classmate's post. **(Image 2.1)**	Participation in BigBlueButton video session. -**CANVAS Discussion Forum.** -**CANVAS Discussion/ Breakout room Activity.** -**CANVAS Assignment/Research Activity.**
			Speaking (Using Interactive Strategies) **Cultural awareness**	-**CANVAS Discussion/ Breakout room Activity.** *CELEBRATING HOLIDAYS IN THE U.S.* Ss. are divided in breakout rooms and discuss the following questions with their classmates based on the shown picture **(Image 2.2)**: *Do you celebrate any of these holidays?* *Do any of your friends celebrate them?* *What are some holidays in Mexico?* *How are they similar to the ones shown in the picture?*	

			Writing	**-CANVAS Assignment/Research Activity.** Ss. research about a popular festival or holiday held in another country.	
3	**Unit 11**	**Holidays and Festivals**	**Reading** **(Reading for gist/ for detail)**	BigBlueButton video session about Holidays in other countries. **-CANVAS Reading/ Breakout room Activity.** *HOLIDAYS AND FESTIVALS.* Ss. are randomly divided in five teams of five members each. **(1)** Each team is given a piece of information for its members regarding a specific holiday or festival around the world, *e.g. Mardi Gras, Running of the Bulls, St Patrick's Day, etc.* **(Table 1.2). (2)** In their corresponding teams, students read and then socialize the piece of information given **(3)** Once each student have discussed with their team, new teams will be conformed so as to have one member of each. **(4)** In turns, students will ask about each other's festival and jot down some notes as their classmates answer. *What is the holiday or festival?* *When is it celebrated?* *Where is it celebrated?*	Participation in BigBlueButton video session. **-CANVAS Reading/ Breakout room Activity.** **-CANVAS Discussion.**
			Speaking **(Using Interactive Strategies)**	**-CANVAS Discussion.** *Which festival sounds more interesting?* *Why?*	

| 4 | Unit 11 | Holidays and Festivals | Speaking (Using Interactive Strategies) | BigBlueButton video session and Digital Presentation.

-CANVAS Digital Presentation. *HOLIDAYS AND FESTIVALS.* Ss. create a five-minute presentation of the holiday/festival they read about the previous class and share it with their classmates. | |

Chapter 3: Experience Report

To introduce the topic I started with *'Months and Dates',* and to provide some vocabulary for further activities I worked with a song by Stevie Wonder named *'I just called to say I love you'.* The first part of the activity was probably the most difficult for them since the title of the song did not actually reflect what the intention of the lesson was. They had to listen to the song, without the lyrics, and to start brainstorming the words as they listened to them. To do so, we created a word cloud by using the application called Mentimeter in the students had to introduce the code provided by the teacher so as to share as many words as possible.
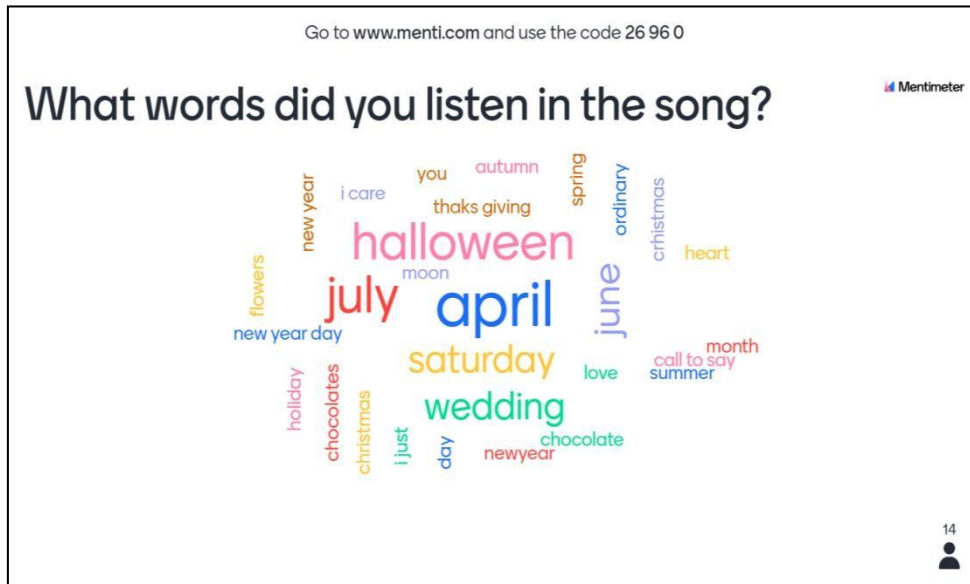
Image 1.1

Many of the students shared words such as '*called', 'heart', 'chocolate', 'love',* they did appeared in the song, but in the first attempt most of them did not catch the vocabulary expected: *seasons and months of the year, days of the week* and *holidays.* This was quite all right for they were just asked to socialize the words they got to understand.

Once they had already shared some words of the specific vocabulary, they were given a worksheet with a fill-in the blanks activity for them to complete the lyrics of the song:

Image 1.2

When having completed the activity, they found out that the vocabulary used in the song could be categorized as follows:

Holidays: *New Year's Day, Halloween, Thanksgiving, Christmas*

Seasons of the year: *Spring, summer, autumn*

Days of the week: *Saturday*

Months: *April, June, July, August*

And this was the trigger for the first discussion: *What is your favorite holiday/ month/ season of the year and why? How do you usually celebrate it?* As they shared their opinions with their peers, I got to monitor some of the conversations and listen to them saying: *'We don't eat "pavo" on Christmas, my grandma always prepare "romeritos"* or *'Really? I don't usually celebrate my birthday'* and even when I had not listened to the whole conversation, I could imagine that they had already found some

differences in the way they and their peers celebrate special occasions, even when sharing similar sociocultural backgrounds.

As for the next session, they had to start by talking about plans or activities they commonly do with their families or friends, to do so, students were divides in three different discussion groups and they had to post a contribution in which they talk about a popular activity that can be done in Mexico City.
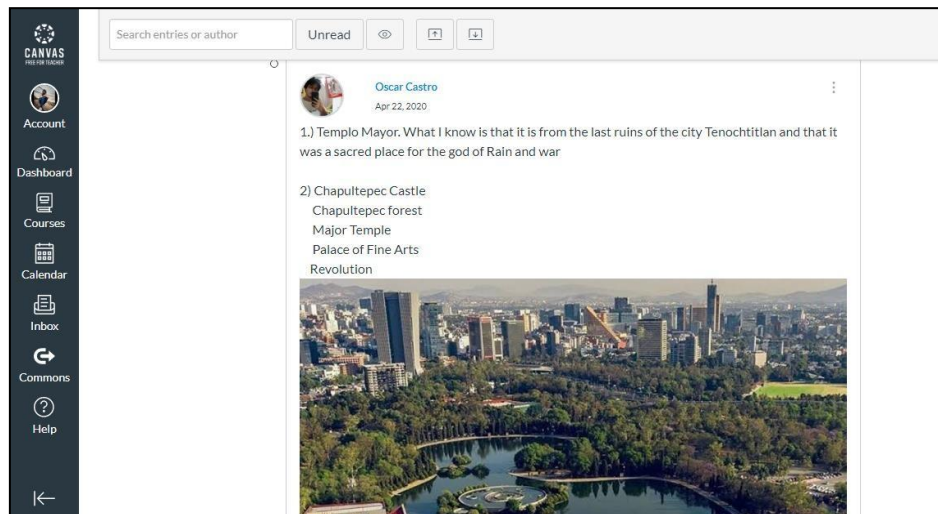

Image 2.1

Once they finished sharing, they were divided in breakout rooms so that they could discuss the following questions based on the shown picture: *Do you celebrate any of these holidays? Do any of your friends celebrate them? What are some holidays in Mexico? How are they similar to the ones shown in the picture.*

Image 2.2

For many students there was no significant distinction between *Halloween* (tradition which actually dates back to the ancient Celts) and *Day of the Death*, they used both ideas indistinctly, saying that '*In Día de los Muertos my family and I ask for candies*', they were not familiarized with the expression *trick or treating*. In contrast, some of them pointed out that asking for candies was not actually a Mexican tradition but something that we have picked up from another culture. As for the origins of Halloween, I briefed my students on how this tradition has evolved over time: from the ancient Celtic festival of Samhain, when people would light bonfires and wear costumes to activities like trick-or-treating, carving jack-o-lanterns and festive gatherings.

On the other hand, when talking about Independence Day the first comparison they made was about the date Mexican and American Independence was celebrated, which was an important contribution for some of them did not know when Americans celebrate their Independence. After that, we brainstorm information about how Independence Day in Mexico is celebrated and most of them said that people commonly gather in the Plaza de la Constitución or the main square of the city to watch Mexico's president ring the bell as he delivers his speech at the National Palace. This they knew because they had either attended there or at least watched the live broadcast on T.V. As for the U.S., their guesses were that Americans commonly celebrate with parades, barbecues and fairs because this is the portrayal they had found in most T.V series or movies. This mirrors how students do stereotype when being exposed to social media.

When thoroughly analyzing this outcome, I consider the activities described thus far were more about the intercultural competence and less about the communicative one. While it is true that the former refers to cross-cultural exchanges - that is to say, interactions among various cultural groups - and the activity only involved knowing about their own culture and that of an English- speaking country, while holding conversation with their peers, students were not actually focusing in the way they addressed to them or in the application of sociolinguistic rules or conventions of the target language (communicative competence) for they were in a familiar context where verbal and non-verbal communication were not relevant to this task. Instead, their main goal was to get as much information as possible to build up their own knowledge regarding other culture, which is complicated when taking into account that almost none of them has ever been to another country and their cultural frame of reference was merely based on articles, news or documentaries they had previously watched and not first-hand experiences or information.

The last activity was a Jigsaw Reading about Holidays and Festivals all around the world. As mentioned before, when comparing the traditions of Mexico and the United States they struggle because they knew little about both their own and the second language culture so this resulted in a lack of information exchange. Therefore, this time I provided the necessary input in a text passage.

As this was a team activity, before they joined to the assigned room, I had them copy the following table in their notebook:

Holiday / Festival	What is it about?	When is it celebrated?	Where is it celebrated?

Table 1.1

As they copied, I share with them several pictures, each one depicting and specific holiday/festival. I gave them some minutes to watch them all and then share their impressions about each one.

Since they did not have idea neither of the name, nor of the country where that holiday came from, I encouraged them to focus in small details such as people's clothing, things they were holding, eating, drinking and the like. Though none of them could guess the name of the celebration, many shared important observations about what the celebration might be about just by looking at people's gestures.

Afterwards, students were divided in five different breakout rooms. Each team was given a a piece of information for its members regarding a specific holiday or festival around the world, *e.g. Mardi Gras, Running of the Bulls, St Patrick's Day, etc*. (Table 1.2) In their corresponding teams, students had to read and then socialized the piece of information

given so that they became 'experts' of the holiday or festival they got. Once each student have discussed with their team, I let them know the purpose of the chart they had previously copied: new teams (rooms) were to be conformed so as to have one member of each, then in turns students will ask about each other's festival and jot down some notes as their classmates answer so that at the very end of the activity they all had information about five different holidays.

Mardi Gras, New Orleans, USA
When Mardi Gras takes over the streets of New Orleans for two whole weeks it's the carnival to rival all carnivals. Make sure you've got your best fancy dress costumes with you because Mardi Gras is all about dressing up. Be as wild and as exaggerated as you can imagine, then go join in the fun. Mingle among the crowds thronging the streets, follow the parades, and dance the hours away to live music and marching bands then put your best foot forward at a masquerade ball. But don't forget, there's only one rule for Mardi Gras and that's party until you drop. **When:** The Mardi Gras dates change every year depending when the official dates for Easter fall. The festivities generally start two weeks before Shrove Tuesday so make a note in your diary. **Where:** New Orleans, Louisiana, USA
Running of the Bulls, Pamplona, Spain
If you're an adrenaline junkie, you just might want to consider adding the fiesta of San Fermin in the Spanish city of Pamplona to your list of must do's. The Running of the Bulls will really get your heart pumping though there's a lot more to the San Fermin fiesta than stampeding bovines. Apart from getting chased by bulls through the streets of Pamplona, you'll be able to join in the parade of the giant dancing mannequins and "The Roar" where the crowds make as much noise as possible with drums and whistles in front of the local council office. Plus there's a massive fireworks display every night of the seven-day event. The Running of the Bulls is not for the faint-hearted as several bullfights do take place during the fiesta. The bull run isn't something to be taken lightly either and if you're planning on participating, make sure you take a good pair of running shoes with you. **When:** The Running of the Bulls is held every year from midday on the 6th of July to midnight on the 14th of July. **Where:** Pamplona, Spain
St Patrick's Day, Dublin, Ireland & New York, USA
Your friends will turn green with envy when you tell them you're going to a St Patrick's Day celebration. Whether you're in Dublin or New York on the 17th of March, you'll be guaranteed an amazing time. It's a bit of a mad bash considering the festivity is in honor of Ireland's patron saint and if you think you've seen a leprechaun in the parade, well, you probably won't be hallucinating. You might think that "going green" means you're a budding environmentalist, but not on St Patrick's Day it doesn't. You'll need to be dressed from head to toe in the color and have your face painted too otherwise you'll stand out like a sore thumb. Don't forget to learn the Irish word for cheers, *sláinte*. This is a boozy party so you could well be saying it quite a lot. **When:** 17th March every year. **Where:** Dublin, Ireland. New York, USA. Towns and cities all over the world.

Table 1.2

The text has some complex vocabulary, that is why I had them work in teams so that they could work out not the meaning of every single world, but the general idea of the text.

The second part of the activity was more difficult, they had to assume the role of informants and answer their classmates' inquiries. They already had the information needed which was an advantage, they just did not know how to make themselves understood, especially when it came to describe what the holiday was about because it required some

paraphrasing and not the plain words in the text. Consequently, there were lots of communication breakdowns between the speaker and the hearers but they managed to pulled it off by making use of strategies such as spelling words or using body language.

As for the last session, and according to the lesson plan, each team created a five-minute presentation of the holiday/festival they read about the previous class and shared it with their classmates. Subtle corrections were made during their participation for it might have discourage them, so major mistakes were pointed out once they have already finished. The second part of the presentation consisted of a discussion time in which the rest of the class could pose questions or make comments to their classmates. The most difficult part for the students was exactly this one; providing a prompt, swift reply to their peers even after having read and performed the group task. I consider this is quite common among beginner students whose communicative competence is yet not that developed so as to provide other answers than pre-fabricated structures, so my role during the discussion time was that of a speech 'elicitor', meaning that I constantly provided key words and helped with choice words students who found it hard to answer.

On the other hand, the assessment instrument and model I applied with my students was a rubric (Table 1.3) that considered the Micro- and Macro- skills of the speaking domain as proposed by Brown (2004, Language Assessment. Principles and Classroom Practices). The last modules of this specialization were mainly about language assessment and the distinction between productive and receptive skills, so being this an activity that involved students' spoken production the rubric I used included aspects of the productive skills. These are observable, thus being easier to assess. Why is that so? Well, because by producing, students perform and show actual evidences of language learning by making use of it to hold communicative exchanges.

Since the group I worked with was basic, I had to make sure that the descriptors included in the rubric were aligned with what they knew and that they were also easy to understand and follow, for a great part of what they presented was highly determined by the clarity of these descriptors, which of course were provided to them beforehand. This is nothing new; I always let my students see the rubric in advanced so that they know what to expect when

assessing them and I think it's fair that they know what elements must be taken into account instead of being caught out of guard. Most rubrics just assign a certain number of points to each criteria, what I also do with my students is to mention what that quantitative data means for their language learning, for example: if the score means that they need improvement, that it is satisfactory or the like. In this way, students learn to see what they do not just as a number, but also as a way to identify their strengths and opportunity areas so as to improve their language learning.

Criteria	Needs Improvement	Satisfactory	Good	Excellent
Vocabulary	Student produced reduced forms of words and made no use of the vocabulary seen in class.	Student used limited vocabulary and reduced forms of expressions and used some of the vocabulary seen in class	Student included the vocabulary seen in class with slight errors in word choice	Student included prior vocabulary as well as the one seen in class with appropriateness and connections between ideas
Usage	Student had major errors and could not be understood	Student had frequent errors and could be barely understood	Student had frequent mistakes in both grammar and structure but was yet understood	Student had no or minor mistakes in grammar and structure but could be perfectly understood
Delivery/ Fluency	Student was unprepared and hesitated too often when speaking, which interfered and hindered communication	Student was somewhat prepared and spoke with some hesitation which sometimes interfered with communication	Student was well prepared, spoke with little hesitation and without significant interference	Student was very well prepared, spoke smoothly and with few hesitations that did not interfere with communication
Comprehension	Student had difficulties understanding the questions posed by his/her peers	Student fairly grasped some of the questions that were being discussed	Student was able to comprehend and respond most of the questions that were being discussed	Student was able to comprehend and respond promptly to the posed questions
Use of audio visual resources	Student used no visual aids to support the presentation	Student included either a visual or an audio visual resource but did not make use of it while presenting	Student included either an audio or visual resource within the presentation	Student included either an audio or visual resource so as to enhance and support the overall presentation

Table 1.3

At the end, most of them had completed the task and, more importantly, became familiar with traditions from different countries as they developed some intercultural skills as

established in Michael Byram's model. For instance, the Interpreting and Relating skill referred to the ability to interpret a document or event from another culture when sharing the information read about holidays which, at the same time, help to foster an Intercultural Attitude for they showed at all-time willingness and eagerness to learn about different cultures, even if it was only by means of digital resources.

Chapter 4: Conclusions

Culture matters. Acknowledgment of one's commonly held traditions, values and ways of behaving is indeed important - and the first step to build cultural awareness – but development of cultural sensitivity towards those manifested in different cultures is what not only second language teachers, but educators in general, should seek for. Knowledge about other cultures can be taught at school as well as values that enable us to sympathize with people we interact with can be learned as we grow up. Those are essential things to start building up cultural awareness, that is true, but they do not guarantee that we have the sensitivity required to behave in specific contexts.

I dare say that the development of social skills and behavior requires communication and interaction. Students and teachers do that on a regular basis, they know each other, and they bound, they create their own socio linguistic rules so they know how to communicate effectively -when in class- but it is difficult to foster a truly intercultural environment when the only culture they know is that of their own. Intercultural refers to cross-cultural exchanges where people get to know each other's values, traditions, habits, opinions and so forth; qualities that get to be respected through the use of language because, among all those cultural differences that makes them exceptional, they get to find something that brings them together, LANGUAGE. Unfortunately, in my teaching context –where most of my students come from the city- opportunities to get to talk with people from another country, whose medium of communication is English, scarcely happen.

Even when students have a plethora of information about other cultures, they hardly ever get the chance to use English as a medium of interaction to put into practice their communicative or intercultural competence. Despite the English level of advanced students, lack of real-life interaction eventually can be disadvantageous; they may be linguistically competent but still not develop their communicative or intercultural competence.

In spite of this prospect, the teaching of a set of cultural skills within the English classroom remains important because of the international role of the English language and globalization itself. The times where we could avoid learning English because it seemed as useless had long gone. We may not provide all of our students a firsthand experience or a face-to-face conversation with a native speaker, but we can keep on developing intercultural awareness using English as the medium of interaction. Being intercultural is an attitudinal change that is expressed through the use of language (Tomalin, 2008).

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