Chapter 22

Studies in Intercultural Communicative Competence in Language Teacher Education

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Abstract

The aim of this chapter is to review some of the most relevant research on intercultural communicative competence in English language teaching published since 2000. Fifty-five studies have been examined and information regarding the methodology used, their research aims and themes, and their findings are briefly identified. Moreover, based on the analysis of the studies, three categories of topics of research have emerged: (a) studies on intercultural communicative competence in pre-service teacher training; (b) studies on intercultural communicative competence in in-service teacher training; and (c) studies focused on other major areas of research (i.e. theoretical foundation of intercultural communicative competence, materials/activities/strategies aiming at developing the learners' intercultural communicative competence and student-based research). It is hoped that novice as well as experienced researchers in the field of English language teaching, in general, and of intercultural communicative competence, in particular, might gain some useful information regarding the most recent research trends in their area of research.

Keywords: intercultural communicative competence; research aims; research methods; research findings.

1. Introduction

Intercultural communicative competence (ICC) may be broadly defined as someone's ability to understand cultures, including their own, and be able to employ that understanding to successfully communicate with people from a variety of cultural contexts. In other words, it is the "ability to communicate and interact across linguistic and cultural borders appropriately and efficiently" (Byram, 1997, p. 7) or even "the appropriate and effective management of interaction between people who, to some degree or another, represent different or divergent cognitive, affective, and behavioral orientations to the world" (Spitzberg and Chagnon, 2009, p. 7). Byram (1997) considers three possible

contexts in intercultural communication: (1) interaction between people using different languages, from different countries, where one individual is a native speaker of the used language; (2) interaction between people using different languages and from different countries, where the used language is a lingua franca; and (3) interaction between people from the same country but using different languages, one of whom is a native speaker of the used language.

However, any attempt to conceptualize ICC will face a variety of terminologies due to their different objectives. Terms such as cross-cultural awareness, or intercultural adaptation, have been commonly used. So far, no consensus have been reached as to a definition of intercultural competence (Arasaratnam, 2009; Fantini, 1999; Han, 2012). Consequently, Deardorff (2009, p. 403) called for a multimethod, multiperspective approach to assess intercultural competence.

Byram (1997) draws an important distinction between Intercultural Competence (IC) and Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC). While IC refers to people's "ability to interact in their own language with the people from another country and culture," ICC considers language teaching and focuses on "the ability to interact with people from another country and culture in a foreign language" (p. 71). In Byram's opinion, someone who has developed ICC is capable of building relationships while using the foreign language, communicating effectively, taking into consideration his and the other's needs and points of view.

In essence, research on ICC has aimed to construct models based on attitudes, beliefs and skills to measure successful intercultural communication (Byram and Morgan, 1994; Fritz, 2002; Lies, 2004; Spitzberg and Changnon, 2009). Byram and Morgan (1994) proposed a three-dimension model (knowledge, attitudes and behavior) to assess ICC in foreign language education. As for the 'knowledge dimension' Byram and Morgan suggested that in order to successfully communicate interculturally, students need factual knowledge (i.e. historical and geographical facts, facts about the society such as its ceremonies and institutions). Regarding the 'attitudes dimension', learners should develop positive attitudes towards language learning as well as towards the people from other countries. Finally, the 'behavior dimension' should not be limited to being polite, or following etiquette when engaging with people from other cultural contexts.

However, one of the problems in ICC is to describe how it is acquired. Even considering Byram and Morgan's (1997) three-dimension model, it would be somewhat straightforward and objective to teach facts or institutions of a

society (the 'knowledge dimension'). Research has shown that teachers tend to focus on factual information (i.e. traditions, holidays, housing, etc.) and not much on the sociolinguistic and pragmatic competences required for the intercultural speaker (Reid, 2014). However, the attitudes and behavior must be developed and changed in a way that goes beyond the language classroom. Moreover, teachers may be resilient to incorporating intercultural awareness materials even though research has pointed out the importance of developing teachers' and learners' reflective attitudes towards intercultural learning (Cortazzi and Jin, 1999).

Finally, Alptekin (2002) called attention to another central issue in the development of ICC which derives from the role of English as an international lingua franca in the 21st century. For him,

> "the conventional model of communicative competence, with its strict adherence to native speaker norms within the target language culture, would appear to be invalid in accounting for learning and using an international language in cross-cultural settings. A new pedagogic model is urgently needed to accommodate the case of English as a means of international and intercultural communication." (Alptekin, 2002, p. 63)

2. Method

The primary aim of this article is to identify and review current research on ICC in English language teaching and English language teacher education. More specifically, it intends to provide core information about the aforementioned studies, such as the research methodology used, the topics and objectives of the research, and the findings. In order to gather this data, it became necessary to determine the data collection sources, the selection criteria and the search items.

Firstly, two data collection instruments were used: the online library of education research and information Education Resources Information Center (ERIC) and the abstract and citation database of peer-reviewed literature SCOPUS. Secondly, the selection criteria for the inclusion of papers were established: the studies should be published in and after 2000; the studies should have be written in English; the selection should include scientific articles and conference proceedings published in refereed academic journals, books and book chapters; book reviews, letters, responses, commentaries, editorial materials an unpublished PhD dissertations should be excluded. Finally, within the ERIC database search, the following search terms were used in the following sequential order so as to narrow down the amount of results:

"intercultural competence" + "English language teacher education", "intercultural competence" + "teacher education" + "English language", "intercultural competence" + "teacher education" + "English". Due to the scope and limitations of this review article, the initial number of results (30,848) was narrowed down to 18 results. To supplement this search, the keywords "intercultural communicative competence" were used in the SCOPUS database, which provided 391 citations. In order to narrow it down, the keywords "intercultural competence" and "language teacher education" resulted in 141 citations. Once the *corpus* of analysis was identified (159 studies), access to the three main parts of the studies which are the focus of this review article, namely the research aims/topics, the methodology employed, and the findings of the study, were examined. Due to the limitations of retrieving such data, the final *corpus* of this review consisted of fifty five studies.

3. Focal Points of Research Conducted on ICC

Due to the importance of ICC in a fast-changing globalized world and, specifically, the crucial role it plays in teacher education and language teaching, the analysis of the selected *corpus* distinguished the following three main areas of research: (a) ICC in pre-service training, (b) ICC in in-service training and (c) other major areas of research, such as the theoretical foundation of ICC, materials/activities/strategies aiming at developing the learners' ICC and student-based research. Thus, the following subsections will briefly introduce the main topics and aims of research in each of those areas.

3.1. Studies on ICC in Pre-Service Teacher Training

The studies analyzed from several geographic educational contexts, namely Colombia, Chile, Finland, Germany, Poland, Russia Serbia, Slovakia, and Turkey, revealed a major concern with the best ways to develop and assess ICC in pre-service teacher training.

Some studies on how ICC was addressed described how some European universities prepared foreign language teacher trainees and to what extent teacher education programs focused on the integration of intercultural dimensions into language teaching and learning (Kizilaslan, 2010; Reid, 2014) or on how IC skills were enhanced after the implementation of a cultural and intercultural content program, for example, in a Colombian public university and in Turkey respectively (Ramos Holguin, 2013; Bektas-Cetinkaya, 2014).

Other studies adressed the importance of partnerships, of studying abroad, or of using technology-mediated instruction. Dooly (2010), for example,

reported on the anaysis of policy documents related to practice teaching in a consortium of nine partners which designed a joint teacher training graduate degree with two key axes: teaching practice abroad (TPA) and intercultural communicative competence. Saricoban and Oz (2014) examined whether such factors as studying abroad, gender and academic achievement revealed any differences in the use of ICC. Time spent abroad also called the attention of Czura (2018), who examined whether the length of time exerted any effect on teachers' beliefs about ICC and their awareness of how this construct should be developed in the language classroom. Finally, Smolcic and Arends (2017) reported on a course-embedded student partnership among pre-service teachers and international students studying English.

The importance of diversity in education and the assessment of cultural preconceptions and pedagogical beliefs regarding technology-mediated instruction and globalization were addressed by Leh *et al.* (2015), who analyzed the effects of online intercultural exchange (OIE), by means of a cross-cultural project between one American and one German university. The authors stressed the value of OIE as an integrated method for teaching language and culture as it also promoted familiarity in culturally diverse settings prior to an international field experience. The concept of IC and its use for formative assessment within international teacher education were also examined by Dervin and Hahl (2015), who designed a portfolio of IC (PIC) to help Finnish students develop IC, focusing on the students' reflexive and critical essays on five stories of meaningful intercultural encounters during a course on multicultural education.

Rodriguez (2015) based his study on the concept of deep culture, focusing on a critical multiculturalism approach to education, rather than congratulatory topics of surface culture. Therefore, the author explained that issues dealing with the loss of cultural identity, the difference between cultural assimilation and acculturation, social injustice, prejudice and social class struggles should constitute a relevant teaching content in the professional preparation of EFL pre-service teachers.

The trainees' perception of ICC in the L2 classroom was highlighted by Czura (2016). With the collaboration of undergraduate student teachers of English from three departments at the University of Wroclaw (Departments of English, German and History), the author examined whether that perception was influenced by their major fields of study.

To clarify the relation between intercultural competence (IC) and teacher training, Salazar and Aguero (2016) assessed the intercultural profile of

European student teachers based upon the criteria established by the Intercultural Competence Assessment (INCA) Project in which IC levels are ranked. Intercultural sensitivity was also measured by Demir and Kiran (2016) and Altan (2018). Using the Intercultural Sensitivity Scale (by Neulip and McCroskey), Demir and Kiran analyzed the effects of two variables: (a) intercultural sensitivity and ethnocentric level, and (b) subject matter studied at university on primary and secondary school teacher candidates. Altan's study was based on Chen and Starosta (2000). As a case study of assessment tools in a Serbian ICC course for pre-service teachers, Lazarecic (2017) reported on how different assessment strategies were selected and employed over a period of ten years. Special attention was given to the balance between the three ICC domains, the use of summative and formative assessment, and the consequent effect against the specificities of the teaching context and pre-service English language teacher profile in a monocultural setting.

Within the framework of challenging teaching and learning environments, Kasumagic-Kafedzic (2016) defended a critical pedagogy framework in which the integration of an intercultural approach would emphasize critical thinking, and empathy along with other aspects of ICC. To foster cultural knowledge and readiness to intercultural dialogue, Kudabayeva *et al.* (2017) focused their attention on the detection and diagnostics of future teachers' level of ICC. Moreover, Yucel and Yavuz (2017) reported on the design of an intercultural education course to assess its impact on pre-service teachers' perceptions of intercultural education in language classrooms.

Reflecting on the possibilities provided by intercultural educational processes, either in indigenous or in new immigration contexts, when seeking new ways of communicating that confront monocultural education, Quintriqueo *et al.* (2017) explored the challenges posed by ICC in teacher training in a postcolonial Chilean context. The authors stated that the preparation of new indigenous and non-indigenous teachers had failed to transversely implement an intercultural educational approach, with Chile keeping the hegemony of eurocentric monoculturality.

3.2. Studies on ICC in In-Service Teacher Training

A systematic analysis of recent studies on ICC in in-service contexts has identified two main areas of research: (1) studies focusing on approaches, courses or programs aiming at developing teachers' intercultural competence, and (2) identifying and assessing teachers' beliefs, attitudes and classroom

practices focusing on intercultural competence or intercultural language teaching.

Studies aiming at developing teachers' intercultural competence displayed similar objectives. Some of these researches were based on approaches, training programs, and international projects which proposed tools to be implemented so as to allow teachers to develop ICC and to integrate the intercultural dimension into their English classes. McCloskey (2012) suggested that an online teacher professional development approach may highly support the increase of teachers' intercultural competencies. Similarly, Yang (2018) proposed an intercultural communication competence approach and suggested some strategies for TESOL teacher intercultural identity development. Conversely, Conway, Richards, Harvey and Roskvist (2010) reported on a language teacher professional development program. The authors concluded that successful programs should be based on providing teachers with principled knowledge of intercultural language teaching. Bastos, Araújo and Sá (2015) implemented a training program with teachers of English in secondary schools aiming at the integration of the intercultural dimension into their professional practices, allowing the authors to devise a heuristic model of ICC and suggest ways to develop ICC through teacher education. Finally, Strugielska and Piatkowska (2016) presented the results of an international project involving EFL teachers from four European universities, aiming at developing their intercultural competence and incorporate those competences in their language classes.

However, the vast majority of the current studies on ICC and intercultural language teaching for in-service teachers examine teachers' beliefs, perceptions and practices. One of the main characteristics of these studies is the geographical diversity of the educational contexts, such as New Zealand, USA, UK, France, China, Turkey, Taiwan, Iran, Slovenia, Belgium, Thailand, which reinforce the international scope and relevance of this topic of research. Another important feature of these studies is the variety of the educational levels of the EFL teachers assessed, ranging from primary schools to teachers in higher education institutions. More specifically, Derin *et al.* (2009) aimed at identifying Turkish EFL teachers' perceptions and attitudes towards the intercultural approach. Similarly, several other studies aimed at identifying teachers' understandings of ICC and if or how those beliefs were reflected in their pedagogical practices: Sercu (2005) investigated Belgian EFL teachers' willingness to support intercultural aims; Young and Sachdev (2011) focused on and compared the beliefs and practices of English language teachers in the USA, the UK and France; Gu (2016) carried out a study on Chinese EFL

teachers' opinions and attitudes towards ICC and how these were put into practice in the classroom; Oranjie and Smith (2018) presented a study on New Zealand English language teachers' beliefs and practices following an intercultural language teaching approach. However, some other studies focused directly on recognizing teachers' classroom practices. Tolosa *et al.* (2018) investigated two teachers' practices which aimed at developing the students' ICC. Likewise, Dolinar and Mlekuž (2018) examined how Slovenian EFL teachers' employed their intercultural competencies into the classroom.

Several other studies contemplated the link between teachers' beliefs and their pedagogical practices. Aiming at helping EFL teachers develop their ICC, Chao (2015) identified the procedure for developing a self-assessment inventory of ICC. Following a similar approach, Cheewasukthaworn and Suwanarak (2017) offered three dimensions to examine Thai teachers' perceptions of ICC: their understanding of ICC; their perceptions on how to incorporate ICC into their teaching; and their views on how ICC may contribute to their students' communicative competence. Slapac, Song and Chasteen (2016) discussed teachers' perspectives and experiences regarding intercultural responsiveness and intercultural competence, among other constructs. Dealing with primary school EFL teachers, Breka and Petravić (2015) examined their intercultural competence profile and identified their stated beliefs and perceptions of their practices. Similarly, Bickley, Rossiter and Abbott (2014) also examined the ICC beliefs and practices of 70 ESL teachers, while Cheng (2012) conducted a comparable study focusing on Taiwanese EFL teachers' perceptions of intercultural competence and their self-reported pedagogical practices. Finally, a couple of studies aimed at recognizing English teachers' ICC and Intercultural Sensitivity (IS) and the possible relationship between these two concepts. Mostafaei Alaei and Nosrati (2018) explored Iranian English language teachers' levels of ICC and IS while Wang (2016) conducted a similar study with Chinese college English teachers.

3.3. Other major areas of research on ICC: theoretical background, materials/activities/strategies and student-centered research

Although most studies have been examining how ICC has been dealt with in pre-and in-service teacher training, there are also some key fields and topics which have deserved some attention from applied linguists, such as the theoretical background to support ICC, the development of innovative materials, activities and strategies to foster ICC in the language classroom, and

studies focusing on the learners' acquisition and development of communicative competence.

In a study based on the theories of ICC and Criticality, Parks (2018) aimed to define and contextualize the competencies of communicative criticality and *savoir se reconnaître* (awareness of otherness within self) to assess learners' development of intercultural competence and criticality in the US and the UK. Taking Weigand's (2010) Mixed Game Model, a theory which combines the abilities of thinking, perceiving and speaking, as the foundation for the teaching of intercultural competence in language teaching, Grein (2018) suggested a 'dialogic holistic model' which would integrate all aspects of language use. Furthermore, Strugielska and Piatkowska (2017) critically analyzed contemporary perspectives on ICC, examining the appropriateness of the theory of complex systems to investigate ICC based on a constructionist perspective. Based on theories of culture and globalization and focusing on a more general perspective of the impact of the intercultural approach on language teaching, Hermessi (2015) examines the cultural dimension in English language teaching and the challenges to curriculum design. Finally, Piatkowska (2015) compares and assesses four approaches (knowledge-based approach, contrastive approach, Communicative Language Teaching, intercultural communicative competence approach) to teaching cultural competence in foreign language teaching.

Another major trend in recent studies on ICC has been the research on the production and use of original and effective materials, activities and strategies in the classroom so as to foster the students' acquisition of intercultural competence. Nurutdinova *et al.* (2017) examined the sociocultural and intercultural factors which might develop ESL learners' communicative skills. Siek-Piskozub (2018) provided an example of intercultural activities joining language and intercultural teaching in an EFL class with Erasmus+ students in Poland. Likewise, Lwin and Marlina (2018) called attention to the international role of the English language in the 21st century and the consequences it brings to the English classroom as far as the learners' awareness of linguistic and cultural diversity is concerned. More specifically, the authors suggested the use of folktales to teach English as an International Language and provide teachers with a guiding framework to engage students in developing intercultural communicative competence. Orsini-Jones and Lee (2018) explored the linguistic, digital and critical intercultural components of global citizenship in order to help students engage in effective online interaction. Grounded on a web-based intercultural telecollaborative project between the UK and France, the authors analyze linguistic politeness and intercultural awareness in written

exchanges in internet-mediated communication and identify emerging politeness patterns. In a similar vein, Vilbar and Ferrer-Malaque's (2016) study aimed at training ESL teachers to develop interactive multimedia courseware through a syllabus that promoted reading skills, grammar and intercultural communicative competence. Aiming at assisting pre-school children in a multicultural and multilingual educational setting in Russia acquire intercultural competence, Gabdulchakov and Shishova (2017) provided teachers with materials, such as exercises, games and assessment tools so as to build the students' communicative competence to allow them to successfully participate in a multilingual and multicultural environment. Lastly, Wagner, Perugini and Byram's (2017) pioneering action research suggested how teachers should plan and execute materials and activities based on the theory of teaching and learning ICC in the foreign language classroom. Based on a collaborative project involving graduate students and foreign language teachers, this study bridges theory to practice by showing teachers how to integrate the intercultural component into their classroom activities.

However, a few studies focused directly on the students' attitudes and perceptions of their ICC. For example, Ware (2013) identified the pedagogical and conceptual factors within the integration of intercultural communication competence in an online exchange project between secondary students in the USA and Spain. Briefly, the author examined the students' online comments hoping to identify the subjects' ICC through their use of interactive intercultural strategies. Moreover, Lin and Wang (2018) aimed at examining the usefulness of using open educational resource videos in university EFL classes in Taiwan so as to improve learners' multicultural competence. In essence, the use of TED Talks videos with multicultural themes enabled students to use communicative strategies and develop awareness of multicultural encounters.

4. Research Methods used in ICC Studies

Due to the diversity of topics and aims, the studies analyzed made use of different types of methodology. Significantly, a great number of studies used quantitative methods through the employment of paper-based or online questionnaires and surveys. Some, however, made exclusive use of qualitative methods. In these studies, a variety of data collection instruments were used, such as interviews, field notes, classroom observations, interviews, debriefing conversations, written reflective pieces by teachers, documents, materials analysis, online interchange, the reading of short-stories, ICC measurement scales, testing and self-testing, diagnostic methods, portfolio, intercultural tasks and post-study open-ended questions.

However, possibly aiming at a stronger triangulation of data, a number of studies made use of mixed-method research design, sometimes using both quantitative and qualitative data, though other times making use of a plethora of data collection techniques, such as diaries, focus groups, questionnaires, observations, conversations, pedagogical experiments, interviews, and students' assessments.

On the whole, the studies analyzed exhibited a heterogeneous approach to data collection. Although there is a great amount of quantitative data collection and, to a certain extent, quantitative data, it is possible to state that the different aims of the studies allow for a more diverse approach through data collection.

5. Findings of the ICC Research

Most of the studies reviewed in this chapter produced significant results that help understand the current conditions of research on ICC. To begin with, some significant findings of the studies focusing on the training of pre-service teachers around the world will be briefly highlighted. Not surprisingly, such studies revealed the relevant role played by ICC in teacher education, not only in EFL curricula, but also in other disciplines (Czura, 2016). In fact, underpinned by varied perspectives and contexts in language and culture teaching, most of the research findings revealed that ICC broadened the understanding of cultural diversity and promoted readiness to intercultural dialogue in diverse settings, encouraging pre-service teachers to question preconceived ideas and adopt a more critical and reflexive approach towards the role of interculturality in the classroom (Yucel and Yavuz, 2017).

Reflecting on the establishment of partnerships, Dooly (2010) concluded that Colombian pre-service teachers started to interpret and contextualize cultural practices and raised their awareness of contextual complexities; in Turkey, however, despite the significant effects on developing cultural knowledge, intercultural skills and awareness, there was no significant attitudinal change in an EFL context. Salazar and Aguero (2016) showed that most European student teachers who participated in their research displayed an intermediate level of IC, which indicated the need to improve their IC training, highlighting such dimensions as behavioral flexibility or communicative awareness. Smolcic and Arends (2017) concluded that work with international partners stimulated both an introspective process and cultural self-awareness that may not have come about through traditional course readings and discussions, nor through field experience in public classrooms. Saricoban and Oz (2014) stated that there were no significant differences in male and female levels of ICC, nor any relationship between their ICC and their academic achievement. Before the strong positive correlations between studying abroad and levels of ICC, the authors concluded that pre-service students should be encouraged to participate in study-abroad programs and take elective intercultural education

courses. Czura (2018) defended that despite some minor discrepancies in the understanding of ICC between participants with different international experience, it was clear that future teachers linked this concept to the ability to communicate cross-culturally. However, regardless of the time spent abroad, participants seemed to lack practical skills to develop this competence in the classroom context.

Rodriguez (2105), defending the importance of deep culture, showed that participants in his study were able to build critical thinking and intercultural awareness when they read and talked about controversial topics present in the texts and related them to their own culture and life experiences. On its turn, Leh *et al.* (2015) reported that online intercultural exchange (OIE) reduced concerns before meeting face-to-face and that this process facilitated a deeper understanding of cultural diversity in education. Regarding assessment tools in a Serbian ICC course for pre-service teachers, Lazarecic (2017) concluded that further adjustments were needed taking into consideration the student profile and required outcomes for teacher education.

There were some research findings which showed that student teachers' perception of the role of culture in a language classroom was, to some extent, based on traditional knowledge-oriented approaches and that the major field of study affected their approaches to developing ICC in the classroom (Czura 2016). Demir and Kuran (2016) further concluded that teacher candidates' ethnocentrism level significantly differed depending on gender. Bektas-Cetinkaya (2014) stated that despite the significant effects on developing cultural knowledge, intercultural skills and awareness, there was no significant attitudinal change in a Turkish EFL context, hence suggesting systematic instruction in teacher education departments in the absence of study-abroad programs.

The design of national curricula was highlighted by Quintriqueo *et al.* (2017) who reported that the preparation of Chilean new teachers had failed to transversely implement an intercultural educational approach, resulting in the student teachers' insufficient understanding of the cultures present in the classroom.

Subsequently, some of the most relevant findings of the studies regarding ICC and intercultural language teaching for in-service teachers which examined teachers' beliefs, perceptions and practices will be briefly identified. It is interesting to note that several studies share similar findings as far as teachers' attitudes and practices are concerned. Gu's (2016) survey on Chinese EFL teachers' perceptions and practices revealed that although teachers are willing to deal with ICC in their classes, they are not so sure about the concept itself, ultimately not knowing what to assess and how to measure their students' ICC. In the same way, Sercu (2005) identified quite positive attitudes towards the

implementation of intercultural education. However, the author also found out that teachers tend to perpetrate the use of communicative competence approaches instead of moving towards the acquisition of ICC. Young and Sachdev's (2011) subjects also displayed positive attitudes regarding the relevance of interculturality in ELT. Yet, they stated that there is a lack of support mainly from textbooks and syllabi which fail to provide suitable approaches to promote interculturality. Oranje and Smith's (2018) findings also showed discrepancies between teachers' attitudes and beliefs and their practices; although teachers regard ICC quite positively they have not incorporated it into their classes. Finally, Dolinar and Mlekuž's (2018) subjects showed that teachers place particular emphasis on the acquisition of speaking, vocabulary and written skills, grammar and pronunciation, giving little relevance to intercultural competence.

A number of studies which examined the link between teachers' beliefs and their pedagogical practices also presented significant findings. Chao's (2015) construction of a self-assessment inventory of ICC for EFL teachers identified four dimensions of ICC in ELT: (a) affective orientations to intercultural communication; (b) capabilities for intercultural communication; (c) perspectives on ELT; and (d) employment of intercultural strategies in ELT. Breka and Petravić (2015) confirmed the teachers' positive attitude towards the development of intercultural competence although the results showed some inconsistencies between the subjects' beliefs as opposed to their self-assessment of their culture teaching experiences. Interestingly, Mostafaei Alaei and Nosrati's (2018) Iranian EFL teachers displayed high levels of ICC and Intercultural Sensitivity. However, other studies did not display such optimistic results, especially regarding the lack of classroom practices which aimed at developing ICC. In Cheng's (2012) study, Taiwanese EFL teachers' perceptions of ICC and cultural self-awareness did not play a significant role in their pedagogical practices, although most of them acknowledged the importance of intercultural learning. Similarly, although Bickley, Rossiter and Abbott's (2014) ESL instructors displayed a strong belief in the importance of ICC, they also stated that ICC was not systematically developed in their teaching practices. The Thai EFL teachers in Cheewasukthaworn and Suwanarak's (2017) paper had a general grasp of ICC, and believed that ICC could be incorporated into their teaching. Most interestingly, although those subjects viewed ICC as an important element in ELT, they did not think it had a crucial role in fostering learners' communicative competence. Finally, Wang (2016) suggested that overall, the higher vocational college English language teachers who participated in his study demonstrated Intercultural Sensitivity on an average level although far from what was expected in their teaching context.

Accordingly, a couple of studies focusing on learners' acquisition and development of communicative competence revealed quite interesting results.

Ware (2013) found out that secondary school students from Spain and the USA interacting online exhibited interculturally strategic interactional features which fostered their acquisition of ICC while Lin and Wang's (2018) Taiwanese EFL university students also displayed multicultural competence through the use of communicative strategies through the use of open educational resource videos (TED Talks).

6. Conclusion

The considerable amount of literature and case studies that have been produced on ICC all over the world forced us to delimit the span of time of our review work. Furthermore, article size dimension implied the choice of some fairly and accredited representative research studies that comprised the *corpus* under analysis.

In a globalized world under constant social, political, economic and cultural change, Intercultural Communicative Competence is of paramount importance; its perception and practical application have generated and will generate discussions as the world evolves. In times of increasingly diverse multicultural societies, ICC is vital for living and working in global or local contexts and, consequently, to understand and accept otherness. The corpus analyzed clearly revealed this preoccupation.

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