

Intercultural Teaching in the Polish Context

Paweł Sobkowiak

Abstract The aim of the paper is to justify the idea that in order to develop learners' capacity to use a foreign language (FL) efficiently in the global world, the long established goals of FL teaching must be reconsidered and a more open-ended intercultural (IC), process-oriented approach adopted. Thus, language training, apart from the traditional work on teaching the four skills, should focus on developing learners' IC competence and raising their awareness of difference and diversity among representatives of various cultures. Equally important is engaging learners in the process of decentering, acquiring desirable attitudes to otherness, fostering empathy, developing their ability to mediate and promoting tolerance. In the empirical part of the paper, the results of a quantitative study aimed at creating a profile of a high school FL learner in Poland and assessing whether and to what extent FL classroom in Poland is conducive to developing learners' IC competence is reported. The results demonstrate that IC teaching plays a marginal role in the Polish FL classroom.

1 Introduction

The importance of intercultural communicative competence (ICC) as an extremely relevant capacity for the 21st century has been well recognized, not only by individuals, but also by the educational sector, which recognizes that building students' ICC is a prerequisite for their competence in the global community. Bhawuk and Brislin (1992, p. 416) posit that to be effective in another culture "people must be interested in other cultures, be sensitive enough to notice cultural differences, and then also be willing to modify their behavior as an indication of

P. Sobkowiak (✉)
Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań, Poland
e-mail: pawelsob@amu.edu.pl

respect for the people of other cultures in order to effectively bridge across cultural differences and commonalities". Hence, if students are to benefit from their international encounters, knowledge of culturally affected variables and the skills for dealing with otherness need to be incorporated into FL syllabuses.

This paper aims to discuss the nature of ICC, analyzing the various components which contribute to the ability to understand and relate to people from other countries. It also indicates the necessity of promoting awareness of difference and diversity in the FL classroom to help prevent and modify stereotypical views among students which often hinder communication among representatives of different cultures. In the empirical section, the article presents a profile of a high school FL learner in Poland and reports the results of a study which aimed to assess IC teaching in the Polish high school.

2 Communication Across Cultures

Communication is more than just an exchange of information and dispatch of messages—the focus on practicing the four skills in the classroom, which has dominated communicative language teaching in recent years, does not suffice for learners to be able to function in a multi-cultural world. There is a multifaceted link between the linguistic form and the interpretation of meaning; the components of vocabulary, grammar, metaphor, style, politeness and inference are shaped by socio-cultural practices to produce the language used. Similarly, social taboos, politics, religious traditions and values differ from country to country. Language signals to other people who we are and what group/s we belong to. It expresses culture (Kramsch 1998). Thus, failure in communication does not necessarily result from insufficient knowledge and inadequate skills in terms of linguistic competence.

Successful ICC depends on understanding that how and what one says or writes will be perceived and interpreted in another cultural context, i.e. on the ability to decentre and take up the listener's or reader's perspective on their culture, anticipating and, where possible, resolving dysfunctions in communication and behavior. However, it has to be remembered that culture itself is dynamic, and any interaction is characterized by constant negotiation in the production of meanings. That is why teachers "should be aware of the danger of presenting 'a culture' as if it were unchanging over time or as if there were only one set of beliefs, meanings and behaviors in any given country" (Byram 1997, p. 39). Similarly, FL speakers should be aware of the constant need to compare, contrast and establish relationships between concepts in their own and the FL.

To survive in a multi-cultural environment, learners' educational starting point should be an exploration of the home culture so that they become aware of the fact that home culture determines their lifestyles and behaviors, informs their moral judgments, expectations and values, which, in turn, guide their interactions with others. If FL learners are to manage IC interaction effectively, they need to be

aware of the inherent norms of their own speech practices, the ways in which norms vary depending on situational factors and the ways in which speakers from other language backgrounds may have different expectations about language usage and communicative behavior. Such knowledge, indispensable for successful IC contacts, empowers people to understand the relativity of their own cultural group.

However, successful interaction is not assessed merely in terms of the efficiency of information exchange, but also by the degree to which one manages to establish and maintain relationships, which is also highly determined by culture, i.e. beliefs, behaviors and meanings through which people interact with one another. These differ across countries, may be incompatible and conflicting unless relationships are maintained through politeness. Therefore, learners should develop interpersonal skills that would help them negotiate mutually acceptable identities in cross-cultural interactions (Cupach and Imahori 1993).

3 Intercultural Communicative Competence

Although scholars have synthesized various understanding of ICC, the processes underpinning its individual acquisition, evaluation and placement are far from evident and invite further investigation. Scholars have conceptualized ICC from a variety of perspectives. A number of ICC definitions provided in literature limit it to personal skills and abilities, and emphasize the appropriateness and effectiveness of an individual's behavior and attitude¹ (Spitzberg 2000; Bennett and Bennett 2004; Martin and Nakayama 2004). Such a conceptualization, however, implies two risks by referring to the image of the native speaker. Firstly, it suggests that there exists a homogeneous native community, governed by a set of norms and conventions shared by all the members of the community.² Secondly, it considers the native speaker as the model of behavior, a view attacked especially by the proponents of English as a lingua franca, who claim that when English is used as an international language students are no longer expected to achieve the native speaker's competence in terms of linguistic and sociolinguistic knowledge³ (McKay 2002; Seidlhofer 2010).

¹ ICC often appears in literature together with the term *intercultural sensitivity*, which is used to refer to the ability to discriminate and experience relevant cultural differences (Hammer et al. 2002, p. 422). Greater IC sensitivity is associated with greater potential for exercising ICC.

² This assumption is unjustifiable. For example, the white middle-class culture is perceived to be American culture, although there are many more ethnic groups in the American society, often referred to as 'a melting pot'. The culture of the Han group is often taught to students learning Chinese, although China is composed of 56 ethnic groups (Carbaugh 1996).

³ This goal was not only completely unrealistic, but also meant abandoning one's native language in order to blend into another linguistic environment, separation from one's own culture and the acquisition of a native socio-cultural competence, a new socio-cultural identity (Kramsch 1998).

A definition of ICC focusing on attitudes indicates the necessity of developing in learners a more positive stance towards foreign cultures. This position, however, is based on the perception of culture as an object, with clear limits and comparable features, and ignores its dynamic and dialogic character. Alas, the cultural dimension can no longer be looked upon as a product, i.e. a static list of facts and behaviors of a specific, allegedly homogeneous, cultural group, to be reproduced and transmitted by the teacher and memorized by learners. Instead, in the current view of culture as a process, where one's own values are constantly called into question, more emphasis is laid on the promotion of respect for difference in general as well as on developing the skills of observing and interpreting, which will help learners cope with the cultural diversity of their IC interlocutors (Kramsch 2001; Risager 2007; Byram 2008).

According to Spitzberg and Changnon (2009), in the definitions of ICC not enough attention has been given to the emotional aspect, namely how people manage cross-cultural interactions, and to the processes they undergo while talking to foreigners. They warn against conceptualizing ICC as a set of skills and abilities as these may pertain to one context and not another, to one perceiver, but not another. Such oversimplified definitions ignore the role of thought processes, such as introspection, self-reflection and interpretation, and the processes of individual agency, i.e. how individuals transgress, remediate and negotiate rules in everyday communication (Carbaugh 1996). To fill this gap, Spitzberg and Changnon (2009, p. 7) defined ICC as “the appropriate and effective management of interaction between people who, to some degree or another, represent different or divergent affective, cognitive and behavioral orientations to the world”.

Some definitions highlight the individual's psychological adjustments. Kim (2001, p. 259) states that ICC is “the overall internal capacity of an individual to manage key challenging features of IC communication, namely cultural differences and familiarity, intergroup posture and the accompanying experience of stress”. In her opinion, developing ICC encompasses processes of acknowledging reluctance and fear, foregrounding and questioning stereotypes, monitoring feelings and emotions, working through confusion and grappling with the complexity of IC encounters.

Of particular importance is Byram's descriptive model of ICC (Byram 1997), which comprises *linguistic*, *sociolinguistic*, and *discourse* competence, and five separate *intercultural* components which individuals bring to the IC encounters, namely positive attitudes, knowledge, skills of interpreting and relating, skills of discovery and/or interaction. It also encompasses political education and critical awareness—the ability to interpret, evaluate and negotiate, on the basis of explicit criteria, perspectives, practices and products in their own and other cultures, which may lead to some degree of acceptance of new ideas.

Byram (1997, pp. 32-47) realizes that to possess ICC means to see relationships between different cultures, both internal and external to a society, and be able to mediate, i.e. interpret each in terms of the other, either for oneself or for other people. Thus, FL teachers have a responsibility to develop in learners a critical awareness of the values and significance of cultural practices in one's own culture

and the other's. ICC has many dimensions and the provision of knowledge about different cultures or dominant non-verbal practices can only be an introductory phase of gaining it. It is important that learners develop a critical or analytical understanding of parts of their own and other cultures, consciousness of their own perspective, of the way in which one's thinking is culturally determined rather than believing that one's understanding and perspective is neutral. Learners should also possess the ability to gather knowledge about other cultures and the skills of empathy, and learn how to manage anxiety and adaptability (*attitudes* in Byram's model). Since knowledge and skills are interrelated, teachers and learners should practice and reflect upon cultural differences hidden in texts/events in the classroom.

4 Intercultural FL Teaching

According to Bennett (1986), the best way to acquire IC sensitivity and competence is by experience. The assumption which lies behind Bennett's model is that as one's experience of cultural differences becomes more complex and sophisticated, one's potential competence in IC relations increases (Hammer et al. 2003, p. 423). Experience, however, is a function of how one structures events (Kelly 1963). Thus, the extent to which an event of cultural difference will be experienced is a function of how complex its structure is. Individuals who have gone through largely monocultural socialization have access only to their own cultural worldview, so they are unable to form and experience the difference between their own perception and that of people who are culturally different. That is why they should attain the ability to put together (and thus experience) cultural differences in more complex ways in the classroom. This can be done by implementing experiential learning, i.e. engaging learners both intellectually and emotionally through active participation.⁴

Experiential learning entails providing learners with opportunities for concrete experience, e.g. through drama, the use of films and stories; reflective observation, e.g. through reflective essays and thought-provoking questions; abstract conceptualization, e.g. through theory construction and lecturing; and active experimentation, e.g. through fieldwork, projects and games (Kolb 1984, p. 42). Also the dialogical approach has to play a central position in the classroom, since knowledge is seen as constructed and reconstructed through interaction with one's social and cultural environment, including interaction with others. Reflective processes are of importance throughout the learning process, which is seen as a spiral progression from simple to more complex models rather than as a gradual linear

⁴ Scholars emphasize that the most valuable means for ICC development is facilitating continued relationship building with the cultural other. This can be achieved by IC encounters in the real world—only then can individuals shift their focus away from an external evaluation of the other to an inward contemplation of what is really going on (Holmes and O'Neill 2012).

progression from facts to understanding and analysis. Thus, a dialogical approach can create more common frames of reference for the educational experiences—through continued interaction around learners' expanding knowledge it is easier for the teacher to see what could be added, restricted or given new perspectives (Forsman 2010; Thompson 2011).

5 Intercultural Teaching in a Polish FL Classroom: A Research Study

5.1 Rationale and Aims

The impulse for the study came from a detailed analysis of the literature on intercultural learning and teaching done by the present author. ICC is presented there as the fifth skill to be acquired by learners in order to be able to function effectively as citizens of the world. Furthermore, as a Ministry of National Education reviewer of textbooks used in Polish schools, the author observed that IC components still play a marginal role in most textbooks. Hence, this has aroused the author's curiosity about whether IC is developed in FL classrooms in the Polish context.

The author wished to examine if and to what degree the assumptions of IC teaching are being implemented in Poland. The study was meant to answer the following questions:

1. Do FL lessons help learners develop ICC by being a source of IC experience?
2. Do teachers focus learners' attention on the relation between language and culture, as well as the importance of socio-cultural knowledge in international communication?
3. To what extent do FL classes help learners become aware of cultural differences? Do students learn appropriate strategies which will help them cope with IC encounters?
4. Are 'soft skills', namely an open and accepting attitude to otherness, which helps in managing cross-cultural interaction, developed in the classroom?
5. Are learners made aware that they themselves are the products of enculturation? Are they referred to Polish culture in the classroom or do they practice analyzing foreigners from the Polish culture perspective while looking at themselves through the eyes of foreigners?
6. Do textbooks that learners use and the practices of their teachers contribute to ICC development? To what extent?

The research also aimed at creating a profile of a high school learner of foreign languages in Poland and measuring to what degree IC elements were present in the FL classroom.

5.2 Participants

The research involved 338 high school students in Poznań, Poland, in the spring of 2011. Stratified, multiple stage sampling was used: 3 high schools were drawn, then 4 classes in each school. Finally, groups (strata) were established, according to sex. Of the 338 respondents, 48 % were men ($n = 162$) and 52 % were women ($n = 176$). The sample size fulfilled the sample requirement recommended by Nunnally (1994) of 300 respondents for scale testing.

5.3 The Method and Measurement Instruments

Two research instruments were used in the study: they were two paper-and-pencil questionnaires in Polish developed by the author. The first (Questionnaire A), consisting of 21 questions, 14 closed and 7 open-ended, gathered information about students and their FL education at school. The other (Questionnaire B), a 24-item questionnaire, asked the respondents for their opinions and assessed FL classroom teaching from an IC perspective. This questionnaire was constructed after a detailed analysis of comprehensive literature on IC teaching; it referred to the most important elements of IC teaching (see Appendix 1⁵). Scale construction guidelines were followed (DeVellis 1991). The students were asked to mark to what extent they agreed with the opinions concerning elements of IC teaching in their classroom. A 5-point Likert scale was used and the following response options were incorporated: 1—*strongly disagree*, 2—*disagree*, 3—*neutral*, 4—*agree*, 5—*strongly agree*. The participants were not supposed to consult each other while completing the questionnaires.

A pilot questionnaire was administered to a sample of 12 students to check clarity of instructions, item clarity, overall time taken to complete the questionnaire and balanced keying (to see if the respondents avoid using extreme response categories). A relatively equal number of extremely positive (5) and negative (1) responses in the sample proved that the scale had been chosen correctly. The length of time needed to complete both questionnaires ranged from 20 to 25 min.

Construct and content validity of the second questionnaire was established. A panel of two experts was asked to participate in the study and review the item pool for clarity, sentence structure and ambiguous meanings. This aided in establishing the relevance of the items to IC teaching, also providing the initial reliability and validity estimates (DeVellis 1991). Two experts, both PhD holders, were selected based on their demonstrated expertise within the IC field. They were asked to decide independently whether they felt that a particular item was important for

⁵ The first questionnaire is not presented in the appendix because its content is discussed in detail in the paper (Sect. 5.4). The second one has been included since it will enable the reader to relate the results of the study presented in Table 2 to a specific questionnaire item.

ICC development in the FL classroom. The criterion for incorporating items into the final version of the questionnaire was that each had to be accepted as important for IC teaching by both experts, who also provided comments on the item's clarity and conciseness. In the process, 6 items were eliminated from the pool.

In order to analyze the results and perform a reliability analysis, Microsoft Excel software was used to compute descriptive statistics. Internal consistency reliability of the questionnaire was measured—the survey had Cronbach alpha coefficient of .84, and thus met the lower bound for internal consistency reliability (Crocker and Algina 1986).

5.4 Results and Discussion I (questionnaire A): Respondents' Profile as FL Users from the IC Perspective

The respondents were from 17 to 18 years of age, evenly split in the age categories. The majority of the informants began their FL education in elementary school, either in the first grade (67 %, $n = 227$) or in the fourth grade (21 %, $n = 71$). The remaining 12 % ($n = 40$) started learning a FL in junior high school. At the time of the study they had been learning a FL for 10, 7 or 4 years respectively; thus, it can be assumed that they had learned a FL for long enough to be aware that each new language introduced them into a new world.

The majority of the informants learned two FLs at school (68 %, $n = 230$), which is mandatory for high school students in Poland; 32 % ($n = 108$) learned three or more FLs. All sample learned English (100 %, $n = 338$). German was studied by 55 % ($n = 187$), French by 31 % ($n = 104$), Russian by 14 % ($n = 47$) and Spanish by 6 % ($n = 19$) of the respondents. The minority FLs were Italian, Dutch, Czech, Japanese, Chinese, Arabic, Korean and Mongolian. 85 % of the population surveyed ($n = 286$) had FL classes twice or three times a week, 15 % ($n = 52$) had an extended program, i.e. 5 or 6 h of instruction per week.

Most of the respondents had no experience of living abroad in another culture for a longer period of time (a year or longer) (98 %, $n = 331$). The 2 % ($n = 7$) who had such an experience had stayed abroad for a relatively short period of time, namely a year ($n = 4$) or two ($n = 1$). Only 2 respondents had stayed abroad longer, 1 for 8 and the other for 14 years. The countries of their residence were the USA ($n = 3$), Great Britain ($n = 2$), Germany and Korea. Thus, during their formative years the respondents lived primarily in Poland and constituted a homogenous group of a similar national, ethnic and cultural background. Consequently, the subjects did not have the opportunity to practice on a daily basis the attitude of openness and tolerance towards minorities, foreigners or otherness in contacts with their classmates, as it happens in multinational countries such as Great Britain or the USA.

When asked if a FL classroom was a source of IC experience for them, 58 % (n = 195) of the informants answered “yes”, while 42 % (n = 143) “no”. Those who considered a FL classroom a place where IC teaching was taking place were asked to tick the sources of their IC experience. Among the instruments used were course books (71 %, n = 101; 30 %),⁶ teacher’s lectures (58 %, n = 83; 25 %), books, press articles and films in a foreign language (56 %, n = 80; 24 %), discussing cultural differences (43 %, n = 61; 18 %), students’ presentations on target language history, geography and various other aspects of culture (32 %, n = 46; 14 %), projects (19 %, n = 27; 8 %), discussions of current events (15 %, n = 22; 7 %), role-playing foreigners (4 %, n = 6; 2 %) and cultural portfolios (1 %, n = 2). Only three respondents (2 %) mentioned the Internet as a source of IC experience in the FL classroom. The data show that culture is taught in a very traditional way, and the methods and techniques which resort to learners’ autonomy, such as ethnographic projects or tasks demanding Internet searches, are not used at all.

The respondents have contact with foreign languages, and presumably with foreign cultures outside the classroom. 77 % (n = 259) watch foreign TV channels, 63 % (n = 212) go abroad with their families, 41 % (n = 140) read literature in foreign languages. 48 % (n = 161) take private lessons, 34 % (n = 116) have foreign friends and keep in touch with them on a regular basis either by e-mail or Skype. 33 % (n = 111) read foreign language press, 31 % (n = 104) listen to foreign broadcasts on the radio, while 31 % (n = 104) search foreign sites on the Internet. 15 % (n = 52) participate in summer language camps. However, the present study did not aim to assess whether and to what extent such international experiences or self-study contribute to learners’ ICC.

Scholars have claimed that building a relationship with the cultural other is the best means of fostering ICC. Byram (1997) calls it an “experience of fieldwork”. In his opinion, visits abroad “particularly over a longer term, where learners are separated from other learners and teachers, and from their family and friends, provide them with the opportunity to develop attitudes which include ability to cope with different stages of adaptation, engagement with unfamiliar conventions of behavior and interaction, and an interest in other cultures which is not that of the tourist or business person” (1997, p. 65). For this reason, the respondents were asked about foreign exchange programs in their schools and sources of gaining ICC outside the classroom.

79 % respondents (n = 266) declared that the schools they attended or had attended before had student foreign exchange programs, whereas 21 % (n = 72) claimed that visits abroad were/had not been organized by their schools. Among the countries visited most often were Germany (49 %, n = 164), Sweden (42 %, n = 143), France (24 %, n = 81), Great Britain (9 %, n = 32) and Holland (8 %, n = 26). The range of countries listed by only a few respondents was much wider

⁶ The second of the parenthesized percentages refers to the proportion of the whole population surveyed (n = 338).

and included Spain, Italy, Austria, Russia, Belgium, Lithuania, Belarus, the Czech Republic, Switzerland, Finland, Hungary, Romania, Greece, Norway, Denmark, Turkey, Kenya, South Africa, Canada and the USA. However, those exchange programs were not available to all the students. Only 34 % (n = 91) of the sub-population of the students who attended schools with foreign exchange programs had participated in such a program (27 %, n = 91, of the whole population surveyed), whereas 66 % (n = 175) had not (73 %, n = 247, of the whole population surveyed).

Unfortunately, even those who did participate in school visits abroad did not benefit from them as much as they could have from the IC perspective, since the majority of their teachers (67 %, n = 61) did not prepare them for the contact with a foreign culture. The minority who did (33 %; n = 30) resorted to very traditional methods, mainly classroom lectures and discussions about the target culture and cultural differences (97 %, n = 29). Only 3 % (n = 1) assigned presentations and 7 % (n = 2) observational tasks to be performed during the stay abroad; such tasks would have allowed learners to play the role of an ethnographer, recommended by IC teaching experts (Roberts et al. 2001). Nor did the teachers summarize school visits abroad on return to school (70 %, n = 64). The minority who did (30 %, n = 27) organized in-class discussions (60 %, n = 16) and slide shows (30 %, n = 8), assigned special projects (11 %, n = 3) or written reports (11 %, n = 3), or asked students to post comments on a bulletin board (4 %, n = 1).

66 % of the respondents (n = 222) would like to take part in a foreign exchange program or repeat this experience; however the majority were not aware of the potential of such visits for developing ICC. The reasons given in response to the question why they would like to participate in school visits abroad were the following: to practice the language (61 %, n = 135) or test their language skills (44 %, n = 98), to meet new friends (41 %, n = 90), or to experience something new (16 %, n = 35). Very few respondents mentioned travelling (1 %, n = 2) or gaining knowledge (1 %, n = 2). Only 13 % (n = 29) mentioned the opportunity to get acquainted with a new culture. Obviously, the school foreign exchange programs embrace only the minority of student population, and those who go abroad treat the experience as a sightseeing trip and a test of their linguistic abilities. The limitless potential of such visits for fostering ICC is thus not properly exploited.

5.5 Results and Discussions II (Questionnaire B): IC Elements in a Polish FL Classroom

As has already been mentioned, the instrument used to assess IC teaching was a 24-item questionnaire. The respondents were asked to grade from 1 to 5 the questionnaire items. The findings are presented in Table 1 and Table 2 below. The 0.05 level of significance was set for all the results; thus the confidence level was 95 % ($p = .95$).

Table 1 Descriptive statistics for all the 24 items of the questionnaire

Parameter	Results
Mean	2.78
Standard deviation	1.28
Coefficient of variation (in %)	46.04
Mode	3.00
Median	3.00
Skewness	0.12
Kurtosis	-1.04

Table 2 Descriptive statistics for each questionnaire item

Parameter	Item							
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Mean	2.99	3.13	3.23	2.62	2.99	2.86	2.48	2.71
SD	1.21	1.22	1.11	1.11	1.22	1.16	1.09	1.28
CV (%)	40.46	39.09	34.42	42.56	40.86	40.59	43.84	47.12
Mode	3	4	4	3	3	3	3	3
Median	3	3	3	3	3	3	2	3
Skewness	-0.154	-0.169	-0.466	0.216	-0.154	-0.024	0.291	0.116
Kurtosis	-0.910	-0.915	-0.489	-0.698	-0.926	-0.828	-0.638	-1.090
Parameter	Item							
	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
Mean	2.55	2.95	2.05	2.04	2.51	3.52	2.58	3.86
SD	1.20	1.19	1.12	1.04	1.17	1.16	1.16	1.18
CV (%)	46.85	40.24	54.62	51.09	46.77	33.03	44.90	30.67
Mode	3	3	1	1	3	4	3	5
Median	3	3	2	2	3	4	3	4
Skewness	0.353	-0.036	0.818	0.721	0.263	-0.555	0.186	-0.853
Kurtosis	-0.724	-0.840	-0.270	-0.223	-0.818	0.400	-0.835	-0.127
Parameter	Item							
	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24
Mean	3.03	2.19	2.16	2.46	2.52	2.61	2.69	4.05
SD	1.22	1.11	1.08	1.31	1.27	1.16	1.23	1.19
CV (%)	40.29	50.63	49.85	53.16	50.44	44.47	45.76	29.49
Mode	3	1	1	1	1	3	3	5
Median	3	2	2	2	2.5	3	3	4
Skewness	-0.067	0.605	0.559	0.427	0.374	0.192	0.203	1.207
Kurtosis	-0.963	-0.460	-0.567	-0.965	-0.874	-0.784	-0.909	0.537

The results ($M = 2.78$) reveal that, in the respondents' opinion, IC teaching in Poland plays a marginal role in the classroom (Research question 1). The informants' grades for separate questionnaire items ranged from 2.04 (item 12) to 4.05 (item 24). Standard deviations for the majority of the questions were high, which indicates small concentration of the results around the mean value; rather, the

results are spread (dispersion, which is measured by coefficient of variation, is higher than 30 % and in all cases and amounts mostly to over 40 % (14 items) or even 50 % (5 items).

The results show a considerable diversity of the respondents' opinions. There is also a wide scattering of the mode in the sample—as many as 6 questionnaire items scored 1 and only one item scored 5. The dominant score was 3, as it was achieved by 13 items. This might mean that IC teaching differs between schools and teachers, and that in the classroom the vast majority of learners are introduced only to some aspects of IC teaching. All the variables were found to be asymmetrical, not normally distributed (all the 24 questionnaire items have negative kurtosis, skewness not near zero). For the 10 questions which had negative skewness, the majority of the results were above the mean.

The highest scores were given to Questions 14, 16 and 24, but only the findings for Item 24 were absolutely positive—a large number of the respondents agreed that traveling abroad and foreign school exchanges have a strong influence on their attitudes and behaviors towards representatives of foreign countries. The mean here ($M = 4.05$) is 1.27 higher than for all the 24 questionnaire items (2.78). Furthermore, a great number of informants attached the highest value of the rating scale (5) to this item. The coefficient of variation is below 30 %, which indicates a large concentration of the results around the mean—most of the respondents assigned a high value to this item.

A large number of informants admitted that their teachers warned them against stereotyping foreign cultures and foreigners when meeting them (Item 16, the highest value of the rating scale (5) dominated in students' responses)—the mean ($M = 3.86$) is 1.08 higher than the average for all the questionnaire items (2.78). In the respondents' opinions, FL classes prepare them to a moderate degree for avoiding premature assessment of foreigners' attitudes and behaviors (Item 14, $M = 3.52$).

A vast majority of the respondents were neutral about the second research question (Items 1–5, the means from 2.62 to 3.23) concerning the attention learners pay in the classroom to the relationship between language and culture, which implies that not much is done in the FL classroom in Poland to help learners realize the cultural connotations of language and the fact that not knowing the foreign culture impedes their ability to communicate. Similarly, FL classes do not contribute much to learners' knowledge of the target and foreign culture/s.

In the informants' opinion, FL classes do not raise their awareness of cultural differences (Research question 3). The scores for this part of the questionnaire (Items 6–9) ranged from 2.48 (Item 7) to 2.86 (Item 6). A large number of the respondents claimed that they neither develop the skills that would help them communicate effectively with representatives of the foreign cultures (Item 8), nor practice establishing and maintaining contacts with foreigners (Item 9).

The Polish high school does not prepare learners for managing cross-cultural interactions (Research question 4). The study revealed that developing learners' 'soft skills' is completely ignored. The scores of this part of the questionnaire were the lowest and very diversified, as they ranged from 2.04 to 3.52. A vast majority

of the subjects declared that they were not taught how to avoid assessing a situation or a phenomenon in an emotionally-driven way (Item 12, $M = 2.04$) or how to keep negative emotions under control (Item 11, $M = 2.05$). Furthermore, both items had the lowest mode on the rating scale (1) and a low value of the median (2).

The majority of the informants were either neutral or negative about Research question 5 concerning building learners' awareness of being a product of enculturation. There was a considerable discrepancy in the results obtained, with the scores in this part of the questionnaire ranging from 2.16 (Item 19) to 3.86 (Item 16). The mode value for four of the items was the lowest (1), which means that half of the respondents expressed strong disagreement. Surprisingly, the respondents thought that the FL class did not help them understand their own culture and identity better (Item 19, $M = 2.16$ and the lowest mode on the scale (1) and a low median (2)). The majority were neutral when asked if they compared in class a spectrum of various foreign cultures with their own (Item 17, $M = 3.03$).

Both textbooks used in the classroom (Item 22) and FL teachers (Item 23) were assessed by the informants relatively low in the IC perspective (Research question 6)—the mean values were 2.61 and 2.69, respectively. However, the coefficient of variation for both items was high (over 40 %), which indicates a considerable diversity of the responses, which might mean that there are schools where IC teaching is implemented by teachers with the use of the textbooks. Furthermore, some teachers might teach FLs interculturally.

To offer a broader picture of IC teaching in the Polish FL classroom, the study also aimed to establish what factors, if any, determined the respondents' assessment. The following seven factors were considered to find out whether they differentiated the questionnaire results: gender, the length of FL education, the number of FLs learned, language proficiency, intensity of FL instruction, participation in a school exchange program and experience of living abroad. *U*-tests were run on the first six of the subpopulations and *t* test on the last.⁷ No significant differences were found on any of the seven measures ($U = 1.64$; $p < .05$). However, there were significant differences in a few separate items in the subpopulations determined by gender (3 items), the length of FL education (1 item), intensity of FL instruction (12 items) and participation in a school exchange program (2 items) (see Appendix 2).

Some limitations of the present study should be addressed in additional research. Firstly, the quantitative investigation was limited due to the subjectivity of the respondents' assessment. Secondly, the study examined only the opinions of learners, and teachers should be surveyed in a separate, qualitative study involving lesson observations and interviews.

⁷ The critical values are 1.64 and -1.64 , respectively.

6 Concluding Remarks

If school education is expected to produce wise, open-minded graduates capable of critical thinking and forming their opinions about the multicultural, complex world, it should provide greater opportunity for learners to immerse not only in the language, but also in its culture. Learners should be shown that culture is not monolithic and that IC dialogue leads to new awareness which consists of many truths and opinions the representatives of different cultures share. FL classes should help learners identify themselves with their own culture and provide them with the opportunity to compare it to what might seem strange, foreign and different. Consequently, mutual learning, instead of simply transferring declarative knowledge should be at the heart of IC teaching, complemented by IC mediation. By developing the skills of interpreting, relating, discovery and interaction, learners should be taught how to interpret/understand language and non-verbal signals in their own and others' behavior. Equally important are openness to otherness, modification of stereotypical views, elimination of prejudices and promotion of tolerance. The present research has demonstrated that IC teaching in the Polish educational context plays a minor role and much needs to be done to implement multi-dimensional IC teaching in the FL classroom in Poland.

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A.1 Appendix 1

A.1.1 Intercultural Education in a FL Classroom in Poland

A number of statements which are used to describe FL classroom from the IC perspective are given below. Read each statement and indicate by circling the right number how this particular comment refers to your FL classes. Use the following rating scale: 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree.

1. Thanks to FL classes I know that both language and body language have cultural connotations, e.g. people in different parts of the world differ in their perception of time, the distance kept by interlocutors during a conversation or the use of gestures.
2. FL education has made me aware that lack of knowledge of cultures impedes our abilities to communicate with their representatives and can lead to a wide range of communicative misunderstandings.
3. FL classes contribute to my better understanding of the TL culture/s.

4. FL classes broaden my knowledge of various cultures, characteristic of the people living all over the world, not only in the TL culture.
5. FL classes provide me with the information not only about history, geography, literature or art of the TL culture/s, but also about everyday habits of the inhabitants.
6. Thanks to FL education I know that different societies differ from each other in the systems of values or attitudes that prevail there.
7. FL education is conducive to reflections on cultural differences and development of observational and analytical skills.
8. In FL classroom we develop skills which help us communicate effectively with speakers who originate from various cultures. For example, we do exercises or tasks which require adopting linguistic and paralinguistic behavior appropriately to the situation.
9. FL teaching is integrated with establishing and maintaining contacts with foreigners.
10. FL classes develop in us openness and tolerance towards different nations and cultures, promote positive attitudes towards them and teach us perceive the world from different perspectives.
11. FL classes have taught me to keep under control my negative reactions, such as anger or fury towards representatives of the cultures distant from mine.
12. In FL classroom I have learned to avoid assessing a situation or a phenomenon impulsively or emotionally-driven.
13. FL education has helped me develop empathy towards people who live in different countries or originate from different cultural regions.
14. When I compare foreign cultures or behavior of foreigners with my own I try not to assess them.
15. FL classes have taught me to disagree with the opinions or attitudes of the other people in such a way that does not provoke conflicts or excludes cooperation with them.
16. FL classroom does not contribute to strengthening stereotypes and prejudices among us towards foreigner cultures, e.g. Scots are mean.
17. In FL classroom we often compare foreign cultures with the Polish one.
18. FL classes help us reflect on our own values and beliefs.
19. FL classes help us understand better our own identity and native culture.
20. FL education contributes to reducing our ethnocentrism.
21. Contacts with other cultures in foreign language classroom help us improve our self-assessment as Poles—we do not have an inferiority complex toward representatives of other cultures because we realize that Poles have their own valuable contribution to the world's cultural heritage.
22. FL textbooks which we have used in the classroom so far have prepared us well to function in a multi-cultural world. Among others, they had a separate module devoted to developing ICC.

- 23. My FLteachers are/were very effective IC mediators—they make/made us aware that we live in a multi-cultural world and prepare/prepared us well to interact with foreigners.
- 24. Visits abroad (school exchange programs included) have a positive influence on my attitude and behavior towards foreign cultures and their representatives.

A.2 Appendix 2

Item	U statistics (<i>t</i> -test) ^a for the differences between mean results in the subpopulations determined by:						
	Gender	The length of FL education	The number of FLs learned	Language proficiency	Intensity of FL instruction	Participating in a foreign exchange program	Having experience of living abroad
1	-0.3795	-0.9433	-1.1153	-0.7398	-2.7771	0.6391	0.2169
2	0.2249	0.7012	-1.2124	-0.7941	-2.1978	0.2118	0.0765
3	-1.5733	-0.1708	-1.2229	-0.8189	-2.4645	-1.7695	-0.6172
4	-1.1525	0.4012	0.1396	0.0920	-0.4395	0.2088	0.0692
5	-1.6638	-0.5521	-0.0266	-0.0176	-2.7139	-0.6744	-0.2267
6	-0.6360	0.5224	0.3994	0.2621	-2.2484	1.0363	0.3435
7	-1.5198	-0.4283	-0.7347	-0.4873	-1.8748	-0.1492	-0.0484
8	-1.0089	1.0740	-0.3426	-0.2259	-0.0586	-0.4272	-0.1382
9	-0.2296	-0.1384	-0.1580	-0.1042	-1.8408	-0.9659	-0.3213
10	-1.1624	1.0998	0.1720	0.1133	-1.4144	1.0650	0.3430
11	-1.7973	0.1563	-0.3124	-0.2044	-0.4171	-0.8565	-0.2775
12	-1.4107	0.3618	1.0684	0.7081	-1.2027	0.5238	0.1874
13	0.3125	1.2140	-0.7841	-0.5189	-1.9975	0.1165	0.0390
14	0.8697	-1.2613	-0.9278	-0.6154	-0.2085	-0.8379	-0.2935
15	-0.9526	0.8695	-0.7956	-0.5297	-1.7727	0.1545	0.0494
16	0.6949	0.3615	1.1769	0.7749	1.1645	-0.8278	-0.2917
17	-0.3767	1.3582	0.2092	0.1403	-1.7833	-1.3933	-0.4535
18	-0.2483	1.5526	0.7389	0.5029	-0.9162	0.4503	0.1470
19	0.0855	-0.2950	0.4434	0.2998	-1.6589	0.0440	0.0135
20	-0.7694	2.3394	0.4859	0.3230	0.5105	1.4181	0.4595
21	-2.0228	-0.0266	-0.0216	-0.0144	0.6612	0.1328	0.0404
22	-1.5121	-0.2367	-1.0464	-0.6795	-1.8884	-1.6546	-0.5387
23	-1.1943	-0.8844	1.0351	0.7035	-0.1966	0.4255	0.1449
24	4.2533	0.1335	-3.0990	-2.1818	-2.5470	5.0995	1.3050
Total	-0.5481	0.2895	-0.2441	-0.1621	-1.2188	0.0498	0.0164

a For the first six factors, *U* statistics were used, for the last one *t* test because of the small number of the subpopulation of the students who had experience of living abroad (n = 7).

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