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Developing Intercultural Communicative Competence through Case Technology: Pedagogical Potential and Implementation in Foreign Language Education

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ABSTRACT

Intercultural communicative competence has become an essential component of foreign language education, since effective communication in contemporary academic and professional environments requires not only linguistic proficiency but also the ability to interpret cultural differences, negotiate meanings, and respond appropriately to unfamiliar communicative situations. This article presents a narrative review of the pedagogical potential of case technology for developing intercultural communicative competence in foreign language education. Drawing on major models of intercultural competence and recent studies of the case method, case-based learning, and Internet-based case study technology, the article examines the relationship between case analysis and the cognitive, communicative, behavioural, and reflective components of intercultural learning. Particular attention is given to authentic problem situations, collaborative decision-making, perspective-taking, classroom discussion, and reflection. The review demonstrates that case technology can integrate linguistic practice with cultural interpretation and problem solving, while its effectiveness depends on appropriate case design, linguistic scaffolding, teacher facilitation, and reflective assessment. A staged model for implementing intercultural cases in foreign language classes is proposed.

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I. INTRODUCTION

The objectives of foreign language education have changed considerably under the influence of globalisation, academic mobility, international professional cooperation, and digitally mediated communication. Language learners are increasingly expected to interact not only with speakers of the target-language community but also with individuals representing diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Consequently, knowledge of vocabulary and grammar, although essential, is no longer sufficient to ensure effective communication. Learners need to understand different systems of values, social conventions, communicative expectations, and culturally conditioned patterns of behaviour and, more importantly, to interpret and negotiate these differences in actual interaction.

This requirement has led to the increasing importance of **intercultural communicative competence (ICC)** as an objective of foreign language education. Byram (1997) proposed one of the most influential models of ICC, according to which an intercultural competent language user combines linguistic and sociolinguistic abilities with attitudes of openness and curiosity, knowledge of social groups and cultural practices, skills of interpreting and relating, skills of discovery and interaction, and critical cultural awareness. In the revised version of his model, Byram (2021) further emphasises mediation, intercultural citizenship, and the ethical dimensions of interaction across cultural boundaries.

The concept therefore changes the traditional understanding of successful language learning. The ultimate objective is not simply to imitate an idealised native speaker but to develop an **intercultural speaker** capable of establishing relationships between different cultural perspectives. Such a learner should be able to recognise that communicative behaviour can have different meanings in different contexts, suspend immediate judgement, obtain additional information, explain their own cultural assumptions, and mediate between potentially conflicting interpretations.

Deardorff (2006) similarly conceptualises intercultural competence as a developmental process combining attitudes, knowledge, skills, internal changes in perspective, and appropriate external behaviour. From this perspective, openness, respect, cultural self-awareness, adaptability, empathy, and effective interaction are interconnected rather than isolated educational outcomes. The *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Companion Volume* also reflects this broader conception of communication by incorporating mediation, online interaction, and plurilingual/pluricultural competence into its system of descriptors (Council of Europe, 2020).

These theoretical developments create a methodological problem for foreign language education. Intercultural competence cannot be effectively developed through the transmission of isolated facts about the history, traditions, food, holidays, or etiquette of another country. Cultural information may provide necessary background knowledge, but it does not automatically teach learners how to act when different expectations come into conflict. Students require learning situations in which cultural knowledge becomes a resource for interpretation, comparison, communication, and decision-making.

One approach that offers such possibilities is **case technology**. In the present article, this term refers to an integrated pedagogical technology centred on the analysis of a concrete problem situation and involving individual interpretation, information processing, collaborative discussion, problem solving, decision-making, presentation, and reflection. In English-language scholarship, closely related practices are more commonly described as the *case method*, *case study method*, or *case-based learning*. The term *case technology* is retained here because it emphasises not only the case itself but also the organised sequence of pedagogical procedures through which learners work with it.

The case method originated outside language education and has been widely employed in business, law, medicine, management, and professional training. Its central principle is the replacement of the simple reproduction of previously presented information by the analysis of a realistic situation containing uncertainty, competing interests, or a problem requiring a reasoned decision. When transferred to foreign

language education, the method creates a double learning task: students must understand and solve the problem while simultaneously using the target language as the principal instrument of analysis and communication.

This combination is particularly relevant to ICC development. Intercultural communication is characterised by situations in which participants may interpret the same words, actions, silence, hierarchy, politeness strategies, time orientation, or interpersonal distance differently. Case technology makes these differences visible by transforming them into concrete communicative problems rather than presenting culture as a collection of abstract facts.

II. METHODS

The study adopts a **narrative literature review** design in order to synthesise theoretical and empirical research related to intercultural communicative competence and case-oriented approaches to foreign language teaching. This design is appropriate because the relevant literature encompasses different types of publications, including theoretical models of ICC, methodological studies, classroom-based research, qualitative investigations, and recent studies of digitally supported case technology.

The review focuses on four interconnected areas: theoretical conceptualisations of intercultural communicative competence; the pedagogical characteristics of the case method and case-based learning; applications of case technology in foreign language education; and empirical studies addressing intercultural, communicative, cognitive, or motivational outcomes. Foundational publications were included when they remain theoretically significant, while particular attention was given to research published during the last decade.

The selected sources were analysed thematically rather than chronologically. The analysis concentrated on the relationship between case activities and specific dimensions of ICC, the reported advantages and limitations of case-based instruction, the characteristics of effective intercultural cases, and the stages of classroom implementation. Because the reviewed studies differ in context, participants, research

instruments, and methodological design, their findings are interpreted qualitatively rather than compared through statistical effect sizes.

III. RESULTS

3.1. Intercultural Communicative Competence as a Pedagogical Objective

The literature demonstrates that ICC is a multidimensional construct in which language competence and cultural competence are inseparable. Byram's (1997, 2021) model is particularly useful for understanding how case technology can contribute to its development because it distinguishes several interconnected components.

The first is the learner's **attitude** towards cultural difference. Curiosity, openness, and willingness to suspend disbelief about another culture and unquestioned assumptions about one's own culture create the psychological basis of successful intercultural interaction. In educational practice, this means that students should not approach cultural differences only in order to determine which behaviour is "correct". They should learn to investigate why different participants interpret the same situation differently.

The second component is **knowledge**. It includes knowledge of social groups, cultural practices, institutions, interactional conventions, and processes through which identities are constructed. However, cultural knowledge is meaningful for communication only when learners can apply it to the interpretation of concrete situations.

The third component consists of **skills of interpreting and relating**. Learners need to interpret a culturally marked document, statement, or event and relate it to phenomena within their own cultural experience. This comparative activity is central to case analysis. A learner confronting a workplace disagreement, for example, may have to examine whether the conflict results from individual behaviour, linguistic ambiguity, organisational hierarchy, different understandings of responsibility, or several factors operating simultaneously.

The fourth dimension involves **skills of discovery and interaction**. Real intercultural encounters frequently contain insufficient information. Competent speakers must therefore know how to ask questions, clarify intentions, obtain new cultural knowledge during interaction, and adjust communicative strategies accordingly.

Finally, **critical cultural awareness** enables learners to evaluate practices and perspectives critically rather than merely accepting their own or another culture as normative. Intercultural competence consequently requires reflection on the values that underlie communicative choices.

These components reveal why ICC cannot be adequately developed through reproductive exercises alone. If students are expected to remember information supplied by the teacher and reproduce predetermined answers, there is little opportunity to practise uncertainty management, perspective-taking, negotiation, or critical cultural reflection. Case technology is pedagogically relevant precisely because it introduces a problem for which the learner must construct rather than recall a response.

Explicit intercultural instruction has been shown to contribute to ICC development. Huang (2021), examining EFL learners in Taiwan, found that a structured intercultural approach could produce measurable changes in learners' intercultural development. Such findings support the broader methodological principle that ICC should be treated as an intentional learning objective rather than as an incidental consequence of language practice.

3.2. Pedagogical Potential of Case Technology

Case technology is based on a contextualised representation of a problem. Unlike a conventional language exercise, a case normally contains a situation, participants, relevant contextual information, competing perspectives, and a task requiring analysis or decision-making. The learner is not asked merely to provide a linguistically correct answer but to determine what should be done, why a problem has occurred, which interpretation is most convincing, or how communication could be improved.

This problem-oriented character gives case technology significant potential for foreign language education. It combines receptive and productive skills within a single activity. Students may read a written case, analyse emails or documents, listen to recorded statements, search for additional information, discuss the problem, negotiate a group position, write recommendations, and present the final decision orally. Language therefore becomes the medium through which a meaningful objective is achieved.

Esteban and Pérez Cañado (2004), studying the use of the case method in Business English, emphasise its capacity to create realistic professional communication while also identifying important methodological conditions for successful implementation. Appropriate preparation, the authenticity of learning materials, learner motivation, correspondence between the case and course objectives, and suitable assessment are particularly important when students work in a language they have not yet fully mastered.

The intercultural potential of case technology becomes especially visible when the central problem arises from different communicative expectations. Safina and Salieva (2018) argue that cases in foreign language education can encourage students to analyse and compare cultures, communicate with one another, search for information, and make collective decisions. Their classroom application also demonstrated the importance of preliminary language preparation and the adaptation of case materials to learners' proficiency levels.

Case technology is therefore capable of connecting several educational processes that are often separated in conventional instruction. **Linguistic development** occurs because learners need vocabulary, grammar, discourse strategies, and pragmatic resources to formulate and defend their positions. **Cognitive development** is stimulated by the need to identify relevant information, establish causal relationships, compare alternatives, and justify decisions. **Social learning** occurs through collaborative work, while **intercultural learning** develops through the interpretation of different perspectives.

Recent studies provide further support for this integration. Tran and Thai (2023), investigating instructors' perceptions of case-based learning in an English communication course at a Vietnamese university, report perceived improvements in

learner involvement, critical thinking, problem solving, communication, confidence, and motivation. Importantly, the instructors also associated the method with the development of intercultural competence.

Medynska (2023), analysing the case method in Business English within multicultural communication contexts, similarly identifies a close relationship between case work, practical communication, cooperation, problem solving, and the ability to respond to cultural diversity. The professional orientation of such cases is important because intercultural misunderstandings often become particularly visible when participants must achieve a common practical objective.

The value of case technology can therefore be described in terms of **situated communication**. Students do not discuss cultural difference in the abstract; they encounter it within a communicative event. A disagreement over deadlines, a request formulated too directly or too indirectly, an unsuccessful business meeting, different expectations regarding feedback, or a misunderstanding between an international student and a university administrator can become the starting point for both linguistic and cultural analysis.

At the same time, effective cases should avoid presenting national cultures as homogeneous systems that mechanically determine behaviour. If students are told that a conflict occurred simply because “culture A is direct” whereas “culture B is indirect”, the activity may reinforce rather than challenge stereotypes. The intercultural value of a case emerges when several plausible explanations must be considered and when learners distinguish observation from interpretation.

3.3. Case Technology as a Process of Intercultural Problem Solving

The reviewed literature suggests that the pedagogical effectiveness of case technology depends not only on the content of a case but also on the sequence through which students work with it. A case is therefore better understood as a structured learning process than as a single classroom text.

The first stage is **pre-case preparation**. Students need sufficient linguistic and contextual resources to understand the situation. This may involve pre-teaching key vocabulary, introducing relevant communicative functions, reviewing pragmatic forms, or providing necessary social and professional background. Safina and Salieva (2018) specifically emphasise the importance of preliminary language training when the case requires learners to operate within a specialised thematic area.

The second stage is **individual familiarisation and problem identification**. Students read or watch the case and determine what they perceive as the principal difficulty. Individual interpretation before group discussion is important because it makes learners aware of their own initial assumptions. Two students may identify different problems in the same interaction: one may see inappropriate language, another a cultural difference, and a third a conflict of professional roles.

The third stage is **information analysis and perspective-taking**. Learners distinguish facts from interpretations, identify missing information, and reconstruct the situation from the positions of different participants. At this stage, questions such as *What does each person know?*, *What does each participant assume?*, *How might the same behaviour be interpreted differently?*, and *What additional information is required?* are pedagogically more productive than asking students simply to identify a cultural difference.

The fourth stage is **collaborative discussion and negotiation**. Learners compare their individual interpretations and attempt to formulate a common explanation or solution. This stage directly activates foreign language communication. Students need to express agreement and disagreement, clarify their position, request evidence, challenge assumptions, reformulate ideas, and persuade other group members. The linguistic objective is therefore embedded within an authentic communicative purpose.

The fifth stage is **decision-making and communicative production**. Groups select a solution and transform their analysis into an observable communicative product. Depending on course objectives, this may take the form of a presentation, role-play, business meeting, written recommendation, email, mediation task, negotiation, or action

plan. Such production is significant because ICC is not simply the ability to explain cultural differences theoretically; it includes the capacity to act appropriately within communication.

The sixth stage is **reflection and debriefing**. Students reconsider their original assumptions and compare them with their final interpretations. They may be asked what information changed their position, which interpretations were unsupported, whether their group initially relied on stereotypes, and how they would approach a comparable situation in the future. Reflection transforms the completed problem into an opportunity for intercultural self-awareness.

This final stage corresponds closely to the reflective dimension of ICC. Deardorff's (2006) model suggests that intercultural competence includes internal shifts in perspective, adaptability, and empathy before these qualities become visible in external behaviour. The reflective phase of case technology allows such changes to become explicit and therefore pedagogically observable.

3.4. Authenticity, Digitalisation, and Intercultural Interaction

The development of digital learning environments has expanded the forms in which case technology can be implemented. A traditional printed description may now be supplemented with video fragments, authentic websites, emails, social media posts, institutional documents, maps, interviews, or other multimodal resources. Students can therefore investigate a problem rather than receive all information in a closed textual package.

Svyrydiuk, Hordieieva, and Kyryklytsia (2026) specifically examine **Internet-based case study technology** for developing Master's students' intercultural foreign language communicative competence. Their model stresses the role of digital resources in providing authentic materials and supporting students' independent information search. The authors also emphasise that case technology can be combined with other interactive methods rather than functioning as an isolated teaching technique.

Digital environments provide another important possibility: students representing different cultural contexts can analyse the same case together. Kim (2025), studying online case-based learning between Japanese and Malaysian university students, found that work with authentic workplace conflicts stimulated the exchange of sociocultural knowledge and encouraged learners to integrate multiple perspectives when proposing solutions. Student reflections demonstrated increased attention to language practices, cultural conventions, interpersonal relationships, and different ways of interpreting workplace situations.

This form of intercultural case technology is particularly significant because it changes the source of cultural diversity. In a conventional classroom, cultural difference is represented within the case material; in international online collaboration, it is also present among the learners themselves. Students may therefore discover that members of another cultural group interpret the case differently or, conversely, that national background does not necessarily predict an individual's interpretation.

The teacher's role also changes in such environments. Instead of being the sole provider of cultural knowledge, the teacher becomes a **facilitator of inquiry and communication**. The instructor selects or develops the case, provides linguistic and methodological scaffolding, monitors interaction, asks questions that challenge premature conclusions, and organises reflection. The teacher should provide factual clarification where necessary but should generally avoid imposing one culturally "correct" interpretation when the evidence permits several plausible explanations.

3.5. Limitations and Conditions for Effective Implementation

Despite its pedagogical potential, case technology does not automatically produce intercultural competence. Several recurring limitations identified in the literature require consideration.

The first is **linguistic difficulty**. An intellectually valuable case may fail if learners lack the linguistic resources required to express complex interpretations. Tran and Thai (2023) identify differences in students' English proficiency as one of the

challenges of case-based learning. Linguistic scaffolding should therefore be treated as an integral component of case design rather than as remedial support added afterwards.

The second challenge is **case authenticity and relevance**. Artificial scenarios whose solution is immediately obvious generate little genuine discussion. Effective cases should contain sufficient complexity to allow several interpretations while remaining accessible within the learners' knowledge and language level. Safina and Salieva (2018) stress that materials should be authentic, connected with contemporary realities, and adapted to the needs of the learner group.

Third, case technology can reproduce **cultural stereotyping** if national identity is used as the only explanatory variable. Cases should therefore include individual, institutional, professional, linguistic, and situational factors alongside cultural ones. Students should be encouraged to formulate hypotheses rather than categorical statements about cultural groups.

Fourth, implementation is **time-intensive**. Teachers must select or construct appropriate situations, prepare supporting materials, anticipate linguistic difficulties, design tasks, monitor group work, and develop assessment criteria. Students also require more classroom time for discussion than in highly controlled exercises.

Finally, ICC itself is difficult to assess through conventional language tests. Deardorff (2006) recommends the use of multiple forms of evidence when evaluating intercultural competence. Within case technology, assessment can combine observation, reflective writing, peer assessment, self-assessment, oral performance, and analytic rubrics.

A useful rubric can distinguish between several dimensions: the accuracy of problem identification; the ability to distinguish evidence from assumption; recognition of multiple perspectives; appropriate use of cultural knowledge; avoidance of unsupported generalisations; effectiveness of communicative strategies; linguistic clarity; ability to negotiate with others; and quality of reflective analysis. Such assessment makes ICC an explicit educational objective rather than an undefined additional benefit of speaking practice.

IV. DISCUSSION

The reviewed theoretical and empirical literature positions case technology as a pedagogically coherent approach to intercultural foreign language education. Its value derives from the correspondence between the structure of a case and the structure of intercultural competence itself. Both involve incomplete information, alternative perspectives, interpretation of behaviour, negotiation of meaning, and the need to make context-sensitive decisions.

The pedagogical potential of case technology is particularly evident in its ability to integrate **language, culture, cognition, and action**. In conventional language lessons these dimensions may appear separately: vocabulary is practised in one activity, cultural information is discussed in another, and speaking is assessed independently. A case connects them through a common problem. Learners require language because they need to solve the problem; they require cultural interpretation because language alone cannot explain the situation; and they require critical thinking because several possible responses may be available.

Research on foreign language case instruction supports this interpretation. Safina and Salieva demonstrate the importance of authenticity, cultural comparison, language preparation, and collaborative decision-making in the case method. Tran and Thai report perceived benefits for communication, critical thinking, motivation, confidence, and intercultural competence. Recent digital applications extend this model further: Kim's study of Japanese–Malaysian online case-based learning illustrates how intercultural dialogue can modify learners' interpretations, while Svyrydiuk et al. show how Internet-based case technology can incorporate authentic materials and independent information search into the development of intercultural foreign language communicative competence.

At the same time, the evidence base should not be interpreted as demonstrating that case technology invariably produces ICC. The reviewed studies vary in methodology and many rely on qualitative evidence, student reflection, instructor perceptions, or relatively limited samples. Consequently, the strongest conclusion is that case technology

provides pedagogical **conditions favourable to ICC development**, rather than that a universal causal effect has already been established.

An important methodological implication follows from this distinction. Intercultural competence should be built intentionally into the structure of the case. A conventional problem-solving case may improve speaking, cooperation, and critical thinking without necessarily developing the ability to interpret cultural difference. To become an intercultural learning instrument, a case needs culturally meaningful ambiguity, competing perspectives, opportunities to compare interpretations, and a reflective phase that directs attention to the assumptions underlying learners' decisions.

This principle is especially relevant in foreign language education contexts where students have limited opportunities for regular international mobility or face-to-face contact with culturally diverse speakers. Case technology cannot fully reproduce real intercultural experience, but it can create a controlled environment in which students learn how to analyse unfamiliar situations before encountering comparable challenges outside the classroom.

Future research should investigate this process through larger samples, longitudinal designs, and pre-test/post-test comparisons. Particular attention should be paid to the transfer of case-based learning: the central question is not only whether students can successfully analyse a case after instruction but whether the acquired interpretive strategies are applied to new, unfamiliar intercultural situations. Research should also compare traditional text-based cases with multimedia and internationally collaborative formats in order to determine which elements contribute most strongly to specific components of ICC.

V. CONCLUSION

Intercultural communicative competence has become an essential objective of contemporary foreign language education because successful communication requires learners to interpret cultural meanings, recognise different perspectives, negotiate misunderstanding, and adapt communicative behaviour to changing contexts. Case

technology provides an appropriate pedagogical environment for developing these abilities by placing language learning within realistic and problem-oriented situations.

The reviewed studies indicate that case work can contribute to communication skills, critical thinking, collaborative problem solving, cultural comparison, perspective-taking, learner motivation, and reflective awareness. Its principal pedagogical strength lies in integrating linguistic practice with intercultural interpretation and decision-making. However, these outcomes depend on carefully designed cases, authentic and culturally meaningful materials, appropriate linguistic scaffolding, structured group interaction, teacher facilitation, and reflective assessment.

Case technology should therefore not be understood simply as the discussion of an interesting situation. It constitutes a structured pedagogical process moving from problem recognition through analysis and intercultural negotiation to communicative action and reflection. When these stages are systematically integrated into foreign language instruction, the case becomes not only a means of practising language but also a model of the interpretive and communicative challenges that learners may encounter in real intercultural interaction.

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