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Intercultural Competence Development in ESP Teaching of Future Managers

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ABSTRACT

At present, tertiary education is practice-oriented and has to react not only to the requirements of professional orientation but also to the broader socio-economic changes shaping today's globalized world. In the business sphere, culture has become an increasingly important factor influencing communication, collaboration, and decision-making. As a result of ongoing internationalization and dynamic market developments, future managers are expected to be interculturally competent to be able to communicate effectively in intercultural situations and lead multicultural teams. Therefore, tertiary education of future managers involves ways of intercultural competence development. Raising cultural awareness in the English for Specific Purposes (ESP) classroom is recognized as one of the ways to develop intercultural competence and thus contribute to the necessary soft skills enhancement. The purpose of the study is to describe the possible teaching method used for the intercultural competence development of future managers. At the Faculty of Management and Business of the University of Prešov, the three-step strategy was used with the students enrolled in the ESP course, to identify and explain the elements of culture and how they can help effective communication in intercultural business setting: creation of the identity wheel (one's cultural elements), application of cultural metaphors (conceptualisation of one's culture) and comparison of cultural values (cross-cultural comparison). The dominant cultural metaphors and values were selected by a

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systematic and critical literature review of academic literature. The implications of the study are relevant for the context of intercultural competence development as well as the ESP teaching process.

Keywords: English for Specific Purposes; Intercultural Competence; Tertiary Education; Culture; Culture Learning; Identity Wheel; Cultural Metaphor; Cultural Values

1. Introduction

Globalization, migration of the workforce, leadership dilemmas and other current trends in the international business sphere involve culture and intercultural differences. Business education has to react to the need to uncover the meaning of culture in a business context. A New European Agenda for Culture by European Commission deals with the evolution of the cultural sector^[1]. It states that culture promotes common values, inclusion and intercultural dialogue as well as active citizenship. Culture has “the power to improve lives, transform communities, generate jobs and growth, and create spill over effects in other economic sectors”^[1]. In this document, culture is seen as a force strengthening European identity while, creating a sense of belonging”^[1]. Obviously, understanding the culture can lead to successful and effective business relationships. Nevertheless, culture is one of the most heterogeneously defined terms with more than 164 different definitions of culture till the middle of the last century^[2]. Mishan and Kiss claim that culture is conceptualised within the discipline in which it is applied^[3].

Gudykunst and Ting-Toomey argue that culture is a theoretical variable^[4]. Slušná adds that culture is a historical phenomenon and names three meanings of the term culture: narrow (e.g. popular art), broader (e.g. rituals), and the broadest (e.g. norms)^[5]. In comparison, Halliday et al. mention two meanings of culture: essentialist (e.g. Japanese culture) and non-essentialist (e.g. sports culture in various school systems in the world)^[6]. Baldwin et al. describe culture as dynamic, learnt and shared. It is related to communication and exists at different levels^[7]. Culture is mostly invisible and influencing and being influenced by its environment. All cultures can be usually considered ethnocentric. Baldwin et al. also point out that race and ethnicity differ from culture because culture is shared, while race is connected with biological differences and ethnicity is a feeling of belonging based on a shared ancestry^[7].

Moreover, Lustig and Koester add that culture is learnt and affects the behaviour of large groups of people^[8]. It is a set of shared interpretations and involves values, norms, and social practices. Frank talks about the 3P model of culture which involves perspectives, practices, and products^[9]. Slušná writes that culture is defined by human activity that is purposeful and intentional^[10]. Each individual is a “bio-cultural being”, influenced not only by his or her biological nature but also by the social and cultural environment. The fact that cultures are shared, lived, practiced, and influenced by their environments means that cultures must be contextualized^[10].

Tertiary education at present has to react to dynamic nature and complexities of socio-economic developments in the world. Skills and competencies of students have to be developed with the aim of equipping them for the practice in a globalized world. Future managers have to be able to work in multicultural teams. It does not involve only the foreign language proficiency but also intercultural competence. In the context of foreign language acquisition, the focus on studying language in the cultural contexts in modern times came with Byram’s work in the 1980s^[3]. Byram talks about interculturally competent people who understand their own culture and thus see how it shapes them and thus can identify how cultural elements manifest in other cultures^[11]. In the context of foreign language learning, Byram calls for intercultural rather than native speaker and claims that *lingua franca* does not coexists with *cultura franca*^[11]. Moll adds that “only one out of every four English users is a native speaker of that language”^[12].

Without culture, effective and appropriate communication would not be possible^[13]. Woodrow claims that “intercultural communication is central to ESP” as “intercultural competence is an essential element in ESP settings...”^[14]. Though the language is not just a reflection of culture, it is its integral part and therefore a language should be connected with culture learning^[15]. Paige defines culture learning as “the content and process of learning about a culture other

than one's own"^[13]. Hymes argues that culture learning is a crucial part of language learning as it helps appropriate understanding of a cultural community's norms, behaviours, or socio-cultural relations^[16].

The context of culture and the specific purpose of the English language use are closely connected and create the rationale for the intercultural competence development within English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses for the students of management. Harding argues that "different professions and vocations have different ways of thinking, different cultures, and this is reflected in the way they need and use the English language"^[17]. ESP can be defined as purposeful learning of the English related to the learner's vocation needs^[17].

The purpose of the study is to describe the importance of culture learning in ESP setting and exemplify it by the proposal of the three-step culture learning strategy used at the Faculty of Management and Business of the University of Prešov. The objectives of the study are: highlighting the importance of understanding of the dynamic and complex nature of culture for the intercultural competence development of future managers, identification of the dominant cultural metaphors and values by a systematic and critical literature review of academic literature dealing with cross-cultural and intercultural communication and business culture and exemplification of their use in ESP teaching process at the Faculty of Management and Business.

2. Research: Culture and ESP Teaching

Teaching methods have always reflected the dynamics of reality. ESP courses often involve strategies developed by teachers as a reaction to learners' needs. As it was mentioned, future managers need to be interculturally competent to be able to effectively communicate in an intercultural setting. Therefore, at the Faculty of Management and Business of the University of Prešov, ESP courses also aim at developing the intercultural competence as a necessary managerial skill. Paige states that "understanding the nature of culture serves as a conceptual building block for becoming interculturally competent"^[13]. Nevertheless, the longitudinal needs analysis among the students of management showed that though the students were aware of the importance of cultural knowl-

edge for the English language proficiency, their knowledge of the concept of culture was not developed^[18, 19]. Consequently, they did not consider intercultural communication as a dynamic process but rather the knowledge of cultural specifics.

The study describes the development and content of the three-step strategy of culture learning applied in the teaching of second-year Master's students enrolled in the course of Applied English Language 3 as an example of possible intercultural competence development method. All forty-three students enrolled in the course during the summer term of 2023/2024 took part in the activities. The three-step culture learning strategy was proposed based on the teaching experience, results of the longitudinal learners' needs analysis among the master's students of management at the same faculty and literature review. The three-step strategy was also inspired by Michael Paige's culture learning model divided into five dimensions^[13]:

1. the elements of culture,
2. cultural self-awareness,
3. culture-general learning,
4. culture-specific learning,
5. learning how to learn culture^[13].

The culture learning is aimed at identification of those dimensions that are specific to their learners, and it integrates key culture concepts into the course. It provides the culture learning skills enhancement opportunities and supports "a learning-how-to-learn approach to intercultural education"^[13].

The three-step strategy combines theory and practice and is based on three tasks: identity wheel creation, cultural metaphors application and cultural values comparison. It uses identity wheel to make the students aware of their cultural self, while cultural metaphors can describe the elements of cultures but also supports culture-general and culture-specific learning. Cultural values then can be used for the comparison of respective cultures. The strategy was performed during five consecutive weeks and provided the learners with the opportunity to learn how to learn by its processual character. Further assessment of its effect on intercultural competence development is needed and it is a part of ongoing longitudinal research.

To identify the dominant cultural metaphors and values used in the three-step strategy, a systematic literature

review was used. Woodrow states that in ESP, reviewing the literature is used “to gather knowledge about the proposed topic”^[14]. For a review to be good, main issues in the field and most valued theoretical and methodological approaches should be identified. Nightingale considers systematic literature review to be aimed at the identification of all significant resources avoiding data constraints^[20]. Woodrow proposes the following critical reading steps: evaluating the source and identifying the main arguments of the text^[14]. Brignardello-Petersen et al. claim that systematic reviews have clearly stated eligibility criteria for the synthesis of evidence from relevant sources using unbiased methods^[21]. The literature was chosen by a systematic review of publicly available academic databases dealing with the summarization and comparison of cultural values and metaphors in the context of intercultural or cross-cultural communication. The most cited sources and summarizations of respected authors dealing with cultural values – Geertz, Hofstede et al., Minkov, Gudykunst & Ting-Toomey, Baldwin et al., and Martin & Nakayama – were selected and described to avoid the possible bias^[4, 7, 22–25]. The systematic and critical literature review was performed from 2022 to 2024 as part of two projects dealing with intercultural communication and intercultural communicative competence in tertiary business education setting.

3. Results: Understanding Culture

Understanding culture involves a complex and layered process that requires moving beyond visible customs and behaviours to explore deeper aspects such as individual identity, symbolic meanings, social norms, and shared values that shape human interaction. In the context of ESP teaching, developing cultural awareness is essential not only for effective communication but also for fostering mutual understanding in diverse professional environments. This section presents the findings from a three-step pedagogical strategy designed to guide students through the process of understanding culture. Each step progressively deepens learners’ cultural awareness – beginning with self-reflection on personal identity, moving toward interpreting culture through metaphors, and concluding with the analysis of cultural value systems. Through interactive classroom activities, students engaged with key theoretical concepts in a practical and reflective manner, which allowed them to internalize complex

cultural constructs and relate them to their own experiences as future professionals. The three-step strategy can also be adapted to different cultural or institutional contexts as it is focused on an individual’s processing of his or her identity within the native culture and subsequent application of selected cultural metaphors and values on the individual’s culture. For a different institutional context, a different cultural values can be chosen as the study focused on those dominantly used in the business sphere discourse.

3.1. Step 1: Identity Wheel

Identity is an important factor in foreign language learning. To understand intercultural differences, the first step is to have a very clear understanding of oneself as a cultural being^[26]. That is, we need to understand what our own culture is and how it affects us day to day. Galante adds that “negotiating identities can be particularly beneficial in language classrooms where students can voice their beliefs, values, and issues from a cultural standpoint”^[27]. Woodward claims that we recognize who we are by understanding how we are different from others^[28]. Berg adds that intercultural identity “evolves from a way of understanding and acting that is egocentric, ethnocentric, and cognitively simple to one that includes a broader range of perspective”^[29].

Mishan and Kiss point out that at present, “elements like identity become increasingly fluid. They can no longer be defined in terms (solely) of national, cultural, or linguistic affiliation”^[3]. Moreover, elements of identity have become a matter of individual choice often created in interaction. Kramsch agrees and adds that culture is not pre-existing or fixed, but rather dynamic and hybrid^[30]. Baldwin et al. differentiate personal and social identities. Personal identity is based on the view of us as unique while social identity is relational, and group based^[7].

In the first step of the three-step strategy of culture learning, students were asked to draw the identity wheel themselves and fill in those elements, which they consider to be the most important for their identity. They were then asked to comment on them and link them to the micro-cultures they are members of. The Identity Wheel by World Learning is a visually designed tool to help learners to identify the different roles and characteristics that define who they are^[31]. These multiple identities can be visually organized into a wheel as could be seen in **Figure 1**.

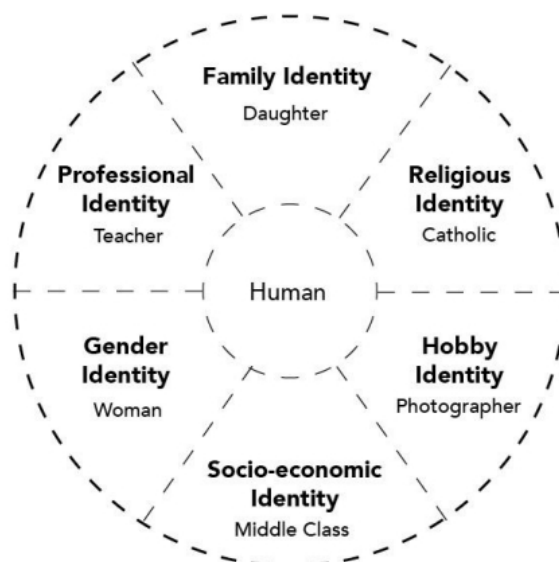


Figure 1. Identity Wheel^[31].

Multiple identities involve various personal roles or aspects of an individual based on age, gender, profession, hobbies, socio-economic status, religious beliefs, etc. Different elements of an individual's identity are connected to the various micro-cultures the individual belongs to.

During the ESP course, students first engaged in a guided activity to create their personal identity wheels. They identified key aspects of their identity such as age, gender, professional aspirations, language background, and affiliations with specific micro-cultures (e.g., regional, academic, or professional groups). In classroom discussions, students presented and reflected on how these identity components influence their values and communication styles. This activity fostered a strong sense of self-awareness and opened the discussion about the interplay between identity and intercultural communication.

3.2. Step 2: Cultural Metaphors

Slušná writes that culture has a specific set of expressions, language and “grammar” and academics should describe the “grammar” of culture. The language of culture is similar to other symbolic systems by its coherence, symbolism, and possibility to be learnt^[5]. The most famous proponent of the culture-as-symbolic-system school of thought was Geertz, who used the octopus as a metaphor for culture: “It is rather more the octopus, whose tentacles are in large part separately integrated, neutrally quite poorly connected with

one another and with what in the octopus passes for a brain, and yet who nonetheless manages to get around ...”^[22].

Probably one of the most widely used metaphors across disciplines is the culture iceberg by Edward T. Hall^[32]. Hall created an analogy where only a tip of the iceberg – the surface culture – could be visible, while much bigger part of any new culture is like a submerged part of the iceberg – the deep culture – not visible at first sight. Specifics of national cultures can be considered the elements of surface culture, while attitudes or unconscious values can be a part of a deep culture^[32]. Deep culture is obviously more difficult to identify^[9].

Hofstede et al. understand culture as the software of the mind^[23]: “It is the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from others.” They also claim that culture is “always a collective phenomenon” and it is learnt. Culture involves unwritten rules of the social game. Hofstede et al. explain the analogy with computer software as programming of mind indicating likely reactions stemming from an individual's past and being developed while growing up and collecting experiences. There are three levels of uniqueness in mental programming: human nature (universal, inherited), culture (specific to group, learnt), and personality (specific to individual, inherited and learnt)^[23].

Hofstede et al. also offer the metaphor of an onion skin to describe manifestations of culture. The skins or layers represent^[23]:

- symbols (e.g. uniforms);
- heroes (e.g. Asterix);
- rituals (e.g. business meetings);
- values (e.g. moral vs. immoral).

The core of culture is made up of values and represents the preferred quality. Symbols, heroes, and rituals are practices visible to others. While rituals are collective practices, heroes are role models with preferred characteristics of behaviour. Symbols are any meaningful and shared objects, words, etc., in a given culture^[23].

In the second step, the cultural metaphors were explained as tools of culture identification. All the described cultural metaphors were transformed into blank templates and students were asked to fill them in, starting with own micro-cultures and moving to English-speaking countries cultures by using the information they know and then the information given to them about the respective cultures. This way, the differentiation between the micro-cultures and national cultures as well as the visible artifacts of national or country cultures and more dynamic hidden cultural elements can be seen and understood. Students were also asked to comment on the possible relationships of their micro-cultures as identified in identity wheels to these metaphors. The task culminated in presentations where students explained how these metaphors helped them interpret cultural differences. This exercise promoted deeper engagement with abstract cultural concepts and allowed students to contextualize metaphors using their own experiences.

3.3. Step 3: Cultural Values

Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck studied value orientations and believed that to understand different cultures, it is crucial to focus on cultural values^[33]. Values can be described as specific types of belief that some idea, thing, or activity should serve as the best guide for behaviour^[7]. As opposed to individual values, cultural values are shared by a cultural group.

Hofstede et al. describe values as those stable elements in cultures which can be measured and compared^[23]. Geert Hofstede researched cultural values by collecting and analysing the data from more than fifty countries obtained from the employees of IBM corporation and identified four problematic areas represented by four cultural dimensions: small vs. large power distance, collectivism vs. individ-

ualism, femininity vs. masculinity, and weak vs. strong uncertainty avoidance^[23]. Though the Hofstede's research on cultural dimensions is widely criticized for possible stereotyping and oversimplification of culture^[25], it is still accepted and respected in business culture discourse as proved by the systematic literature review.

Based on Hofstede's work, there are six cultural dimensions used in the field at present^[34]: High power distance vs. Low power distance, Individualism vs. Collectivism, Masculinity vs. Femininity, High uncertainty avoidance vs. Low uncertainty avoidance, Long-term orientation vs. Short-term orientation, and Indulgence vs. Restraint. The fifth and sixth dimensions were added as a reaction to the criticism of Western European bias and as a result of the research of Hofstede's colleague Minkov. The fifth dimension of long-term vs. short-term orientation was added in response to Asian-oriented research^[25]. Minkov's sixth dimension of indulgence vs. restraint completed the cultural dimensions used in academic discourse at present. While the long-term/short-term orientation is connected with the good vs. evil guidelines, the indulgence vs. restraint is connected with the subjective feeling of happiness^[25].

Minkov also offers descriptions and characteristics of cultural dimensions that can help to understand cultural differences^[24]. He calls for more quantitative research in contrast to just descriptive or interpretative study of culture. This marks a shift toward a more data-driven methodology in the study of culture, aiming to enhance the reliability and comparability. Minkov talks about the following measurable cultural elements and the ways to study them^[24]:

- "Values are studied by asking people what is important to them in their own lives"^[24].
- "Norms are studied by asking respondents what people should or should not do"^[24].
- "Beliefs are most often studied by asking respondents whether they agree with various statements"^[24].
- "Attitudes are studied by asking respondents what or whom they like or dislike"^[24].
- "Self-perceptions are measured by asking respondents to describe themselves with adjectives or verbs"^[24].
- "Cognitive ability is measured through IQ tests and school tests of mathematics, science, and reading"^[24].
- "Differences in behaviors can be analyzed by comparing various national statistics"^[24].

- “Stereotypes can be studied by asking respondents to provide a collective description of a group of people – either their own or one that they are supposedly familiar with”^[24].

This framework outlines how cultural elements can be systematically studied: values, norms, beliefs, attitudes, and self-perceptions are explored through self-reporting; cognitive ability is tested academically; behaviours are compared using national data; and stereotypes are assessed via group descriptions, enabling measurable cross-cultural analysis^[24]. Each culture then reflects these elements and their interrelations and can generally be defined based on their quantification. Cultural differences can then be studied in terms of the following cultural dimensions^[24]:

- industry vs. indulgence (in work orientation);
- monumentalism versus flexumility (in personal stability and pride);
- hypometropia versus prudence (in acceptance of risk);
- exclusionism versus universalism (in treatment of people)^[24].

These cultural dimensions describe contrasts in work ethics, personal identity, risk tolerance, and social inclusion, highlighting diverse cultural approaches to industry, pride, caution, and interpersonal treatment across cultures^[24].

Minkov contributes to the understanding of cultural differences by offering detailed descriptions and characteristics of measurable cultural dimensions. Minkov also points out that there is no good or bad culture, just a personal judgement or perception of that culture^[24].

Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner claim that cultures are different in the ways of solving dilemmas arising from relationships with other people, time, and the environment^[35]. They believe that culture is a shared system which helps the automatic solution of frequently repeated problems^[35]. Trompenaars and Woolliams analysed the organizations’ cultural values in the context of leadership dilemmas to uncover the efficiency of great leaders and found out that these leaders “reconcile seemingly opposing values” and “that’s what makes them effective, and that’s what makes them great”^[36].

For the third step, the Hofstede’s six cultural values were explained and exemplified. These cultural dimensions were chosen as the most frequently used in the business discourse and their occurrence in the intercultural management textbooks used at the courses at the Faculty of Management and Business at the University of Prešov. The Country Comparison Tool by was used to compare the cultural dimensions of selected countries (Slovakia, the Czech Republic) in their respective values^[37]. The values for Slovakia and the Czech Republic can be seen in the **Table 1**.

Table 1. Comparison of Slovak and Czech cultural dimensions^[37].

Cultural Dimension	Slovakia	The Czech Republic
Power Distance	100	57
Individualism	57	70
Motivation/Achievement and Success	100	57
Uncertainty Avoidance	51	74
Long Term Orientation	53	51
Indulgence	28	29

The biggest differences in scores can be seen in the dimensions of Power Distance and Motivation towards Achievement and Success; less prominent differences are in the values of Individualism and Uncertainty Avoidance. Slovakia scores the highest values in two dimensions: Power Distance and Motivation towards Achievement and Success. The Czech Republic scores approximately the middle values in both mentioned dimensions. Both countries are considered hierarchical but in Slovakia, it is more prominent. Slovak managers are father-like figures expected to exercise their

power^[37]. In the Motivation towards Achievement and Success dimension, both countries are decisive societies living to work, but Slovakia is strongly decisive. Concerning Individualism, the Czech Republic is highly individualistic while Slovakia is a relatively individualistic society. In the Uncertainty Avoidance dimension, Slovakia is not clearly defined while the Czech highly avoids uncertainty. Both countries score similarly in the remaining two dimensions when there is no clearly shown preference in the Long Term Orientation dimension and “a tendency to cynicism and pessimism” in

the Indulgence dimension^[37].

During the ESP course, students were divided into groups and asked to comment on the differences in the value dimensions. They worked in teams to interpret the data and identify patterns relevant to management and workplace dynamics. Each group presented their findings and discussed implications for intercultural communication in business contexts. The activity not only enhanced students' understanding of cultural dimensions but also developed their ability to translate cultural theory into practical insight.

4. Discussion

Culture is reflected in the language of its members^[38]. There are many factors supporting the incorporation of culture learning into language teaching. Moll claims that at present, it is the English language that is *lingua franca*, i.e. "a language that is shared for some purpose of intercultural contact (commerce, politics, religion, education, etc.) by people who have different mother tongues"^[12]. Frank argues that many English Language teachers do not know how to incorporate cultural aspect into their teaching^[9]. Galante claims that incorporation of intercultural communicative competence development into English Language Teaching (ELT) lacks practical application mainly due to the limited teachers' knowledge about the target culture^[27]. Byram claims that if culture is included in ELT, it usually focuses on visible elements, i.e. a surface culture^[11]. Zerzová explains that culture learning does not involve only the knowledge of other cultures, but it also enables the understanding of own culture while developing necessary skills and attitudes leading to effective intercultural communication. Zerzová mentions critical incidents, culture capsules, culture clusters, or cultural islands as possible methods of intercultural competence development^[39].

The presented study provides practical evidence of how intercultural competence can be systematically incorporated into ESP courses for future managers. The three-step culture learning strategy, comprising identity wheel creation, use of cultural metaphors, and comparison of cultural values, proved to be both pedagogically viable and conceptually grounded. This method draws on Paige's model of culture learning, integrating the five dimensions of intercultural development into classroom practice^[13].

The identity wheel task proved particularly effective in encouraging cultural self-awareness, a foundational element of intercultural competence. It helped students recognize their multiple affiliations and understand the micro-cultural dimensions of their identity. This introspective step was essential for contextualizing cultural learning and fostering empathy toward cultural others. It also mirrored the ideas of Galante and Berg, who highlight the importance of identity negotiation and developmental progression in intercultural understanding^[27, 29].

In the second step, the use of cultural metaphors such as the iceberg, onion skin, and software of the mind enabled students to visualize abstract cultural constructs. These metaphors provided access points into the often invisible structures of culture, thus supporting both culture-general and culture-specific learning. Importantly, this strategy allowed students to connect macro-level national cultures with their own micro-cultural experiences, facilitating a deeper engagement with abstract intercultural concepts.

The third step – comparison of cultural values – fostered critical thinking and analytical skills. Students engaged in comparative discussions that revealed differences and similarities between Slovak and Czech cultural dimensions. These discussions demonstrated that students were able to interpret cultural data critically and relate it to managerial contexts. This part of the strategy reflected the increasing need for data literacy in culture-related business decisions, as advocated by Minkov and Trompenaars & Woolliams^[24, 36].

Despite its strengths, the strategy has certain limitations. First, its implementation was context-specific, i.e. designed for the students at the Faculty of Management and Business and may require adaptation for other institutional or disciplinary settings. Second, the intervention was carried out within a relatively short time frame, limiting the long-term assessment of students' intercultural development. Future research could benefit from longitudinal studies that track the impact of such interventions over extended periods and across multiple cohorts. Another limitation concerns the subjective interpretation of metaphors and value dimensions. While these frameworks offer pedagogical clarity, they also risk reinforcing stereotypes if not critically contextualized. It is therefore essential that instructors emphasize the dynamic and hybrid nature of culture and actively encourage students to challenge essentialist views^[30].

Overall, the findings support the view that intercultural competence is a teachable and assessable component of ESP instruction. When guided by critical reflection and contextual relevance, ESP classrooms can become transformative spaces that not only improve language proficiency but also prepare learners for culturally complex professional environments.

5. Conclusions

International business partners as well as managers of multinational teams have to be able to effectively communicate with members of other cultures. Understanding the concept of culture, its elements and their importance for meaning making is therefore of crucial importance. Modern tertiary education is practice oriented and as such, it requires flexibility in the incorporation of new trends in the studied area. Development of intercultural competence can be seen as one of such requirements of the future managers. The study responds to this necessity by offering a structured and pedagogically grounded approach to culture learning within English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses. The three-step strategy comprising of identity wheel creation, application of cultural metaphors, and comparison of cultural values demonstrated its potential as an effective method to support the development of intercultural competence among management students.

In the context of education of future managers, the culture and intercultural differences are often described in terms of cultural metaphors and values, which can also be used in ESP courses as the tools for language and culture learning. The study presented a possible three-step model of culture learning strategy practiced at the classes of ESP courses for second-year master's students of management at the Faculty of Management and Business, University of Prešov. The main contribution of the three-step strategy lies in progressive deepening of learners' cultural awareness – beginning with self-reflection, moving toward interpreting culture through metaphors, and concluding with the analysis of cultural value systems.

The strategy was developed based on longitudinal needs analysis, teaching experience and the theory of culture learning by Michael Paige^[13]. It was performed during six classes and included three tasks: the identity wheel by World

Learning personalization, the cultural metaphors lecture and template filling, and the cultural values lecture and use of the Country Comparison Tool by Hofstede Insights Oy (2024) to compare the values of selected countries^[31, 37]. The cultural metaphors and values were selected by the systematic literature review. The implications of the study are relevant for the context of intercultural competence development as part of ESP teaching process.

While the study was conducted in a specific institutional and cultural context – at the Faculty of Management and Business at the University of Prešov – its implications are broadly applicable. The findings support the view that intercultural competence is a teachable and assessable skill that can be systematically integrated into ESP curricula. Moreover, the study illustrates that culture learning does not have to be abstract but can be made reflective, and directly relevant to learners' experience and required professional practice. Future research could further explore the long-term impact of such instructional interventions, especially their influence on intercultural competence development. Additionally, further adaptation and validation of this strategy across different cultural and educational settings could contribute to a more validated framework for intercultural education in ESP. Integrating culture into ESP instruction transforms language learning into a more holistic process, i.e. one that prepares learners not only to speak a language but to use it meaningfully and effectively in a globalized professional context.

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Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement

Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

Data Availability Statement

There no new data were created.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest. The funders had no role in the design of the study; in the collection, analyses, or interpretation of data; in the writing of the manuscript; or in the decision to publish the results.

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