



## Research Article

**TEACHING – LEARNING LITERARY TEXTS  
FOR FOREIGN STUDENTS: AN INTERCULTURAL APPROACH***Dam Anh Thu<sup>\*</sup>, Pham Thi Thuy Trang**Ho Chi Minh City University of Education**<sup>\*</sup>Corresponding author: Dam Anh Thu – Email: thuda@hcmue.edu.vn**Received: April 07, 2019; Revised: May 16, 2019; Accepted: June 10, 2019***ABSTRACT**

*This article will explore the interaction between foreign language education and intercultural competence. The article will also discuss literary texts as a source of “authentic materials” that are valuable in teaching foreign languages to develop intercultural competence for learners. Finally, the paper will analyze a case of teaching and learning a specific literary text (Beloved Oxford) using this approach to clarify all the above points.*

**Keywords:** foreign language, literary texts, intercultural competence.

**1. Rationale**

Facing the challenge of globalization era, the method of teaching foreign languages interculturally is being concerned by many researchers and educationalists. The way of teaching of Vietnamese literature for foreigners, in our points of view, is also necessary to be conducted in the intercultural direction with the highest goal of helping students interact effectively in a multicultural environment. The article will focus on analyzing the case of teaching a specific literary text, thereby, initially explaining the meaning and effect of literary texts as a useful resource for teaching Vietnamese and literature and Vietnamese culture followed the intercultural method

**2. Contents****2.1. Foreign language education and intercultural competence**

From an intercultural perspective, the concept of “culture” has been redefined many times, in a variety of ways. D. Moon pointed out that in the history of research on intercultural communication, “culture” has been conceived as a nation, homogeneity (among members of the same country) and diversity (between countries) (Moon, 2002). Here, we will not re-present the controversy surrounding how to define “culture”. Instead, we want to emphasize intercultural communication that is interested in “culture” as values and social norms to answer questions about the connection between members from many

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countries, races, genders and social classes. Intercultural language-oriented teachers need to be well aware of this. Teaching foreign languages, especially at university level, plays an important role in providing intercultural training, which means it must help students achieve intercultural competence. There are many ways to define intercultural capacity, but in general, it can be defined as the ability to interact effectively in intercultural situations.

According to A. Thomas, the intercultural method has to avoid miscommunication and create opportunities to solve problems, which makes people involved agree and satisfy (Thomas, 2003). With the same viewpoint, L. Sercu thinks that learning culture should be defined as the formation and development of the ability to independently explore cultures or the ability to successfully reconcile problems that arise in inter-connected situations. culture (Sercu, 2005). This requirement requires foreign language learners to master the characteristics of many different cultures, thereby developing a communication strategy. Aglaia Blioumi (2015), on the basis of summarizing many previous research projects, has introduced an electoral approach as a model consisting of three levels: awareness, experience and communication (Blioumi, 2015).

First, at the cognitive level (cognitive level), it is not enough for the learners to know the foreign history-social knowledge as before. Learners also need other theoretical knowledge to teach them how to handle the “alien” problem. In the eyes of indigenous people, “aliens” are an unfriendly visualization of foreigners. Their behaviors, habits, and language are very vulnerable to “labeling” as unfamiliar and incomprehensible. Stereotype templates about a country, a culture often make us impose a fixed interpretation on the individual we are interacting with. Therefore, the teaching process of culture and foreign languages is increasingly paying attention to developing critical thinking for learners to help learners be aware of the diversity and differences between cultures.

At the same time, learners also need to understand that any data they know before is stereotypes derived from social and cultural classification and they are all likely to be broken. After all, the data related to “identifying” the cultural identity of a country we approach is influenced by the political-social lens of the presenter while the cultural characteristics in each ethnic group, each group of people and each individual is extremely complex and still it is moving. Being aware of those things will help learners adjust their attitudes when approaching and communicating with “strangers” or “others” (Others), ie those who do not belong to the social standard system that they knew.

At the experiential level (experiential level), learners have to develop their attitudes and certain intercultural abilities. In all attitudes and abilities, the most basic thing needed is “empathy” (empathy). “Empathy” means being able to put yourself in the shoes of others to see their difficulties through their own eyes, tolerant and willing to communicate with people from many different cultural backgrounds. Besides, learners need to be able to separate themselves from familiar cultural conceptions. This ability is closely related to the

critical spirit, with the realization that we cannot expect “other people” or “aliens” to have the same opinion with us. Another possibility is the ability to tolerate when at the same time facing different and opposite expectations among people from many cultures to accept foreigners' views, avoiding fearful reactions. scared and hated by foreign-related factors.

At the communicative level, the intercultural communication skills need to be cultivated with the ultimate goal of helping learners communicate successfully in foreign languages. This means that learners must understand and properly apply cultural codes, for example, they must understand the polite rules of communication, including verbal communication and nonverbal communication (non- verbal), know how to say hello and say goodbye, how to receive and reject invitations, compliments and complains, how to congratulate and comfort, etc. Another essential skill is the ability to analyze, explain, relate, which are to connect your cultural characteristics to other cultures to find links, cause and effect, and relationships. In addition, learners need to develop skills to analyze their country's and foreign cultural concepts from two perspectives: external perspective and internal perspective. From the inside perspective, learners will penetrate other people's thoughts, see the world through the eyes of others, understand the conceptual system of people from other cultures. On the contrary, from an external perspective, learners will have to consider themselves to see how other people's notions and whether they can agree with that concept.

In the process of internationalization and globalization, facing with pressure from the emergence of artificial intelligence, which makes it easier to translate languages, teaching foreign languages in intercultural ways are being more concerned. Teaching Vietnamese as a second language is no exception. The Vietnamese language and culture classes for foreigners are the multicultural environment where teachers are Vietnamese and students are from many countries in Asia (such as Korea, China, Taiwan, Japan) and Europe (like France, Germany). Other environments in Vietnam that foreign students contact on a regular basis also appear many problems that require an ingenious resolution to minimize cultural shock, cultural conflict and stagnant communication. Therefore, focusing on teaching skills in Vietnamese and Vietnamese culture programs will help students change their attitudes, behaviors, ways of communication, thus, better integrate and adapt to other individuals. in class and interact with Vietnamese people more successfully in daily life.

## ***2.2. Literary texts and the process of teaching foreign languages following an intercultural orientation***

In the last three years, the survey that we had for foreign students before they start studying Vietnamese literature showed that about 70% to 80% of students identify literary learning unnecessary. The main reason is because they think that what is about to be learned cannot be applied to life. That is the general view of literature. However, the actual literary text has a lot of potential for the development of teaching skills of learners.

The power of literary text is that on the one hand they allow them to recreate the image of a particular culture through the individual's own experience, but on the other hand they aim to universal values you can caught in any culture. The first use of literary texts in Vietnamese and Vietnamese culture programs helps students increase their understanding of culture, explain the difference and the next, more importantly, change attitudes. of students when recognizing and evaluating other cultures (including Vietnamese culture and the classmates' cultures). Some researchers have shown that literature has the ability to influence both the cognitive and emotional aspects of students, paving the way for intercultural awareness and understanding. When receiving a literary work, the reader not only acquires knowledge alone but also accompanies the character, they could be happy, sad, worried with the happiness, sadness, anxiety of the character. Therefore, in addition to improving analytical capacity, critical thinking of students about different cultures, literary texts could also elicit empathy, tolerance thanks to the process of indirect learners spread experiences of different attitudes and values, even contradictory in literary works.

Cultural awareness can be achieved in a direct way when we visit a culture or in an indirect way through film, music and literature. Exposure to literary texts not only helps students increase their language ability, explore new cultures, but also helps them redefine their own cultural values, enhance their ability to accept diversity. with a tolerant, non-judgmental attitude.

In the past, literary texts were not classified as “authentic materials”, ie documents written in the target language, collected from daily life, then used during school hours. foreign languages without experiencing any editing. It includes various types of prints, videos and audio, for examples articles, magazines, forms that changed the address, job applications, menus, messages, voice mail, radio and television programs, etc. Real documents are encouraged because they meet the following three reasons: first, it reflects a variety of situations that learners may encounter in the target language environment; second, it helps teachers save time and energy; thirdly, it encourages and motivates learners to “conquer” themselves a real document.

From the above point of view, literary texts can also be considered a “real document” because it reflects real-life communication situations. Moreover, although literary texts do not completely replace cultural texts, the use of literary texts will overcome the weaknesses of cultural lessons that are often presented academically. or lack of a specific situation to elicit empathy. Being different from the cultural curriculum, literary text provides students with a context closed to reality, bringing them characters with different attitudes and behaviors, creating a sympathetic response to the experience. of the characters in the story (Häggbloom 2006). This will make the intercultural learning process more convenient. Conscious that literary text has potentials that are not fully exploited, in the teaching

process, we have chosen to include multicultural literary texts, while teaching literature according to intercultural orientation.

In the next section of the article, we will give a small example of the case of teaching Oxford loving (Duong Thuy) for foreign students in Vietnamese and Vietnamese culture majors (student group has enough Vietnamese language skills to read literary texts). From an intercultural perspective, this is an appropriate work because it allows students to explore and ponder intercultural issues that are closely related to their current lives.

### **2.3. Applying the intercultural orientation into teaching the literary text “*Beloved Oxford*” by the author Duong Thuy to foreign students**

*Beloved Oxford* mentions faithfully the difficulties, challenges and success of a Vietnamese student when living alone, studying and working in a multicultural environment at Oxford University through one profound and romantic love story for readers who are foreign students, the content of the work is easy to create sympathy for readers because it gives them empathy through the process of comparing with their own experiences when living and working in foreign countries. In addition, differences, even cultural conflicts, expressed in the works and situations of behavior among characters, will be specific and vivid images of life and social issues that one can when interacting with people from different ethnic groups and cultures. Since then, students will have an overview of modern social issues in the context of multiculturalism and globalization. One more reason why we chose this work to teach is because the vocabulary and grammar used here are quite close to the words used in daily conversations, even very suitable with students.

According to our observations, for foreign students, when they study literature documents, they were in a quite high level of Vietnamese language, but they still feel lack of confidence because they think that literary texts often have a lot of multi-definition, complex grammatical structures. Therefore, an appropriate literary text for Vietnamese literature and foreigners, besides aesthetic and artistic values, should also pay attention to the difficulties of Vietnamese language used in the text to “Reduce shock” for learners and create a positive interaction, cooperation between teachers and students.

In *Beloved Oxford*, the experience of the main character, a Vietnamese student named Thien Kim, during the years of studying and working at Oxford University, focused on five issues: (1) pressure to succeed of a Vietnamese student at a prestigious school; (2) feeling unfamiliar when exposed to a new lifestyle; (3) difficulties in studying in a multicultural environment; (4) changing one's mind to integrate with the surrounding life; (5) critique of “pre-formed patterns” in Vietnamese life and culture.

Kim's experiences are more or less familiar to those of many overseas people. In addition, the differences as well as the meeting points in Eastern culture (mostly Vietnamese culture) and the West in the work are viewed from many different aspects and perspectives. However, within the scope of the lecture, we guide students to focus on

analyzing some of the speech and thoughts to clarify the changes during the contact, collision and inclusion in characters' culture. In addition, for effective teaching and to help students interact better in the learning process, we guide students to participate in a number of activities before, during and after reading the evidence in the work. On that basis, students can define their own attitudes, form their own views and choose ways of dealing with different cognitive and cultural communication situations in real life.

In teaching practice, we find that teaching Vietnamese literary texts if only focusing on reading and analyzing aspects of documents such as vocabulary, grammar, facts, characters... will easily caused the foreign students the feeling of bore and discouragement because at the same time they have be familiar with both complex vocabulary grammar system in the text and be the literary theoretical terms academic. More importantly, for this audience, they need a practical purpose when learning Vietnamese as a second language. Whether exposing to literary texts or other “real documents”, what learners are most concerned about is what they can learn about the ability to use language, apply the knowledge they have learned to understand. about society, culture, people where they are living, studying and working. If an hour of studying Vietnamese literature cannot create excitement, positive interaction in learners, the effectiveness of teaching and learning will be difficult to achieve.

Therefore, when teaching Beloved Oxford, besides selecting brief quotations that show concise content for students to read, we use a combination of other “real documents” to lead students before reading, organize some activities for learners to express their understanding of intercultural experience and communication after reading. We find that the combination of different methods and means in addition to literary texts will create a friendly, practical and dynamic connection environment to help students actively absorb effective lessons and good interaction in a multicultural learning space. We will concretize the content presented above through the description of the process of implementing the lesson below.

Within the framework of class time, we choose only a few chapters of Beloved Oxford to guide students to learn the basic content to help them have a broad view of the work and create a background and then students can read and analyze the rest by themselves. For the first issue (the pressure to succeed of a Vietnamese student at a prestigious school), we choose the first chapter “Surprised admission”. In this chapter, students can find many details expressing thoughts and feelings that clearly show Kim's anxiety about academic performance under the pressure of a student from an developing country must conquer the “diploma” to prove she was admitted to a famous school like Oxford.

The main evidence we chose was: “She sighed, thinking that even though I was accepted to study, the biggest pressure was to go out with a diploma. Later, I returned to Vietnam with the name of studying at Oxford, but could not prove that Kim had left the country alone” (Duong Thuy, 2012, p.3). With the main evidence selected (in this chapter

and in the following chapters), students are instructed to analyze vocabulary, grammar and to understand the meaning of evidence in the general context of the whole chapter. Before analyzing evidence, we ask students to briefly present some common notions about the reasons and goals of university study in their country. In the process of reading and analyzing evidence, students are asked to note their comments on the learning perspective of Kim characters in particular and Vietnamese people in general under the guidance of teachers. Finally, students will discuss in groups the similarities and differences in determining the learning goals of other countries compared to Vietnam.

In the second issue (the feeling of strangeness when exposed to a new lifestyle), students will learn chapter 4 “Initial success”. In this chapter, the character Kim often talks to herself when exposed to different ways of thinking, ways of living compared to the familiar experience she has had since she was in Vietnam. It is a step-by-step process to overcome the initial concerns to gradually adapt to a new learning and living environment in Oxford. The main evidence we chose was: “No one here gives someone something for free; lovers, husband and wife also clearly calculate the details. In the restaurants, Kim was surprised that everyone had to “handle” themselves, not that man had to pay everything his lover. The couple who are living in the same room must also share a flat rent Eat and drink, electricity and water, the fireplace also divided equally. Everyone should take care their own lives, no matter we are eating on the same table or sharing a bed “(Duong Thuy, 2012, p.26).

Before going into the details of chapter 4, students can watch a short video clip entitled “Vietnam period...” on Youtube. After watching, students will answer the questions: Have you encountered any situation that is similar / quite similar to the situations in this video clip; How do you feel when you encounter those situations; In your opinion, in order to be able to integrate with a foreign environment, what should a person do to reduce / eliminate cultural differences? Based on the experiences and personal feelings of the learners, students will list the actions of foreign strangers with the character Kim through evidence and give some explanation why Kim feels like that. After that, students will be divided into groups to carry out a short script to recreate a “problematic” communication situation with indigenous people when they live in Vietnam or another country and perform in front of the class.

The third issue (difficulties in studying in a multicultural environment) is vividly expressed in chapter 7 “Stress” of the work. The main evidence we chose was: “Kim is tired of the group of teachers doing the exam of Professor Portlock. They are not active, lazy and lose their basic knowledge totally. Someone who is from Brazil is outdated, there is one Central American person who have not said anything but started quarrelling, someone is lack of the basic knowlegde because of the poor and outdated education system like Roumania, someone who speaks English but no one can understand because of Indian accent. we could not study anything during the whole meeting because everyone just

criticized each other and avoid the work. The volume of articles is so massive but the pace of working is slow” (Duong Thuy, 2012, p.49). For this chapter, students are asked to find an article on the Internet themselves (they can choose articles written in their students' native languages) on the subject of the common things that international students will face when studying abroad. and a brief note of the problems that most international students encounter. After that, the students in the class will analyze the evidence and show how they feel about Kim's way of thinking with the group's friends. Finally, each student will write a short paragraph sharing some experience that helps to study and collaborate effectively with other foreign students in the class.

Before entering the fourth issue (the change of one's mind to integrate with the surrounding life), students will be able to watch a video clip prepared by teachers to interview some foreigners about their thoughts and their own feelings about the Vietnam and Vietnamese before and after they come to live, study and work in Vietnam. Next, students will read and analyze the main evidence that we selected: “One year, from the time I went to England to study, not only did she harvest a lot from books, methods, lectures at school r, but she also has a lot of experience after all that has happened. Thuy Ha with leeway, Le Chi slipped along the pace of integration, Thuy Vu rationally kept herself in the hope of having a beautiful love, Yutaka proud of Phu Tang's culture in the distant time, Mauricio craved to conquer although there were so many collectible love affairs. They told Kim that everyone has their limits and no one can round be perfect in their lives.” (Duong Thuy, 2012, p.61) is extracted from chapter 8 “Farewell” of the work.

In this chapter, the author focuses on showing the changes in Kim's view of the relationships around her in a more positive, optimistic, and friendly way after a period of her attachment Oxford school. For the above evidence, the students in the class will split into small groups and discuss why Kim feels she “has so many life experiences”. Since then, students in small groups compared the content they viewed in video clips to give their own views on the reasons that hinder or promote a person's integration with the surrounding community. around overseas and presenting in front of discussion results.

For the fifth issue (the critique of “pre-formed patterns” in Vietnamese life and culture), students mainly learn chapter 12 “People who come later”. This is an interesting chapter in the work because it reproduces quite vividly and focuses on “conflicts” about the views of many different characters (Kim, her boyfriend Fernando, Kim's parents, Fernando's parents, Kim's friends ...) for the close issues in life: love, marriage, lifestyle ... Thereby, cultural conflicts in modern society between generations in the same nation, between Different ethnic groups are clearly exposed to create a multi-dimensional dialogue space between values. The main evidence that we selected was: “The more you interact with many foreigners, the more you realize that your people are too proud to accept the”

Dragon and Fairy “, but every Vietnamese person knows that we are leaving behind” (Duong Thuy, 2012, p.107).

To analyze this evidence, before that, students were asked to present their own thoughts on the shortcomings of their ethnicity after a period of time living and studying abroad. In the process of reading chapter 12 and analyzing the evidence under the guidance of teachers, students will note the limited characteristics of Vietnamese in the character of Kim. After that, students will discuss in groups to answer the questions: In a multicultural environment, should a person be aware of his or her disadvantages compared to other ethnic groups? How does the criticism of a person for his people compare with other peoples affect his attitude and behavior when dealing with foreigners? In the age of globalization, a nation knows what its cultural shortcomings are and what its value from foreign culture will achieve for its development.

In the context of an article, we can only stop at giving some specific suggestions for the process of teaching the loving Oxford literature for foreign students to a certain extent. Issues of methods of finding teaching materials, organizing classes, guiding students to conduct activities as well as evaluating the effectiveness of intercultural teaching orientation for teaching this text in particular and other Vietnamese literature in general we do not have deep table conditions here. These are all significant issues for teaching Vietnamese and Vietnamese culture for foreign students. We will return these issues in another article.

### **3. Conclusion**

Following the inevitable trend, teaching and learning a language is not only about teaching and learning words, sentences or communication methods in that language but more importantly, teaching and learning to broaden awareness, enhance the critical thinking of students, build on their curiosity and prejudice when interacting with different cultures. In other words, foreign language teaching is closely related to the transmission of intercultural messages and the development of literacy skills in learners. Teaching Vietnamese as a second language for foreign students cannot be beyond this trend. And according to us, literary texts with content referring to cultural prejudices and cultural differences, reenacting attitudes and behaviors in intercultural communication, building intercultural communication situations unsuccessful, etc. is a potentially rich source of intercultural training.

Although for foreign students, reading literary texts in Vietnamese is a big challenge, this reading will not be boring and useless if the teacher shows a literary work that can give them indirectly experience of the diverse, vivid and colorful cultural circumstances and values of Vietnam. This will give them a deeper understanding of the language and culture, gain the ability to accept and tolerate the dilemmas they encounter in multicultural classrooms and in the Vietnamese environment. Since then, the study of literature and language learning will become more useful and practical for foreign students.

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#### BƯỚC ĐẦU DẠY – HỌC VĂN BẢN VĂN HỌC CHO SINH VIÊN NƯỚC NGOÀI THEO ĐỊNH HƯỚNG LIÊN VĂN HÓA

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#### TÓM TẮT

Bài viết này sẽ đi vào tìm hiểu mối quan hệ tương tác giữa giáo dục ngoại ngữ và năng lực liên văn hóa. Bên cạnh đó, bài viết khẳng định văn bản văn học như một nguồn “tài liệu thực” (authentic materials) có giá trị trong việc giảng dạy ngoại ngữ nhằm khai mở và phát huy các cấp độ năng lực liên văn hóa ở người học. Cuối cùng, bài viết phân tích trường hợp tổ chức giảng dạy và học tập một văn bản văn học cụ thể (tác phẩm Oxford yêu thương) theo định hướng liên văn hóa để làm rõ các luận điểm trên.

**Từ khóa:** ngoại ngữ, văn bản văn học, năng lực liên văn hóa.