

Cultural competency in foreign language teaching for successful interpersonal skills in culturally diverse working environments

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Cultural competency refers to a set of attitudes, behaviors and skills that enable a person to work successfully in a cross-cultural setting. Cultural competency is more than just being aware of difference; it refers to demonstrating attitudes and an approach that allows you to work effectively cross-culturally. One of the most comprehensive studies based on cultural diversity at workplace was conducted by Professor Geert Hofstede. He analyzed a large database of employee value scores collected within IBM between 1967 and 1973 covering more than 70 countries, based on which he has presented six cultural dimension theories. A closer look to the literature reveals, that the research pertaining to cultural competence is limited only to workforce diversity and no references on this topic seem to exist on cultural competence in Foreign Language Teaching. Therefore this research seeks to identify the importance of integrating cultural competency into foreign language curriculum as a new language competency. The aim of this research is to examine how pertinent it is to integrate cultural competency oriented teaching activities into Foreign Language curriculum to intensify the cultural awareness of Foreign Language learners. The research sample consisted of 25 Graduates, who have graduated during last three academic years from the Department of Modern Languages, University of Kelaniya. These Graduates have followed German as Foreign Language during their general and special degree program and now working as employees at both local and overseas agencies. Two data collecting techniques were used for the research. A questionnaire was distributed during the first data collection session and a narrative interview was conducted during the second session limiting the sample to five participants. When comparing the data collected from both the questionnaires and from the narrative interview, it was evident, that many had difficulties in working in culturally diverse working environments, although they have been exposed to adequate cultural knowledge during teaching sessions. According to the findings of the research, it was evident, that language and literature competencies are not adequate for foreign language learners to become professionals in diverse cultural environments and focus should be given to teaching materials to train students to deal with conflicts, misunderstandings, and cultural intolerance in professional working environments.

Keywords: Cultural Competency, diversity, working environment, conflicts, foreign language