



DIGITAL PLATFORMS FOSTERING INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE IN LANGUAGE CLASSES

Ivana Đerić*,
[0000-0003-2914-932X]

Neda Maenza,
[0000-0002-4974-6052]

Nataša Stanišić,
[0000-0001-9487-8225]

Aleksandra Gajić,
[0000-0002-6804-4662]

Tijana Gajić
[0000-0002-5013-2867]

Singidunum University,
Belgrade, Serbia

Abstract:

The increasing interconnectedness of the globalized world has underscored the necessity of fostering intercultural competence alongside language learning. In this context, the development of intercultural communication skills is central to promoting tolerance, understanding, and empathy among diverse cultural groups. Foreign language proficiency is crucial in overcoming linguistic and cultural barriers, yet the path to achieving intercultural competence remains complex and often secondary to traditional educational goals. This paper explores the role of digital platforms in enhancing both language proficiency and intercultural competence in foreign language classes at Singidunum University, with a particular focus on French, Spanish, and English courses. The integration of digital platforms into these language programs has proven to be an effective tool for bridging cultural divides. These platforms facilitate not only the development of linguistic skills but also increase cultural awareness by providing authentic, interactive, and cooperative learning environments. Digital platforms enable students to engage with people coming from diverse cultural backgrounds thus dismantling stereotypes, promoting cross-cultural understanding, and nurturing critical intercultural skills such as communication, critical thinking, and empathy. This overview paper demonstrates how technology can transform foreign language education into an engaging and culturally inclusive experience, enhancing the global competence of students.

Keywords:

Intercultural Competence, Language Learning Platform, Cross-Cultural Communication, Language Courses, Educational Technology.

INTRODUCTION

Language learning extends beyond acquiring linguistic skills. It connects individuals across cultures, fostering dialogue, mutual understanding, and empathy. It empowers young people to communicate across cultural boundaries, breaking down social and ethnic barriers while enhancing intercultural awareness.

Intercultural understanding is essential in dismantling stereotypes and building trust among communities. The exchange of ideas and traditions promotes inclusive dialogue, contributing to a more tolerant society. When combined with cultural appreciation, language learning has the power to transform individual's perspectives and strengthen global citizenship.

Correspondence:

Ivana Đerić

e-mail:

idjeric@singidunum.ac.rs



Rapid technological advancements have made it possible for information and communication technology to be integrated into education as a powerful catalyst for societal change. Digital platforms have revolutionised language learning by fostering intercultural competence through interactive experiences.

The paper explores the role of digital platforms in enhancing intercultural competence in French, Spanish, and English courses taught at Singidunum University. It highlights best practices for integrating digital tools into language education so as to prepare students for meaningful cross-cultural interactions by analyzing academic perspectives and real-world applications.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The increasing interconnectedness of the world has reinforced a common goal within the international community: the development of effective intercultural communication skills [1]. This evolving paradigm has significantly influenced foreign language education, shifting its focus toward the development of cultural competencies. It encourages an appreciation for inclusive values while fostering tolerance, respect, and openness toward different cultures. Furthermore, it facilitates the exchange of ideas and experiences across cultural boundaries. As Petrović [2] notes, effective communication with individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds is a skill that requires continuous development. A key aspect of this ability is intercultural sensitivity, which entails recognizing significant cultural differences and cultivating positive attitudes toward them.

The role of educators is crucial in developing intercultural competence among students, both within national contexts and on a global scale. Teachers must not only possess these skills themselves but also be capable of effectively transferring them to their students. Despite the implicit presence of cultural elements in education, intercultural competence remains a secondary objective rather than a core educational priority. There is no universally established approach for its integration, making its incorporation into formal education a gradual and complex process [3].

Foreign language proficiency plays a fundamental role in fostering effective intercultural communication [4]. In contemporary society, the ability to communicate in multiple languages is a key factor in building intercultural competence, facilitating understanding across linguistic and cultural divides. Language functions as a bridge for communication, comprehension, knowledge exchange, and cultural assimilation, transcending

territorial, ethnic, historical, and religious barriers. It holds an integrative function in intercultural interactions, encompassing both interpersonal and sociocultural dimensions [5].

Studying foreign languages provides valuable insights into different cultures, reinforcing the intrinsic connection between language acquisition and intercultural communication. Research has consistently shown that incorporating digital platforms into conventional foreign language instruction enhances student learning outcomes [6]. Several factors should be considered in this context, as digital platforms not only enhance all language skills—especially listening and speaking—but also promote a more positive attitude toward learning a foreign language while fostering intercultural competence [7].

Establishing effective intercultural communication has become increasingly important, particularly in an era where direct communication across borders is facilitated by digital technologies. The world is more interconnected and mobile than ever before [8]. This necessitates a comprehensive understanding of both the languages being studied and the cultural, historical, and social contexts of different nations. As Ceramella [9] points out, successful cross-cultural interactions require a degree of familiarity with the cultural frameworks of interlocutors.

In this context, fostering intercultural competence and language learning is essential for enhancing global harmony, mutual understanding, and empathy. The rapid advancement of information and communication technologies has introduced innovative platforms that facilitate both language acquisition and intercultural understanding. Numerous studies have explored the benefits of digital platforms for language learning, emphasizing their ability to improve learners' proficiency across various linguistic skills [10]. By incorporating technology into language education, the learning process becomes more engaging and motivating for students. Digital tools provide immediate access to diverse sources of information, enabling more dynamic and interactive learning experiences [11]. This is particularly relevant for younger learners, who find mobile devices and applications more stimulating compared to traditional textbooks and audio CDs. Research indicates that nearly one-third of children aged eight to ten already own a mobile phone and actively use language-learning applications [12].

The foundation of digital language-learning platforms is based on interactive and immersive approaches to foreign language acquisition. These platforms represent a modern pedagogical innovation aimed at enhancing



both linguistic competence and socio-emotional skills. Learning through digital environments is characterized as a transformative process that fosters cognitive and behavioural changes shaped by social interactions, experiences, and cultural practices [13]. Moreover, digital platforms play a crucial role in fostering intercultural competence. Research indicates that collaborative learning through these platforms serves as an effective means of breaking down stereotypes, promoting equal opportunities, and developing key intercultural skills such as communication, teamwork, tolerance, adaptability, and critical thinking [14].

Computer-mediated communication has been shown to enhance intercultural competence by providing learners with authentic opportunities to interact with individuals from different cultural backgrounds [15]. Online platforms enable learners to engage in meaningful intercultural exchanges, helping them develop a deeper understanding of different cultural perspectives [16]. A study [17] confirms that these platforms facilitate cross-cultural communication by exposing learners to diverse cultural traditions, customs, and societal values, thus broadening their global awareness. Furthermore, online intercultural communication platforms play a pivotal role in fostering intercultural dialogue, allowing learners to engage in meaningful discussions that enhance their cultural sensitivity and cross-cultural awareness [18].

3. DIGITAL PLATFORMS FOSTERING INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE

3.1. DIGITAL PLATFORMS FOSTER INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE IN FRENCH LANGUAGE CLASSES

TV5 Monde [19] is a multimedia platform dedicated to promoting Francophone culture and fostering intercultural understanding. It encompasses the website apprendre.tv5monde.com [20] and the free educational mobile application *Apprendre le français*. The app serves as a streamlined version of the website, offering learners quick and convenient access to exercises designed to enhance both their language proficiency and cultural awareness, regardless of time or location.

The platform features a rich collection of videos on diverse and authentic topics, each accompanied by comprehension exercises adapted to different proficiency levels, from A1 (beginner) to B2 (advanced). These videos expose learners to a variety of cultural, social, and historical aspects of the French-speaking world, reinforcing not only their linguistic abilities but also their

intercultural competence. Additionally, the platform includes a unique "Memorize vocabulary" section with thematic word lists (e.g., animals, housing, health) and interactive tools like quizzes, flashcards, and listening activities, enabling learners to expand their vocabulary within meaningful cultural contexts.

While users can access the app without an account, registering allows them to track their progress and create a personalized collection of favourite activities, available both on the app and the website. Teachers can also assign activities as homework, encouraging students to engage with authentic French-language materials in and outside the classroom. Each activity consists of a short video, often highlighting current events, social issues, or everyday life in francophone countries, followed by four comprehension exercises. These exercises take various forms, such as true/false questions, sequencing tasks, and multiple-choice quizzes, helping learners to develop both linguistic proficiency and a deeper understanding of francophone cultures. However, as the exercise structure remains relatively consistent, it may feel repetitive over time.

For complete beginners, the full French-language interface might pose challenges without additional support. Nevertheless, TV5 Monde learning program is not intended to replace formal instruction, but rather to complement it by offering authentic exposure to francophone culture. The app excels in this role thanks to its user-friendly design and auto-corrected exercises, which provide instant feedback and encourage independent learning.

Both the app and website include features that support comprehension and cultural immersion, such as adjustable playback speed, optional French subtitles, and full transcriptions. Overall, the TV5 Monde platform serves as a valuable tool for learners aiming to enhance their linguistic skills while gaining intercultural competence and a deeper appreciation of francophone cultures. It also helps teachers integrate authentic, ready-to-use activities that go beyond language learning to explore the richness and diversity of the francophone world.

Podcast Français facile [21] is a well-established online platform designed to facilitate French language acquisition, particularly for beginner and intermediate learners. It provides free access to a wide range of resources, including audio lessons, transcripts, and grammar explanations. By integrating practical conversations, phonetic training, and insights into French and francophone cultures, this platform not only strengthens linguistic proficiency but also fosters intercultural competence.



Over time, *Podcast Français facile* evolved into a comprehensive online learning resource, open to both learners and educators. Its user-friendly interface features an extensive collection of hyperlinked materials, facilitating seamless navigation. The platform hosts more than 500 texts and activities, covering diverse linguistic and cultural topics, including numbers, dialogues, grammar exercises, dictations, poetry readings, and adapted folktales. Each resource is structured around an audio file paired with a printable exercise sheet, which can be used independently or in a classroom setting. To enhance accessibility, earlier flash-based flashcards were later converted into video animations available on YouTube, ensuring compatibility with mobile devices.

Podcast Français Facile proves to be an effective pedagogical tool due to its comprehensive approach to language learning. It provides a wide range of language activities that cater to learners from beginner to advanced proficiency levels, allowing for gradual and structured progression. Each lesson follows a well-organized format, combining theoretical explanations, MP3 audio files that enhance listening comprehension, and exercises that develop productive language skills. This structure enables learners to engage with clearly defined topics in a systematic manner. Additionally, the platform offers flexibility by allowing users to practice listening comprehension offline through printable transcripts and worksheets, making it a convenient resource for independent study. As an open-access platform, it ensures universal availability, removing financial barriers to language learning.

Beyond linguistic development, *Podcast Français Facile* plays a crucial role in fostering intercultural awareness by exposing learners to authentic speech patterns, cultural references, and real-life communicative contexts. Through the inclusion of descriptions of holidays, customs, traditions, folktales, poetry, and everyday dialogues, learners engage with various aspects of Francophone culture, deepening their understanding of cultural nuances, traditions, and communication styles. This immersion not only enhances language proficiency but also cultivates a broader intercultural perspective, equipping learners with the skills necessary to navigate diverse cultural interactions. By integrating both linguistic and cultural dimensions, *Podcast Français Facile* serves as a valuable resource for learners seeking to develop both their command of the French language and their knowledge of Francophone cultures.

3.2. DIGITAL PLATFORMS FOSTERING INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE IN SPANISH LANGUAGE CLASSES

Ver-taal [22] is a multimedia platform designed for learning the Spanish language and promoting Hispanic culture. It significantly enhances language proficiency while also fostering intercultural competence. The platform serves as an excellent tool for both language acquisition and cultural immersion, offering a vast array of vocabulary and grammar exercises, as well as an extensive collection of multimedia content related to Hispanic culture. It is an ideal supplementary resource for classroom activities and an excellent foundation for homework assignments.

The platform offers a diverse range of content divided into three sections: vocabulary, grammar, and culture. The vocabulary section is structured into three proficiency levels—beginner (*principiantes*), intermediate (*intermedio*), and advanced (*avanzado*). It includes exercises for learning thematic vocabulary (e.g., *La casa*, *la ropa*, *la familia*), as well as interactive activities such as memory games and the classic "hangman" game. A particularly valuable segment for developing intercultural competence is *Vocabulario práctico* (Practical Vocabulary), which provides commonly used phrases in different contexts, such as greetings in formal and informal settings, conversations in restaurants and stores, and interactions at the dentist's office. Many of these expressions are accompanied by audio recordings. Additionally, this section includes exercises on idiomatic expressions, proverbs and sayings (*proverbios y refranes*).

The grammar section offers a wide range of exercises covering basic structures such as articles, pronouns, noun gender and number, and verb tenses. A key feature for enhancing intercultural understanding is the use of adapted authentic texts from Spanish newspapers like *El País* and *El Mundo*, as well as excerpts from reports produced by Spanish National Television (TVE). These resources provide a contextualized approach to grammar learning, reinforcing both linguistic and cultural comprehension.

The culture section of the platform is its most valuable feature when it comes to intercultural competence. It is divided into five categories: movie excerpts (*Trailers*), song lyrics (*Canciones*), advertisements (*Anuncios*), news reports (*Reportajes*), and general culture (*Cultura*). The collection of movie clips is extensive, featuring dialogues from over fifty films produced in the past thirty years in Spanish-speaking countries. This allows users to familiarize themselves with different dialects and regional vocabulary variations. The platform



includes works by directors from Spain, Mexico, Argentina, Colombia, and Chile, providing exposure to a diverse linguistic landscape. The multimedia approach supports the development of multiple language skills—reading, listening, and comprehension—through interactive exercises that provide instant feedback and error correction.

Similarly, the song lyrics section follows an interactive format, allowing students to engage with music by artists across the Spanish-speaking world. The collection includes both contemporary tracks and classics from the mid-20th century, offering cultural and linguistic insights through music.

Ver-taal is a free and user-friendly digital platform that does not require account registration or collect personal data through cookies. It is designed to facilitate Spanish language acquisition while enriching cultural awareness, making it an invaluable tool for developing intercultural competence. Additionally, it offers resources for learning other languages, including French, Dutch, English, Hungarian, and Catalan. The only notable drawback of the platform is its somewhat outdated user interface, but this does not significantly impact its effectiveness in language learning and cultural exploration.

3.3. DIGITAL PLATFORMS FOSTERING INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE CLASSES

British Council Learn English [23] is a digital platform that promotes intercultural competence, raises awareness of cultural differences, and enables students to explore diverse cultures worldwide in an engaging manner. More specifically, it introduces learners to the Anglophone world through stories, video/audio recordings, and interactive exercises. *Learn English* was developed by the British Council, the United Kingdom's leading organization dedicated to promoting English as a global language and providing support to both learners and educators.

The platform features drop-down menus that allow students to select their language level (ranging from A1 to C1, according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages) and the specific language skill they wish to focus on (listening, reading, speaking, or writing). Additionally, dedicated sections are available for grammar and vocabulary, offering a wide range of diverse interactive activities. One of the platform's key advantages is the immediate feedback provided to learners.

It is also worth noting that the platform includes sections for both General English and Business English. Beyond its outstanding potential for enhancing English language proficiency and developing digital literacy, the

Learn English platform serves as an exceptional tool for familiarizing students with the culture, customs, traditions, and heritage of Anglophone countries. Within the General English section, there are subsections such as Video Zone, Audio Zone, Magazine Zone, and Story Zone. These components offer a captivating insight into the culture (and, to a lesser extent, literature) of English-speaking countries, with a particular emphasis on the United Kingdom.

Within the Video Zone and Audio Zone, students can improve their comprehension of English speakers with various accents, as well as their understanding of colloquial and idiomatic language in context. Lessons such as A Study Trip to the UK, Coventry City F.C., Living in London, Music in Manchester, Saint Patrick's Day, Black Friday and Buy Nothing Day, Thanksgiving, Glastonbury Festival, and National Tea Day contribute to a deeper understanding of the culture of Anglophone countries, help overcome cultural barriers, and foster the development of intercultural competence.

To develop confidence in using English in social situations and gain deeper insights into various aspects of British life and culture—including art, history, sports, and music—students can explore the engaging video series Britain is GREAT. Additionally, there is a dedicated set of Shakespeare videos designed for upper-intermediate learners. The World on the Street video series, which features clips of two individuals exploring different locations across the UK, followed by a teacher's explanations of the language used, has proven particularly effective in helping learners overcome both linguistic and cultural barriers. Moreover, this series serves as a strong motivational tool, encouraging EFL students to persist in their language-learning journey.

The BBC Learning English [24] platform is one of the most widely recognized online sites that help people learn English through various multimedia content such as videos, audio, and interactive exercises. Designed and developed by the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) the platform is completely free of charge and offers materials for learners at all levels. The platform is divided into different sections that focus on key aspects of language learning: Courses, Grammar and Vocabulary, Pronunciation, News and Current Affairs. In addition to the above sections, there are also various subsections, including Drama, Business, Teachers, Podcast, Quizzes, etc. 'Grammar and Vocabulary' section includes grammar lessons, everyday words and phrases, and practice exercises, making learning easy to follow. The lessons in the 'Pronunciation' section use audio and video resources to enable users to improve their listen-



ing and pronunciation skills by having them repeat what native speakers are saying. 'News and Current Affairs' section provides short news items and analyses of the current affairs thereby helping learners gain an insight into real-life English in context. The 'Business English' section is intended for those who wish to improve their English in the workplace setting through lessons on business vocabulary and communication, and workplace etiquette. The section includes workplace scenarios such as meetings, negotiating, presenting, and email writing. Series like English at Work and Business Daily provide interesting conversations in real business settings. Each lesson is accompanied by transcripts, key phrases, and practice exercises. The 'Drama' section uses the art of storytelling to help learners improve their English. It provides serialized audio dramas with engaging plots, professional narration, and authentic dialogues. Some of the popular dramas include *The White Elephant*, *A Christmas Carol*, and *The Race*. Through comprehension exercises, vocabulary explanations, and transcripts learners are enabled to improve their listening skills, pronunciation, and vocabulary in an enjoyable way.

BBC Learning English is a globally accessible platform with easy navigation through user-friendly layout. It offers multimedia format, i.e., reading, listening, and interactive exercises to cover different learning styles. Mobile applications and social media are its additional facilities for learning on the go. Through real-world dialogues, cultural insights, and global news stories, learners not only improve their English proficiency but also develop an understanding of different cultures, customs, and communication styles. Testimonials and research evidence prove it has helped millions learn English, and it is a significant force in global language learning.

4. CONCLUSION

In today's increasingly interconnected world, fostering intercultural competence has become an essential goal of language education. This paper explored how digital platforms used in foreign language classes contribute to the development of intercultural competence in language classrooms. These platforms offer learners unique opportunities to immerse themselves in authentic cultural contexts, engage with diverse language resources, and enhance their understanding of the cultural nuances that shape communication. By integrating linguistic and cultural content, these platforms not only support language acquisition but also enable learners to navigate the complexities of cross-cultural interactions.

Platforms for learning French, Spanish, and English described in the paper illustrate how digital tools can be effectively utilized to expose students to a broad range of authentic materials, from everyday dialogues and folktales to poetry and cultural discussions. These resources facilitate the development of both receptive and productive language skills, while also promoting a deeper appreciation of the cultural dimensions of the language. In doing so, learners are better prepared to engage with the international world, equipped with the linguistic proficiency and cultural sensitivity necessary for meaningful intercultural exchanges.

The insights from this paper have several important pedagogical implications. First, language educators should embrace digital platforms as valuable supplementary tools to enhance traditional classroom learning. These platforms offer flexible and accessible resources that allow learners to independently explore the cultures of the language being studied, fostering a more autonomous and self-directed approach to language learning. By incorporating these platforms into their teaching practices, educators can provide students with authentic cultural content that enriches their language proficiency and intercultural understanding.

Second, teachers should consider the integration of both linguistic and cultural learning objectives in their curriculum design. The platforms mentioned in French, Spanish, and English exemplify how digital tools can bridge the gap between language instruction and cultural exploration, providing learners with a holistic language learning experience. Educators can curate digital content that reflects global diversity, including not only linguistic exercises but also materials that introduce cultural traditions, customs, and everyday communication practices.

Additionally, while these digital platforms offer valuable opportunities for intercultural competence development, educators must be mindful of potential challenges, such as the lack of formal assessment tools on these platforms. To address this, teachers should complement the use of digital resources with in-class activities that assess students' progress in both linguistic and intercultural areas. This could include guided discussions, group projects, or reflective exercises that allow learners to apply the cultural insights gained through digital platforms to real-world contexts.

Finally, the importance of digital literacy in language education cannot be overstated. As digital platforms become an integral part of language learning, educators must ensure that students are equipped with the skills to navigate these resources effectively.



This includes not only the technical ability to use the platforms but also the critical skills to analyse and interpret cultural content, thus deepening their intercultural understanding.

Digital platforms offer powerful tools for fostering intercultural competence in language classrooms. By thoughtfully integrating these resources into the curriculum, educators can enhance both the linguistic and cultural dimensions of language learning, preparing students for the challenges and opportunities of an increasingly globalized world.

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