

The ICE Blended Learning Course

January 2018

Questions & Answers



Questions to ask:

- When is Blended Learning helpful?
- What requirements are there?
- Which target groups is it for?
- What concept of 'intercultural competence' is the course based on?
- How is the course administered?
- Has the course been practically piloted?
- What are the results?

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1) Blended Learning CAN be helpful, provided that ...

Blended Learning can be more effective than either traditional face-to-face teaching or self-study. A meta-study conducted by four Stanford Research Institute authors, which included findings of 45 empirical studies, came to the conclusion that "purely online learning has been equivalent to face-to-face instruction in effectiveness, and blended approaches have been more effective than instruction offered entirely in face-to-face mode."

We are reminded, however, that

- a) uploading conventional training material and methods alone does not improve learning results,
- b) technology does not make good teaching dispensable and
- c) online learning effectiveness studies do not necessarily take into account the latest technological innovations.

Bearing this in mind, blended learning for corporate and academic training offers important advantages. It allows learners to study and practice at their own pace and receive the support they need if and when required.

Combining face-to-face and online training activities gets the best of both worlds for trainers and learners alike.



"From a practical standpoint ... a major reason for using blended learning approaches is to increase the amount of time that students spend engaging with the instructional materials. The meta-analysis findings do not support simply putting an existing course online, but they do support redesigning instruction to incorporate additional learning opportunities online while retaining elements of face-to-face instruction. The positive findings with respect to blended learning approaches documented in the meta-analysis provide justification for the investment in the development of blended courses." p.36

B. Means, Y. Toyama, R. Murphy, M. Baki (2013). The Effectiveness of Online and Blended Learning: A Meta-Analysis of the Empirical Literature. Teachers College Record Volume 115, 030303, March 2013.

2) Intercultural Competence: The concept

The training of intercultural competence has long been regarded as the field of psychology-based training procedures, which claim to analyse and form an individual's personality by specifying and quantifying personality traits. The underlying assumption is that what is analysed as a candidate's personality can be treated as indicator of that same person's practical performance in intercultural encounters.

The ICE Blended Learning Course is based on a different approach, aptly summarized by the British anthropologist

Brian Street: **"Culture is a Verb"***. Culture is an active and collaborative way of meaning-making and contest over definitions, including its own definition. The theoretical foundations of the course are provided by research findings in the field of intercultural discourse analysis and relevant descriptors of communicative competence provided by the CEFR.

* Brian V. Street. Culture is a Verb: Anthropological aspects of language and cultural process. In David Graddol, Linda Thompson, Mike Byram. Language and Culture. Clevedon 1993.

"Using a foreign language with no regard for its culture-based dimensions (i.e. values, assumptions, implications, expectations etc.) is

comparable to driving a car in a desert. Obviously, you can start the car and operate it at will. You might even enjoy your isolated ride, not molesting or endangering anyone or anything (...) When driving in an inhabited environment, however ... you must be familiar with traffic regulations such as the 'deeper meaning' of a red traffic light and what distinguishes it from other red lights you may see. You should know the dos and taboos of driving, you should be aware of what other motorists expect from you and what you can expect from others."

R.Camerer, J.Mader (2012). Intercultural Competence in Business English. p.25f..



Speaking and writing English in London or New York is different to speaking and writing English in Cairo, Shanghai or Buenos Aires.

The course encourages learner involvement and self-guided learning by connecting self-study content with practical classroom activities.



The topics focus on difficult functions which may prevent a trustful relationship from developing.

3) ELF: Language No. 1 of intercultural communication

English is the language number one of international business, tourism, technical and academic communication today. Speaking and writing English in London or New York, however, is different to speaking and writing English in Cairo, Shanghai or Buenos Aires. Undoubtedly, co-constructing identities, roles and relationships in different (cultural and other) environments follows different rules. So learning how to use English appropriately worldwide is important both for company staff and learners of all ages.

Until today, most English language training focusses on British and US-American standard varieties.

The majority of international encounters, however, in which English is used, take place in the absence of native speakers of English.

[Beneke 2000; Graddoll 2006 and others]

This bears important consequences for the training of intercultural communicative competence in English.

"ELF [English as a Lingua Franca] studies have shown the significance of identity issues in intercultural communication through ELF and again underscored that this is not a 'neutral' form of communication. Findings have revealed English being used to create and index multiple identities including cultural identities. These cultural identities have been associated with hybrid cultural identities with speakers embracing being 'in-between' cultures and adopting the role of mediators between different cultural groupings.... This links ELF research to other research into identity, intercultural communication and globalisation."

Will Baker (2015). Culture and Identity through English as a Lingua Franca. p. 239.

4) The ICE Blended Learning Course

General information:

The course is not meant for beginners in English. Linguistic knowledge and competence in English corresponding to level **B1 CEFR** or higher is required.

Typical target groups are (young) adult learners in professional schools, corporate training and tertiary education.

The course combines the teaching of KNOWLEDGE, AWARENESS and SKILLS. Special attention is given to developing the learners' SELF-AWARENESS and to help them prepare for intercultural encounters in practice, e.g. by preparing presentations on culturally relevant information concerning (at least) one country or culture of their choice.

The course encourages LEARNER INVOLVEMENT and SELF-GUIDED LEARNING by connecting self-study content with practical classroom activities.

The overall focus of the course lies on the development of communication skills in International English which will be effective in a great variety of potentially difficult intercultural encounters.

Topics, Materials, Methods:

The **topics** addressed in the exercises vary greatly but principally focus on 'difficult' FUNCTIONS which may, in intercultural environments, prevent a trustful relationship from developing. Typical examples are criticizing, refusing, giving advice, giving/accepting compliments etc. which follow different 'cultural scripts' and, thus, have been a

frequent source of culture-based misunderstanding. Other DISCOURSE FEATURES addressed in the course are Directness, Enthusiasm, Formality, Assertiveness, Self-promotion, Personal disclosure etc. which may contribute to mutual trust-building, or the opposite.

Critical issues connected with GENDER, HIERARCHY and CONFLICT are also addressed.

Although highly sensitive subjects in any context, they bear particular risks when culture-based values, roles and identities clash. Practical examples are provided to raise awareness of these and to prepare learners to deal with misunderstandings in a way which does not harm the development of trustful relationships.

Case studies are used to demonstrate the importance of appropriate communication both on a PERSONAL and an ORGANISATIONAL level. Well-researched examples are e.g. the DaimlerChrysler take-over, the BMW-Rover merger, the LA Riots of 1992 and others. More recent examples include the AirFrance-KLM culture clash, or, as an example of successful intercultural corporate co-operation, the Renault-Nissan collaboration.

Professionals from various fields have talked to us about their experience in international environments. These **interviews** serve as introductions to each unit's topics and are an important part of the six self-study sections. Among the experts we interviewed are business consultants, student advisors, retailers, bankers, professors, teachers, coaches and authors. All of them have practical experience and good advice to give.

Methods: The course consists of six sections. Although these constitute a learning progression, trainers are advised to select the training material appropriate to the needs of the groups they are working with.

The web-based self-study material (homework) is designed for study sessions of 25 to 45 minutes per unit.

The material provided for face-to-face teaching can be used to prepare training sessions

of between 90 and 360 minutes per unit.

Depending on the time available, some of the activities suggested may extend over 90 minutes or more.



Theory:

Theory input is provided both in self-study units and in worksheets and powerpoint-slides for the classroom teaching. The theoretical input includes authors like Hall, Hofstede, Trompenaars/Hampden-Turner, but also scholars from the fields of intercultural discourse analysis, politeness theory, corporate culture analysis and more.

Trainers' Notes:

All the material provided for face-to-face teaching is accompanied by extensive trainers notes. These specify the aims, suggest a lead-in, elaborate on possible methods, provide background information and suggest follow-up activities.

Assessment of Learning Progress

Based on a valid construct of intercultural communicative competence, practical formats and procedures for the testing of intercultural competence are provided, equally important for employers, employees, teachers and learners. The tests have been extensively piloted and practically administered for many years.

All the material provided for face-to-face teaching is accompanied by extensive trainers notes.

5) The Piloting Results

Between October 2016 and July 2017, the course was piloted in academic and professional environments. Based on the feedback we received from our piloting partners, the course has been revised both in terms of content and technicalities.

These are the main features of the revised course:

Technical features:

Quick access to both platforms (self-study & classroom)

Integration of the ICE-Blended Learning course into Learning Management Systems

Separation of the downloadable materials for face-to-face teaching into classroom material and teachers' notes

Contents:

Suggestions for connecting the self-study input and tasks with the exercises and activities provided in the classroom sections
Suggested curricula for 20-30 hour courses

Suggested extra activities connected to these

Additional content for specific target groups (e.g. MINT students and professionals)



The course has been piloted in academic and professional environments.

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The ICE Blended Learning Course has several advantages for trainers as well as for learners:

- Original input on intercultural experience in individual contexts as well as in companies, universities and schools
- Effective and efficient learning, combining self-study with relevant classroom material
- Exercises for speaking and writing, focussing on establishing trustful relationships in a wide range of intercultural situations
- Extensive trainers' notes with background information, suggested methods and additional activities
- Regular assessment of progress and success
- A reasonable starting price

The course is based on typical communicative situations in four areas: **personal, public, educational and occupational**. Professional situations are the main focus from Unit 4 onwards.

Get access to UNIT 1

<http://elc.eurokey.de/>

Send us an e-mail and we will provide your access details immediately.

Feedback from a piloting partner

In addition to the standardised feedback form I would like to give you a “free-hand” summary of my experience with the course and also to summarise the evaluation received from the students. These were collected as open questions at the end of the course.

I had structured the 6-weeks course as follows: 50% face-to-face (2h/week), 50% self-study (2h/week) plus

project work (interviews with professionals relating to their intercultural experience). [...]

Most of the students found the topics provided in the self-study sections very appealing, comprehensive, practical, interesting, understandable and versatile (only one student felt “gender” was an unnecessary topic ☺). The task sheets were rated by some as too simple, by others as appropriate and

feasible ranging to highly demanding. This was probably due to different English language skills (participants from India found them easy, participants from Germany without any international experience rather difficult). Perhaps it would help to distinguish between different language levels here? [...]

Many thanks for the co-operation. I personally appreciate your approach very

much. As an ethnologist I was pleased to see that – contrary to other intercultural business literature – you did not provide recipes and generalisations. I find the discourse communities approach particularly helpful.

Professor Magdalena Stülb
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