



INTEGRATING INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE INTO ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING

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E-ISSN : 3109-9777

Received: June 2026

Accepted: June 2026

Published: June 2026

Abstract :

The increasing importance of English as a worldwide lingua franca requires that learners are prepared with not only linguistic competence but also the capacity to communicate in meaningful ways across different cultural contexts. The present study explores the integration of Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) in English Language Teaching (ELT) by examining its theoretical basis, classroom implementation and the perceived advantages and disadvantages. The qualitative study design was used using literature analysis and semi-structured interviews with five selected purposefully English teachers. Data from both sources were analysed thematically for repeating patterns and themes. The findings suggest that ICC is seen by the literature and the teachers participating as an important aspect of successful English language teaching. Teachers used intercultural education through comparative cultural discussions, real multimedia tools, collaborative projects, role-plays and reflective classroom activities. These strategies were believed to contribute to students' communicative competence, intercultural awareness, critical thinking, learner engagement, and appreciation for cultural diversity. The study identified several challenges for the systematic implementation of ICC, including: examination-oriented curriculum, limited time for teaching, lack of intercultural teaching resources and lack of professional development opportunities for teachers. Research shows that successful implementation includes curriculum support, ongoing teacher training, and culturally responsive teaching. Intercultural competency in English language education helps learners to be ready to interact successfully and appropriately in multicultural academic, social and professional settings, and promotes global citizenship and intercultural awareness.

Keywords: Intercultural Communicative Competence, English, Language, Teaching

INTRODUCTION

Globalisation, digital communication and international mobility have increased quickly and English has become a global language franca. Hence, intercultural communication is a crucial feature of language education. In the present day, English speakers are more likely to come into contact with people from a variety of language and cultural backgrounds, rather than only fellow native speakers. Thus excellent communication is not only about linguistic skills but also includes the ability to perceive, interpret and handle cultural differences in an acceptable way (Zabrodskaja & Wang, 2025). This change has encouraged



instructors and researchers to re-examine the objectives of English Language Teaching (ELT) from traditional aims of grammatical precision and communicative fluency to creating learners who are good cross-cultural communicators (Mantra et al., 2025).

Inclusion of Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) has been recognised as a crucial ground to react to these growing educational needs. ICC is the information, attitudes, skills, and critical cultural awareness that enable individuals to communicate successfully and appropriately with people from different cultural backgrounds (Pang et al., 2021). ICC asserts that language is not distinct entities but is intricately tied to cultural values, attitudes, behaviours and social activities. People with international communication competency can better grasp cultural perspectives, prevent misunderstandings, demonstrate empathy and engage in respectful conversations in multicultural circumstances (Anlimachie et al., 2025).

Hence, the inclusion of ICC in ELT has become a key objective in training learners to be actively engaged in an ever-connected society. In the last two decades, research has repeatedly underscored the pedagogical advantages of bringing international viewpoints into the teaching of English as a Foreign Language (Mantra et al., 2024). Research has shown that ICC-oriented teaching improves learners' communication effectiveness, cultural awareness, critical thinking and global consciousness, and results in more meaningful language learning experiences. Classroom activities including intercultural lectures, real cultural materials, collaborative projects, internet exchanges and reflective learning encourage students to uncover their own and others' cultural identities (Stadnik, 2024). These tactics enable learners to see cultural differences without falling into stereotypes, to negotiate meaning across cultures and to appreciate diverse perspectives, hence improving the language and intercultural learning results.

There is an increased awareness of the need for intercultural competency (ICC), but not equitable integration of it into English language programs in different educational settings (Godwin, 2013). English teaching tends to focus on the expansion of grammar, vocabulary, reading comprehension and test accomplishment which frequently leaves minimal opportunities for systematic intercultural learning (Pratolo et al., 2025). In English speaking cultures, cultural information tends to be communicated as factual knowledge rather than as an ongoing process of intercultural interaction and critical analysis. Furthermore, teachers may encounter issues such as the absence of professional development in intercultural pedagogy, the shortage of instructional resources, the restrictions of curriculum and the ambiguity of acceptable evaluation methodologies for intercultural competency. These cases lead to a huge gap between theoretical significance of ICC and practical application of it in ELT (Ahmed & Pardaev, 2025).

It is extremely important to include intercultural competency in English language instruction in multicultural and multilingual contexts, because students are frequently exposed to cultural variety both within and outside the

classroom (Mariyono, 2024). With the rising focus of educational institutions on global citizenship, worldwide collaboration and 21st century skills, English classrooms provide a significant opportunity to enhance learners' intercultural knowledge as well as linguistic proficiency. Carefully planned educational experiences can help students learn to talk nicely across cultural boundaries while yet maintaining an understanding of their own cultural identities (Liu & Lee, 2025). This strategy fosters communicative competence and helps to cultivate inclusive, tolerant and culturally aware global citizens.

The integration of ICC into ELT needs more than merely adding cultural characteristics to teaching materials. This involves reorganisation of educational targets, classroom procedures, evaluation methodologies and teachers' roles in language education to encourage intercultural learning (Cong-Lem, 2025). Teachers are facilitators who help learners to analyse cultural viewpoints, think critically about cultural assumptions, participate in true intercultural communication and develop attitudes of openness, curiosity and respect (Sabilah et al., 2025). This educational revolution calls for appropriate curriculum design, teacher professional development and instructional support so that intercultural learning is integrated as an intrinsic part of language instruction, not as something supplemental or peripheral (Gutiérrez-Santiuste & Ritacco-Real, 2023; Soriya Enny et al., 2025).

Although an increasing number of studies on intercultural competence (ICC) in language education have been conducted, additional research is needed to understand how intercultural competence could be effectively implemented into different English Language Teaching (ELT) settings (Furyanto et al., 2025). The successful integration of ICC in classroom practices depends on differences in educational systems, cultural contexts, teacher readiness, curriculum implementation and student characteristics (Wibowo et al., 2024). Understanding these contextual aspects is important in identifying instructional tactics that are theoretically sound and practically feasible.

The study investigates the integration of Intercultural Communicative Competence in English Language Teaching by evaluating its theoretical foundations, pedagogical significance, methods of implementation, opportunities and problems. This study aims to make a contribution to the discourse on intercultural language education through the integration of extant knowledge and the analysis of contemporary practices, thereby providing guidance to teachers, curriculum developers and policymakers in the design of English language instruction that prepares learners for competent and responsible communication in culturally diverse settings.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study adopted a qualitative research method to explore the integration of Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) in English Language Teaching (ELT). The qualitative approach was chosen as it offers a broad knowledge of teachers' attitudes (Mantula et al., 2024), experiences and practices regarding the implementation of ICC in language classes. The study

included a literature review and semi-structured interviews to provide a theoretical framework and practical insights on the integration of ICC in English language education.

The literature search included a thorough evaluation of the scholarly literature relevant to ICC and ELT. Data were collected from peer-reviewed journal articles, academic publications, conference proceedings and policy documents retrieved from reputable academic sources such as Scopus, Web of Science, ERIC, ScienceDirect, SpringerLink, Taylor & Francis Online and Google Scholar. The works were selected based on the priority given to recent publications and to key works that have had a major impact on the theory development of Intercultural Communicative Competence. The reviewed literature was used to develop the conceptual framework, recognise existing pedagogical approaches, and examine current challenges and best practices in integrating ICC into English language teaching.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted to complement the literature review with carefully selected English teachers with expertise in teaching English at the secondary or tertiary level and who are familiar with intercultural learning or multicultural classroom contexts. The purposive sampling technique was used to ensure that participants had relevant professional experience that might provide useful perspectives on the topic of the research. The interviews delved into teachers' understanding of ICC, teaching methods, classroom experiences, perceived benefits, challenges of implementation, and recommendations for improving intercultural learning in English language instruction. Each interview used a standardised framework, so participants could share their experiences and to ensure consistency across interviews.

The data collected from literature review and interviews were analysed thematically. Interview transcripts were transcribed word for word, read several times and coded to identify common themes and patterns. The codes were further categorised into overarching themes that reflected teachers' beliefs and practices toward ICC integration. The outcomes of the interview were cross-checked with the literature review to make more reliable and deeper analysis. In this triangulation, the theoretical frameworks and classroom realities were compared which resulted in a comprehensive understanding of the effective integration of the Intercultural Communicative Competence in English Language Teaching.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In this section the research findings and the discussion of the integration of intercultural communicative competence into English language teaching are presented briefly. The data includes the results from literature review and the interview with the English teachers.

Results

The results were obtained from two free sources of data: (1) a literature review on the current integration of Intercultural Communicative Competence

(ICC) in English Language Teaching (ELT) and (2) semi-structured interviews with five purposely selected English teachers. The literature research provided the theoretical and empirical underpinning for the study, while the interviews provided practical insights into the experiences of instructors implementing ICC in classroom settings. Researchers could combine diverse data sources and so gain deep insight into the techniques used, the perceived benefits and the challenges encountered in implementation.

The literature review showed a consensus that English language education should not be limited to improving linguistic competence but rather equip learners to communicate effectively in cross-cultural contexts. Recent research tends to conceptualise ICC as a multidimensional notion consisting of intercultural knowledge, communication skills, attitudes of openness and respect, and critical cultural awareness. Recent literature suggests that instead of treating culture as a peripheral subject, intercultural learning should be integrated into English language teaching to prepare learners to communicate authentically in a range of global situations.

The literature suggests that effective ICC integration depends on learner-centred and experiential pedagogies. The most commonly reported instructional approaches are authentic multimedia materials, intercultural dialogue, comparative cultural study, project-based learning, role-play, virtual exchanges, and reflective writing. These strategies foster the analysis of similarities and contrasts across cultures, the challenging of prejudices and the development of empathy for people from different cultural origins. Numerous studies demonstrate positive educational outcomes, such as greater communicative competence, increased motivation of students, enhanced critical thinking, increased intercultural awareness and increased confidence to work with folks from different cultural backgrounds.

But the research constantly points to a number of problems in effective implementation notwithstanding these advantages. Many teachers still prefer to prioritise language accuracy and testing requirements over intercultural education. The common barriers highlighted are poor teacher training, limited professional development opportunities, lack of teaching materials and absence of defined ICC goals in national curriculum. The results indicate that successful implementation of ICC requires systematic support through curriculum design, teacher development, and institutional commitment.

The interview findings mostly confirmed the conclusions drawn from the literature review. Analysis of the interview transcripts showed four linked themes. Only two of the participants were familiar with the formal terminology of Intercultural Communicative Competence, although all the teachers articulated activities that reflected the notions of intercultural learning.

“Students will be working with people from many countries and will need more than grammatical skills. “They need to understand other cognitive frameworks and communication styles. (Teacher 1)

“Language is always a reflection of culture. “If students only learn vocabulary and grammar, they can speak accurately but they can still misunderstand people from different cultures.” (Teacher 2)

“Some parts were already incorporated into classroom activities, but the integration of ICC became more understandable after professional reading. (Teacher 3)

“Before this I didn’t know the academic term ICC, but I often encouraged students to compare Indonesian traditions with other countries. “Now I realise that these activities are part of learning between cultures.” (Teacher 4)

“When talking about festivals, family traditions or food, students compare their culture with the others and become more interested, as they can see the unique values in the culture” (Teacher 4)

“I use YouTube videos, interviews, podcasts, internet articles from elsewhere. ‘The students understand that English is pronounced differently by people from different cultures” (Teacher 5)

These answers show that instructors consider intercultural competence as an important complement to linguistic competence, in line with the conceptualisations found in the literature analysed. The teachers described different pedagogical approaches to include intercultural learning in teaching English. The most often mentioned activities were lectures comparing local and international cultures, the study of real films and news items, project-based learning, role-playing and collaborative presentations. All participants reported positive benefits on student learning. The teachers noted that infusion of ICC improved classroom participation, increased confidence in communication, improved critical thinking and built up a greater respect for cultural diversity.

“Discussions that focus on understanding alternative views, rather than on pinpointing the one correct solution, are more likely to draw out students’ ideas.” (Teacher 1)

“Students are interested in the different behaviour of people in many countries. “They ask more questions and think critically more than they do in traditional language instruction.” (Teacher 2)

“Our teaching calendar is already somewhat full. “We are mainly focused on exam preparation for students, which sometimes makes it difficult to include intercultural activities.” (Teacher 3)

“We need more seminars and practical demonstrations of how to integrate Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) into everyday English teaching and not just academic discussion.” (Teacher 4).

“Some textbooks portray culture as information about English-speaking countries, they do not encourage comparative analysis or critical reflection from students.” (Teacher 5)

Teachers saw that pupils were more confident in interacting with people from different cultural backgrounds in online exchanges and international cooperative projects. The teachers were enthusiastic proponents of incorporating ICC but they nevertheless acknowledged certain practical challenges. Barriers

most frequently reported included limited classroom time, curricula focused on testing, substandard professional training, and limited availability of intercultural teaching resources.

The material from the literature study together with the teacher interviews shows a significant correspondence between the theoretical frameworks and the implementation in the classroom. Literature defines ICC as an important component of current English language teaching and interview results indicate that teachers acknowledge the pedagogical importance of ICC and have begun to include intercultural aspects into their teaching. However, both sets of data reveal similar constraints, including limited teaching time, curricular priorities, lack of teaching materials and lack of professional preparation. The findings suggest the importance of collaborative efforts made by curriculum developers, teacher educators, school administrators, and classroom teachers for the successful integration of ICC so that intercultural learning becomes a core part of English language instruction instead of an addition.

Discussion

The results of this study suggest that the integration of Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) in English Language Teaching (ELT) is increasingly viewed as an educational imperative, rather than an enhancement. The continuous integration of the study of literature and interview data shows that effective English language teaching must include not just grammatical and communicative competence but also intercultural knowledge, skills, attitudes and critical cultural awareness. This finding is in line with the changing role of English as a world lingua franca, where successful communication depends not just on linguistic competency but also on learners' ability to interact appropriately and cordially with people from different cultural backgrounds. The participating teachers recognised that English learners are inclined to engage in multicultural communication in their academic and professional endeavours. Therefore, the language learning has to prepare the students for authentic intercultural interactions rather than just for tests or communication with native speakers.

An important finding of this study is the convergence of contemporary theories of ICC with teachers' educational convictions. Although few participants knew the formal nomenclature of Intercultural Communicative Competence, all teachers spoke about classroom activities consistent with its basic ideas. Their acknowledgement of the interrelationship between language and culture demonstrates an implicit grasp that successful communication demands the interpretation of cultural meanings, as well as the linguistic structures. The results of this study show that teachers may have real international teaching experience despite the absence of formal theoretical knowledge of intercultural competency. Thus, professional development programs should not only convey the idea of ICC but also support instructors in identifying, improving and systematically expanding the intercultural dimensions already present in their teaching methods. The strategy may boost teachers' confidence and may promote more systematic incorporation of

multicultural objectives in the English language teaching (Kalogerogianni, 2025; Moeis et al., 2024).

The teaching strategies developed in this study are in line with contemporary pedagogical views that support learner-centred and experiential approaches in intercultural education. Literature research and interview data suggest that teachers use comparative cultural conversations, authentic multimedia materials, project-based learning, collaborative activities and reflective dialogue to expose students to cultural diversity. These approaches are more than the rote presenting of cultural information about English-speaking countries as they encourage students to compare cultural perspectives, reflect on their own cultural identities and negotiate meaning through interaction. The approaches encourage active learning through inquiry, collaboration, and critical reflection, where students build multicultural knowledge. This supports the notion that intercultural competency is developed via active involvement in cultural diversity rather than passive receipt of cultural knowledge (Harrison & Skrebneva, 2020).

The results indicate that the integration of ICC boosts different elements of student learning. Teachers interviewed noted that students taking part in intercultural learning activities displayed increased engagement in classroom discussions, greater curiosity in cultural differences and increased confidence in communicating in English. These findings are consistent with the research, implying that intercultural learning simultaneously promotes communicative competence, critical thinking, empathy, and global consciousness. Rather than only focusing on language accuracy, ICC-oriented training promotes both the understanding of multiple perspectives and the questioning of cultural assumptions and the development of respectful attitudes toward diversity. These competencies are widely recognised as essential 21st century skills, allowing learners to function well in multicultural educational, social and professional situations (Mantra et al., 2023).

One important finding is the effect of local culture on intercultural teaching of English. The participating teachers often claimed that the introduction of global cultures should not jeopardise students' appreciation of their own cultural heritage. Intercultural learning was seen as a process of comparison that helps pupils get a deep understanding of local and global cultures. Classroom conversations in which Indonesian traditions were compared with those of other societies helped students to identify cultural parallels and differences, which in turn reinforced their own cultural identity. This study backs the present concept that ICC is not the substitution of local cultural values with foreign ones but the improvement of the ability to navigate between cultures while maintaining one's own cultural identity. This method is particularly relevant in multicultural contexts, where English language education may promote global competence while maintaining cultural heritage (Saini et al., 2026).

However, despite these positive findings, the study also highlighted additional continuing difficulties to the effective implementation of ICC in

English language schools. The main challenges reported were curricula aimed at exams, insufficient teaching time, inadequate teaching materials and lack of teacher training. These limitations underscore the gap between the increased theoretical awareness of ICC and the practical problems faced by classroom teachers. In many educational settings, curriculum priorities continue to prioritise measurable linguistic outcomes, hence limiting opportunities for contemplative intercultural learning. Teachers also pointed to the superficial treatment of culture in existing textbooks, with an emphasis on facts rather than stimulating intercultural research and critical analysis. Teachers may struggle to consistently include ICC even though they recognise its educational importance because of the lack of curriculum support and appropriate instructional resources (List et al., 2024; Sahdat et al., 2025).

The respondents pointed to the necessity of continuing professional development of English teachers. Participants stated the need for practical support for the creation of intercultural learning activities, the selection of culturally appropriate teaching materials, the promotion of intercultural discussions and the assessment of students' intercultural competence. The findings suggest that ICC should be a key component of pre-service and in-service professional development in teacher education programs. Professional development should move beyond the theoretical language of discourse, giving teachers opportunities to construct lesson plans, to critically reflect on classroom situations, to engage in collaborative thinking, and to share good teaching practices. Improving the intercultural pedagogical ability of teachers is likely to contribute to a higher quality and more consistent application of ICC in different educational contexts (Hassan, 2025; Zhou & Colomer, 2024).

The results of the literature review and teacher interviews are consistent and this contributes to the validity of this study. Similar opportunities and barriers were identified in both sources, which suggests that the problems of ICC integration are not isolated to specific classrooms, but reflect more general developments in English language education. The literature provides the theoretical foundation for the inclusion of ICC in ELT while the interview results show the interpretation and practice of these theoretical principles in the classroom (Aminah et al., 2025; Yassung, 2026). The triangulation of many data sources offers a complete picture of the present state of ICC integration and highlights areas that require extra instructional help.

The findings of this study demonstrate that the integration of Intercultural Communicative Competence into English Language Teaching is a necessary educational change as a result of globalisation and increasing cultural diversity. For the successful implementation it is necessary to introduce cultural themes into language lessons, but also to transform the curriculum, to train teachers, to use teaching materials that are relevant to culture, and to use evaluation methods in which intercultural learning is seen as an important educational objective. The inclusion of intercultural competence into English language instruction enables schools to prepare learners to be effective communicators, critical thinkers and responsible global citizens who can engage respectfully and successfully in

culturally diverse societies.

CONCLUSION

The study studied the infusion of Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) in English Language Teaching (ELT) with a qualitative methodology that combined a literature review and interviews with five English teachers. The results show a consensus from the literature and the teachers' experience that ICC is an important part in teaching English language nowadays. Besides linguistic competence, English training should develop learners' intercultural knowledge, communication skills, open-mindedness to cultural diversity and critical cultural awareness. The participating teachers reported the use of intercultural elements through comparative cultural discussions, authentic learning resources, collaborative projects and reflective classroom activities which enhanced the students' communicative competence, critical thinking and appreciation for cultural diversity.

The research also demonstrated an awareness of these good practices, however many difficulties hamper the effective implementation of ICC, such as an examination-based curriculum, limited teaching time, lack of good teaching tools, and low professional development opportunities. The findings suggest that ICC integration into ELT has to be supported by systematic curriculum development, teacher training and the provision of culturally sensitive teaching resources. Integrating intercultural learning into regular English teaching helps educational institutions to prepare learners to communicate effectively and appropriately in culturally diverse settings and to develop the global competencies necessary for the twenty-first century.

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