

In conclusion, intercultural communication is an indispensable component of effective English Language Teaching in the twenty-first century. By integrating intercultural awareness and skills development into their pedagogy, educators can empower learners to become more effective communicators, empathetic individuals, and informed global citizens. While challenges exist in implementing intercultural communication in the ELT classroom, the opportunities for enriching the learning experience and preparing learners for a culturally diverse world are immense. Through conscious effort, innovative strategies, and a commitment to fostering intercultural understanding, English language teachers can play a vital role in shaping a more interconnected and harmonious global community.

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REFRAMING ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING THROUGH INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION

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In today's increasingly interconnected world the traditional models of English Language Teaching (ELT) which prioritize linguistic competence often prove insufficient for equipping students with the specific skills and heightened awareness necessary for effective intercultural interaction. In our work we aim to demonstrate that the conscious and systematic integration of the principles and practices of

intercultural communication (IC) is not merely an additional enhancement, but a critically important pedagogical imperative. Such integration undoubtedly enhances students' overall communicative competence, develops essential intercultural competence, and ultimately prepares them for meaningful and effective participation in diverse global contexts.

Today's world demands a fundamental paradigm shift in ELT - one that moves beyond a singular, often narrow focus on linguistic competence and embraces intercultural communication as an indispensable and non-negotiable component of effective language education. While the foundational importance of grammatical accuracy and lexical acquisition remains unchanged, linguistic knowledge alone is clearly insufficient to prepare students for the complexities of communication, where cultural contexts profoundly shape meaning-making and interaction dynamics.

A lack of intercultural awareness can lead to communicative breakdowns, misunderstandings rooted in divergent cultural norms, and even the perpetuation of harmful stereotypes - thus severely hampering effective intercultural engagement. Therefore, the development of intercultural competence - conceptualized as the demonstrated ability to interact effectively and appropriately in diverse cultural environments - has risen to paramount importance in ELT.

The deliberate and systematic integration of robust intercultural communication principles and empirically supported activities into ELT practices significantly enhances students' holistic communicative competence and prepares them more effectively for meaningful intercultural engagement.

To achieve meaningful integration of intercultural communication into ELT, a deep understanding of its foundational theoretical elements is essential. Intercultural communication fundamentally involves a necessary set of knowledge, skills, and attitudes that enable individuals to interact effectively and appropriately with people from different cultural backgrounds. In this context, the concept of culture transcends simplistic notions of nationality and encompasses a complex network of shared

values, deeply embedded beliefs, established behavioral norms, and characteristic interaction patterns within various social groups.

Cultural norms represent implicitly understood and socially sanctioned standards of behavior within a given cultural community, while values refer to deeply held and often emotionally charged beliefs about what is morally good, ethically correct, or inherently desirable. Beliefs in this context constitute fundamental assumptions about the nature of the world and how it operates, while communication styles include the various verbal and non-verbal patterns of interaction that vary significantly across cultural contexts. A lack of deep understanding of these fundamental cultural elements can easily result in major cultural misunderstandings and serious communicative failures - even when students exhibit relatively high levels of linguistic competence. For example, differing cultural expectations regarding directness in communication, culturally influenced interpretations of silence, or culture-specific use of non-verbal cues such as eye contact can easily lead to misinterpretations, interpersonal conflicts, and strained relationships.

Moreover, effective IC integration into ELT goes beyond the mere didactic transmission of superficial information about different cultures. Instead, it demands the cultivation of students' internal capacity for deep self-awareness, enabling them to critically examine and understand their own culturally shaped frameworks in comparison with those of others, and crucially to strategically adapt their communicative repertoire and interaction strategies accordingly. Promoting self-awareness involves actively encouraging learners to critically reflect on their own often unconscious cultural biases and assumptions, thereby recognizing that their culturally normative behavioral patterns and communication styles are neither universally applicable nor inherently superior.

This introspective process fosters a range of essential intercultural skills, including:

- *Empathy* – the cognitive and affective ability to understand and vicariously experience another person's feelings and perspectives;

- *Tolerance* – the active acceptance and respectful consideration of diverse viewpoints and behavioral norms;
- *Flexibility* – the ability to adapt one's behavior and communication style in response to varying cultural contexts;
- *Active listening* – a focused and engaged approach to understanding both the explicit verbal content and the implicit non-verbal cues of another person's message.

Furthermore, considering the growing role of English as a global lingua franca in many intercultural interactions, modern ELT must also strategically equip students with the necessary skills to navigate the diverse linguistic landscapes of World Englishes and the varying communication styles used by speakers from a wide range of linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

Effective integration of intercultural communication principles requires a fundamental shift in traditional pedagogical practices - from teacher-centered, grammar-translation methodologies to more learner-centered, communicative, and experience-based approaches. The strategic use of authentic materials - such as carefully selected texts, engaging video resources, and diverse audio recordings sourced directly from a range of cultural contexts - clearly exposes learners to a broader spectrum of perspectives, nuanced communication styles, and implicit cultural features than do conventional, often culturally sanitized, textbook materials.

Fostering structured intercultural comparisons through well-designed discussions and analytical tasks actively encourages learners to identify both striking similarities and significant differences between their own cultural frameworks and those of others. This promotes a deeper and more nuanced understanding of the relative nature of cultural norms and values. The implementation of well-crafted role-plays and simulations provides ethically grounded, pedagogically valuable, safe spaces and engaging environments for students to actively practice navigating simulated intercultural interactions, strategically experiment with different communicative strategies, and iteratively develop their vital adaptive skills in low-

risk settings. Such activities effectively encourage students to critically analyze core cultural factors and develop their higher-order analytical and problem-solving abilities in authentic intercultural scenarios.

Inviting knowledgeable guest speakers from diverse cultural backgrounds to share their lived experiences, or participating in carefully structured virtual exchange programs with students from other countries, offers invaluable opportunities for direct, meaningful interaction and organic development of intercultural understanding through personal, experiential learning.

Finally, the implementation of culturally sensitive language analysis entails explicit exploration of how language use subtly reflects core cultural values and deeply embedded norms. This includes culturally influenced variations in politeness strategies, culturally defined levels of directness or indirectness in communication, and culture-specific use of particular linguistic markers that carry significant, often implicit, cultural weight.

Online collaboration platforms can be effectively used for carefully designed joint projects that intentionally bring together students from diverse cultural backgrounds - thus fostering direct interaction, encouraging shared learning experiences, and developing intercultural understanding through collaborative meaning-making. The strategic use of videoconferencing and well-structured virtual exchange programs offers synchronous, real-time opportunities for meaningful intercultural dialogue and the organic development of vital communication skills in diverse virtual environments. Furthermore, the creative co-construction and thoughtful exchange of digital stories and engaging multimedia projects enable students to express and share their own unique cultural perspectives while learning about those of others in a compelling, multimodal, and often deeply personal way. Thus, technology serves as a powerful and increasingly indispensable tool for effectively bridging geographical distances and facilitating meaningful and productive intercultural encounters within the ELT context.

To conclude, the central pedagogical aim of thoughtfully integrating intercultural communication into ELT is the development of robust intercultural competence in students. Key components of this multifaceted competence include a clear set of skills and supportive value orientations that are essential for effective and appropriate intercultural communication. In this context, knowledge entails a deep understanding of diverse cultural values, deeply rooted beliefs, various communication styles, fundamental social structures, and relevant historical contexts that significantly shape intercultural interactions. Skills encompass a wide range of practical and visible abilities, including active listening, empathy, adaptability, flexibility, tolerance of ambiguity, heightened awareness of non-verbal communication, and effective conflict resolution strategies specifically in intercultural contexts.

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