

Teachers' Perception and Practices of Intercultural Communicative Competence Integration in the EFL Classroom: A Systematic Literature Review

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ABSTRACT

Intercultural communicative competence stands as a cornerstone in modern English as a Foreign Language education, playing a pivotal role in nurturing learners' abilities to navigate diverse cultural landscapes. This systematic review meticulously examines the perspectives and practices of EFL educators in integrating intercultural communicative competence into language teaching, drawing insights from a comprehensive analysis of diverse studies across global contexts. The systematic review employed Gough and Newman's methodology. The findings underscore a discrepancy between teachers' positive perceptions and practices in integrating intercultural communicative competence into the EFL classroom. Besides, we highlight the responsibility of educators in fostering inclusive learning environments that empower learners with the indispensable skills for successful cross-cultural communication in an interconnected world.

1. Introduction

English has emerged as the primary means of interaction and communication among individuals from other cultures worldwide in response to the increasing need for globalization. They interact with individuals from diverse nations and cultural backgrounds (Byram & Wagner, 2018). In today's globalized world, English is vital in promoting cross-cultural communication. A crucial ability for language learners is intercultural communicative competence as emphasized by Byram and Wenger (2018). It alludes to the capacity for successful interaction and communication with people from various cultural backgrounds. The absence of emphasis on Intercultural Communicative Competence (henceforth abbreviated as ICC, or just IC) in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) training could potentially lead to learners displaying cultural insensitivity or ethnocentrism. This may lead to the formation of preconceptions, prejudice, or incorrect conduct when interacting with

others from different cultural backgrounds. The lack of ICC could prevent the cultivation of open-mindedness and the capacity to value cultural disparities, both of which are vital components of successful intercultural communication. ICC has been regarded as a core component of language instruction in English Language Teaching. Intercultural communication in education aims to explore social, cultural, and political aspects of language (Dombi, 2021).

Learning a language involves delving into its linguistics and culture or gaining exposure to various cultures that are different. Therefore, language instruction must thus cover more than just the language's grammar. When teaching or learning a new language, it is essential to have a comprehensive understanding of how the language is used in social contexts that necessitate an awareness of many cultures. Byram and Wenger (2018) further highlighted a parallel concern, specifically that English language learners must be guided toward achieving proficiency in intercultural competence. Therefore, it is fundamental for teachers to step into the role of facilitators and intercultural mediators, serving as intermediaries between different cultures and their own cultures (Czura, 2016).

Accordingly, embracing intercultural learning is an essential component of EFL instruction. It is essential for EFL teachers to foster their students' intercultural communicative competence in the classroom since there is an evolving pattern in language education towards an emphasis on these abilities (Toscu & Erten, 2020; Iswandari & Ardi, 2022). Intercultural communicative competence refers to the ability to effectively and appropriately communicate and interact with individuals from diverse cultures in intercultural situations, based on their knowledge, skills, and attitudes (Bultseva & Lebedeva, 2019; Pinto, 2018; Wolff & Borzikowsky, 2018; Byram et al., 2002; Deardorff, 2004). It involves adapting and responding appropriately to their behaviors, attitudes, and expectations (Byram, 2021). ICC has grown significantly in a globalized world because it helps students handle cross-cultural settings and gain a deeper understanding and appreciation of other cultures. Since language reflects culture, language, and culture are inextricably linked and impact one another. In relation to the essential role of ICC, EFL educators must possess expertise in the subject matter and teaching methodologies and an understanding of cross-cultural perspectives. EFL instructors who possess an excellent ICC are better equipped to manage classroom differences and respond in a way that minimizes cultural disparities (Megawati et al., 2020).

The emphasis on teachers' perceptions of ICC is critical since teachers' perspectives directly influence instructional practices. Understanding how teachers perceive and understand ICC can offer valuable insights into the potential obstacles and attitudes that could influence their teaching techniques. It is crucial to explore the practical aspects at the same time to connect theoretical frameworks with practical applications. Investigating how teachers integrate ICC into their teaching methods uncovers obstacles and successes, providing valuable explanations for enhancing ICC growth. Acknowledging the significance of ICC in English Language Teaching (ELT), this research aims to perform a comprehensive review of empirical studies conducted in EFL contexts examining in-service teachers' intercultural communicative proficiency. This study aims to uncover the perception and cognition of teachers, as well as their practices in integrating ICC in their English classroom, as reported in research articles. Within the field of current research on ICC in ELT, a thorough analysis uncovers a substantial gap regarding a comprehensive evaluation of both perception and practical aspects among teachers. Although there have been studies on teachers'

perspectives and classroom practices separately, there has been limited exploration of the integration of both factors in a systematic approach. The findings of this study can provide valuable insights for promoting ICC in EFL classes. The results are anticipated to provide a more coherent understanding of the current theoretical and pedagogical challenges regarding in-service EFL teachers' ICC, making a valuable contribution to EFL teacher education and the professional development of in-service teachers.

Research Questions

1. Based on the literature study, how do EFL teachers perceive the components and importance of ICC integration in English classrooms?
2. Based on the literature study, how do teachers practice in integrating ICC into their classrooms?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Perception of ICC in ELT

In English language teaching, perception of ICC refers to how teachers understand and interpret the significance and efficacy of intercultural communication skills in relation to language learning and usage. In addition, Ou (2017) provides comprehensive insights into the notion of perception, which includes the cognitive process of conceptualizing and imagining objects or ideas, the sensory experience of perceiving things through senses such as sight and hearing, and the inherent ability to comprehend or notice things swiftly. Ellis & Newton (2005) argued that perception is a significant psychological aspect that substantially influences individuals' behavior and actions and it is not merely a response to external stimuli but a process of generating new experiences. According to Good (2006) Perception is comprised of two components, which the process of dividing is based on the nature of attitude, namely the affecting qualities. First, perception appears as attitude (therefore, perception becomes affective). Furthermore, creative perception. The first one mainly discusses attitude, whereas the second one is focused on creating something. The instructional decisions were influenced by educators' pedagogical ideas and linguistic, cultural, educational, and political issues. Understanding and settling cultural differences, being sensitive to different points of view, and being able to communicate properly and successfully across cultural boundaries are all components of intercultural competency. Chronologically, the subsequent part provides the findings of several studies that investigated the beliefs, attitudes, and perceptions of English classroom teachers regarding the incorporation of ICC.

Additionally, within the Indonesian context, research has been undertaken on the interconnectedness of culture and language. Kusumaningputri and Widodo (2018) conducted the first study, which investigated the potential advantages of photograph-mediated intercultural tasks in raising university EFL students' critical cultural awareness. The study suggested the strategic utilization of culturally rich educational materials, which allows students to gain a deeper comprehension of their cultural viewpoints and establish connections with the perspectives of others. Reid (2015) presented various techniques for developing ICC, comprising the comparison method, cultural assimilation, cultural capsule, drama, Total Physical Response, cultural island, reformulation, noticing, treasure hunt, prediction, role plays, research, songs, games, portfolio, and educational trips. These techniques should be considered for students to acquire ICC. In a recent study, Munandar

and Newton (2021) assessed the pedagogical beliefs and practices of Indonesian EFL instructors on the teaching and learning of culture and interculturality in high-school EFL classrooms. The study indicates that teachers acknowledged the correlation between language and culture but encountered difficulties directly addressing and contrasting sociolinguistic characteristics between English and local languages. The lack of a clear discussion of cultural elements during class demonstrated an inconsistency between the teacher's stated perspectives on culture and their implementation in the classroom. The researchers further discussed that teachers intentionally included culturally relevant topics in their classes to ensure linguistically and culturally suitable resources for students. They connected classroom subjects to students' lives by emphasizing local culture.

Ultimately, how intercultural communicative competence is considered in English language classrooms impacts curriculum design, teaching strategies, and the overall learning process, all of which help to produce well-rounded language learners who can successfully navigate a variety of cultural contexts. While most of the previous research indicated that English teachers recognized the need for ICC in the English classroom, a few were reluctant to incorporate it as part of their teaching methods. This could be attributed to a lack of knowledge or experience with cultural elements in the English classroom.

2.2 ICC

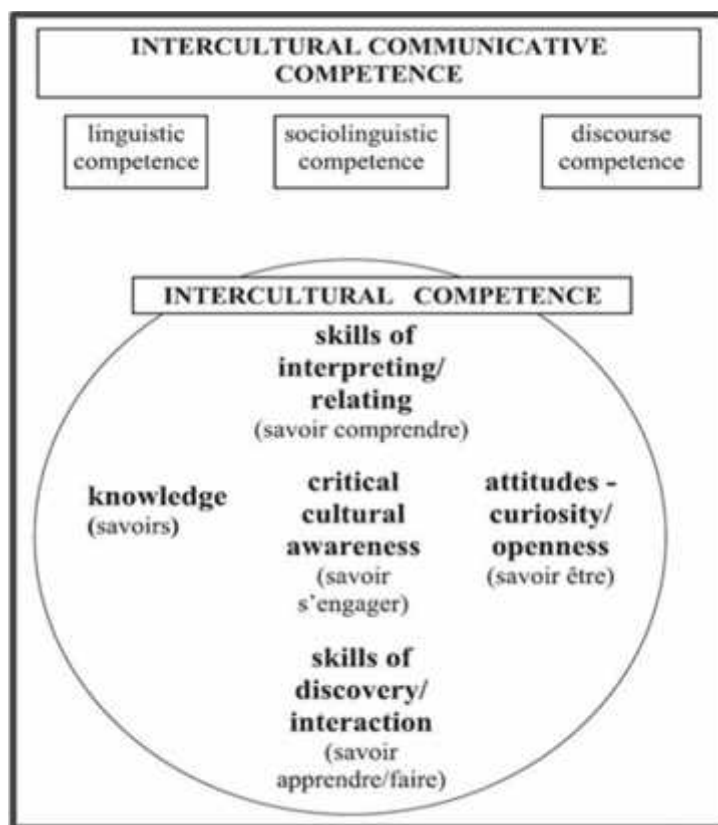
The practice of native speakerism (N), which involves giving priority to native speakers over non-native speakers, has faced criticism for its role in creating biases and restricting opportunities for individuals learning a language. Prioritizing ICC addresses these challenges by stressing the capacity to understand and communicate effectively in a variety of cultural situations, regardless of whether the speaker is native or non-native (NN). This shift facilitates inclusiveness, reduces linguistic biases, and cultivates a more equitable and more interconnected communication environment. ICC has garnered more attention from ELT experts and instructors worldwide over the past ten years. Xu, Hao, and Huennekens (2016) examined the necessity and significance of such pre-service ICC instruction. They investigate how a graduate-level course on cultural perspectives affects the IC competency of aspiring special education teachers. The results show no discernible variation in the pre-service teachers' general level of intercultural sensitivity. However, this research supports the need to grow cultural understanding and awareness. There are several ICC definitions by experts: Despite the idea that ICC has only recently been introduced to the field of second or foreign language education, some recent studies that are based on ICC premises have raised doubts about the effectiveness of communicative competence-oriented teacher training programs in raising language teachers' intercultural awareness (Czura 2016). Furthermore, Brunsmeier (2017) and Corder et al. (2018) are the two instances of this research that highlight how ineffective teacher preparation programs are at equipping teachers with concrete conceptualizations of ICC and instructional techniques for ICC development. Conversely, the latter speaks of "the capacity to communicate in their own language with individuals from different cultures" (Byram, 2021, p. 96).

To interact with individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds, foreign language learners need to possess both intercultural and communicative competence. ICC is the outcome of combining as a model to create an intercultural speaker who can use a foreign language in intercultural communication in an acceptable way, according to Byram (1997, 2021). both

intercultural and communication competence. The ability "to interact with people from another social group in another language" (p. 97) is what Byram (2021) defines as ICC. Therefore, individuals who are learning a foreign language and have a high ICC can effectively communicate in the target language with people from varied cultural backgrounds because they combine their linguistic, sociolinguistic, and discourse competencies in language use and have a more excellent grasp of both their own and other people's cultural viewpoints.

Byram's (2021) first model of intercultural communication competency is generally accepted and utilized as a reference by instructors of foreign languages to advance the ICC of learners. The information, abilities, and attitudes necessary for effective cross-cultural communication are included in the model's conceptualization of intercultural communicative competence. Additionally, information Byram's (1997, 2021) shared model comprises interconnected components such as knowledge (knowledge of self and other, knowledge of interaction), *savoir comprendre* (skills of interpreting and relating), *savoir apprendre/faire* (skills of discovering and/or interacting), *savoir être* (relativizing self, valuing other), and *savoir s'engager* (political education, critical cultural awareness).

Figure. 1 Intercultural Communicative Competence by Byram (2021)



The first element, *savoir*, described as the comprehension of "social groups and their products and practices in one's own and one's interlocutor's country, and of the general processes of societal and individual interaction," reflects the knowledge dimension (Byram, 2021, p. 85). Students must comprehend both their own and other cultures. They acquire understanding through the socialization process in their family, culture, and formal schooling. Second, the ability to "interpret a document or event from another culture, to explain it and relate it to

documents from one's own" is the second component, or *savoir comprendre* (Byram, 2021, p. 87). The ability of learners to interpret and relate depends on their prior knowledge of both their own and other cultures. As a result, they could recognize the shared features and distinctions between civilizations. The third, *savoir apprendre/faire*, is the capacity to operate knowledge, attitudes, and skills under real-time communication and interaction constraints and acquire new knowledge of a culture and cultural practices" (Byram, 2021, p. 88). Students discover cultural meanings and values through interaction and discovery skills. Therefore, because they are more aware of their own and other people's cultural viewpoints, foreign language learners with high ICC are better equipped to converse with other culturally varied individuals in the target language. and incorporate their discourse, sociolinguistic, and linguistic skills into their language use.

3. Research Methodology

A systematic review is a research methodology that involves discovering and evaluating relevant research, as well as collecting and analyzing data from that research (Liberati et al., 2009). In research methodology, critical review refers to evaluating and deriving meaning from research findings, publications, or other literature from an impartial and perceptive viewpoint. It attempts to evaluate the caliber, applicability, and validity of previous research while emphasizing the advantages and disadvantages of the studies. To deal with the research problems mentioned earlier, this study has undertaken a systematic review employing a methodology that synthesizes data obtained from original research. The researchers meticulously adhered to the procedures and methods outlined in the Newman and Gough (2020) systematic review, employing a scientific and rigorous approach specifically designed for the subject of education.

Figure. 2 Research Methodology steps according to Newman and Gough (2020)



1. Developing Research Question.

A research team collaborated with a mentor professor to formulate the research topic for this systematic review. The idea arose from the interconnected nature of language and culture, known as ICC. We recognized the crucial role that ICCs play in EFL courses. Furthermore, the inclusion of cultural elements is vital for comprehensive comprehension when teaching language. The educator plays a crucial role in conveying linguistic information and cultural comprehension. Therefore, from 2016 to 2023, our objective was to examine the current state of research on how teachers perceive and put into practice the incorporation of ICC in both local and international settings. To provide a comprehensive analysis, we have broadened the scope of the topic to encompass other aspects such as the objective, emphasis, findings, structure, and approaches employed in the studies deemed essential for this systematic review.

2. Designing Conceptual Framework.

The conceptual framework is created to place ICC within the context of language education paradigms. Our conceptual framework was developed from extensive research on ICC integration conducted both domestically and abroad. Subsequently, our attention was directed to Teachers' perceptions and practice on integrating ICC research conducted specifically in the setting of English classrooms, including English as a Foreign Language. To establish a theoretical basis, we thoroughly examine existing literature on intercultural communicative competence, language acquisition, pedagogy, and multicultural education.

3. Constructing Selection Criteria

Prior to developing the search strategy, the inclusion and exclusion criteria were established in accordance with the systematic review guidelines proposed by Newman and Gough (2020). Consequently, we developed a set of parameters for our study by looking at other systematic reviews in the context of ICC by Iswandari and Ardi (2022).

Table 1: displays the organization of the inclusion and exclusion criteria.

| The studies were included if... | The studies were excluded if..... |
|---|---|
| They were published between 2016 and 2023 | They were theses, dissertations, and unpublished research reports |
| They were empirical and published as peer-reviewed articles in journals | They were published before 2016 |
| They were researched in the EFL/ESL classroom | They were published in books |
| They had school (primary, secondary, and tertiary) education as an aim | They were based on EAP |

4. Developing a search strategy

To guarantee accuracy and reliability, we conducted experiments using several search techniques. A meticulous search strategy, including suitable keywords and regulated vocabulary, is devised to encompass all possible aspects of intercultural communication competence, interculturality, language education, and teacher perspectives and practices. A wide range of academic databases, relevant journals, and literature sources are selected to ensure thorough coverage. Therefore, we exclusively utilized the fundamental terms in specific databases. We searched for the integration of ICC in EFL using electronic databases such as SCOPUS, Semantic Scholar, Scimago, ERIC, ELICIT, and Google Scholar.

5. Selecting studies using selection criteria

The meticulous implementation of prior requirements was used to optimize the selection process, ensuring that only research that met the required features was considered appropriate for inclusion. The methodological rigor employed in this systematic review aims to improve the relevance and consistency of the study, ensuring it follows to established standards. After conducting a thorough search on electronic databases, a total of 32 publications were found that focused on Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC). These articles were recognized by their research-oriented and methodical approach. Afterwards, the researchers carefully reduced the number of options to 21 publications. After doing a comprehensive study, the focus was narrowed down to a specific subset of 10 articles. These selected articles focused on the perceptions and practices of EFL teachers in incorporating Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) into the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom. This methodical approach ensures the incorporation of studies that make a significant contribution to the comprehension of ICC in the educational setting, strengthening the scholarly foundation for our research.

6. Coding Studies:

A careful data extraction and coding procedure for identifying suitable studies is required. The chosen literature is subjected to a systematic analysis, which includes identifying and extracting relevant information regarding the perspectives and practices of English teachers in incorporating intercultural communicative competence in their classrooms. Coding requires systematically organizing qualitative and quantitative data, emphasizing key themes such as teachers' cognition of ICC, interculturality, teaching pedagogy, and encountering difficulties. This approach enables the systematic organization and comparison of varied findings among researchers, facilitating the identification of repeating patterns, contradictions, and gaps within the existing body of literature.

7. Assessing the Quality of Studies:

In order to ascertain the validity and reliability of the synthesized evidence. This evaluation involves applying defined criteria to each included study's methodological credibility and validity. The trustworthiness of data-gathering methods, researcher reflexivity, and the coherence between findings and interpretations are all scrutinized in qualitative research. The appropriateness of research methods and measurements,

statistical analysis, and sample representativeness are a few factors affecting the quality of quantitative studies. A thorough evaluation strategy is used for mixed-methods studies, considering the strengths and limits of both qualitative and quantitative components. This rigorous assessment guarantees that only research with good methodological quality contributes to the synthesized findings, reducing biases and increasing the accuracy of the review's conclusions.

8. Synthesizing Findings:

An analysis of the combined data from the chosen studies is done to find common themes, differences, and new trends in how English teachers perceive and integrate intercultural communication skills into their language teaching. This synthesis aims to offer a comprehensive understanding of the current landscape in the field. Finding main themes, sub-themes, and trends in the literature is part of the iterative process. This synthesis clearly shows the ICC's role and examines the details, conflicts, and gaps in what is already known. The synthesis gives a solid base for understanding the complexities surrounding English teachers' practices in fostering intercultural communicative competence. It also helps us come to useful conclusions and suggestions for future work.

9. Reporting Findings:

The systematic review findings follow established reporting guidelines. The report includes sections on introduction, literature review, methodology, results and discussion, and conclusion to present a coherent narrative of English teachers' perceptions and practices concerning intercultural communicative competence integration in language teaching.

4. Findings

To respond to the research questions, the researchers created and investigated the following themes: teachers' perceptions and teachers' practices in integrating intercultural communicative competence in EFL classrooms. As mentioned in the methodology, the researcher focused on 10 studies which represent the context of both EFL teachers' perceptions and practices of integrating ICC in global framework.

Table 2. The empirical article on EFL teachers' perception and practices on ICC integration

| No | Sample Articles | Teachers' Perceptions | Teachers' Practices |
|----|-----------------------------------|--|---|
| 1. | Batunan, Kweldju & Wulyani (2023) | Indonesians' teachers are unfamiliar with the notion of ICC. | Teachers primarily emphasized linguistic features in their lessons, utilizing actual resources from inside nations. |
| 2. | Ghavamnia (2020) | Iranian EFL teachers possessed an awareness of the necessity of incorporating culture teaching in their classes. | The primary focus of the teachers in class was to teach linguistic knowledge with no regard for cultural understanding. |
| 3. | Sobkowiak (2021) | The EFL teachers in Poland showed favorable attitudes towards intercultural teaching and | They put interculturality in second place and focused on developing |

| | | | |
|-----|----------------------------------|--|---|
| | | showed a satisfactory level of expertise on the subject. | linguistic and sociolinguistic competence. |
| 4. | Safa & Tofighi (2021) | EFL teachers held positive attitudes and inclinations toward the development and incorporation of ICC in their foreign language classes. | Teachers performed an imbalance of willingness to incorporate ICC into their teaching practices. |
| 5. | Munandar & Newton (2021) | Indonesian educators acknowledged the connection between language and culture. | As intercultural mediators, teachers have a limited role in facilitating students' intentional and open exploration of cultural topics. |
| 6. | Tajeddin & Rezanejad (2019) | The teachers thought that the inclusion of ICC in language courses was essential and beneficial for the learners. | The teachers lacked confidence in their ability to incorporate language and culture effectively in their language classroom. |
| 7. | Vo (2017) | Vietnamese educators possess an extensive awareness of intercultural communication proficiency in the context of teaching the English language. | The frequency of ICC implementation remains relatively low for most teachers. |
| 8. | Banjingjit & Boonmoh (2018) | Teachers perceived intercultural competency as having an awareness of cultural diversity and the ability to communicate with individuals from diverse cultures in an appropriate and effective manner. | Teacher made efforts to enhance students' ICC. However, some of them reported uncertainty in applying ICC concepts in classes. |
| 9. | Czura (2016) | The participants were able to formulate definitions of ICC. | They were unable to choose educational methods and resources that could enhance intercultural understanding in the school setting. |
| 10. | Nguyen, Harvey, and Grant (2016) | the teachers believed that teaching cultural aspects was not essential | Teachers given a limited amount of time for cultural education. |

A study conducted in Indonesian context by Batunan, Kweldju & Wulyani (2023). This study has focused on the lack of evidence on instructors' perception and teaching methods related to interculturality, specifically beyond cultural backgrounds centered around Java. The research findings demonstrated that teachers possess a neutral comprehension of interculturality and their education largely focuses on improving students' language competency using resources influenced by the Anglophone culture. To enhance intercultural understanding among students from different locations, it is recommended to incorporate online collaborative meetings into regular English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classes. This research emphasizes significant consequences that should be considered for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction. Initially, it is necessary to organize additional training sessions and intercultural interactions to assist teachers in effectively integrating many cultures into their teaching methods and familiarize them with various cultural backgrounds. Teacher education institutes must incorporate and promote for the inclusion of interculturality.

According to Ghavamnia (2020), Iranian EFL teachers prioritized teaching culture over language, believing that "culture teaching" must be incorporated into English classrooms since language and culture cannot be separated. However, the study found that despite their awareness of the ICC incorporation, the teacher did not perform intercultural teaching, and language, not culture, was mainly taught in class. Stated differently, 80% of the class time was devoted to teaching languages. The teachers' statement that one of the challenges preventing them from imparting cultural knowledge in the classroom was a lack of time was the study's second key conclusion. Therefore, to encourage teachers to set aside time for this aspect, the Ministry of Education should incorporate "culture teaching" into the curriculum for English teachers. Additionally, they ought to offer content that comprises cultural details for university and language school English classes. The educators remarked that there was no focus on "culture teaching" in teacher preparation courses. The focus of decision-makers in teacher education should shift to cultural teaching, a new area of study. This results from the requirement that teachers teach the content outlined in a predetermined syllabus created in advance. As a result, EFL instructors are not allowed to conduct themselves in any way when teaching English. Though they encounter challenges, educators know how important it is to incorporate cultural education into their lessons. Addressing these issues and challenges is the duty of educators and those in charge of making decisions in the field of education. Therefore, future research on issues pertaining to cultural teaching resources, methods, and time for doing so in English lessons is necessary if EFL teachers are to successfully include culture in their classes.

Teachers need to proactively design approaches to foster ICC in the classroom. In addition to external solutions, educators have an essential position to play. Prioritizing cultural understanding through diverse information, open discussions, and exposure to cultural objects produces an inclusive environment. Implementing a pedagogical method that focuses on the needs and interests of individual learners from various backgrounds improves their level of involvement and participation. Practical experiences in intercultural communication are offered through real-world scenarios and participatory activities. Continuous professional development ensures that instructors remain proficient in promoting intercultural communicative competence. By employing these strategies, educators give a substantial contribution to fostering individuals in their classrooms who possess a strong understanding of global issues and are sensitive to different cultures.

The practice of intercultural education was a hotly debated subject among Polish educators; according to Sobkowiak (2021), most respondents considered ICC to be applicable in EFL classrooms and to be a benefit in an increasingly globalized society. The respondents prioritized the development of linguistic and sociolinguistic abilities over interculturality, relegating the latter to a supporting role. Practically speaking, there was a lack of emphasis in the participants' classrooms on instructional strategies that encourage students to think critically. Despite their efforts, teachers rarely use specially created pedagogical interventions to improve students' intercultural comprehension intentionally. According to the accounts provided by the respondents, instruction frequently focused on exposing pupils to various cultures, which led to declarative knowledge being passively imparted to them. Unfortunately, it seems that educators are limited in what they can do to provide useful scaffolding for students' intercultural development, given the context in which they work, their limitations, and the absence of training and support. The results of this investigation

have obvious consequences for textbook authors, school administrators, organizations in charge of teacher preparation in various contexts, and EFL teachers in Poland. First, one unique feature of the EFL curriculum should be the development of students' ICC. Second, the performance of pupils on the final exam, which still evaluates rigid, monolingual native speaker norms and proficiency and ignores the intercultural perspective, should not be the only criteria used to evaluate instructors' work. Third, there should be a greater emphasis on interculturality in instructional materials. These resources should include exercises and assignments encouraging students to critically and reflectively investigate and evaluate different cultures despite the evident cultural divides. A method like this would make it possible to examine and combat oversimplified stereotypes, biases, and prejudices, which impede rather than promote cross-cultural learning.

Safa & Tofighi (2021) also presented the EFL beliefs and practices of the teachers. Their research revealed that the teachers believed ICC should be used in foreign language classes and supported its use in their instructional practices. However, observing their teaching methods revealed how ineffectively they were implementing ICC in their learning environments. The way that teachers' instructional practices deviated from their ideas about ICC suggests that their knowledge of ICC was primarily theoretical and that they were not sufficiently motivated to apply ICC to their pedagogical activities. In light of the result, the researchers believe they have good reason to assert that EFL teachers' teaching experience and teacher training programs enhanced their theoretical and professional growth. ICC's importance and effectiveness in foreign language education programs, but they lacked the pedagogical knowledge and commitment they needed to incorporate it into their instruction. The author's analysis also revealed that the length of time EFL teachers had taught had not much impact on their ICC opinions. The lack of variations between pre-service and in-service English as a Second Language instructors that have been shown may suggest that the change in EFL teachers' attitudes about ICC development is not related to the teaching experience of in-service teachers. This concept goes beyond support in light of the established absence of any discernible variation in ICC beliefs between EFL teachers with different degrees of expertise. However, this study starkly contrasts the inference that the EFL teachers' ICC beliefs are unaffected by their teaching experience. It means that Iranian teacher education programs must pay closer attention to incorporating the intercultural aspect of foreign language instruction. Stated differently, there needs to be a significant overhaul of EFL teacher preparation programs concerning developing potential foreign language instructors' cross-cultural proficiency.

Additionally, the policies which represent the nation's underlying ideology have an impact on teachers' judgments of other people's languages and cultural beliefs, which in turn has a significant impact on how they establish language and culture in the classroom. This worldview may not work well with an intercultural approach when teachers are expected to challenge national or cultural stereotypes and refrain from equating cultures with nations Munandar & Newton (2021). The teachers' cultural views and practices were significantly impacted by the alignment of their individual religious and cultural backgrounds with Indonesian state policy on the one hand, patriotism, education, language, and religion on the other. It is impossible to regard these policies as objective and free of ideological motivations. According to these perspectives and inside the character education framework, the educators aimed to foster students' sense of national, cultural, and religious identity while

emphasizing the community's moral, religious, and cultural values. By employing this in order to negotiate and navigate the occasionally contradictory values and practices normally connected with English, they displayed active agency in their sketching. Focusing on local knowledge, languages, and customs is necessary for this. Declared beliefs and observed classroom behaviors illustrate the educators' intricate understanding of the concept of culture and interculturality as well as the situatedness of EFL teaching within the everyday lives and perspectives of instructors and learners, as lived both within and outside the classroom. But there wasn't much in the instructors' perceptions consistent with the practice. The observed classroom lessons lacked an open and guided discussion of culture. Raising awareness of the unconscious integration of the language and culture requires a sustained, deliberate effort. It is the duty of educators to foster critical receptivity and increase students' understanding of the cultural significance of local knowledge, languages, and practices. Teachers' responsibilities include bridging cultural gaps, arbitrating disputes between opposing points of view, and identifying how culturally formed frames of knowledge affect target and home speech groups' communicative behaviors. Rather than trying to hide these disparities, instructors and students must carefully investigate similarities, areas of agreement, and obvious connections with persons from different cultural backgrounds.

Apart from that, the study by Tajeddin and Rezanejad (2019) revealed that most teachers (60%) believed that teaching culture was essential for intercultural language instruction. They believed culture and language were inextricably linked and could not be separated. This survey clarified the instructors' opinions regarding the significance of teaching cultural subjects. It was discovered that a sizable portion of the educators supported the idea of teaching culture broadly. Nevertheless, as they lacked confidence in their abilities to properly handle implementation-related challenges or integrate language and culture, several teachers' replies throughout the interviews suggested some doubt about the premise of ICLT. These findings imply that, as teachers' views would influence their practices in the classroom, more thought needs to be given to ICLT-related concerns while creating a language teacher education curriculum in order to equip teachers with the skills and knowledge they require. As a result, educators must restructure their intercultural knowledge and practices, which is only possible through ongoing professional development and instruction. Language instructors must become proficient in various methodical approaches to combining language and culture. They require expert assistance in considering their ideas and perceptions about ICLT. Many educators may believe that teaching culture is a waste of time because it could help students improve their language skills, and they may not see themselves as accountable for assisting students in developing intercultural competence. However, effective ICC education for language teachers is a prerequisite for producing interculturally competent language learners.

Vo (2017) conducted a study among Vietnamese educators on intercultural communication competency in English language teaching, and the results showed that ICC is essential for enhancing language acquisition through cultural awareness. Lecturers widely advocated for integrating diverse cultural perspectives into language learning, with 94% emphasizing its significance. Similarly, 86% highlighted the value of teaching English while exposing students to varied cultural viewpoints. However, contrasting opinions surfaced on methodologies for enhancing students' ICC within English classes. The study revealed a prevalent trend of low-frequency implementation of ICC activities among most teachers, with approximately 50%

engaging in such activities occasionally or rarely. Specific ICC methodologies like pair work discussions (56.7%), group discussions (90.4%), and role-play exercises (67.3%) were acknowledged but executed sporadically. Challenges impeding ICC development included limited time for integration (82.2%), a scarcity of culturally relevant teaching materials (55.1%), and insufficient foreign contexts for communication (55.1%). Internal barriers like inadequate understanding of teaching cultures (42.1%) and lack of training (36.4%) were also noted. Despite acknowledging the efficacy of specific ICC activities, lecturers perceived insignificance regarding their execution in English classrooms. Participants in the interviews also mentioned curricular constraints, student readiness, time allocation for English instruction, and prior teaching experience in ICC as additional difficulties. These results highlight the contradiction between the ICC's perceived value and its patchy integration, illuminating significant obstacles to Vietnamese teachers' successful use of ICC in EFL classes.

The research by Banjongjit (2018) focused into how educators believe about ICC and what approaches they apply to get teachers enthusiastic about applying it to EFL classes. Based on Dearsorff's ICC framework (2006), the results showed that teachers viewed ICC as the objective external effect (communication skills) and interact with individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds in an effective and appropriate manner), knowledge (understanding both their own and other cultures), necessary attitude (cultural awareness, openness, and respect for cultural diversity), and skills (listening, observing, evaluating, and interpreting). ICC was not viewed by any of them as the intended internal result (having empathy, flexibility, adaptability, and an unrelative viewpoint). Three primary categories developed from the techniques that teachers utilized to support ICC in the classroom: teacher-centered strategies, student-centered strategies, and strategies requiring cooperation from both teachers and students. The preferred methods that a large number of educators employed to encourage ICC uses role-playing, reading aloud to pupils, and sharing anecdotes from teachers' firsthand experiences. Based on the teachers' observations, role-playing is the best approach to enhance ICC. Teachers additionally talked about the difficulties they face in promoting ICC. Several of them have to do with the uniform experiences and backgrounds of the kids. In addition, curriculum, time, resources, and instructors present additional difficulties in advancing ICC. The participants expressed a need for greater assistance in all areas, particularly with regard to curriculum clarification on ICC principles and ICC evaluation. They emphasized further those tools for support and teacher training could be beneficial to their future teaching.

In a study conducted by Czura (2016), the researcher explored student teachers' perceptions of ICC in a second language (L2) classroom. The study also aimed to determine if their chosen field of study influenced the student teachers' attitudes. The study included 162 prospective undergraduate English teachers from three departments at the university level who enrolled in the TEFL course. The findings indicated that prospective educators acknowledged the interconnection of language and culture. Nevertheless, in the presence of a restricted amount of teaching time, the students' teachers were content to ignore the teaching of cultural aspects. Consequently, it was deduced that teachers expressed the belief that integrating multicultural education into language teaching was not feasible. The results of this study highlight the urgent requirement to update teacher education goals, which should cover the academic and practical components of creating ICC. It is probably reasonable to expose potential teachers to specifically created intercultural training as a part of TEFL, other

content subjects, and real-world L2 classes if ICC is to play a more significant role in language classrooms. Teacher training programs should also emphasize the importance of the action-oriented approach which maintains a balance between accuracy and fluency in language classrooms and the development of teacher and learner autonomy in traditional educational settings. That considering the current study's findings, it would be advised to conduct a thorough needs analysis prior to intercultural teacher training courses in order to better tailor the program's content to the needs of each individual group of student teachers. Student teachers of second language (L2) who are less exposed to academic subjects directly related to language, literature, and culture because of their major field of study may need teacher preparation that places a greater emphasis on intercultural education and the relationship between ICC and communicative language competence. Numerous studies have highlighted the role of mobility programs in developing prospective teachers' own intercultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes, which are essential to fully understand the need for culture teaching, even though intercultural training courses have been shown to have a positive impact on student teachers' intercultural awareness in the employment they do in the future.

In another significant study on this concern, Nguyen, Harvey, and Grant (2016) investigated the perspective of Vietnamese EFL teachers regarding the relevance of culture in language classes. A thematic analysis was performed on the data collected from semi-structured interviews. The findings revealed that most teachers allocated limited time to cultural instruction. Furthermore, the teachers believed that teaching cultural aspects was not essential. Concerning the role of instructors in teaching cultural knowledge, the study participants responded that it is the responsibility of others to educate individuals about culture. Primarily, they held the belief that their utmost priority was to address the matter of language acquisition. In addition, certain participants expressed that they did not possess the role of cultural educators. Moreover, teachers claimed that the teacher development programs that they had attended did not assist in strengthening their cultural awareness. The examination of the interview data revealed that the teachers perceived culture to be distinct from language and were unwilling to place a high value on it in their teaching of English as a Foreign Language. The majority of interviewees expressed a favorable opinion of their own cultural practices when teaching online, in addition to the importance of culture in foreign language instruction. Aside from a few challenges with this new way of teaching, it is also seen as a benefit of switching up the delivery methods. This finding suggests that educators might also be able to adapt novel teaching techniques as a necessary component of more established ones, accepting and implementing them with flexibility. Furthermore, it is indisputable that a few difficulties with this novel teaching approach could have an impact on how well cultural education is included into their online courses. These difficulties originate from both educators as well as pupils. However, teachers typically overcome these obstacles and see a steady improvement in their online instruction.

5. Discussion

The combined collection of research data offers significant understandings into the viewpoints and methodologies of EFL instructors about the integration of Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) within their educational settings. This discussion presents a thorough examination, uncovering a range of viewpoints in different situations. As observed in Ghavamnia's (2020) research, the Iranian context reflects a prevalent awareness among EFL educators regarding the importance of cultural integration in English instruction.

However, this acknowledgment often contrasts with the predominant emphasis on language teaching due to constraints in time allocation and curriculum constraints. This disparity between awareness and prioritization aligns with Safa & Tofighi (2021) findings, highlighting the persistent gap between theoretical understanding and practical implementation. Similarly, the Polish context portrayed in Sobkowiak's (2021) study illustrates positive attitudes toward ICC among teachers. Yet, educators emphasize a distinct focus on linguistic and sociolinguistic competencies over interculturality within classroom practices. This parallel between various contexts underscores the challenge of aligning acknowledged importance with practical application. Besides, Munandar & Newton's (2021) exploration of Indonesian teachers' perspectives reveals the impact of state policies on cultural viewpoints, affecting classroom practices. This mirrors the influence of curriculum limitations observed in Ghavamnia's study, portraying the struggle to align idealized beliefs with instructional realities amidst external constraints. Tajeddin & Rezanejad (2019) investigation into EFL teachers' perceptions of teaching culture echoes the recognition of its significance across contexts. However, it highlights uncertainties regarding effective integration and practice, mirroring challenges identified in Ghavamnia and Safa and Tofighi's studies and emphasizing the crucial need for robust teacher education and pedagogical training to bridge this gap. In alignment with the other recent research findings, there is agreement among EFL educators about the value of ICC in the Vietnamese context that Vo (2017) studied. Nevertheless, a persistent gap persists between perception and practical implementation, akin to challenges encountered in Iranian and Polish contexts.

A common pattern arises throughout this research: recognizing the significance of ICC in language learning and the difficulties associated with effectively implementing it in the classroom. Several obstacles encompass limited time availability, curricular restrictions, a disparity between academic comprehension and actual implementation, and uncertainty regarding successful integration approaches. These studies underscore the critical nature of ensuring that the perceptions of educators correspond with their instructional practice. As a result, it strongly urges stakeholders in education to confront significant obstacles. The recommendations encompass a variety of measures, including changes to the curriculum, improvements in pedagogical training, and the development of culturally appropriate teaching materials. Moreover, there is a demand for a change in the standards used to assess performance, with a focus on intercultural skills, as well as a requirement for ongoing professional training specifically designed to include cultural aspects in language teaching successfully. In conclusion, this comprehensive body of research supports the idea of adopting a holistic strategy to address the disparity between teachers' perceptions and actual classroom practice when integrating ICC effectively into EFL education.

6. Conclusion

Incorporating ICC into EFL teaching is essential and challenging. Our critical review of research reveals that educators worldwide recognize the vital significance of ICC in language teaching. Although this positive perception has been gained, there is still a noticeable discrepancy between educators' theoretical comprehension and practice. Integrating ICC into classroom practices is challenging due to time limitations, inflexible curricula, and ambiguities regarding effective application strategies. Despite the obstacles, the advantages of integrating ICC are substantial, as it improves language skills, promotes cultural sensitivity, and equips learners for employment in a global environment. Therefore, immediate and

significant actions require a fundamental change in education. Bridging the gap between teachers' perceptions and practices demands a holistic strategy that aligns theoretical acknowledgment with practical implementation. Stakeholders – policymakers, curriculum developers, teacher trainers, and educators themselves – bear the collective responsibility to embark on this transformative journey. Through collaborative action and innovation, language education evolves into an intermediary for fostering cultural understanding, nurturing global citizenship, and navigating the complexities of a more interconnected world.

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