

Journal of Communication and Cultural Trends (JCCT)

Volume 5 Issue 1, Spring 2023

ISSN(P): 2706-9141 ISSN(E): 2706-915X

Homepage: <https://journals.umt.edu.pk/index.php/jcct>



Article QR



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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.32350/jcct.51.07>

History: Received: July 29, 2022, Revised: February 9, 2023, Accepted: February 10, 2023

Citation: Khan, I. U, Ahmed, A., & Saeed, K. (2023). Analyzing the models of Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) and constructivist EFL pedagogy: A review study. *Journal of Communication and Cultural Trends*, 5(1), 128–147. <https://doi.org/10.32350/jcct.51.07>

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Conflict of Interest: Author(s) declared no conflict of interest



UMT

A publication of
Institute of Liberal Arts
University of Management and Technology, Lahore, Pakistan

Analyzing the Models of Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) and Constructivist EFL Pedagogy: A Review Study

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Abstract

In recent years, the importance of developing intercultural communicative competence (ICC) has gained significant traction. Since language teachers are expected to play a crucial role in helping students to develop their ICC, this review article aims to analyze the research available about this construct to understand its implications for teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in academic settings. It begins by examining the current understanding of ICC and its importance in language learning. It then looks at how an ICC-based curriculum can be paired with a constructivist pedagogical approach to create a learning environment that promotes the exploration, experience, and comprehension of intercultural communication opportunities and challenges. Finally, it concludes with a discussion of the potential implications of incorporating ICC into English language instruction in Pakistan and other similar EFL contexts. This includes its impact on teacher education as well as its wider social implications for promoting interculturality in EFL learning environments.

Keywords: constructivist pedagogy, culture, English as a Foreign Language (EFL), intercultural communicative competence (ICC), language teaching, *savoirs*

Introduction

Over the course of the past two decades, there has been a growing recognition among researchers and educators in the field of language teaching that a primary objective of language education should be to equip students with the capacity to engage in successful intercultural communication. The focus on intercultural communication has, therefore, become a central concern in the teaching of English as a Foreign Language (EFL). This approach asserts that developing effective intercultural

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communication skills necessitates more than just the mastery of linguistic structures and the acquisition of linguistic proficiency. With the world becoming increasingly connected, the ability to effectively communicate across cultural boundaries has become a critical skill. Pedagogy based on Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) provides the linguistic and conceptual resources necessary for students to develop this competence (Byram, [2021](#)).

Until the 1970s and before the introduction of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) method, language pedagogy was centered on the abstract acquisition of the grammatical structure of the target language, rather than learning its contextual usage. The shift toward the CLT methodology in language instruction recognizes this need, moving away from the rote memorization of grammatical structures toward a more contextualized approach to language learning (Liddicoat & Scarino, [2013](#)). This approach prioritizes the development of communicative competence, which includes not only the ability to communicate effectively but also the ability to do so in a culturally appropriate manner. In other words, it's not enough to simply know and utter the right words; rather, students must also understand the cultural context to adapt their language use accordingly (Byram & Rauschert, [2022](#)).

This emphasis on ICC is reflected in the practice-based syllabus used in CLT, which seeks to immerse the learners in real-world language use situations. By engaging in meaningful communication with native speakers and other learners from different cultures, students can develop an understanding of the nuances of intercultural communication, including differences in language use, nonverbal cues, and cultural norms (Xu & Knijnik, [2023](#)). This approach to language learning helps students to develop their ICC that is essential in today's globalized world. By recognizing the need for effective communication across cultures, ICC-based pedagogy has transformed the way that language is taught, moving away from a narrow focus on grammar to a more holistic approach that encompasses the cultural context in which the target language is used.

The current review article analyzes the existing research on intercultural competency and ICC to find out its implications for teaching English as a foreign language in academic settings. It suggests pairing ICC-based curricula with a constructivist pedagogical approach. Constructivism, as a learning theory, is centered on the idea that individuals build their own

knowledge and understanding through experiences and interaction with their environment. By combining ICC with a constructivist approach, language teachers can create a dynamic and inclusive learning environment that encourages students to reflect on their own cultural experiences and perspectives, while also exploring and understanding the experiences and perspectives of others.

Problem Statement

The current study strives to know how ICC models can be applied to English language instruction in Pakistan and other similar EFL contexts, the implications of an ICC approach for teacher education, and the wider social implications of promoting intercultural competency in academic foreign language learning.

Significance of the Study

Encouraging interculturality in foreign language learning can contribute to the development of more tolerant and inclusive societies, where individuals are better equipped to understand and appreciate the experiences, perspectives, and values of others coming from different cultural backgrounds.

Literature Review

It is generally assumed that learning a language requires to develop an understanding of other cultures. Intercultural competence, or the ability to understand and value different cultures, has been linked to improved communicative competence, positive intercultural attitudes, and overall language proficiency (Kramsch, [2013](#); Sharifian, [2012](#)). The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) has long stated that the aim of teaching modern languages, such as English, is to give students a strong foundation in intercultural competencies and skills (Council of Europe, [2001](#)). Hummel ([2021](#)) pointed out that despite these benefits, a sizable number of EFL/ESL classrooms still prioritize the study of grammatical and lexical competence over the acquisition of intercultural knowledge. This excessive emphasis on linguistic competence is frequently attributed to the prevailing language teaching approach which prioritizes the development of linguistic accuracy and fluency over an advancement of cultural understanding.

Culture, as an essential component of linguistic communication, plays a crucial role mastering effective communication in a foreign language. According to Kramsch (2013), when a language learner makes use of a culturally insensitive expression, it becomes evident that culture is a significant background element that only comes into prominence when language usage is put to the test in real-life situations. Therefore, second language learning should not be limited only to the acquisition of linguistic proficiency in the target language; rather, it should also encompass the awareness of cultural boundaries and an attempt to understand and respect them. However, as shown by Holliday et al. (2010), language teachers may feel that they lack the expertise or resources to effectively integrate intercultural knowledge into their classes. They may also feel that there are limited opportunities for students to engage with authentic cultural materials and experiences, or that there is a lack of support for intercultural teaching and learning in their institutions (Newton et al., 2010; Richards et al., 2010)

Elyza and Susiani (2023) examine how the Communicative Approach (CA) influences various aspects of teacher preparation, instructional material design, testing, evaluation, and the learning environment. Their investigation examines the different tasks and activities that help students develop their communicative competence. Furthermore, it emphasizes the importance of designing a learning environment that is tailored to the specific needs of each student, individually. It also aims to support students' development of communicative competence and advance their overall language proficiency by providing them with an opportunity to interact and take part in communicative activities. It does not specifically address how to integrate ICC into classroom pedagogy; rather, it focuses on how to enhance student's overall communicative competence.

In contrast to communicative competence, which refers to the interlocutor's capacity to comprehend messages and identify points of agreement for meaning-making in a particular communicative context, ICC refers to the interlocutor's capacity to interact with individuals from cultures that are dissimilar to their own (Ahnagari & Zamanian, 2014). Nevertheless, in many EFL/ESL contexts, the focus is on mastering vocabulary lists, grammar rules, and textbook exercises, while intercultural competence is frequently consigned to sporadic cultural notes in the textbook or to a separate cultural unit. Mighani and Moghadam (2019) demonstrated that

increasing intercultural competence helps language learners to become more proficient and motivated, in general. They argued that opportunities for learning the culture can improve students' engagement, pique their curiosity, and cultivate a favorable attitude toward the target language and culture.

It is critical to understand that intercultural competence is an essential component of language proficiency and cannot be effectively separated from the growth of linguistic competence. Language teachers run the risk of producing graduates who lack the intercultural competence and awareness required for success in the current globalized world by ignoring intercultural knowledge. According to Griffith et al. (2016), EFL/ESL classrooms need to focus more on incorporating intercultural knowledge into their language curricula. This can be achieved by incorporating authentic cultural materials, encouraging cross-cultural interaction and communication, and giving students the chance to consider their own cultural experiences and perspectives. According to Xu and Knijnik (2023), China's English language education should change its emphasis from merely preparing students for the global economy to producing citizens who are aware of other cultures. It views the English Language Teaching (ELT) process as an "intercultural action for freedom" where students' intercultural identities are shaped through experiences communicated via a multi-directional dialogue. The study illustrates how to include intercultural awareness in a reading course through an example and shows how dialogic practices can improve critical reflection and intercultural awareness.

In addition to the use of dialogic immersive techniques in a student-centered classroom, students' metaphoric awareness can play a significant role in improving their communicative understanding and language proficiency. In contrast to the conventional method, Martn-Gascón (2023) found cognitive-based instruction as significantly more effective at fostering learners' metaphorical competence and performance in building target constructions. The study evaluated their general metaphor comprehension and original production, as well as their performance in the comprehension and production of change-of-state constructions. The study was conducted with university students from a North American college. It assessed their metaphoric competence based on cognitive linguistic principles. The findings indicated that teaching difficult constructions in second language can be accomplished easily when a cognitive-based

instruction method is used along with regular assessment. The study contributes to the ongoing debate regarding the significance of cognitive approaches in second language instruction and their potential for enhancing learning outcomes by emphasizing the significance of students' metaphoric competence in real-life communication.

Since culture is a broad concept, the complexity of intercultural communication needs a wide range of competencies including sociolinguistic proficiency, pragmatic proficiency, sociocultural awareness, and intercultural sensitivity. The range of skills mentioned above necessitates a high degree of cultural knowledge and this fact has significant implications for ESL/EFL instructors and students. Similarly, it could be useful to make a distinction between the big-C and small-c aspects of culture in order to clarify specific cultural characteristics. According to Espinar and Rodríguez (2019), while the big-C aspects of a culture, such as arts, literature, dance, film, and sculpture may be more obvious and easy to notice, the small-c aspects are less obvious to a learner. The latter comprise the pitfalls that the learner has a greater chance of falling into while communicating in real-life situations. The small-c aspects include an interconnected cluster of attitudes, assumptions, norms, values, and socially acceptable clues which can be noticed only upon a close and empathetic observation of other cultures. According to Espinar and Rodríguez, these small cultural traits influence peoples' linguistic and non-linguistic behavior and may provide cause for miscommunication or even conflict in intercultural interactions.

As the aforementioned literature review shows, for EFL students to engage meaningfully in a global society, they must be allowed to develop ICC by converting opportunities for international engagement into intercultural connections. In English as a Second Language (ESL) and English as a Foreign Language (EFL) environments, it is imperative to concentrate on learning the target language from a cultural standpoint. In most ESL contexts, students can communicate with native English speakers. However, in specific EFL contexts such as Pakistan, they may not interact with native speakers at all. Instead, they communicate with non-native speakers using both their native tongues and English (Pennycook, 2017). In these circumstances, students may be regarded as English as an International Language (EIL) learners, enabling them to interact with people from around the globe for the purposes of science, arts, commerce,

culture, and tourism. Therefore, to be prepared for a global experience, they must have intercultural communication skills in both English-speaking and non-English-speaking cultures (Khan et al., [2021](#)).

The existing research reveals a persistent lack of attention to this aspect in EFL classrooms in Pakistan, despite the increasing recognition of ICC as a critical component of effective language learning. This is partially a result of the prevailing methodology of teaching language as a collection of discrete skills and rules, rather than as a tool for cross-cultural communication in the multilingual ecology of the country (Manan, [2014](#)). This narrow emphasis on language proficiency ignores the value of cultural awareness and the influence of culture on language use. This imbalance might be corrected and the growth of intercultural communication skills might be supported by implementing a constructivist, student-centered pedagogy that emphasizes interaction and collaboration. This method emphasizes the active role of the learner in the acquisition of knowledge and understanding and encourages students to interact meaningfully with people from other cultures. According to Botes ([2020](#)), EFL classes in Pakistan can aid in the development of students' intercultural communicative competence. They may also equip them with the skills necessary to effectively communicate in a world that is increasingly interconnected by promoting a learner-centered environment that encourages intercultural interaction.

This review article seeks to highlight the importance of an explicit focus on ICC in English language curriculum, pedagogic methods, and classroom activities involved in EFL teaching in Pakistan. It also brings to fore the necessity of training EFL teachers in the constructivist praxis of language teaching. Moreover, it offers a review of the key models of ICC discussed in international literature to link them with the suggestions for EFL instruction in the country.

Research questions

1. What are the major themes in the key models of ICC discussed in the literature?
2. What is the relevance of these models for a constructivist EFL pedagogy in the current era of globalization?
3. What are the implications of adopting ICC in EFL teaching in terms of improving teachers' cognition and professional practices?

Methodology

This review article aims to analyze the models of ICC used in EFL teaching and its importance for developing student's communicative ability in intercultural contexts. To achieve this aim, a comprehensive and systematic literature review was conducted to identify and analyze the existing studies and literature describing the various models and their implications for EFL teaching. The following steps were taken in conducting the literature review.

Search Strategies

Using keywords associated with ICC, EFL teaching, constructivism, intercultural contexts, and communicative ability, a thorough search of the pertinent databases including JSTOR, ProQuest, EBSCOhost, and Google Scholar was carried out. Only peer-reviewed articles were included in the search.

Inclusion Criteria and Synthesis

Articles were included in the review if they focused on ICC, EFL teaching, constructivism, intercultural contexts, and communicative ability. Moreover, only those articles that provided empirical evidence, theoretical frameworks, or practical examples related to the topic were incorporated into the study. The information gathered from the articles was extracted, analyzed, and synthesized to identify the key themes, models, and theories related to ICC in EFL teaching. Data was also synthesized to identify the gaps and limitations in the existing literature and to make recommendations for future research. Ultimately, a comprehensive and critical overview of the modelling of ICC in EFL teaching and its importance for student's communicative ability in intercultural contexts was presented.

Findings and Discussion

The goal of fostering ICC in language education has been attained through the years using several models. Byram introduced one of the earliest and the most well-known models in 1997, which was updated in 2021. Bennett and Bennett (2004) put forth the Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity, while Calloway and Deardorff (2017) proposed the Empathy model of ICC. These models all have the same overall goal, which is to promote intercultural understanding and effective communication in cross-cultural situations, despite the differences in their specific foci. Some

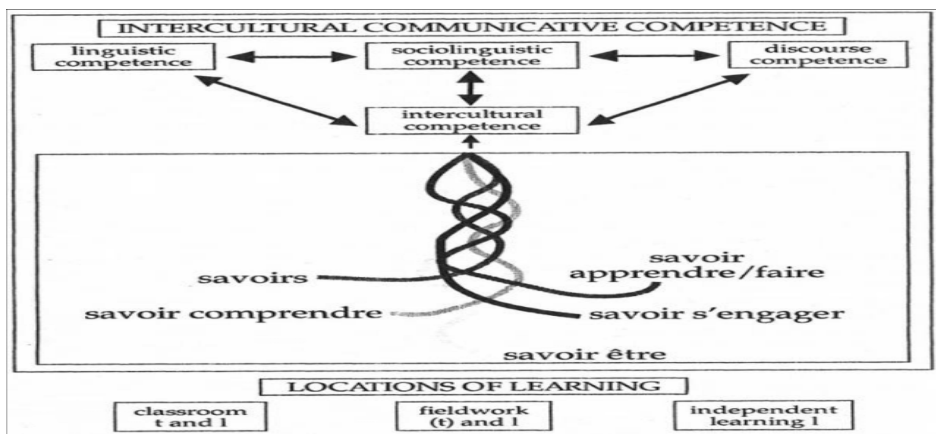
emphasize the value of cultural knowledge and understanding, while others emphasize the cultivation of communicative skills and empathic awareness, both of which are crucial for the development of ICC. The key concepts in these models and how they relate to language learning and teaching are analyzed below.

Models of ICC

Byram's Model

Byram's model is a significant framework in the study of foreign languages that aims to provide teachers with directions for enhancing students' ICC. The model, first put forth by Byram (2021), is well-known and utilized in language education as a thorough reference for fostering ICC in language learners. The three dimensions of knowledge, skills, and attitudes are the foundational elements of this model. Five interconnected parts make up the model, each of which can be used as a building block for effective cross-cultural communication (Figure 1).

The first component, namely *savoir*, refers to the knowledge of self and others, as well as the knowledge of the dynamics of intercultural communication. The second component, *savoir comprendre*, encompasses the skills necessary for interpreting and relating to other cultures. This includes the ability to understand cultural norms, values, and perspectives, as well as the ability to make connections and build relationships across cultures. The third component, *savoir apprendre/faire*, refers to the skills necessary for discovering and interacting with other cultures. This involves the ability to learn about new cultures, engage in intercultural communication, and interact effectively with people from diverse backgrounds. The fourth component, *savoir être*, involves relativizing one's own cultural perspective and valuing the perspectives of others. This is crucial for successful intercultural communication, as it requires individuals to be aware of their own biases and assumptions and to be open to alternative ways of seeing the world. Finally, the fifth component, *savoir s'engager*, encompasses political education and critical cultural awareness. This involves an understanding of the political and cultural systems that influence intercultural communication, as well as an awareness of one's own place within these systems.

Figure 1*Byram's Model of Intercultural Communicative Competence*

Byram's ICC model makes a significant contribution to the study of foreign language education and is widely used by language teachers as a comprehensive guide for helping language learners develop ICC. The model highlights the need for comprehensive, experiential, and integrative language education by highlighting the interdependence of the four components of ICC. It offers advice to language teachers about how to foster an environment in the classroom that encourages students to investigate, experience, and comprehend the opportunities and dangers connected to communicating with people from other cultures.

Although Byram's model of intercultural communicative competence is widely recognized and used in language education, it has been criticized also by some scholars for various reasons. For instance, the model has been criticized on the basis that it places a greater emphasis on the cognitive aspects of ICC, such as cultural knowledge and linguistic competence and does not adequately address the role of emotional intelligence in intercultural communication (Avgousti, [2018](#)). A limited focus on emotions can limit the effectiveness of the model in promoting intercultural understanding and empathy. Secondly, it has been observed that the model primarily emphasizes linguistic competence, with a limited emphasis on non-verbal communication and other aspects of cultural interaction. This narrow focus may overlook important elements of intercultural communication and lead to a reductionist view of ICC. Thirdly, it has been noted that the model focuses primarily on cultural differences between the

learners and the target culture, rather than considering the cultural relativity of the learners' own culture. This approach can lead to oversimplification and stereotypes about different cultures, rather than promoting intercultural understanding. This critique highlights the limitations of Byram's model of ICC and suggests the need for a more nuanced and context specific approach to ICC development in language education.

Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS)

To examine the stages of intercultural development, the Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS) has been proposed (Bennett & Bennett, [2004](#)). The model suggests that two broad categories—ethnorelative and ethnocentric—can be used to categorize six developmental stages. Denial, defense, and minimization are the respective phases of ethnocentrism. A person in the denial stage denies the existence of cultural differences and is unaware of them. While, in the defense phase, a person begins to acknowledge the existence of cultural differences, although still believing their own culture to be superior to others. Finally, in the minimization stage, a person minimizes the importance of cultural differences, viewing them as merely surface differences that have no bearing on interpersonal interactions or communication.

On the other hand, ethnorelative stages are integration, adaptation, and acceptance. In the acceptance stage, a person acknowledges the existence of cultural differences and the potential effects they may have on interactions with others. In the adaptation stage, a person adjusts their behavior and communication strategies to take cultural differences into account. Finally, the integration of the knowledge of cultural differences into one's own cultural identity during the integration stage can lead to a greater appreciation and respect for cultural diversity.

The Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI) continuum was created based on the DMIS model to determine a person's stage of intercultural development using the tools of ethnocentrism and ethnorelativism (Iswandari, [2022](#)). Moreover, it provides a more quantifiable classification of intercultural development for researchers and teachers. The DMIS model provides a helpful framework to understand and investigate intercultural development, while IDI offers a useful tool to measure and evaluate intercultural competence.

DMIS presents a linear progression of intercultural competence and assumes that everyone must progress through the stages in the same order. Since it may not accurately reflect the intricate and dynamic nature of the development of intercultural competence, this notion of linear progression has been criticized as being overly simplistic. Furthermore, according to some researchers, the DMIS model may not adequately account for the complexities of cross-cultural communication as well as the intersections between cultural and personal identities (Dervin, [2016](#)). The relationship between ethnocentrism and ethnorelativism is described via separate and distinct stages in the model, although it may be more interconnected and intertwined in a person's cultural experience and perspective (Holliday et al., [2010](#)).

Empathy Model of ICC

In the model proposed by Calloway and Deardorff ([2017](#)), the authors emphasize the critical need for intercultural competence in today's rapidly globalizing world, where people from diverse backgrounds are increasingly coming into close contact (both physical and virtual) with each other. Furthermore, it has been identified that the lack of full understanding remains a major source of uncertainty and confusion in these interactions. Hence, the model places particular importance on empathy as a key solution to this problem. According to the authors, empathy is essential for holding the civil society together and is a crucial component of successful intercultural communication.

Empathy is a habit of mind and a reciprocal behavior that leads to a greater understanding and a stronger connection with others. According to the authors, empathy can be developed through education and training. Hence, the model provides useful stages for teachers and trainers to assess the development of empathy in their learners over time. Additionally, barriers to the development of empathy have been identified and ways have been suggested to overcome these barriers. By presenting empathy as a key factor in intercultural competence, the authors contribute to a growing body of research that seeks to better understand the complex and interrelated factors involved in successful intercultural communication. Their emphasis on empathy is also in line with the recent developments in the field of psychology which highlight the important role of emotional intelligence in social and intercultural interactions (MacCann et al., [2020](#)). Overall, the model proposed by Calloway and Deardorff ([2017](#)) provides a valuable

framework for understanding the importance of empathy in intercultural communication and offers useful insights for teachers and trainers seeking to enhance intercultural competence in their learners.

Intercultural Communicative Language Teaching (iCLT)

Language and culture are integrated into the intercultural communicative language teaching (iCLT) method. This method is predicated on the notion that every message conveyed through language is cultural and that culture influences how language is organized and used. To make culture a natural component of every language classroom, iCLT aims to integrate the teaching of language and culture. Liddicoat and Scarino (2013) outlined six iCLT tenets, including integrating language and culture from the outset, preventing cultural ignorance, and avoiding learners from making cultural assumptions. The first principle focuses on the relationship between culture and language and the significance of incorporating culture right away in lessons. Language teachers need to incorporate interculturality and culture into their lessons because ignoring culture can result in the formation of uninformed cultural assumptions.

The second principle emphasizes the value of social interaction in learning and the relationship between language and culture. The third principle emphasizes an exploratory and reflective approach to culture and language, where students are encouraged to learn keeping in view cultural differences and similarities. The fourth principle encourages direct contrast and connection between language and culture, which can result in cultural dissonance and the growth of bicultural or multicultural identities. The fifth iCLT principle acknowledges and responds to students' varied backgrounds and learning preferences. Diversity in the classroom is valued and the teacher is urged to respect the background of students. Consequent to this strategy, students receive differentiated instruction. Instead of focusing on native speaker competence, principle six emphasizes intercultural communicative competence. Instead of teaching students to speak without an accent, the objective is to help them understand and be understood (Dervin, 2016). This method liberates students from the unattainable ideal of native speaker proficiency and aids to their understanding that retaining one's cultural identity does not preclude one from acquiring language proficiency. By adopting an approach that values cultural diversity, recognizes it, and encourages learners to see the target language as a tool for cross-cultural communication, these principles seek to promote

intercultural understanding and language learning. Instead of striving for linguistic perfection, the emphasis remains on developing the capacity for understanding and being understood.

Conclusion

Instead of being static stereotypes based on literature, art, and media projections of culture, the concept of culture has evolved from being a static entity to one that is dynamic and functional. Instead of using the native speaker as a static model, Intercultural Language Teaching (IcLT) seeks to develop learners who can communicate effectively in complex social contexts. Intercultural speakers are mediators of meaning who identify and value the individual's personal qualities, rather than viewing their interlocutor as a representative of a cultural entity.

It takes more than just acquiring knowledge and skills to develop intercultural competence, which is a continuous process. It entails acquiring a mindset that enables people to negotiate cross-cultural interactions and adjust to various situations. Intercultural competence can be taught and assessed in the EFL classroom using various approaches to measure it. This may result in more fruitful cross-cultural interactions and improved communication. Language proficiency alone is insufficient for effective communication, which is also influenced by cultural perception and comprehension. To comprehend the target language's culture and use it in real-world communication situations, students must be given experiential knowledge of the target culture and its nuanced understanding.

The above analysis indicates the necessity of conducting extensive research into ELT practice in Pakistan in order to determine the extent of ICC integration in English language classes and the instructors' familiarity with ICC. One of the primary problems with ELT in Pakistan is that the majority of teachers and evaluation processes are aimed to assist the students to grasp the linguistic system, even if there are teaching methodologies available to teach English communicatively (Khan et al., [2022](#); Manan & David, [2014](#)). English is typically taught as grammatical knowledge with little to no use of genuine learning resources to encourage classroom participation. IcLT can offer a more flexible constructivist framework to improve EFL pedagogy that involves actual engagement with meaning-making in cultural contexts. Through this approach, EFL learners can acquire English in a personal, experiential, and meaningful manner that

can be conducive to a long-term impact on their intercultural knowledge and skills.

Implications for ELT and Teacher Training

The integration of intercultural communicative practices into EFL classes requires careful consideration of several factors. Firstly, it is important to assess teachers' understanding and perceptions of ICC, as these can greatly impact their teaching practices. Despite a willingness to integrate ICC, many EFL teachers are confused about its meaning and may believe that it simply involves transmitting their own knowledge to students. Research has shown that teachers often do not fully incorporate ICC into their teaching, with some not fully comprehending the concept (Megawati et al., [2020](#); Safa & Tofighi, [2022](#)). Additionally, teachers' prior experiences and cultural background play a significant role in shaping their perception of culture and ICC (Yesil & Demiröz, [2017](#)). Their limited knowledge, obtained mainly from their past language learning and teaching experiences, can impact their teaching practices in an imitative manner.

The successful integration of ICC into EFL courses also depends on teachers' familiarity with ICC assessment. According to Liddicoat and Scarino ([2013](#)), ICC assessments should include the evaluation of a student's linguistic, communicative, and intercultural skills in order to track their progress over time. Teachers can employ performance-based assessment strategies and reflective self-assessment to determine students' ICC. ICC training should be included in programs for aspiring EFL teachers to improve their ICC knowledge and pedagogical skills. Through workshops and seminars in teachers' professional development programs, their ICC knowledge and pedagogy can be updated and improved.

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