

Lecturers' Perceptions of Intercultural Communication Competencies in English Language Learning

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Abstract

This study examines the integration of cultural competence in English Language Teaching (ELT). Despite its importance, lecturers' understanding of culture remains limited, making it difficult to implement in teaching. This study analyzes lecturers' knowledge of culture, intercultural competence (IC), and intercultural awareness (ICA) in ELT. A qualitative research method with a case study approach was employed. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with four English lecturers at IAIN Bone, selected purposively based on their teaching experience and involvement in culture-based instruction. Thematic analysis was used to identify patterns in their understanding and implementation of IC in the classroom. The findings indicate that most lecturers acknowledge the significance of culture and intercultural communicative competence (ICC) in ELT. However, their approaches vary, from merely transmitting cultural information to prioritizing dialects over broader cultural aspects. Some lecturers also adhere to the native speaker (NS) model, which contradicts the ideal integration of IC in an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom. This study recommends training programs for lecturers on IC and ICA and curriculum development emphasizing cultural integration in ELT. Future research could explore more specific teaching approaches and their impact on students' intercultural competence.

Keywords

Culture; English Language Teaching (ELT); Intercultural Competence

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1. INTRODUCTION

English in the era of globalization not only functions as a means of communication but also as a medium of cross-cultural interaction (Porto & Byram, 2015; Qin & Zhang, 2020; Schafier, 2017). Therefore, teaching English cannot only focus on linguistic aspects but must also pay attention to the cultural aspects inherent in its use (Gaibrois, 2024; Macdonald & Watson, 2022; Sharifian, 2012). Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) is an essential skill for English language teachers to ensure that students understand the language structurally and use it effectively in various cultural contexts.

At IAIN Bone, even though lecturers have experience in teaching related to culture, there is a tendency that teaching still focuses on delivering material without considering the needs of students to understand the cultural aspects of the English language. This risks making students less prepared



to communicate with speakers from various cultural backgrounds, especially in the increasingly globalized academic and professional world.

In addition, previous research shows that although ICC has been widely studied in the context of ELT (English Language Teaching), its application in higher education settings still has not received enough attention (Fernández, 2019; Gulyamova et al., 2024; Köroğlu & Kimsesiz, 2022; Miao & Yang, 2024). Many EFL (English as a Foreign Language) teachers have not consciously integrated intercultural aspects into the learning process. Therefore, this study is important to dig deeper into how lecturers understand ICC in English language teaching and how they integrate culture in learning to improve students' communication competence.

By understanding ICC better, lecturers can develop more effective teaching strategies, increase students' cultural awareness, and prepare them to communicate competently in a global environment. People with different cultures, races, and ethnicities are interested in intercultural communication (Fäcke et al., 2024; Fakhrutdinov & Fahrutdinova, 2016; Golubkova et al., 2017). Because culture and language competence are closely interrelated, communicating requires knowledge of the right thoughts and actions in the language related to that culture (Riadini & Cahyono, 2021). Therefore, the idea of language and cultural integration is a topic to be discussed, especially in exploring lecturers' perceptions of intercultural communication competencies for English language teaching.

Intercultural communication competencies (ICC) have been conceptualized in various ways based on recognizing what is considered a competency, which involves intercultural and communicative competencies (Sercu, 2019b, 2020). When communicating with others, we need to be aware of their culture. According to (Estaji & Rahimi, 2018), The components of intercultural communication competence are the enthusiasm of others for culture, the sensitivity to be aware of cultural differences, and the willingness to adapt as a sign of respect for people with cultural differences. (Sercu, 2019b) Recognizes EFL teachers' ICCs as an important marker of their specialist personality. The ICC is inseparable from the English context. Today, English is spoken both at home and abroad and helps expand the circle with billions of people (Sharifian, 2021). ICC is one of the characteristics of teachers that requires cultural awareness (Gonzalez-Vidal & Moore, 2024; Kourova, 2020; Lee, 2012; Olivares & Pena, 2015; Vajak et al., 2021b; Zaltsman, 2009), It is intended to enrich information by examining the perceptions, roles, and sharpening of EFL's educational culture in the context of their experience, learning, and teaching.

At IAIN Bone, several lecturers already have teaching experience related to culture. Mastering the teaching culture taught to students has become a habit of lecturers. As part of improving the quality of teaching, lecturers must consider several important things such as quality, capacity, and competence (Pearl Villalon Tomaro, 2018). Even though they already have a lot of teaching experience, lecturers at IAIN tend only to convey, not paying attention to the actual needs of students. For the success of lecturers in instilling the importance of culture to students, they must have a good background in attitudes related to interculturalism. An exceptional lecturer must have extensive knowledge of cultures and languages. Outstanding lecturers serve as role models, influence career choices, and facilitate students to reach their potential. Superior educator qualities can be separated from interest in four areas: (1) emotional characteristics, (2) abilities, (3) classroom organization techniques, and (4) academic knowledge (Eckerson, 2019). The quality of teaching is seen in the delivery in the classroom and in the language used to communicate with students based on their respective cultures.

ICC studies have interested academics from various scientific fields in recent decades. For example, (Bouslama & Bouhass Benaissi, 2019) Investigated Intercultural Competence in the Context of ELT: A Study of EFL Teacher Perception. (Toscu & Erten, 2020) focuses on Intercultural Communicative Competency Development using telecollaboration and (Vajak et al., 2021a) Focuses on Intercultural Competency Assessment in Iranian EFL and Non-EFL Learners: Knowledge, skills,

awareness, and attitudes. Integrating culture in English language teaching to improve intercultural communicative competence in a global era where English has been used as a communication tool between people of different cultural backgrounds. However, EFL lecturers in different contexts have overlooked this important point in their English teaching process. The ICC does not receive special attention in teaching English in higher education.

Researchers have tested the ICC from various perspectives that can be used as a reference in intercultural communication. Although researchers have expressed the importance of the ICC, the role and concept of culture in English is still poorly understood. Therefore, this study aims to find out how lecturers' views and attitudes regarding ICC are applied in the classroom and ICC and the intercultural approach's (ICA) goals in the context of English language teaching (ELT). To gain a deeper insight into the ICC, it is first necessary to examine the cultural place in the context of ELT. The research question is "How do English lecturers understand the concept of culture, the purpose of the IC in the intercultural approach (ICA) in English language teaching?".

2. METHODS

This study uses a qualitative approach with a phenomenological research design to understand the perception of IAIN Bone lecturers towards Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) in English teaching. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with selected participants using purposive sampling techniques. The selection criteria for participants include age, gender, teaching experience, and academic background in English, with a minimum of 3 years of teaching experience. The number of participants is determined based on data saturation to ensure that the information obtained is sufficiently in-depth. The interviews consisted of 12 question items adapted from (Bousslama & Bouhass Benaissi, 2018), Which focused on how lecturers understood and applied intercultural aspects of learning. In analyzing the data, this study uses thematic analysis (Creswel, 2020). Which involves interview transcription, data coding, grouping based on indicators, theme identification, and interpretation of results. This analysis is based on a framework (Byram et al., 2020) That is used because of its relevance in measuring intercultural communication competencies in language teaching. The four main aspects of this framework—attitudes, knowledge, skills, and cultural awareness—are used as a benchmark in understanding the extent to which lecturers integrate intercultural elements in their classrooms. The results of the analysis help reveal how lecturers build cultural awareness, understand the target culture, and develop skills in delivering English material oriented to intercultural understanding.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Findings

After going through the process of re-reading the interview transcript and listening to the recording in detail, several key themes were identified. In general, the results of the interviews showed the similarity of the answer patterns of the various lecturers who were participants. The first theme relates to the main objectives of EFL (English as a Foreign Language) teaching. The lecturers emphasized that the main goal of EFL teaching is to ensure students can produce language well, which is reflected in the use of words such as create, fluent, and master that often appear in interviews.

The second theme relates to understanding culture, where lecturers consider culture as a character inherent in individuals. This can be seen from the appearance of words such as habits, custom, and character, which are repeatedly mentioned in interviews. Meanwhile, the third theme focuses on lecturers' understanding of Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC). Lecturers

understand ICC as a person's ability to communicate effectively with individuals from different cultural backgrounds. This concept is reflected in words such as skills, competence, and ability, which are often used to describe ICC in interviews. These findings show how lecturers understand the concept of culture and ICC in the context of EFL teaching. Based on the thematic analysis results, the data obtained can be further elaborated, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Interview Theme Lecturers understand the concept of culture

Code	Theme
Objectives in EFL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Produce • Fluent in English • Control
Constitutional Court	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Habit • Customs • Character
ICA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Skills • Competence • Ability

Lecturers' perception of culture in the context of English Language Teaching (ELT)

The understanding and perception of lecturers can be summarized in several points:

a. Culture as a source of traditional knowledge

In interviews, several lecturers defined culture as a source of traditional knowledge that includes ancestral symbols and customs in which characters, habits, and values are the basis of culture. Culture is used as a source of traditional knowledge to complement traditional and modern knowledge. To support this perception, see an interview excerpt from D1. One of the lecturers (D1) revealed that when talking about culture, the first thing that comes to mind is the symbols attached to the individual. According to him, culture cannot be separated from a person's personality because culture is part of an individual's identity. In addition, he also emphasized that culture is a process of inheriting values and habits, both consciously and unconsciously, to the next generation. This process forms a pattern of life that becomes a way of life in a society.

D1 believes that a culture recognized as a source of knowledge can build mutual respect. Reduce the emergence of conflicts between tribes, races, ethnicities, and other differences. Knowledge of culture can also make students understand themselves and others. Several lecturers agreed upon this recognition as a form of positive understanding of culture in ELT.

b. Culture as an element in EFL teaching

An important element of culture in the classroom is understanding. Understanding your own culture and the culture of others will make it easier to convey to students to achieve learning goals. One of the lecturers supports this argument that culture must be understood according to each student's cultural background in the learning process. According to him, understanding the student's culture will make it easier to deliver material because cultural differences can affect perceptions, which can ultimately lead to different conclusions. By understanding each other's cultures, the communication process in learning becomes more effective so that learning goals are achieved, and it also helps teachers deliver material better. Therefore, cultural understanding is considered an important aspect for a teacher in supporting the success of the teaching and learning process.

Understanding related to culture integrated into English teaching is a concern, especially for the lecturers. Lecturers must have a broad understanding of culture. Culture understood as teaching material in EFL classes, is believed to facilitate the teaching process so that learning objectives are achieved and an understanding of structural forms or grammatical aspects in using language appropriately in a certain culture.

Lecturers' perception of IC in the context of ELT

Regarding IC, lecturers prioritize knowledge at IC. All lecturers think that culture has traditional knowledge that can be passed on to the next generation, both from teachers and textbooks for students. To support this assumption, one of the lecturers stated that cultural understanding in learning positively impacts teachers and students. By understanding each culture, students can better understand their friends, teachers, and the messages conveyed in learning. Each message given in the learning process can have a different meaning depending on how one understands it, which is influenced by each individual's experience and cultural background. This shows that cultural diversity awareness can increase communication effectiveness in learning.

It should be noted that lecturers' understanding of IC related to attitudes and skills is still lacking. Attitude is an important element emphasizing openness and tolerance and skills emphasizing cultural awareness. The lecturer's understanding is not theoretically related, so students cannot develop IC independently.

Lecturers' perception of the objectives of the ICA

The reasons why lecturers should think culturally and integrate IC into ELT can be summarized as follows:

a. Culture for language learning/comprehension

Lecturers think learning/understanding culture is crucial so students can understand English well according to the cultural context. This perception is supported by the results of an interview with D3; a lecturer explained that cultural understanding is not only about knowing a concept but also how a person interprets it in his mind. In the context of learning, for example, when teachers give proverbs to students, they often do not understand them literally. This is closely related to culture, where understanding foreign cultures can help students interpret the true meaning of an expression. Thus, the better students understand the culture, the more accurately they understand the meaning of the language used.

b. Culture for effective communication/language use

According to some lecturers, cultural studies are needed so students can use English in a cultural context and communicate well. This perception is supported by the statement from D3, in modern life increasingly influenced by globalization, interaction with the outside world becomes inevitable. The ever-changing arrival of tourists also affects local culture, creating cultural dynamics that continue to develop. Naturally, this condition encourages communication between individuals from various cultural backgrounds, ultimately enriching intercultural understanding in society.

Discussion

This study reveals lecturers' perception of culture in the context of ELT, where they view culture as a source of traditional knowledge and an important element in language learning. This view aligns with the findings (Bousslama & Bouhass Benaissi, 2019), Which states that culture in language teaching is often associated with traditional approaches that focus on transmitting cultural knowledge. However, in the broader learning context, the intercultural approach emphasizes developing the attitudes, skills, and competencies necessary in social life. It also shows that culture cannot be separated from language, as affirmed by (Pandarangga and Kapoe, 2022), which states that English as

an international language requires students to not only master linguistic aspects but also understand intercultural aspects in order to communicate effectively.

Lecturers see intercultural competence in language learning as focusing more on the knowledge aspect. This view is reinforced by (Byram et al., 2020), Who emphasized that knowledge, attitudes, and skills are key elements in intercultural competence. An open attitude towards other cultures, skills in interacting with individuals from different cultural backgrounds, and knowledge of various aspects of culture are three complementary elements in forming intercultural competence. In language learning, cultural understanding has two main objectives: understanding language in its cultural context and building effective communication across cultures. As pointed out by (Nemati et al., 2019), Understanding culture helps a person understand the behavior and reactions of others so that despite cultural differences, individuals can still accept and adjust to social interactions.

The relationship between language and culture is complex because language is part of culture and an expression of culture itself (Israelsson, 2018). Emphasizes that culture forms a series of shared meanings learned in society and directly affects communication patterns. Therefore, interculturalism is a very important aspect of English language teaching (Girik Allo, 2020). Found that teaching culture in EFL classrooms can increase students' awareness of cultural diversity, both their own culture and international cultures. Thus, understanding intercultural communication competencies is essential to broaden horizons and improve the effectiveness of cross-cultural communication in language learning.

In the context of intercultural communication competence, Hymes introduced the concept of communicative competence based on a sociolinguistic approach. This concept suggests that language understanding is not enough only from linguistic aspects but must also consider social and cultural factors in communication. This is relevant to the findings. (Azarnoosh et al., 2019), Which states that in language education, there must be a combination of cultural competence and linguistic competence to achieve intercultural communication competence. For example, the concept of freedom or social obligation can have different interpretations depending on the culture of each individual. In this case, intercultural competence assists individuals in understanding different perspectives and avoiding misunderstandings in cross-cultural communication.

Intercultural communication (ICC) competencies are also closely related to skills in interacting with people from various cultural backgrounds. Four main elements in the ICC: attitude, knowledge, skills, and critical awareness (Byram et al., 2020). Attitudes reflect openness and curiosity towards other cultures, while knowledge includes information about different social and cultural groups. Meanwhile, skills in interacting and communicating with individuals from other cultures are essential for building harmonious relationships in cross-cultural communication. The findings (Azarnoosh et al., 2019) Add that intercultural competencies also include sociolinguistic, pragmatic, and social aspects, which shape an individual's ability to understand and adapt to different cultural contexts.

The results of this study are also supported by various previous studies that show the importance of intercultural competence in language teaching. Research conducted by Fantini (2009) revealed that the success of language learning is highly dependent on cultural understanding, where students with intercultural communication skills are more adaptable in a multicultural environment. In addition, the findings (Kramsch, 2018) emphasize that in language learning, approaches that integrate culture into the curriculum can help students understand the social meaning behind the use of language. Another study by (Sercu, 2019a) shows that language teachers play a key role in helping students develop intercultural competencies by providing contextual and social interaction-based learning experiences. Meanwhile, research by (Liddicoat and Scarino, 2017) shows that cultural integration in language learning can increase students' awareness of different cultural perspectives and practices, thus assisting them in building more effective communication with individuals from different cultural backgrounds. Finally, research (Deardorff, 2016) shows that intercultural competence is a skill that can

be developed through direct experience and critical reflection on cultural interactions.

The implications of the findings of this study suggest that in the context of teaching English as a foreign language, lecturers need to improve their understanding of intercultural communication competencies and integrate them into the ELT curriculum. Thus, students can be better prepared to face global communication challenges. In addition, more experiential approaches, such as cultural exchange programs or collaborative projects with native English speakers, can effectively improve students' intercultural competence. Therefore, further research can focus on how experiential teaching strategies can help students develop intercultural communication competencies more effectively. In addition, an in-depth study of the role of technology in supporting intercultural learning can also be an interesting topic for further research.

4. CONCLUSION

This study reveals that although lecturers know the importance of intercultural competence (ICC) in teaching English (ELT), their understanding of ICC is still limited. Hence, its application in ELT classes is not optimal. Therefore, there is a need to increase awareness among lecturers about the ICC approach in line with global demands in language teaching. Lecturers are expected to understand ICC conceptually and apply it effectively in the classroom through balanced cultural and language integration.

The implications of this study show the need for professional development for lecturers through training programs that emphasize more on ICC in ELT. In addition, self-reflection in teaching practice can be the first step for lecturers to increase their awareness of ICC. For further research, further exploration is suggested regarding effective strategies in integrating ICC into the ELT curriculum and the influence of ICC application on students' cross-cultural communication skills.

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