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Intercultural Communicative Competence in Teaching of English as a Foreign Language: Perspectives of Filipino Teachers

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study explored Filipino EFL teachers' perspectives on Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) in their teaching practice. It employed a qualitative approach with six participants to investigate three key areas: teachers' views on ICC, their use of intercultural approaches in teaching, and the perceived contributions of ICC to teaching English as a Foreign Language. The research found that teachers viewed ICC as essential for fostering effective cross-cultural communication and promoting cultural awareness. Participants reported implementing intercultural approaches through interactive cultural learning activities and the integration of authentic materials. Key contributions of ICC included enhanced communication skills and cultural competence, promotion of global awareness and citizenship, and better preparation for real-world interactions in a globalized context. The study argued for a shift from traditional methods towards an intercultural approach in EFL education, emphasizing the need for professional development

INTRODUCTION

The growing interconnectedness of our world necessitates the development of Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) for effective communication across cultures. Despite its acknowledged importance, a persistent gap exists between the theoretical models of ICC and its practical application in EFL classrooms. Byram (1997) identified this very discrepancy, highlighting the challenges educators face in integrating ICC principles into their teaching. Subsequent studies have further emphasized this point. Jantadej and Charubusp (2018) investigated how teachers employed English intercultural teaching at a low level, exposing the teacher's cultural bias, lack of positive attitudes, and behavior assessments.

Cheewasukthaworn & Suwanarak (2017) observed that while educators often acknowledge the value of ICC, they may struggle to integrate cultural and intercultural dimensions into their teaching due to limited exposure to intercultural approaches in language education. Jumpakate and Hieu (2019) demonstrated that while teachers grasp the importance of culture in EFL, they often lack the expertise to translate that understanding into practical strategies for developing ICC in their students.

The concept of Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) has become increasingly significant in language education. Byram (2021) introduced ICC as a combination of communicative competence and intercultural competence, providing a framework for developing intercultural speakers who can effectively use a foreign language in intercultural communication. ICC is defined as the "ability to interact with people from another social group in another language". Learners with strong ICC can better comprehend and recognize both

their own and others' cultural perspectives, integrating these into their language use.

The relationship between language and culture is widely recognized in language education. Educators generally believe that language and culture cannot be separated from one another (Cansever & Mede, 2016; Kahraman, 2016). However, the concept of culture associated with second or foreign language learning has shifted. Rather than focusing solely on the cultures of the target language, it now emphasizes broader concepts of world cultures (Cuartas-Álvarez, 2020; Dooly & Vinagre, 2021). When teaching a foreign or second language, it is essential to include instruction on the cultures encompassing the language's use in context (Toscu & Erten, 2020). This integration of culture in language education has significantly impacted teaching and learning approaches (Tran & Seepho, 2016).

Despite the recognized importance of cultural instruction, research has revealed varying perspectives and practices among teachers. Some studies suggest that teachers do not always prioritize cultural instruction as their main objective in language education (Kılıç, 2013). Bayyurt (2006) noted that teachers did not always feel obligated to teach culture, while Kahraman (2016) found that they spent less time teaching culture than previously thought. Atay *et al.* (2009) discovered that despite teachers' awareness of the value of intercultural education, they frequently neglected its implementation. Moreover, despite the growing recognition of the need for culturally aware teachers, many educators still feel unprepared to deal with students from varied cultural and linguistic backgrounds (Slot *et al.*, 2019).

Estaji & Rahimi (2018) investigated EFL teachers'

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practices in teaching culture and their perceptions of ICC. They argued that instructors' opinions on ICC are crucial in determining how to emphasize the importance of teaching culture in the classroom. This suggests that current approaches employed by EFL teachers may be inadequate for fostering ICC. Teachers' perspectives on culture often differ due to variations in their comprehension of ICC (Banjongjit & Boonmoh, 2018). Nonetheless, it is of utmost significance for English teachers to encourage learners' communicative and intercultural competence in EFL courses, as foreign language education today strongly emphasizes these skills (Cuartas-Álvarez, 2020; Toscu & Erten, 2020). Educators are the facilitators of a language-learning environment that develops IC abilities, and their behavior and observations can offer numerous ideas on how to initiate intercultural communication and prepare students for language learning and teaching intercultural competence (Baker & Feng, 2020). According to Cuartas-Álvarez (2020) and Megawati (2020), EFL instructors with strong ICC can manage the disparities that arise in the classroom and react more skillfully to reduce cultural gaps.

Although there is an existing body of literature about the challenges and importance of Intercultural Communicative Competence, these studies primarily explored the ICC development and teaching practices among International and American educators. There is a dearth of studies examining ICC teaching in the context of Filipino EFL instruction. This study aimed to explore teachers' perceptions and practices regarding Intercultural Communicative Competence in teaching English as a foreign language. It specifically aimed to answer the following questions: how teachers view intercultural communicative competence, how they use intercultural approaches in their teaching, and how intercultural communicative competence contributes to teaching English as a Foreign Language.

This study holds significant importance for both teachers and students in the realm of teaching English as a foreign language. For teachers, it may provide critical insights into effective intercultural communicative competence (ICC) practices, enhancing their pedagogical strategies and fostering professional development to create more inclusive and engaging learning environments. For students, exposure to ICC-focused teaching enhances their cultural awareness, communication skills, and overall learning experience, better preparing them for global citizenship and increasing their motivation and engagement in learning English. Bridging cultural gaps in the classroom, this research may contribute to a more harmonious and productive educational experience, benefiting the entire learning community.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research Participants

The participants in this study were six (6) English as

a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers. Dworkin (2012) reported that the adequate number of research participants for qualitative studies ranges from 5 to 50. The researchers utilized purposive sampling to select appropriate respondents for the study. The inclusion criteria encompassed Filipino EFL educators who were knowledgeable about and had experienced the phenomenon under investigation (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011), and who worked in the field of teaching English as a foreign language. The participants were teaching in various countries, including China, Thailand, Singapore, Vietnam, Indonesia, and Brazil.

Research Instruments

The researchers developed an interview guide to ensure a semi-structured and comprehensive exploration of the key themes. This guide was crafted and validated to ensure its reliability and effectiveness in eliciting relevant information. The validation process included expert reviews to refine the questions and structure. The validated interview guide was then employed during in-depth interviews conducted via Google Meet to allow for a detailed and insightful conversation with the participants. Using this digital platform facilitated an efficient interview process, which enabled the researchers to gather rich, qualitative data while maintaining flexibility and convenience for the participants.

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative descriptive design to meet the aims and objectives of the study. The researcher must select the most suitable design for achieving the aims of the study. This means that qualitative researchers will look into the narratives of teachers attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meaning people bring to them (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005). Nassaji (2015) underscored that descriptive-qualitative research employs rich data collection from diverse sources to obtain a deeper understanding of the research participants' opinions, perspectives, and attitudes. Furthermore, Bradshaw *et al.* (2017) claimed that descriptive-qualitative design is appropriate in studies that require information from people who are directly experiencing the problem that is being investigated. Thus, utilizing descriptive-qualitative design is appropriate for the purpose of this study, as the researchers were aiming to unravel the theoretical teaching in ICC.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the results of the study, providing a detailed analysis and interpretation of the data collected. Specifically, the teachers' view on intercultural communicative competence, their use of intercultural approaches in teaching, and the contribution of intercultural communicative competence to teaching English as a foreign language.

Table 1: Teachers' View on Intercultural Communicative Competence

Emergent Themes	Formulated Meanings
ICC Fosters Effective Communication Across Cultures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ICC is essential for enabling effective cross-cultural communication in language teaching. • Teaching approaches prioritize intercultural skills to enhance students' interactions with diverse cultures. • ICC involves the ability to communicate appropriately and effectively across cultural boundaries. • ICC aids in understanding language and cultural differences to facilitate communication. • Maintaining linguistic and cultural diversity enhances communication while preserving cultural identities.
ICC promotes Awareness and Cultural Diversity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exposure to diverse materials and activities fosters appreciation for language and culture, leading to empathy and inclusivity. • ICC bridges cultural gaps, fostering appreciation of differences and enhancing language learning. • ICC is crucial for developing cultural sensitivity and recognizing personal biases. • Learning languages and developing ICC leads to personal growth and expanded worldviews.

Table 1 presents data on teachers' perspectives regarding Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC). It explores their understanding of the concept and its significance within language education. Two key themes emerge: ICC Fosters Effective Communication Across Cultures; and ICC promotes Awareness and Cultural Diversity. These themes offer valuable insights into teachers' views on fostering ICC within their students.

ICC Fosters Effective Communication Across Cultures

Based on the in-depth interview, participants emphasized the role of Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) in fostering effective communication across diverse cultural landscapes. ICC not only facilitates understanding between individuals from different cultural backgrounds but also enhances one's ability to navigate complex multicultural environments. Participants highlighted that ICC in language teaching aims to help both ESL teachers and learners communicate effectively across cultures. They noted the importance of imparting intercultural skills such as empathy, open-mindedness, and respect for diversity.

Participants defined ICC as the ability to communicate and interact appropriately with people from various cultural backgrounds, rooted in understanding and appreciating diverse cultural norms. Some participants pointed out that it aids students in comprehending language and cultural disparities, enabling effective communication with individuals from diverse backgrounds. Moreover, others highlighted the importance of maintaining linguistic and cultural diversity, suggesting that it enriches the communication process. They emphasized that ICC allows individuals to preserve their cultural identity while improving their ability to communicate effectively across cultures.

"ICC in language teaching emphasizes effective communication with people from diverse cultural backgrounds for both ESL teachers and learners." (MSE-01)
 "In teaching approach, you prioritize imparting intercultural skills such as empathy, open-mindedness,

and respect for diversity to help students effectively interact and communicate with individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds " (MMM-02)

"Intercultural communicative competence is defined by an individual's ability to effectively and appropriately communicate and interact with people from diverse cultural backgrounds, rooted in understanding and appreciating diverse cultural norms." (MII-05)

"Maintaining linguistic and cultural diversity is significant as it enhances the communication process, enabling individuals to preserve their cultural identity while improving their ability to communicate effectively." (MGM-07)

ICC promotes Awareness and Cultural Diversity

The results of the in-depth interviews revealed that participants view ICC as a catalyst for cultural awareness and appreciation of diversity. Respondents emphasized that exposure to diverse activities, materials, and resources through ICC helps learners develop a deeper appreciation for language and culture. They believe this exposure not only enhances intercultural communicative competence but also cultivates empathy, inclusivity, and open-mindedness, which leads to more genuine connections among people from different cultural backgrounds.

The participants characterized ICC as a bridge that fills cultural gaps, fostering appreciation of differences, nurturing cultural awareness, and enhancing language learning, particularly for second language users. They noted that ICC promotes cultural sensitivity by helping learners recognize personal biases and assumptions. Additionally, some respondents viewed ICC as a catalyst for transformative personal growth, challenging assumptions and deepening understanding of oneself and the world.

"Exposure to various activities, materials, and resources, learners can develop an appreciation for language and culture. This exposure not only helps build intercultural communicative competence but also fosters empathy, inclusivity, and open-mindedness, ultimately leading

to genuine connections among people from different cultures.” (MKK-03)

“ICC serves as a bridge to fill gaps, fostering appreciation of cultural differences, cultivating cultural awareness, and enhancing language learning, particularly for second language users.” (MSE-01) and deepening understanding of oneself and the world. “(MCL-06)

“ICC in language teaching aids students in comprehending language and cultural disparities. Its goal is to enable effective communication with individuals from diverse backgrounds.” (MCL-04)

“Learning a language and developing ICC fosters transformative personal growth, expanding exposure to diverse cultures and languages, challenging assumptions, and deepening understanding of oneself and the world. “(MCL-06)

The results indicate a generally positive and comprehensive understanding of Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) among the participants. They emphasize ICC’s role in fostering effective communication across cultures, promoting cultural awareness, and enhancing language learning. This aligns with some aspects of the literature, particularly the recognition of ICC’s importance noted by Cheewasukthaworn and Suwanarak (2017) and Jumpakate and Hieu (2019). However, the results seem to contrast with findings from studies like Kılıç (2013) and Bayyurt (2006), which suggested that teachers do not always prioritize cultural instruction. The results appear to have a more holistic view of ICC, seeing it as integral to language teaching and personal growth, which differs from the varied understanding of ICC noted by Banjongjit and Boonmoh (2018).

Table 2: Use of Intercultural Approach in Teaching

Emergent Themes	Statements
Application of Interactive Cultural Learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teachers create opportunities for intercultural interactions and critical reflection on cultural identities. Cultural storytelling is used to share and compare cultural values and perspectives. Various techniques are employed to promote cultural awareness and respect for inclusion. Interactive activities are used to foster understanding among students from different backgrounds.
Integration of Authentic Cultural Materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Authentic materials from different cultures are used to introduce new perspectives and contexts. Activities like role-playing and group projects engage students with diverse cultural backgrounds. Language exchange programs and multicultural literature are incorporated into the curriculum. Online platforms are utilized to expand learning about specific cultural aspects. Real-life materials such as recordings, songs, videos, and photographs are used to expose learners to authentic situations.

Table 2 presents an analysis on how teachers use Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) in teaching. Two key themes emerge: (1) Application on Interactive Cultural Learning and (2) Integration of Authentic Cultural Materials.

Application of Interactive Cultural Learning

During the in-depth interview, the participants shared that they use ICC in creating engaging, hands-on opportunities for students to explore and interact with diverse cultures. They reported facilitating intercultural interactions through group work, collaborative projects, and cultural exchange programs. They emphasized encouraging critical reflection on cultural identities, biases, and assumptions. Cultural storytelling was used to help students share and compare stories from their backgrounds with the target language culture. Participants also mentioned incorporating techniques that promote cultural awareness, integrate diverse cultural backgrounds, and foster respect for cultural inclusion. Additionally, they also highlighted the importance of discussions about cultural differences and providing opportunities

for students to engage meaningfully with various cultural perspectives.

“Facilitating Intercultural Interactions: Teachers create opportunities for students to interact with peers from different cultural backgrounds. This could involve group work, collaborative projects, or cultural exchange programs that allow students to engage in meaningful intercultural dialogue and exchange ideas. Promoting Critical Reflection: Teachers encourage students to critically reflect on their own cultural identities, biases, and assumptions. This involves challenging stereotypes, examining cultural norms and values, and considering how their cultural background influences their perspectives and interactions with others. (MCL-06)

“Cultural storytelling activities will lead the student to share stories and anecdotes from their origin and compare them with the target language this will help them understand cultural values and perspectives. Another one is cultural days with specific activities students tend to showcase different tribes and history about the culture being presented through dance, story and even re-enact the beginning of their culture.” (MKK-03)

“Incorporate different techniques and strategies that promote cultural awareness, integrate cultural backgrounds or contents, and encourage respect for cultural inclusion among learners and teachers as well.” (MSE-01)

“Drawing from my experience, I use an intercultural approach in my teaching by incorporating diverse perspectives, cultural examples, and interactive activities to foster understanding and appreciation among students from different backgrounds,” (MII-05)

“Teaching in Vietnam in my prior 2 years I integrated the Intercultural approach to the actual surroundings of my students learning about cultural aspects for some reason it can be the values of intercultural approach.” (MGM-07)

Integration of Authentic Cultural Materials

Another use of ICC in teaching based on the responses of the participants centers on the use of genuine cultural resources to provide students with authentic exposure to diverse cultural contexts. Participants described using materials such as news stories, movies, literature, and other media from different cultures to introduce students to new viewpoints. They designed exercises around these authentic materials to promote cross-cultural communication and understanding, including role-playing activities, conversations, and group projects. Some educators mentioned incorporating multicultural literature into their curriculum and using online platforms to expand students’ cultural learning opportunities. The use of various authentic resources like recordings, songs, videos, photographs, and printed materials was emphasized as a way to expose learners to real-life cultural situations and contexts.

““I use intercultural perspectives in my English language instruction as an EFL instructor in Vietnam by introducing my students to new viewpoints and cultural contexts by using authentic materials from different civilizations, like news stories, movies, and literature. I also design exercises that promote communication and understanding across cultural boundaries. Through role-playing, conversations, and group projects, these activities help students engage with classmates from different cultural backgrounds.” (MGM-07)

“I integrate ICC into language teaching through activities such as discussing cultural differences, using authentic

materials from diverse cultures, organizing language exchange programs, and incorporating multicultural literature into the curriculum.” (MCL-04)

“Employing authentic materials and intercultural activities, perhaps I can also utilize the online platform for them to expand their learning when it comes to a specific field of learning they want to understand.” (MGM-07)

“Materials and resources that are authentic which would expose learners to real-life situations may it be recordings, songs, videos, photographs, or printed materials with useful and relevant contents.” (MKK-03)

The results offer insights into how teachers implement Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) in their English language teaching, which can be compared with the broader literature on this topic. It indicates that teachers aim to foster effective communication across cultures by imparting intercultural skills such as empathy, open-mindedness, and respect for diversity. This aligns with the literature’s emphasis on the importance of integrating cultural and intercultural dimensions into language teaching (Cuartas-Álvarez, 2020; Toscu & Erten, 2020). The results also state that teachers focus on helping students comprehend language and cultural disparities, enabling effective communication with individuals from diverse backgrounds. This practice aligns with the findings of Cuartas-Álvarez (2020) and Megawati (2020) that EFL instructors with strong ICC can better manage classroom disparities and reduce cultural gaps.

However, while the result presented positive applications of ICC, it did not fully address the challenges in implementation highlighted in the broader literature. Several studies by Jantadej and Charubusp (2018), Cheewasukthaworn and Suwanarak (2017), and Jumpakate and Hieu (2019) all indicated that teachers often struggle to translate their understanding of ICC into effective classroom strategies. This discrepancy suggests that while there are examples of ICC being applied in teaching, as reflected in the findings, there may still be significant challenges in its widespread, consistent practical application that were not fully captured. The emphasis on ICC as a tool for fostering cultural awareness and appreciation of diversity in the classroom aligns with the literature’s recognition of the inseparable nature of language and culture in education, but it may not fully reflect the varied levels of success in implementation (Atay *et al.*, 2009; Slot *et al.* 2019).

Table 3: Contribution of Intercultural Communicative Competence to Teaching English as a Foreign Language

Emergent Themes	Statements
Enhancement of Communication Skills and Cultural Competence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ICC helps students understand cultural differences, promoting effective communication with diverse English speakers. • ICC integration enhances both language proficiency and cultural competence needed in a globalized society. • ICC encourages mutual understanding and appreciation among students from different cultural backgrounds. • ICC creates connections among learners while exploring various intercultural aspects.
Promotion of Global Awareness and Citizenship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ICC instruction develops global citizenship competencies and responsibility for global issues. • ICC bridges cultural differences and promotes inclusivity in English language education. • ICC helps students become more culturally aware, better communicators, and more open-minded.

Preparation for Real-World Interactions and Global Competitiveness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ICC education prepares students for real-world cross-cultural interactions and communication. • ICC promotes cultural awareness and effective communication in a globalized world. • ICC develops intercultural speakers who can communicate appropriately beyond just grammar and structure.
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Table 3 presents the participants' insights on the contributions of Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) to teaching of English as a Foreign Language. Their responses revealed three main themes: Enhancement of Communication Skills and Cultural Competence, Promotion of Global Awareness and Citizenship, and Preparation for Real-World Interactions and Global Competitiveness.

Enhancement of Communication Skills and Cultural Competence

Participants in the study highlighted the benefits of incorporating Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) into teaching of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL). They reported that ICC integration enhances both language proficiency and cultural understanding. Students were observed to develop a deeper comprehension of cultural differences, which in turn enabled more effective communication with English speakers from diverse backgrounds. The participants emphasized that integrating ICC into EFL teaching equips learners with the cultural competence needed to thrive in a globalized society. Moreover, those teaching in cross-cultural contexts noted that incorporating ICC provides students with valuable opportunities to learn about each other's cultures, traditions, and viewpoints.

"ICC in teaching English helps students understand cultural differences, promoting effective communication with English speakers from diverse backgrounds." (MCL-04)

"Integrating ICC into the teaching of EFL not only enhances language proficiency but also equips learners with the cultural competence needed to thrive in a globalized society." (MII-05)

"Incorporating Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) into my lesson as a Filipino EFL teacher in Vietnam can enhance the learning process in many ways. I encourage mutual understanding and appreciation among my pupils by introducing ICC, which provides them with the chance to learn about each other's cultures, traditions, and viewpoints. I can give Vietnamese pupils a more comprehensive understanding of the English language in cultural contexts by including Filipino cultural components into my English courses as an EFL teacher." (MGM-07)

"In today's increasingly diverse English classrooms, it is an essential component. It creates a sense of connection among learners while exploring various intercultural aspects. So, transmitting other people's culture and traditions through the teaching of English as a foreign language is highly beneficial." (MKK-03)

Promotion of Global Awareness and Citizenship

Based on the in-depth interviews, participants emphasized the role of Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) in fostering a broader worldview and global citizenship among students. They shared that ICC instruction promotes the development of global citizenship competencies, inspiring students to explore global issues and cultivating a sense of responsibility for these challenges. They observed that this approach better prepares students to become engaged global citizens capable of making meaningful contributions to a globalized society. Some highlighted that ICC, when combined with teaching English as an international language, enhances understanding by bridging cultural differences and promotes inclusivity in English language education. Furthermore, participants noted that emphasizing ICC in EFL instruction helps students become more culturally aware, enhances their communication skills, and cultivates a more open-minded and globally conscious perspective.

"ICC instruction promotes the development of global citizenship competencies. As a Filipino teacher in Vietnam, it can inspire pupils to look into global issues, foster a sense of responsibility for those challenges, and spark discussions about cultural diversity. With this method, students are better equipped to become engaged global citizens who make meaningful contributions to a globalized society." (MMM-02)

"With English being an international language, it creates more understanding by bridging cultural differences. It also helps by giving awareness of how to interact with people appropriately and effectively. It promotes inclusivity in English language education." (MKK-03)

"When Emphasizing ICC in EFL instruction, the positive outcome is that it helps students become more culturally aware, better communicators, and more [open-minded/globaly aware]." (MKK-03)

Preparation for Real-World Interactions and Global Competitiveness

During the in-depth interviews, the participants shared insights into ICC's crucial role in preparing students for practical, real-world communication scenarios. They emphasized that students who receive ICC education are better equipped to communicate effectively in a variety of real-world contexts. Some educators described their approach to implementing ICC, which involved designing assignments and exercises that simulate real-world cross-cultural interactions. These activities were aimed at helping students develop the necessary skills for effective communication with English speakers from diverse cultural backgrounds. Respondents highlighted

the importance of ICC in today's globalized world, noting that it promotes cultural awareness and effective communication. They stressed that language learning extends beyond mastering grammar or structure, emphasizing the development of intercultural speakers who can communicate appropriately in diverse settings.

"Students who acquire an ICC education are better prepared to communicate in a range of real-world contexts. Designing assignments and exercises that imitate real-world cross-cultural interactions, I assist students in gaining the skills necessary to communicate effectively and efficiently with English speakers from a variety of cultural backgrounds, including Filipino culture." (MSE-01)

"I think with this globalized world and through the teaching of English, ICC promotes cultural awareness and effective communication because language is not just about using grammar or structure but being able to communicate appropriately by developing intercultural speakers." (MKK-03)

There is a clear alignment between the participants' insights and the theoretical understanding of Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) in teaching of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL). These findings echo Byram's (2021) conceptualization of ICC as a combination of communicative and intercultural competence, enabling learners to effectively use a foreign language in intercultural communication. The participants' observations on ICC's role in developing cultural understanding and effective communication across diverse backgrounds align with the broader shift in language education towards emphasizing world cultures (Cuartas-Álvarez, 2020; Dooly & Vinagre, 2021). Furthermore, the study's emphasis on ICC's contribution to preparing students for real-world interactions and global citizenship resonates with the assertion of (Baker & Feng, 2020) that educators are key facilitators in developing intercultural competence.

Implication for Educational Practices

The findings of the study unveiled a transformative vision for EFL instruction, prioritizing Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) as a cornerstone for student empowerment in our globalized world. This approach marks a significant departure from traditional, textbook-driven methods. Imagine EFL classrooms transformed into vibrant spaces of collaboration, where students from diverse backgrounds tackle real-world scenarios while navigating the complexities of intercultural communication. Social media platforms, once viewed primarily for social interaction, could be repurposed as springboards for critical analysis, fostering the development of critical thinking and cultural awareness as students explore the nuances of communication across various cultural contexts.

To achieve this shift towards ICC, a two-pronged approach within educational practices is necessary. Firstly, pedagogy must transform to equip students with practical communication functions, moving beyond

rote memorization and grammar drills. Educators can leverage authentic materials like social media to expose students to the intricacies of real-world communication. Furthermore, empowering students to take ownership of their learning by encouraging them to explore cultural topics that resonate with their interests and backgrounds fosters deeper engagement.

Secondly, professional development becomes crucial to support this transformation. Educators themselves can benefit from opportunities designed to deepen their intercultural understanding. This equips them to seamlessly integrate ICC activities into the curriculum and effectively guide students in their exploration of diverse cultures. Embracing these pedagogical and professional development strategies may help EFL classrooms evolve into dynamic spaces that empower students not just as language users but as effective communicators, culturally aware individuals, and responsible global citizens ready to thrive in our interconnected world.

CONCLUSION

This study revealed insights into the inherent limitations of traditional textbook-centered methodologies within the realm of EFL education. Through an in-depth exploration of Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC), researchers uncovered a pressing realization: conventional approaches often inadequately equip students for the complexities of intercultural interaction in our increasingly globalized world. This revelation underscored the imperative for a fundamental shift in educational paradigms, one that elevates ICC as a central pillar for fostering genuine cross-cultural understanding and effective communication skills.

Throughout the study, researchers emerged with a deepened understanding of the transformative potential of ICC in EFL education. They recognized that by prioritizing ICC and fostering an intercultural approach within the classroom, educators play a pivotal role in empowering students to navigate the complexities of our interconnected world with empathy, respect, and cultural competence. Armed with this insight, researchers advocate for continued research, collaboration, and investment in professional development to ensure that EFL instruction remains not only linguistically enriching but also culturally transformative for generations to come.

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