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## CULTURE, IDENTITY, AND INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING

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### Abstract

In the modern world, English functions not only as a means of international communication but also as a tool for shaping identity, social belonging, and cultural representation. Consequently, teaching English in the 21st century requires a reconsideration of traditional methodological approaches and the inclusion of a cultural component as a key element of instruction. This article examines the interrelationship between culture, identity, and intercultural communication in the context of English language teaching. Particular attention is paid to the theoretical foundations of intercultural competence, the role of language as a means of expressing identity, and practical strategies for integrating intercultural content into the educational process.

**Keywords:** Culture, identity, intercultural communication, English language teaching, intercultural competence, ELT, EFL.

### Introduction


Before 1960s, Grammar and language structure (grammar–translation, audiolingual approaches were limited to “facts” about English-speaking countries (e.g., holidays, geography, famous people). The goal was to produce grammatically correct sentences — little attention to cultural or identity-based

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aspects. Scholars began to realize that language cannot be separated from culture. Dell Hymes (1966) introduced the concept of “communicative competence” [3;17], emphasizing that effective language use depends not just on grammar, but also on understanding social norms and cultural contexts. This led to the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) movement in the 1970s–80s, which expanded focus to social interaction and meaning rather than rote correctness.

During 1980s–1990s, with globalization and increased international mobility, English became a global lingua franca. Culture teaching began to mean more than learning “British or American” traditions — it included awareness of global, shared, and diverse perspectives. Sandra Savignon (1983) and Michael Byram (1989, 1997) were key theorists who introduced the concept of “intercultural communicative competence” (ICC) [1] — combining linguistic, social interaction. Michael Byram’s concept of intercultural communicative competence (ICC). According to this model, ICC includes: knowledge of cultures and social practices; skills to interpret and relate cultural phenomena; abilities to interact and discover new cultural meanings; critical cultural awareness as well as attitudes of respect, openness, and readiness for dialogue. As for the time being, in the context of globalization, English serves as a medium of intercultural interaction, and learning it is inevitably linked to the acquisition of cultural norms, values, and communicative strategies. At the same time, culture is not a static system; it constantly evolves, interacts with other cultures, and is reflected in language. Alongside culture, the concept of identity becomes particularly relevant. Learning a foreign language influences how individuals perceive themselves, their sense of belonging to social groups, and their modes of self-expression. Therefore, English language teaching becomes a space where cultural perceptions and personal positions are formed and reconsidered.

Culture has traditionally been viewed as a supplementary element of instruction, including information about traditions, holidays, history, and the realities of countries where the target language is spoken. However, contemporary research in applied linguistics and language pedagogy emphasizes that culture is not an

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external component but an integral part of language as a system of meanings and modes of communication. Culture manifests itself in:

- forms of speech behavior (politeness, distance, forms of address);
- pragmatics and communicative context;
- discourse norms (how arguments are structured, how disagreement is expressed);
- value orientations (what is considered acceptable and what is not) [4].

Thus, teaching English without a cultural component result in the development of “linguistic competence without communicative adequacy,” which complicates real-life communication.

In language education, identity is understood as a dynamic concept that includes social roles, personal attitudes, national affiliation, gender, professional status, and other aspects of self-perception. During the process of learning English, students encounter alternative ways of expressing thoughts, emotions, and relationships, which may reshape their self-esteem and communicative style. Learning English expands the repertoire of self-expression. For example, students may adopt more direct or more indirect communication styles, master new forms of argumentation, and develop the ability to articulate personal opinions [3]. However, tension may arise between the cultural norms of one’s native society and those of English-speaking discourse. Motivation to learn English is often associated with the desire to integrate into the global space, pursue education, access career opportunities, or participate in international projects. Consequently, language learning becomes part of shaping one’s future professional and social identity.

Intercultural communication involves interaction between individuals with different cultural frameworks.

In English language teaching, this implies developing not only linguistic skills but also the ability to understand cultural differences, avoid stereotypes, and collaborate effectively in an international environment. The communicative approach to language teaching is grounded in the principle of using language as a means of meaningful interaction in situations approximating real-life communication [7]. Nevertheless, communicative competence cannot be fully

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developed without consideration of the cultural context in which communication occurs. The effectiveness of communicative tasks increases significantly when they incorporate culturally embedded norms of interaction, social roles, and pragmatic conventions. Such integration enables learners to acquire not only grammatical and lexical knowledge but also sociocultural and pragmatic competence, which are essential components of successful communication.

Within the communicative framework, project-based learning serves as an effective pedagogical tool for fostering sustained language use and deeper cultural engagement. Project work encourages learners to investigate cultural phenomena, compare value systems, and critically analyze social issues while using English as a medium of inquiry and presentation. Typical project topics may include cultural traditions and their transformation in contemporary society, differences in educational practices across countries, communication norms in digital and social media environments, and issues related to youth cultural identity. By integrating research, collaboration, and presentation, project-based learning creates conditions for meaningful intercultural interaction and reflective language use.

The use of authentic materials constitutes a key component of culturally oriented communicative instruction. Texts such as newspaper articles, interviews, films, podcasts, and online blogs expose learners to natural language use and culturally situated meanings. These materials allow students to observe how identity, values, and social relations are constructed in English-speaking contexts. It is essential that authentic materials represent linguistic and cultural diversity, including different accents, registers, and social groups, rather than promoting a single normative model of English. Such an approach contributes to the development of learners' intercultural competence and prepares them for communication in global and multicultural settings. The combined use of communicative tasks, project-based learning, and authentic materials facilitates a dialogue of cultures within the language classroom. This pedagogical orientation aligns with contemporary views of language education that emphasize critical cultural awareness. Learners are encouraged to analyze cultural stereotypes, engage in discussion of complex global issues—such as



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migration, equality, and globalization—and recognize the plurality of cultural perspectives. As a result, language learning extends beyond linguistic proficiency to include the development of critical thinking, reflexivity, and intercultural sensitivity, which are particularly important in the context of modern global communication [9;210].

One effective strategy for integrating intercultural competence into English language teaching is the use of comparative discussions. This approach encourages learners to reflect on their own cultural norms while comparing them with those of English-speaking communities. Teachers may introduce discussion topics addressing culturally conditioned patterns of behavior and communication, such as perceptions of politeness, norms of expressing agreement or disagreement, and the ways in which identity is constructed and transformed in digital communication, particularly on social media platforms. Comparative discussions foster awareness of both cultural similarities and differences and promote reflective and analytical thinking.

Role-plays and scenario-based activities enable learners to simulate real-life intercultural communication situations in a controlled educational environment. Through such activities, students practice appropriate linguistic and pragmatic strategies while taking into account social roles and cultural expectations. Typical scenarios may include participating in a job interview at an international company, communicating with foreign tourists, engaging in discussions at an international academic or professional conference, or collaborating on a project within a multicultural team [6]. These activities contribute to the development of pragmatic competence, adaptability, and intercultural sensitivity.

Intercultural case studies represent another important pedagogical tool for developing intercultural awareness and problem-solving skills. Case studies may present learners with authentic or semi-authentic communicative challenges arising from cultural differences, such as the misinterpretation of humor, contrasting perceptions of time, or variations in communication styles, particularly the use of directness versus indirectness. By analyzing such cases, learners are encouraged to identify underlying cultural assumptions, evaluate

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alternative communicative strategies, and reflect on the complexity of intercultural interaction.

Despite the recognized importance of integrating intercultural components into English language teaching, a number of challenges and limitations persist. One significant risk is stereotyping, which may result from the oversimplification or essentialization of cultural characteristics. Another limitation concerns the availability and quality of teaching materials, as many textbooks present culture in a superficial manner or focus predominantly on a single, standardized model of English. In addition, insufficient teacher preparation remains a challenge, since not all educators possess the methodological and theoretical background necessary to facilitate intercultural discussions effectively. Finally, issues related to culture and identity are often socially and emotionally sensitive, requiring careful pedagogical handling. Addressing these challenges necessitates targeted methodological training for teachers, the development of learners' media and critical literacy, and the establishment of a supportive and safe educational environment that encourages open dialogue and mutual respect. In conclusion, culture, identity, and intercultural communication constitute integral components of contemporary English language teaching. As a global means of communication, English functions within diverse sociocultural contexts and requires learners to interact with representatives of different cultural backgrounds, interpret varying communicative norms, and articulate their own identities in a foreign language. Consequently, English language education should extend beyond the development of linguistic accuracy to include the formation of intercultural competence, critical thinking, and cultural awareness. Such an approach aligns with current theoretical perspectives in applied linguistics and responds to the communicative demands of a globalized world.

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