

## Strategies to Promote Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) in ESL Classrooms: Islamic Ethical Values in Pakistani University Teachers' Perspective

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### **Abstract:**

This paper is designed to investigate teachers' attitudes towards the teaching of ICC in the ESL class in Pakistan Universities. It also focuses on the teacher's perspectives as to how they perceive the integration of ICC in teaching English as a second language. In a dynamic era of technology, countries and cultures have come together like never before making cultural awareness and sensitivity a growing need in as multilingual and multicultural society as Pakistan in general and the fast shrinking world in particular. The research methodology used is qualitative in nature with purposive sampling to choose the participants carefully for the interviews which were transcribed and analyzed thematically. The results indicated that the Students' ICC development is very important in a Pakistani society which is multilingual and multicultural so as to instill the much-needed tolerance. But, it exposes the lack of teachers' professional development and appropriate assessment on this matter. The teachers also will have to deal with the inferiority complex as a non-native ESL teacher and introduce the English cultural values and identities into the students. Rigid attitude, limited resources and time constraints are some of the challenges that the teachers face while developing ICC. Considerable work has been done to encourage ICC, such as lecture explanation, selection and creation of multicultural materials, in-class activities and relevant reading/hearing activities.

**Keywords:** Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC), English as a Second Language (ESL) Classrooms, Pakistani University, Teachers' Perspectives, Strategies to Promote ICC

### **1.0 Introduction**

#### **1.1 Background Information of ICC**

The origin of the study of intercultural communicative competence (ICC) goes back to the 1950s and 1960s. Edward T. Hall's 1959 book, *The Silent Language*, changed the paradigm of the

relationship between culture and communication. In 1957 and 1965 Noam Chomsky introduced the notion of linguistic competence and in 1972 Dell Hymes introduced communicative competence, arguing that the socio-cultural context is essential for communication to be successful. He pointed out the importance of combining linguistic and cultural factors of communication. In 1975, Van Ek expanded on the notion of communicative competence to include linguistic, sociolinguistic, discourse, strategic, socio-cultural, and social competence. Canale and Swain in 1980 came up with a framework for communicative competence, which covered grammatical, sociolinguistic, strategic, and discourse competencies. With the world's shrinking size, the communicative competence limitations gave rise to the concept of intercultural communicative competence (ICC) which according to Chen and Starosta (1998) is the communicative competence for the purpose of effective communication of identities across cultures. In 1997, Byram highlighted the close connection between culture and linguistic, sociolinguistic and discourse competence in ICC. Generally, ICC deals with the interaction with people from various countries, negotiating meaning and mediating between cultures. In 2001, the Common European Framework of References to Languages (CEFR) of the Council of Europe highlighted the importance of ICC in FLE. In 2013, Olaya and Gómez Rodríguez noted that learners can gain ICC via communication and exposure to linguistic and cultural materials. ICC develops positive attitudes towards other cultures and effectively resolve cultural differences in communication. Communication and interaction both locally and internationally is a key issue in business for which the acquisition of ICC is essential. The use of ICC in language teaching helps to improve students' cross-cultural interaction ability suitably.

## **1.2 Rationale for Study**

After the advent of latest technology, this closely connected globalized world requires a better development of Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) amongst the people. ESL classrooms are at the centre of this. A knowledge of the strategies used by the ESL teachers of the Pakistani universities may be helpful to gain insight into the teaching methodology which helps in the development of ICC amongst the students. Moreover, the purpose of this research article is also to come to know the views of such teachers on the importance and application of ICC in ESL curriculum.

## **1.3 Research Questions**



There are three important research questions for this study.

RQ 1. How do university English as a second language (ESL) teachers view the importance of ICC in their classrooms?

RQ 2. What do university ESL teachers think about the integration of ICC in their teaching methods and lesson plans?

RQ 3. How do university ESL teachers help their ESL students become ICC?

## 2.0 Literature Review

In order to acquire communicative competence in a language, it is mandatory to develop linguistic competence first. This communicative competence as Vaganova (2019) believes begets intercultural communicative competence. The ability of a second language speaker to comprehend, interpret and express the cultures of his first and second language is called intercultural communicative competence (Syzenko and Diachkova, 2020). Now that the world is becoming smaller because of the development of technology, the second language teaching should incorporate into it the awareness of the target language culture in order to produce good communication in various cultures. Without intercultural communicative competence, meaningful cross-cultural interactions will not be possible.

Today, language, cultural identity and intercultural communication are correlated and this relationship is important. In this sense, Little (2020) has said that languages are a medium of transgenerational transmission of culture. Knowing about the cultural dimensions is an important aspect of second language teaching (Gerwitz & Gribb, 2009; Little, 2020). Intercultural communicative competence (ICC) is essential for people to communicate their ideas effectively across different cultures and languages (Poyas & Elkad-Lehman, 2022).

Different cultures can bring about differences in discourse (Zhu et al., 2020) which bring forth a lot of misunderstanding. Language and culture are associated with each other (Hardini & Sitohang, 2019; Jiang, 2000; Kramsch, 2014) and they influence each other (Sharifian, 2014). There are social norms that are associated with a language and the use of verbal and non-verbal cues in that language. According to Fernández et al. (2000), culture has an influence on emotions. In a similar way, a language and its use is affected by cultural practices. One message can be interpreted within a culture in several ways let alone in an intercultural communication.

In order to build up mutual understanding and minimize misinterpretation, it is mandatory to develop the awareness of cultural differences of two separate languages, which can develop harmony in this increasingly interconnected world.

Communication on a global scale has surged to unprecedented levels today. Ensuring intercultural communicative competence; therefore, is pivotal to avoid miscommunication in different cultural contexts (Cameron et al., 2020). In order to negotiate differences in organizing and social settings effectively, individuals from different language and culture background must possess intercultural communicative competence (Little, 2020; Barros & Albert, 2020). Without ICC, there can be difficulties and issues. Because cultural identity affects the encoding, sending, and understanding of a message (Cameron et al., 2020).

If a connection between language and culture is not understood, neither teachers nor learners will gain understanding of the language in use. It has been stressed by Chau & Truong (2019). While encapsulating in it norms, beliefs and values, a language displays the behavior and attitude of a society. Therefore, a learner can develop better proficiency in a language if a culturally sensitive approach to learning language is adopted.

English language has today become the lingua franca of the world (Ahmad & Ahmad, 2015), and is accepted and used by the people all over the world. It is used and accepted widely and so transcends borders. It has gone over into cultures. English has evolved and taken on a transformative role, according to Baker (2017), becoming a language of transcultural mobility and intercultural communication. It mediates amongst the individuals from different cultures. It is a place where meanings are negotiated and shared understandings are created by people with different cultures. In this situation English becomes a means of linking people from different language and culture backgrounds and is used to foster one culture among many. Hence, Sharifian (2013) claims that competency for successful intercultural communication in this global world should be developed in the English Language Teaching (ELT) curricula for the learners.

But some voices are raising their concerns about the promotion and publicity of western culture in ELT curriculum. Karmani (2006) mentions that the syllabus of English in the Arab world is geared toward the culture of the western world and not towards the culture of the Muslim world. Keeping in view such objections, we need to develop ELT curricula that should merge

the cultures of both the languages. However, Byram (1997) points out that knowledge of multiple cultures, gained as a result of learning another language, is not only about different practices, but it also gives information about alternative conceptions of human existence.

It is mentioned that communicative competence can be best built up if the communicative teachers teach the target language by assimilating language with culture (Alptekin 2002), since several characteristics of target language communication are quite different from the learner's culture. Porto (1996) seconds it suggesting it is beneficial for the learners to acquire multicultural perspectives. Language is related to culture and vice versa, so 'their integration is the fundamental purpose of language learning, where they can use the language as native speakers' (Alptekin, 2002). In most English language books, especially those used in the UK, the characteristics of British society are usually included to enhance the learner's awareness of the target culture, e.g., Oxford Practice Grammar by John Eastwood (2020). Even though it helps the learners to communicate to native English speakers efficiently (Bex, 1994), it, at times, drives them away from their own native-language-communication style. This whole practice, however, should not be regarded as an effort to prove the superiority of the target language culture or culture over the learners. Contrary to the vision of Macaulay, English language, which was to produce 'brown sahibs and Afro-saxons' (Mazrui's, 2019), 'has gone through its localization under the influence different cultural and regional identities (Kachru, 1987). Thus, Alptekin (2002) refutes the 'conventional model of communicative competence' and suggests 'a new pedagogic model to accommodate the case of English as a means of international and intercultural communication in cross-cultural settings. This new pedagogical model should take into consideration the English speech community worldwide referred to by Kachru (1996 November) as 'norm-providing' and 'norm-dependent'.

### **3.0 Research Methodology**

The method of research employed is qualitative. The interviews of five participants were held. Sampling technique adopted was purposive as each participant was a university teacher with the experience of teaching English as a Second Language (ESL) varying from 7 to 12 years in tertiary level universities of both public and private sector in Pakistan. They all had the degree of either M.Phil/MS or Ph.B in English Language Teaching.G in Education. The only person with an MA in the specific field was one participant. One-on-one semi-structured interviews were conducted, recorded and transcribed. In terms of the method the questions were given

were repeated in some of the interviews to get as much information as possible from the interviewees. Thematic analysis was used to analyze the data.

#### 4.0 Results & Discussion

##### 4.1 Pakistani University Teachers' Perspectives

The importance of developing students' ICC is outlined in the following manner:

Participants believed that developing students' ICC is important in these interesting digital times which have brought people from different nations and cultures closer. This competence can help students to comprehend various cultures, which can in turn assist with effective communication. It can help to positively influence the attitudes towards the people from different cultures and also foster some cultural sensitivity and respect. Individual words may have a different meaning based on the language and culture of the language – as highlighted by one participant – "One word may mean different things in different languages that have associated cultures".

You can remember a word that brought disturbance in the minds, if yes then it was a Sindhi MPA Sindhi called a lady member from Urdu speaking Maasi in Urdu Assembly. You can remember a word that disturbed if yes then it was a Sindhi MPA Sindhi who called a lady member from Urdu speaking Maasi in Urdu Assembly. In the Urdu community, massi is of lower status while in Sindhi community it is sacral. Therefore, both attitudes and knowledge of the language is required. a fact echoed by a participant in the following manner:

*If you can recall a word that stirred disturbance is Sindh Assembly when a Sindhi MPA called a lady member from Urdu speaking Maasi. Massi in Sindhi sacred while in Urdu it is about lower status. So both attitudes and knowledge of the language is necessary.*

You have to know and use a word. Rather, students' ability to use it has to be developed in the proper fashion within a specific cultural context (Byram & Rauschert, 2022). Hence, it is recommended that context-based language learning be used (Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013). Also, ICC enhances effective communication by promoting cultural awareness and sensitivity and creates acceptance and tolerance amongst students.

#### 4.2.1 Teaching and learning in the context of ICC in Primary Schools

Participants expressed their concerns about the lack of professional development in terms of ICC for teachers. However, they informed that they have discovered ICC in their own research in English linguistics and sociolinguistics. Instructional trainings such as seminars, workshops and conferences should be conducted to improve teacher's knowledge of intercultural communicative competence. Instead of formal education, experience also taught one of the participants about ICC.

Combined classes for Pakistanis with multiple languages. Multilingual and multicultural classes for Pakistanis.

Since Pakistan is a multilingual and multicultural country having around 73 languages; classes at tertiary level are full of students from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Students' ICC can be developed easily by implementing various activities that can be done in class in pairs or groups. In order to exploit such multicultural classes, teacher have to design activities to promote ICC.

#### 4.1.4 Assessing ICC

In general there is no explicit and direct method for testing students' cultural sensitivity and understanding. However, students are asked direct simple questions about the importance of ICC in language learning to check their comprehension of cultural identities.

#### 4.1.5 Change due to Real-life Interaction (RRI)

Students can be helped in their attitude change when they face and recognize other cultural identities. Real-life interaction with the individual from another culture can change the perspectives positively. A Participant affirmed:

*Yes, real interaction leaves a positive impact.*

Another person seconded it:

*Interaction, especially positive ones changes mindsets. I attended a pedagogical course in Islamabad in 2006 I came across people from all over Pakistan and some teachers commented we held different views*

*about Sindhi community but after their encounter with me they changed their opinion. So Encounter changes and shapes.*

The most conspicuous feature which was observed due to ICC is tolerance, a need for society. Moreover, students will listen patiently to their fellow students. This plants the seeds for respect of freedom of expression. Those who have high openness are more prone to take differences positively and are ready to analyze a problem from the viewpoint of others than those who are low on this dimension (Fujimoto et al., 2000). Since education is enlightenment; therefore, a formal education, exposure to diversity and collaborative work can lead the individuals to have more openness towards the other cultures.

#### **4.1.6 Non-native ESL Teachers & ICC**

When non-native ESL teachers are left with a feeling of inferiority, it is because they believe that their native teachers are superior to them and that they are definitely the best carriers of British/American culture. Non-native ESL teachers can serve as a cultural bridge, however. They can inculcate values and promote positive traditions of English culture. Other than that, their attitude, personality and the cultural background can influence the students. One of the participants even went so far as to say:

*I think, ICC can be better catered by non-native as they are quite sensitive to various cultures.*

In response to a query about English cultural sensitivity as a non-native ESL teacher while addressing ICC topics, a participant said:

*well, staying informed is core idea. Since we have been living in the age of internet we can learn from various sources about different cultures.*

#### **4.1.7 Challenges that Teachers Face while Developing ICC**

Even though teachers try to develop ICC amongst students and play their part in this regard on their end, yet teachers also feel helpless in changing the attitude that is prevalent in society. One of the participants said that society norms and the behavior of the community directly affects individual:

Changing attitude is difficult... very difficult.

Other obstacles are lack of facilities and time restrictions in the curriculum. The students with low ICC consume most of class time in developing their understanding. Moreover, handling cultural differences with students may be difficult and there can be miscommunication.

Although all teachers should make comprehensive lesson plans to implement ICC and activity, teachers have a tendency to teach ICC informally and unconsciously in classes. Multicultural resources and materials can be used to achieve this purpose. Students should also be encouraged to impart their knowledge about the topic.

#### **4.2.1 Lecture-based Explanation**

While delivering lectures, teachers also explain with examples the concept and significance of ICC. Including real-life examples can provide the students with a detailed analysis of culture.

#### **4.2.2 Materials**

Teachers try to develop their own materials promoting cultural sensitivity amongst students. In addition, some of the teachers choose authentic multicultural materials at their discretion. Audio- and particularly video-content can introduce students to authentic cultural identities. Intercultural knowledge (Griffith et al., 2016) should be integrated into the language education. It can be done with the help of using multicultural authentic material, which will lead to better cultural insights of the participants (Khan et al., 2023).

#### **4.2.3 Interactive In-class Activities**

ICC is encouraged by conducting in-class pair and group activities. This can bring together people of various cultures, setting their differences aside. They learn to negotiate and deal with differences in fact through such activities. A participants resonates the same:

*I have seen students from diverse background working together in groups putting aside their political difference.*

Talking about a successful experience of students involving in ICC in classroom, he said:

*Ya, ya,... students conducted interviows with people of various cultural backgrounds. Analyzing these interviows not only improved their language skills but also deepened their understanding of cultural distinctions, uh,, leading to more culturally sensitive and, mmm, effective communication.*

#### 4.2.4 Reading & Listening Activities

Reading and listening activities can help the learners acquire this competence easily and quickly. Thus, such activities should be promoted. The two passive skills can help students not only to develop their linguistic skills but also their intercultural communicative competence.

#### 4.2.5 Feedback on the Development of ICC is a new component of the curriculum to be introduced in 2022.

Successful learning process requires constructive feedback. Feedback is given orally or in writing on the assignments and quizzes on cultural awareness by teachers. Interactive group activities were also reported and individualized guidance was reported.

#### 5.0 Conclusion

Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) is the competence to communicate effectively with persons of other cultures (Ahnagari & Zamanian, 2014). One area of interest in the world today is promoting ICC in ESL classrooms ( Zhang, 2017). ESL (English as a Second Language) classes in Pakistan are diverse in terms of cultural and linguistic backgrounds among students, making the development of ICC crucial to successful communication and understanding.

The cultural inclusion in the language teaching materials is a commonly used technique by the teachers from the universities of Pakistan to facilitate the process of teaching/learning ICC in ESL classrooms. Through the inclusion of authentic materials from diverse cultures, teachers present students with a range of norms, beliefs, values and practices. This contributes into enhancing not only language skills but also cultural sensitivity. Another successful approach to involve learners from different cultural backgrounds in significant interactive activities that builds their understanding of the interlocutor's culture. This can be done in pair or group works, in discussions and projects where students have to work with other students from other language and cultural backgrounds, so that they could get familiar with cultural differences and develop interpersonal skills that is essential to communicate in a diverse environment. The role playing exercises also simulate real life situations of cross-cultural communication which is popular amongst University teachers in Pakistan to promote ICC. Comfortable and safe setting in classrooms where students are able to express their cultural identities without hassle, for the

sake of learning can also facilitate ICC. In this way, teachers can create the atmosphere of intercultural communication.

With the introduction of interactive World Wide Web 2.0 and the latest technology, the societies and their cultures are closer. Human beings and alien cultures are today as near as fingertips to touch screen. The individuals coming from different cultures have been brought together by online platforms. Professional development through conferences, workshops and seminars plays a crucial role in developing Pakistani university teachers' understanding and knowledge to effectively promote ICC in ESL classrooms, which can enabling them to better support their students' intercultural learning journey.

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## Appendix

### Transcript of one of the Interviews

**Interviewer:** What do you think is the importance of developing students' Intercultural Communicative Competence?

**Interviewee:** Inevitable. Digital times have connected us. And...oh.. social platforms have brought people closer to each other. With understanding of the people we communicate I think.

**Interviewer:** What role do you believe ICC plays in the overall language learning process?

**Interviewee:** Language can't be used without understanding the background of the people we communicate with. Culture, religion, rites....everything I mean language carries and communicates. Our likes and dislikes.

**Interviewer:** What challenges do you face in integrating ICC into your teaching practices?

**Interviewee:** To answer this question I think we need to understand what factors play an important role in ICC. It is I think our perception of the speakers of the language. Our attitude towards them and our knowledge of the language.

**Interviewer:** Can you share any specific motivations you have for focusing on ICC in your teaching?

**Interviewee:** I have been teaching English for long. I offer my students many reasons for learning this language. More importantly I tell them this language is the language of library. It is the language of job opportunities.

**Interviewer:** How would you describe your understanding of ICC concepts?

**Interviewee:** Attitudes towards the language and knowledge of the language. You know Pakistan is a multicultural country. Karachi is cosmopolitan city. If you can recall a word that stirred disturbance is Sindh Assembly when a Sindhi MPA called a lady member from Urdu speaking Maasi. Massi in Sindhi scared while in Urdu it is about lower status. So both attitudes and knowledge of the language is necessary.

**Interviewer:** Have you attended any professional development training pertaining to teaching ICC?

**Interviewee:** No, but linguistics taught us many concepts. Sociolinguistics, especially.

**Interviewer:** To what extent do you incorporate specific ICC-related activities in your lesson plans?

**Interviewee:** Thankfully the classrooms we are teaching are multilingual. They provide real life experiences, ...er that is interaction. As far as English language is concerned I talk about meanings in different contexts. I focus on soft skills of empathy, tolerance and understanding and being positive. Examples from local languages..

**Interviewer:** Can you provide any example of how you integrate ICC into your classroom activities?

**Interviewee:** I remind my students a fool can never learn from wise but wise can learn from a fool. This way I emphasis on attitude and obviously I try to provide them examples.

**Interviewer:** How do you assess students' progress in developing ICC?

**Interviewee:** What value they put on the language. How they view a particular language.

**Interviewer:** Are there any challenges that you face in assessing ICC compared to other language skills?

**Interviewee:** Changing attitude is difficult... very difficult.

**Interviewer:** In what ways do you incorporate Intercultural Communicative Competence into your classroom activities?

**Interviewee:** Time and again I remind myself and people I come across to be humane, to show respect and to share a bond of humanity. I ask myself to display myself and want others to display them too.

**Interviewer:** Can you describe specific strategies that you use to ensure ICC is embedded in your lessons?

**Interviewee:** I engage what value they put on people from different religious background or language or culture and ask them what specific reasons or evidence they would provide,,,eh,,,, I mean trying to use Socratic method to correct them when needed.

**Interviewer:** Do you use any multicultural materials in your teaching to enhance ICC?

**Interviewee:** Partly yes anddd partly no because we do not design the syllabus and choose reading but I try best on my own.

**Interviewer:** How do you select or develop materials that promote intercultural understanding amongst students?

**Interviewee:** Sufi literature attracts... something that carries universal appeal....something that promotes diversity.

**Interviewer:** How do you encourage active student participation in ICC-related activities?

**Interviewee:** I have already told you that I value soft skills more than hard skills.

**Interviewer:** Can you share any successful experiences of students engaging with ICC in your classroom?

**Interviewee:** I have seen students from diverse background working together in groups putting aside their political difference.

**Interviewer:** How do you adapt your ICC teaching strategies for students at different language proficiency levels?

**Interviewee:** Character building is universal. Bond of sympathy is lasting. I remind them develop an individual sense of identity and respond to others without compromising your values and at the same time showing sensitivity to the values of others.

**Interviewer:** Are there any challenges you face when trying to implement ICC activities with diverse proficiency levels?

**Interviewee:** Changing mind is difficult, setting an example is difficult. People are stubborn. We need to encourage diverse readings.

**Interviewer:** How do you provide feedback to students on their development of ICC?

**Interviewee:** In Public speaking I appreciate those who show empathy,,, who engage others showing respect for them.

**Interviewer:** Have you observed any changes in student attitudes or behaviors as a result of incorporating ICC into your teaching?

**Interviewee:** Yes, real interaction leaves a positive impact.

**Interviewer:** How do you perceive your role as a non-native EFL teacher in fostering students' ICC?

**Interviewee:** We are the bridge I think. We foster values.

**Interviewer:** Do you believe your own cultural background influences the way you approach ICC in the classroom?

**Interviewee:** Yes, my attitude my personality and the way I respond influences.

**Interviewer:** How do you deal with cultural sensitivity as a non-native EFL teacher when addressing ICC topics?

**Interviewee:** Cultural numbness, racial numbness has stigmatized the world. I encourage such a sensitivity.

**Interviewer:** Have you encountered any challenges related to cultural differences between yourself and your students?

**Interviewee:** Interaction, especially positive ones changes mindsets. I attended a pedagogical course in Islamabad in 2006 I came across people from all over Pakistan and some teachers commented we held different views about Sindhi community but after their encounter with me they changed their opinion. So Encounter changes and shapes.

**Interviewer:** In what ways do you think your language proficiency impacts your ability to teach ICC effectively?

**Interviewee:** Words draw us closer or divide us. It creates credibility. And credibility brings us closer.

**Interviewer:** Have you noticed any differences in how non-native and native EFL teachers approach ICC development?

**Interviewee:** I think people are coming out of stereotypical thinking. Yes there are individual differences.

**Interviewer:** Have you sought specific professional development opportunities to enhance your skills in teaching ICC as a non-native EFL teacher?

**Interviewee:** Linguistics, especially Sociolinguistics, Semantics and Pragmatics influenced me a lot.

**Interviewer:** How do you stay informed about best practices in ICC education?

**Interviewee:** I am sensitive not only to myself but conscious of other.

**Interviewer:** How do your students respond to being taught ICC by a non-native EFL teacher?

**Interviewee:** Depends how we approach it.

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**Interviewer:** Have you observed any unique advantages or challenges in comparison to native EFL teachers regarding ICC instruction?

**Interviewee:** I need to explore it more, I need to have real encounters...