

Investigating Various Methods of Intercultural Teaching Within the Iranian Educational System: A Qualitative Survey [In English]

Vahid Ghorbani^{1*} , Ali Rahimi² 

1 Instructor, English Language and Literature Department, Faculty of Literature and Foreign Languages, Arak, Iran

2 International Agriculture University, Faculty of Foreign Languages, Tashkent, Uzbekistan



*Corresponding author: s39611171003@phd.araku.ac.ir



Received: 10 Feb, 2025

Revised: 24 Jun, 2025

Accepted: 01 Sep, 2025

ABSTRACT

In today's globalized era, intercultural communication has become one of the most crucial pillars of language education, especially in English classrooms. Despite its importance, the Iranian educational system still heavily emphasizes linguistic skills—grammar and vocabulary—while cultural and intercultural dimensions often remain neglected. This study aims to explore and identify effective methods of intercultural teaching in Iranian English classrooms in order to enhance teachers' and learners' cultural awareness and communicative competence. Using a qualitative design, 150 English teachers aged 25–50 were selected through convenience sampling. The data, collected via classroom observations and semi-structured interviews, were analyzed through inductive content and thematic analysis. Findings revealed that traditional approaches such as the grammar-translation method can be productive only when combined with communicative and experiential techniques like role play, discussion, interviews, and project-based tasks. Teachers frequently applied pair work, group work, and comparative discussions to help learners construct and reflect on cultural identities while engaging in cooperative learning. Moreover, the integration of multimedia tools—films, music, and cultural simulations—proved to be highly effective and supportive of experiential learning. The use of technology not only strengthened students' linguistic competence but also improved their sociocultural and intercultural skills. The overall results indicated that Iranian teachers tend to merge traditional and modern approaches, adopting interactive, contextual, and multimedia-oriented strategies that enrich intercultural communication in the language classroom. This study therefore provides valuable implications for language educators, textbook authors, and teacher trainers by highlighting

practical frameworks for integrating culture and communication in teaching. It also paves the way for future quantitative and mixed-method studies focusing on intercultural assessment and teacher development, both within Iran and globally.

Keywords: Intercultural Education, Language Teaching in Iran, Communicative Language Methods, Traditional Language Learning, Communicative Language Tasks.

1 Introduction

Undoubtedly, intercultural communication is a common topic in today's world and it is vital to know how to teach it in our English classes. Intercultural communication is a hot topic in everyday cultural studies and various scholars including Deardorff (2006), Jackson (2014), and Bouchard (2017) asserted that intercultural communication signified effective communication with people from different communities which encompassed cognitive, behavioral, and affective dimensions to obviate intra and intercultural differences.

Different scientists and experts all over the world have done various research on intercultural communication. For example, Ellis (2003, 2005) believed that intercultural learning is a type of experiential learning that needs active participation on behalf of the learners and it is put into practice best via task-based and communicative language teaching. Chlopek (2008) believed that intercultural teaching should be begun as soon as possible in language classes if learners are ready and willing to communicate.

In another study, Ware (2005) noted that the use of computers created opportunities for intercultural learning through online exchanges. Also, Ogan, Alevan, and Jones (2009) used films in their study and concluded that watching films and movies is an effective way to improve and increase the intercultural knowledge of individuals. Ghorbani and Dowlatabadi (2023) showed that teaching culturally-laden texts could improve the intercultural skills of language teachers.

Many other scholars such as Yunlong (2014), Abidin et al (2024), and Kostyrya et al (2022), etc. focused on the role of live discussion, movies, technology, and so on in teaching intercultural communication. The gap that this paper tries to fill is that different ways of intercultural teaching should be discovered and introduced in Iran. Few studies have been done in Iran indirectly but the current paper examined the ways of teaching intercultural issues in English classes in Iran directly. Thus, the researchers with this purpose in their minds go through a deep qualitative

study to search for these ways of teaching to fill the gap and introduce new ways to Iranian teachers and teachers all over the world. The next sections will focus on the review literature, methodology, results, discussion, and finally conclusion and implication.

2 Review of the Literature

Intercultural communication is a hot topic in everyday cultural studies and various scholars including Deardorff (2006), Jackson (2014), and Bouchard (2017) asserted that intercultural communication signified effective communication with people from different communities which encompassed cognitive, behavioral, and affective dimensions to obviate intra and intercultural differences. According to different scientists, interculturality is an indispensable organ of English language teaching that should be covered in second language classes and language teachers should also be intercultural teachers. (Secru, 2005; Galante, 2014; Byram, 1997; Zhang & Zhou, 2019). Baker (2015) stated that to obtain intercultural capacity, one should try to improve his/her foreign culture knowledge and simultaneously probe his or her ability to the connection between language, culture, and communication.

Byram (1997) long before said that intercultural speakers should have mastery over cultural knowledge and linguistic knowledge to use the English language effectively. Garrido and Alvarez (2006) maintained that modern learners should change their attitudes from linguistic speaker to intercultural speaker but English language classes can prepare learners to participate in intercultural encounters to become effective intercultural speakers (Larzén- Östermark, 2008; Sinicrope, Norris, & Watanabe, 2007). In a more comprehensive study, Ghorbani and Dowlatabadi (2023) proved that intercultural communication worked better if the focus was on three elements, that is, language, emotion, and culture.

Yunlong (2014) asserted that the target of language teaching should be nurturing the intercultural ability of language learners. Thus, in intercultural education, the teachers should pay attention to both linguistic and pragmatic errors of the students. To deliver an exact meaning in intercultural interaction, learners should take into account the cultural, social, and contextual agents in their communication while experiencing a new intercultural act to hone in on their cultural awareness. In other words, intercultural communication teaching revealed the link between language and culture and also showed that cultural element has priority in some cases. In reality, in intercultural

communicative language teaching, language and culture co-construct each other (Kramsch, 2004).

Ellis (2003, 2005) believed that intercultural learning is a type of experiential learning that needs active participation on behalf of the learners and it is put into practice best via task-based and communicative language teaching. Finkbeiner & Koplin (2002) stated that one of the hurdles in teaching culture is that most learners have little knowledge about their own culture. They couldn't use and transfer their cultural values properly in intercultural communication and at the same time, they couldn't interpret aptly the opposite cultural values and attitudes, especially the non-observable values and beliefs.

ELT could be defined as a procedure of intercultural relation between learners' first language or culture and their second language and culture. Thus, educators and pupils cope with talking about definitions of establishing and reestablishing cultural identities between their language and culture and the language and culture of others. English teaching suggests unparalleled opportunities for learners to enjoy intercultural confrontations and causes their personal growth to become intercultural persons (Zhang, 2015).

In intercultural teaching, language teachers may face many challenges including cultural and identity challenges and at the same time teachers should provide a supporting role regarding their students and their autonomy (Kuiper, 2017). Also, multifarious factors affect the quality of teaching in intercultural classes such as students' openness, reflectivity, cultural and linguistic understanding level, and to what extent the teacher's teaching process is critically reflective and transformative. The other factors could be subsumed under social, contextual, and environmental categories (Kuiper, 2017).

Yunlong (2014) maintained that learners should experience culture and relate it to their linguistic repertoire and also link the unconscious cultural element to the conscious phase by including miscellaneous activities such as information gap, interviews, brainstorming, problem-solving, debating, and role-play. The focus of these activities is on the process of doing and therefore improving the intercultural competence of language learners. Chlopek (2008) believed that intercultural teaching should be begun as soon as possible in language classes if learners are ready and willing to communicate. Thus, students' exchanges and project work could pave the way for intercultural teaching and learning from scratch.

Many scholars asserted that one of the main things that should be done in language classes is the comparison of one's own culture and the target

culture. Learners and teachers can use their own cultures, i.e., their native culture as a base and resource for comparison to better understand intercultural differences (Alton-Lee, 2004; Wendt, 2003). Ingram (2004) looked into some studies and concluded that the sheer process of language teaching along with different activities in class may not lead to the cultivation of cross-cultural attitudes and intercultural progress.

The use of computers is another facet of education that helped a lot in the growth of intercultural teaching and learning. Ware (2005) noted that the use of computers created opportunities for intercultural learning through online exchanges. Learners can explore the attitudes, values, beliefs, and also the linguistic and pragmatic level of their peers in distant communities. According to Ware (2005) and O'Dowd (2003, 2007), one limitation is that most studies about the use of computers are related to tertiary levels.

Different principles for intercultural teaching and learning were proposed by scholars and the most famous one was proposed by Liddicoat and Scarino (2013). They stated that intercultural language learning encompassed five tenets including active construction, making connections, social interactions, reflection, and responsibility. Role plays and ethnographic interviews were the activities used for implementing these five tenets. Another model of intercultural teaching and learning is related to Tran (2015) which contains input, notice, practice, and output processes. All these tenets and models concentrated on different aspects of intercultural teaching such as language knowledge, cultural knowledge, language and cultural awareness, and practicing and creating communicative and social tasks and environments in real-life situations (Newton, 2016).

Onalan (2005) believed that the reason why most teachers disregarded cultural and intercultural teaching in their language classes is that they showed more interest in the linguistic and practical aspects of communication. Also, they felt that they didn't have ample time to spend on cultural points in their classes. In the meantime, they don't have sufficient knowledge and skills how to combine cultural and intercultural components with linguistic elements in their classes because they didn't receive enough training in this regard (Gonen & Saglam, 2012).

Empirical foundations

Li et al. (2004) in his research emphasized that it is unlikely for foreign learners to acquire the language without learning the cultural component and that culture teaching has a vital status in the foreign language classroom by declaring that the amalgamation of culture and

language could be deemed as the final target for foreign language teaching and learning". Ghorbani and Dowlatbadi (2024) showed that affective, cultural, and linguistic needs are the main parts of intercultural communication and these elements should be put under the limelight of language teachers and intercultural experts in their language classes and training sessions respectively.

Liddicoat and Scarino (2003) introduced collaborative approaches to intercultural learning. The process began with instructors presenting learners with exercises designed to help them observe social similarities and differences. Subsequently, learners were encouraged to compare their own culture with the target culture and to reflect on their existing knowledge of the target culture as well as any new information they had acquired. This comparative analysis led to reflection and clarification of their experiences. Learners evaluated their experiences and reactions, seeking to understand them.

In their research, Ghorbani and Dowlatbadi (2023) conducted a study involving one hundred Iranian language teachers and found that culture-based instruction effectively enhanced the intercultural communication levels of the teachers. Specifically, they demonstrated that the dimensions of ICC, including skills, attitude, awareness, and knowledge, improved following the instruction. Additionally, Ghorbani and Dowlatbadi (2023) quantitatively supported the notion that language, emotion, and culture are the primary macro-needs in intercultural communication, with language being the most crucial, followed by culture and then emotion.

Abidin et al (2024) studied the integration of intercultural communicative competence in English classes. He concluded that the integration of ICC in English classes could have a lot of fruitful results. The first result is that it helped students to develop linguistic, intercultural, and sociocultural skills in the English classroom and the second result is that it helped to raise teacher's awareness, skills, knowledge, and attitude about integration ICC in the English classroom.

Fang Liu (2020) studied the role of films, role play, simulation, and cultural dialogues in teaching intercultural communication in English classes. It is concluded that cultural topics such as marriage and weddings through film role-plays or dialogues could compare and connect different cultures and create a kind of social relations. Also, using these tools and activities could create a kind of engaging and communicative intercultural teaching.

Di Pardo Leon-Henri (2017) used role play and simulation activities in an intercultural teaching setting to substantiate that these activities lead to the improvement in creative language skills in an intercultural class since

they negotiate outcomes and have opportunities to express their meanings, especially pragmatic meaning in intercultural interaction to develop meta-cognitive thinking and skills. Thus, role-play and simulation along with peer collaboration are useful ways to teach intercultural communication.

Zhen (2020) asserted that most of the teachers understood the importance of including intercultural concepts in language teaching and they knew that learners should learn not only vocabulary and grammar but also how to communicate interculturally with foreigners. They also grasped that intercultural teaching and learning is a slow and gradual process. In another study, Mudan (2020) stated that most English teachers showed an inclination toward traditional styles of teaching English though textbooks contained intercultural and cultural lessons. Most teachers ignored the cultural and intercultural section of textbooks because most of the testing process is based on the linguistic aspect of textbooks thus the cultural and intercultural knowledge part of the textbooks was disregarded and students showed a low level of intercultural communication capacity which ended up in failure in intercultural communications.

O'Dowd (2007) utilized a telecollaboration study of three German classes and concluded that the use of telecollaboration was a bit weird for learners but comparing the cultures helped learners to develop and raise intercultural awareness which was a required part of telecollaboration in intercultural teaching. Also, the study revealed that the use of modern technology should cause teachers to develop desired attitudes and skills in teaching culture in their classes.

Belz (2003) used email interaction as a way of telecollaboration in teaching intercultural communication and concluded that most of the problems that occurred were cultural and intercultural problems as students were not familiar with cultural and intercultural patterns and thus they needed intercultural teaching classes to become acquainted with intercultural patterns to have better communication. In another study, Jedynek (2011) mentioned that language and culture are interrelated and they should supplement each other and should be taught in language classes hand in hand but most of the teachers ignored culture teaching in their classes.

Saeidi and Zamanian (2017) proved that, in Iran because of some limitations such as class teaching time, most teachers focus only on the linguistic aspect of English teaching and let the communicative competence go. Most teachers disregarded the cultural competence in

English classes because they didn't know how to teach culture in classes, too. Thus, the goal of teaching is only linguistic ability, i.e., vocabulary and grammar mastery, and the cultural and intercultural aspects of language teaching were not considered a goal in the educational system of Iran.

Ogan, Aleven, and Jones (2009) used films in their study and concluded that watching films and movies is an effective way to improve and increase the intercultural knowledge of individuals. In another study, Hernandez-Bravo, Cardona-Molto, and Hernandez-Bravo (2017) revealed that intercultural tutoring courses could lead to the development of three components of intercultural communication, that is, skills, attitude, and knowledge.

Kostyrya et al (2022) also studied intercultural communication in English language classes and concluded that watching English language movies and reading English artworks could improve intercultural communication skills. Meanwhile, live communication and exchanges could be effective methods to improve intercultural skills.

Rodriguez and Caranza (2017) substantiated that learners' involvement in storytelling and intercultural projects was related to their intercultural progress, i.e., vast grasp of various cultural facets and deeper link with learners of miscellaneous records. In a parallel study, Worawong, Charttrakul, and Damnet (2017) evinced that role-plays helped dramatically to more suitable intercultural conduct of the students as shown by their body movements, gestures, and facial expressions in certain intercultural occasions. Cushner and Mahon (2009) and Moule (2012) disclosed that learners of culturally competent teachers are more likely to gain an improvement in their intercultural ability. This result may be elaborated by educators who appreciate intercultural abilities for themselves and are inclined to concentrate on developing them in their learners more willingly. According to the review mentioned above, the researchers are going to answer the following research questions:

1. Are traditional teaching methods best suited for teaching intercultural issues?
2. Which tasks and activities are best suited for teaching intercultural issues in the classroom?
3. What are the communicative ways of teaching intercultural communication in English language classes?

3 Methodology

3.1 Participant

The current study included 150 female and male language teachers in Iran (F=75, M=75). The ages of the participants ranged from 25 to 50 years old. All the participants had a BA and MA in English language teaching and their teaching experience was between 5 years to 30 years. The researchers used a convenience sampling procedure given the purpose of the study.

3.2 Design of The Study

The current study used an interpretivism paradigm (Nickerson, 2022), accompanied by a qualitative approach to disclose the hidden meaning and new concepts. The researchers utilized exploratory qualitative research to probe and discover the answers to the current study research questions. In other words, Given the nature of both the phenomenon being studied and the research questions, a qualitative approach was adopted, which allowed for a more direct method of gauging the researched problem.

3.3 Instruments

The current research utilized two major tools for the data-gathering process: structured interview and participant observation. A structured interview was selected to simplify a thorough comprehension of the participants' notions, conducts, experiences, and phenomena related to the research topic. Participant observation was used to produce rich and exact qualitative information, allowing for a deeper understanding of the social context and experiences under investigation. Through immersing themselves in the group, the researchers gained valuable insider perspectives on the beliefs, values, and practices of the participants. The interview questions were formulated by the researchers according to the purpose of the study as follows:

1. Do you think that we can use traditional teaching methods for teaching intercultural issues in English classes?
2. What type of activities do you use in your classroom to teach cultural and intercultural matters?
3. Which communicative teaching methods do you use or suggest for teaching intercultural issues in your English classes?
4. How do you teach cultural and intercultural parts of English books in your classes?

3.4 Data Collection Procedure

The current research study consisted of two cycles of data collection, that is, the researchers collected data from interview sessions and

observation sessions respectively. Interview sessions lasted for 20 minutes for each participant and then the interviews were recorded and transcribed for subsequent analysis. It should be noted that the participants could answer the interview questions in English or their mother tongue, Farsi. To ensure content validity, all questions in the interview were discussed with another researcher until an inter-rater agreement was reached. Moreover, the researchers were actively involved in participant observation by allocating a total of 150 hours to observe the participants teaching in their classrooms. The researchers dedicated one-hour observation for each participant.

3.5 Data Analysis Procedure

The researchers used inductive content analysis and thematic analysis to analyze the collected data. A detailed qualitative content analysis of the transcripts and observation was carried out by the researchers. After reading and rereading the transcripts of the interview and observation reports thoroughly, key categories were identified in the corpus of data that reflected teachers' attitudes and practices toward intercultural teaching. The researchers used initial and secondary coding processes (in vivo and descriptive) to extract the required codes and categories and then based on Braun and Clark's (2006) model of thematic analysis, all the categories and themes were extracted. The focus of the study was on finding the following themes:

1. Teachers' attitudes toward using communicative methods for intercultural teaching
2. Teachers' attitude toward using traditional methods for intercultural teaching
3. Teaching procedures, materials, activities, and tasks for developing students' ICC

Concerning the observation sessions, the researchers attended the teachers' classes with the permission of the teachers to observe their teaching procedures. All the observation points were written by the researchers without intruding on the teaching procedures. The researchers only write what they observe. After finishing the observation sessions which lasted for 150 hours, that is, one hour for each teacher, the researchers analyzed the reports to extract the main points of the teaching procedure and compare their practice with what they said in interview sessions to show whether there exist consistency or inconsistency between their attitude and practice or not.

4 Result

This section deals with the analysis of the interview data and observation reports. At first, the analysis of the interview transcripts is explained fully and then the observation report is clarified. The interview analysis is tabulated and elaborated based on Braun and Clark's (2006) thematic analysis model. The following tables show the codes and themes for each interview question. The first interview question is:

IQ. Do you think that we can use traditional teaching methods for teaching intercultural issues in English classes?

RQ: Are traditional teaching methods best suited for teaching intercultural issues?

The following table (Table 1) shows the codes and themes for the above-mentioned research question and interview question. All codes and themes were extracted through initial and secondary coding analysis and a careful thematic analysis process. The codes are written in the form of in vivo and descriptive codes.

Table 1.

Codes and Themes for The First Interview Question

Codes	Frequency	Themes
Having a role	10	Traditional Methods
Not ideal	10	
Outdated	20	
Boring	20	
Stressful	20	
Helpful	30	
Having to stick to traditional methods	10	
Adapting and combining	30	
Total	150	

The first interview question asked whether we could use traditional teaching methods for intercultural issues or not. By using in vivo and descriptive coding procedures, the above-mentioned codes were extracted. The codes revealed that the participants asserted an amalgamation of different attitudes regarding using traditional methods. From 150 participants, 10 participants used the words “having a role, having to stick to traditional methods and not ideal”, 20 participants used the words “outdated, boring”, and “stressful” and 30 participants used the words “helpful, adapting and combining”. The participants believed that in some circumstances we have no choice except to use traditional

methods in teaching intercultural issues and thus traditional methods have a role in it. Some other participants believed that using traditional methods is useless and stressful or they are not ideal and should be put aside as they are outdated and unengaging. Interestingly, 30 participants expressed that we can use traditional methods for teaching intercultural issues in our language classes if we adapt and combine them with more engaging methods like experiential learning and task-based learning activities to show the intercultural complexity and diversity and help students grasp the complexity and nuances of cultural issues. In this way, they admitted that traditional methods can be helpful. In other words, by creating a more interactive and collaborative context, these traditional methods can be more effective. Thus, the answer to the first research question is that traditional methods could be used for teaching intercultural teaching if and only if they are adapted and combined with more communicative activities but if they are used only traditionally, they will not be the best method for this purpose and they should be thrown away. To answer the second research question, we should go through the second interview question. The research question and interview questions are as follows:

RQ: Which tasks and activities are best suited for teaching intercultural issues in the classroom?

IQ: What type of activities do you use in your classroom to teach cultural and intercultural matters?

Table 2.

Codes and Themes for The Second Interview Question

Codes	Frequency	Themes
Role-play	20	Activities
Group discussion	20	
Cultural exchange	20	
Cultural project	10	
Storytelling	20	
Guest speaker	10	
Cultural events	20	
Interviews	30	
Total	150	

The second interview question asked about which activities could be used in an intercultural class. By using in vivo and descriptive coding procedures, an amalgam of codes was extracted which show the diversity of answers on the behalf of the participants. 20 participants maintained that “role play and group discussion” could be used as the main activities for teaching intercultural lessons. 10 participants believed that “cultural

projects and guest speakers” could be helpful activities in teaching intercultural issues. 20 participants expressed that “cultural exchange, storytelling, and cultural events” served the purpose right and finally 30 participants asserted that “interviews” as the most important activity in teaching intercultural issues in the classroom. Participants claimed that role play and group discussion could be effective because they could explain the cultural differences facilitate experience sharing and also they can engage students. Also, they asserted that assigning cultural projects could help students gain insight into various cultures, and inviting guest speakers helps students to see real-world experiences. By using cultural exchange, storytelling, and cultural events, the participants believed that these activities created a more communicative and interactive atmosphere in the class as the focus was on sharing differences and similarities among various cultures and elaborating on different cultural events such as traditions and holidays. Most of the participants chose interview as the most effective activity for teaching intercultural issues because they believed that by using various forms of interview, they could form and orient the intercultural issues and focus on miscellaneous aspects of culture. They could ask questions about differences, similarities, various topics, and events, and in this way, they create a cooperative and interactive teaching atmosphere. It turned out that a variety of activities should be used to teach intercultural issues in classes which depend on the content of the lesson, the timing of the class, and the skill of language teachers in using and conducting these activities. Thus, the answer to the second research question is that to have better intercultural teaching we should enjoy a wide range of activities in English classrooms to cover various aspects of intercultural communications.

To answer the third research question, we should go through the third and fourth interview questions. Thus, the following are the research question and interview questions:

RQ: What are the communicative ways of teaching intercultural communication in English language classes?

IQ: Which communicative teaching methods do you use or suggest for teaching intercultural issues in your English classes?

IQ: How do you teach cultural and intercultural parts of English books in your classes?

Table 3.
Codes and Themes for The Third Interview Question

Codes	Frequenc y	Themes
Project-based teaching	30	Communicative Teaching Methods
Task-based language teaching	50	
Collaborative/cooperative teaching	50	
Technology-based teaching	20	
Total	150	

The third interview question asked about which communicative methods could be used in teaching intercultural issues. The above-mentioned codes were extracted by using in vivo and descriptive coding procedures. From 150 participants, 30 participants believed that “project-based teaching” is suitable for teaching intercultural issues in the classroom. 50 participants believed that “task-based language teaching” as a communicative method is more effective in teaching intercultural issues. 50 participants maintained that “cooperative and collaborative teaching” served the purpose right for teaching intercultural teaching and finally 20 participants asserted that “technology-based teaching” is useful in teaching intercultural issues. The participants said that these communicative methods focused on the interactive and authentic nature of communication, therefore, they could reveal and explain the complexity of intercultural issues and also they are more engaging and motivating. In other words, using group works and pair works along with tasks and technologies creates a more interactive, engaging, and motivating atmosphere in the classroom and helps pupils grasp intercultural issues to the full. As the frequency of the codes showed, most of the participants preferred cooperative teaching and task-based teaching respectively. It turned out that the answer to the third research question is also a mixture of different communicative methods. It appeared that various communicative teaching methods including task-based and cooperative teaching could be used to teach intercultural issues in the classroom. Also, assigning projects and using technologies could be an effective tool in teaching intercultural matters efficiently.

Table 4.

Codes and Themes for The Fourth Interview Question

Codes	Frequency	Themes
Contextual teaching	30	Intercultural Teaching Style
Comparative teaching	50	
Interactive teaching	50	
Multimedia teaching	20	
Total	150	

The fourth interview question asked about how participants are teaching intercultural issues in their classes. By using in vivo and descriptive coding procedures, the above-mentioned codes were extracted from the participants' answers. 30 and 20 participants chose "contextual teaching and multimedia teaching" respectively as their teaching method in their classes and 50 participants chose "comparative and interactive teaching" as their teaching methods while teaching intercultural issues in their classrooms. 30 participants asserted that they also use "contextual discussions" in their classrooms to give more information about various cultures to pave the way for students to understand better and also use multimedia tools such as music, images, and videos to explain different cultural themes and make them more engaging and attractive. 50 participants used "comparative teaching" through forming discussions and reflections in classes to encourage students to compare their own cultures with target cultures to make head of the differences and similarities and also the participants used role play and simulations in their classes to help students experience cultural situations. It could be inferred that the participants applied a variety of activities and communicative teaching methods in their classes to teach intercultural issues and also it turned out that using technology and multimedia is an indispensable tool for teaching intercultural matters in today's classrooms. Again, it turned out that the answer could be different for the third question. Despite using communicative methods such as task-based and cooperative teaching methods, the participants admitted that in their classes, they will use other methods such as comparative teaching, multimedia teaching, and interactive teaching to teach intercultural matters.

5 Results of the Observations

The researchers actively took part in 150 hours of teachers' English classes conducted in Iran. Before reporting the findings of observations from these classes, it is important to provide an overview of the classroom. Each class consisted of 20 students and lasted one hour. The

teachers talked both in English and Persian language. The reports are presented as follows:

1. Using traditional methods sporadically: the researchers observed that in some circumstances the teachers have to use traditional methods such as grammar translation methods to explain cultural concepts in Persian language or using L1 translation for some cultural terms and also using traditional reading and writing skills in the classroom. But most of the time the teachers tried to use information or opinion gap tasks to adapt and combine traditional methods with more task-based and communicative methods.

2. Using group work and pair work: group work and pair work were among the most applicable tasks in the classroom. Teachers used pair work and group work to encourage cooperative and collaborative learning among teachers and students could discuss cultural topics in their groups. In fact, by discussing and comparing cultural points in their groups, students could take cultural identities and in this way, they reflect on what they are discussing and create cultural knowledge. Also, they could create connections among the cultural points they discussed. In other words, the teachers used collaborative (cooperative) and comparative teaching in their classes directly and indirectly.

3. Using discussion and interview: teachers take the role of interviewer in the class and start interviewing the students. The interview topic was about socio-cultural matters and in this way, a kind of social interaction happened among them. Furthermore, using group and individual discussions and interviews helped students to ameliorate their linguistic and cultural knowledge by comparing various aspects of intercultural points concurrently. In other words, the teachers used interactive and comparative teaching in their classes directly and indirectly.

4. Using video and audio tools: the teachers tried to use multimedia technologies most of the time in their classes such as videos and audio tools. The reason was that when teachers used CDs, DVDs, movies, music, and cultural lectures in the classroom, the students were exposed to linguistically correct and socio-culturally appropriate structures and sentences. Thus, this audio-visual equipment could raise students' cultural awareness, too. In other words, the teachers held the belief that multimedia teaching could be effective in improving the intercultural knowledge of the students.

5. Using communicative tasks: role-play, simulation, storytelling, contextual and group discussions were the most important communicative tasks used in the classroom. All these communicative

tasks helped students to form different socio-cultural identities and share linguistic knowledge or information to develop the required skills. Doing these tasks created a kind of experiential learning for students to raise their own and other's awareness regarding cultural and intercultural matters. In other words, the teachers also stuck to communicative and task-based methods in their classes.

In summary, the researchers' observation of the classes unveiled several important aspects of the teachers' teaching process. The teachers believed that traditional methods could be helpful if and only if they were combined with communicative tasks. Also, the teachers held the belief that using, multi-media and technology could create a more interactive and communicative class. Furthermore, the observation revealed that teachers used a wide range of activities in the classroom to develop the linguistic and cultural skills of the students. In a nutshell, one method or activity does not fit all. That is, teachers believe that if they want to have a good intercultural lesson in the classroom, they should use multiple methods and tasks in the classroom simultaneously. It could be concluded that teachers had consistency and congruence between their attitudes and practices in the classroom. This signified that Iranian teachers knew the importance of intercultural communication and tried to mix it in their English classes.

6 Discussion

The current paper tried to shed more light on the ways of teaching intercultural communication in English language classes. As the above-mentioned results revealed, teaching intercultural communication is a multi-faceted process that includes multiple tasks and teaching methods. In other words, we needed different equipment and teaching styles such as videos, group work, pair work, discussion, and interview tasks along with experiential, cooperative, and communicative methods of teaching to implement intercultural teaching in English classes and reach a fruitful result. The literature review section of the paper also substantiated this point.

Ellis (2003, 2005) asserted that intercultural learning is a kind of experiential learning that supported the current study findings. The current study affirmed that by using task-based activities students could experience different intercultural identities and notice cultural differences and similarities to raise their awareness. Chlopek (2008) focused on the use of cultural exchanges and project works which proved the current study findings. Iranian teachers also used cultural exchanges and cultural projects as classroom activities to teach intercultural issues.

Ware (2005) and O'Dowd (2003, 2007) accentuated the use of computers for intercultural teaching and learning. The current study showed that Iranian teachers made use of multimedia technologies in teaching intercultural communication, too. Liddicoat and Scarino (2013) asserted that using interviews and role play is an effective tool in intercultural teaching and learning. The current study also emphasized using interviews and role play as communicative tasks which raise intercultural awareness and knowledge of the students.

Abidin et al (2024) studied the integration of intercultural communicative competence in English classes. He concluded that the integration of ICC in English classes could have a lot of fruitful results. The first result is that it helped students to develop linguistic, intercultural, and sociocultural skills in English classrooms and the second result is that it helped to raise teacher's awareness, skills, knowledge, and attitude about integration ICC in English classrooms. Thus, the current study is in line with Abidin et al (2024) because both studies revealed that teaching intercultural communication through English language classes could lead to improving the sociocultural identity of the students, raising their attitude and awareness, and ameliorating the intercultural knowledge of the students.

Fang Liu (2020) studied the role of films, role play, simulation, and cultural dialogues in teaching intercultural communication in English classes. It is concluded that cultural topics such as marriage and weddings through film role-plays or dialogues could compare and connect different cultures and create a kind of social relations. Also, using these tools and activities could create a kind of engaging and communicative intercultural teaching. This study is also in sync with the current paper as both studies accentuated the role of films and movies along with discussions, dialogues, and role plays as communicative activities to increase the intercultural communicative competence of the learners and teach ICC more effectively.

Di Pardo Leon-Henri (2017) also emphasized that role-play and simulation activities could lead to intercultural learning. The current study revealed that role-play, simulation, and other communicative tasks could improve both the linguistic and intercultural skills of the students and these communicative activities are among the best teaching methods for intercultural teaching. Again, in another study, Ogan, Aleven, and Jones (2009) focused on the use of films in intercultural teaching and learning which is in harmony with the findings of the present study.

Kostyrya et al (2022) also studied intercultural communication in English language classes and concluded that watching English language

movies and reading English artworks could improve intercultural communication skills. Meanwhile, live communication and exchanges could be effective methods to improve intercultural skills. Rodriguez and Caranza (2017) substantiated that learners' involvement in storytelling and intercultural projects was related to their intercultural progress, i.e., vast grasp of various cultural facets and deeper link with learners of miscellaneous records. In a parallel study, Worawong, Charttrakul, and Damnet (2017) evinced that role-plays helped dramatically to more suitable intercultural conduct of the students as shown by their body movements, gestures, and facial expressions in certain intercultural occasions. As a result, all these studies confirmed the findings of the current study that role plays, movies, projects, and live discussions all could be the best ways of teaching and learning intercultural communication in language classes.

The above-mentioned discussion disclosed that the findings of the current study in Iran are in line with the works and research of other scholars in other parts of the world and in the meantime the activities and methods which are used by Iranian English teachers in Iran can be used by other teachers from other parts of the world to improve the quality of intercultural teaching and learning in English classrooms. Reading between the lines of the results, especially the observation reports, it can be understood that Iranian teachers are aware of the importance of finding new ways and tasks to teach intercultural points in English classes and also they work on themselves as teachers and learners at the same time to increase their intercultural knowledge and skills. Thus, it is promising that shortly we observe the growth of new teaching methods and communicative activities in Iranian English classes.

7 Conclusion

Undoubtedly, intercultural communication is a common topic in today's world and it is vital to know how to teach it in our English classes. Thus, this paper tried to fill this gap by considering various tools for teaching intercultural communication in Iran. By applying interview and observation instruments and using qualitative analysis, the researchers discovered that a myriad of methods and activities could be used to have better and more effective intercultural teaching in Iran's English classes. The findings of this qualitative research study disclosed that traditional methods can be used for teaching intercultural issues if and only if they are combined with more interactive and communicative tasks such as interviews, discussions, and role-plays. Also, the results revealed that experiential learning, task-based teaching, and cooperative

teaching along with the use of technology and projects could help teach intercultural issues and develop intercultural skills in learners. This study has several implications for language teachers, book writers, and intercultural experts. The first implication is that teachers should make the most use of the findings of this study. Teachers can make the best use of pair work and group work along with task-based teaching and technology-based teaching in their classes. Also, book writers could include more tasks and topics for group discussion and interviews in the content of the book. The last but not the least, intercultural experts could utilize the findings to train more intercultural teachers in Iran or all over the world. Other gaps should be filled by other scholars in Iran or all over the world. It should be noted that this study can be done quantitatively or in mixed methods design by other experts in Iran or abroad to see whether the same results are gained or not. Also, this study focused on language teachers, but other studies could be done from the students' viewpoint or with more number of participants in other countries. The focus of the current study was different ways of teaching intercultural communication in Iran. Therefore, other Iranian scholars could work on different ways of assessing intercultural communication in Iran. Anyway, the researchers hoped that this study could be of great help to those who are interested in the field of intercultural communications.

Acknowledgements

We would like to express our thanks to reviewers for their valuable suggestions on an earlier version of this paper.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

References

- Abidin, M.Z., Faresta, R.A., Malisa, M., Narayana, I.G.P.P., Fitriani, L.U., Andika, J.D., & Waly, M.M. (2024). "We are conceptualizing and integrating intercultural communicative competence in English Language Teaching". *Diksi*, 32(1), pp. 33-46, DOI: [10.21831/diksi.v32i1.60441](https://doi.org/10.21831/diksi.v32i1.60441).
- Alton-Lee, A. (2004). *Improving educational policy and practice through an Iterative best evidence synthesis program*. Presented at the

OECD-US Seminar, Evidence-based Policy Research. Retrieved from <http://educationcounts.edcentre.govt.nz/research/Bes/index.html>

Baker, W. (2015). "Research into practice: Cultural and intercultural awareness". *Language Teaching*, 48(1), pp. 130-141. DOI: 10.1017/S0261444814000287

Belz, J. A. (2003). "Linguistic perspectives on the development of intercultural competence in telecollaboration". *Language Learning & Technology*, 7(2), pp. 68- 117. <https://www.learntechlib.org/p/95553/>.

Bouchard, J. (2017). *Ideology, Agency, and Intercultural Communicative Competence: A Stratified Look into EFL Education in Japan*. Springer.

Byram, M. (1997). *Teaching and Assessing Intercultural Communicative Competence*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters

Chlopek, Z. (2008). "The Intercultural Approach to EFL Teaching and Learning". In *English teaching forum*, 46(4), p. 10. US Department of State. Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, Office of English Language Programs, SA-5, 2200 C Street NW 4th Floor, Washington, DC 20037.

Cushner, K. & Mahon, J. (2009). *Intercultural competence in teacher education - developing the intercultural competence of educators and their students: creating the blueprints*. In Deardorff (Ed.), *The SAGE Handbook of Intercultural Competence* (pp.304–320). Oaks, CA: Sage.

Deardorff, D. K. (2006). "Identification and assessment of intercultural competence as a student outcome of internationalization". *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 10(3), pp. 241- 266. DOI: [10.1177/1028315306287002](https://doi.org/10.1177/1028315306287002)

Di Pardo Leon-Henri, Dana & Jain, Bhawana. (2017). *Role Play: A Practical Way to Teach Intercultural Communication*. Recherche et pratiques pédagogiques en langues de spécialité - Cahiers de l'APLIUT. 36. 10.4000/apliut.5746.

Ellis, R. (2003). *Task-based language learning and teaching*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Ellis, R. (2005). *Instructed second language acquisition: A literature review*. Wellington: Ministry of Education.

Finkbeiner, C., & Koplin, C. (2002). *A cooperative approach for facilitating intercultural education*. *Reading Online*, Retrieved July 9, 2007, from www.readingonline.org/newliteracies/lit_index.asp?HREF=finkbeiner/index.html

Galante, A. (2014). "Developing EAL learners' intercultural sensitivity through a digital literacy project". *TESL Canada Journal*, 32(1), pp. 53-66. DOI: [10.18806/tesl.v32i1.1199](https://doi.org/10.18806/tesl.v32i1.1199)

Garrido, C., & Álvarez, I. (2006). "Language teacher education for intercultural understanding. *European Journal of Teacher Education*, 29(2), 163-179. [10.1080/02619760600617342](https://doi.org/10.1080/02619760600617342)

Ghorbani, V., & Dowlatabadi, H. R. (2023). "Examining the Role of Language, Emotion, and Culture as Three Basic Needs in Intercultural Communication Based on Iranian Language Teachers' Viewpoints". *Journal of English Language Teaching and Learning*, 15(32), pp.104-125. DOI: [10.22034/elt.2023.57251.2549](https://doi.org/10.22034/elt.2023.57251.2549)

Ghorbai, V., & Dowlatabadi, H. (2023). "The Role of "Instruction" in the Development of Intercultural Communication among Iranian Language Teachers". *Research in English Language Pedagogy*, 11(2), 192-220. DOI: [10.30486/relp.2023.1979330.1437](https://doi.org/10.30486/relp.2023.1979330.1437)

Ghorbani V, Dowlatabadi H. (2024). "Investigating The Role and Position of Linguistic Needs, Affective Needs, And Cultural Needs in Intercultural Communication: A Mixed Methods Study [In English]". *JSAL*. 7(2), pp.139-161. DOR: [20.1001.1.29809304.1403.7.2.6.6](https://orcid.org/20.1001.1.29809304.1403.7.2.6.6)

Gonen, S. I. K., & Saglam, S. (2012). "Teaching culture in the FL classroom: Teachers' perspectives". *IJGE: International Journal of Global Education*, 1(3), pp. 26–46.

Hernández-Bravo, José & Cardona Moltó, María & Hernández-Bravo, Juan. (2017). "Developing elementary school students' intercultural competence through teacher-led tutoring action plans on intercultural education". *Intercultural Education*. 28. pp. 1-19. DOI: [10.1080/14675986.2017.1288985](https://doi.org/10.1080/14675986.2017.1288985).

Ingram, D. (2004). "Language Learning and Cross-Cultural Attitudes. In International TESOL Conference". *Presented at the International TESOL Conference*. Retrieved from www.tesolchile.cl/documents/sept2005/DEIngram_fullpaper_Oct2004.htm

Jackson, J., (2014). *Introducing Language and Intercultural Communication*. Routledge.

Jedynak, M. (2011). *The attitudes of English teachers toward developing intercultural communicative competence*. In J. Arabski, & A. Wojtaszek (eds.), *Aspects of culture in second language acquisition and foreign language learning*. Berlin: Springer-Verlag Berlin Heidelberg.

Kostyrya, Inna & Kozlovska, Ganna & Biletska, Oksana & Shevchenko, Marina & Lastovskyi, Valerii & Mishchenko, Alla. (2022).

"Intercultural Communication Skills as an International Tool for the Development of English-Language Communicative Competencies". *Journal of Curriculum and Teaching*. DOI: [10.5430/jct.v11n6p30](https://doi.org/10.5430/jct.v11n6p30)

Kramsch, C. (2004). *Language, thought, and culture*. In A. Davies & C. Elder (Eds.), *The Handbook of Applied Linguistics* (pp. 235-261). Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing.

Kuiper, Alison. (2017). "Learning and teaching cultural communication; challenging and transforming cultural identities". *Journal of Transformative Learning*, (4)1, pp. 22-32

Larzén-Östermark, E. (2008). "The intercultural dimension in EFL-teaching: A study of conceptions among Finland- Swedish comprehensive school teachers". *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research*, 52(5), pp. 527-547. DOI: [10.1080/00313830802346405](https://doi.org/10.1080/00313830802346405)

Li, J., & Yue, X. (2004). *Self in learning among Chinese children*. In M. F. Mascolo, & J. Li (Eds.), *Culture and developing selves: beyond dichotomization* (pp. 27-43). (New directions for child and adolescent development, (104). Jossey-Bass.

Liddicoat, A. J. (2004). "Intercultural language teaching: Principles for practice". *The New Zealand Language Teacher*, 30, pp.17-23.

Liddicoat, A. J. & Scarino, A. (2013). *Intercultural language teaching and learning*. Wiley-Blackwell.

Liu, F. (2020). "Intercultural Language Teaching Practice in EFL Classroom China--College English Instruction Based on Film the Proposal". *English Language Teaching*. DOI: [10.5539/elt.v13n12p83](https://doi.org/10.5539/elt.v13n12p83)

Moule, J.(2012). *Cultural competence: A primer for educators*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

Mudan, X. (2020). *Cultivating middle school students' cultural awareness: from the perspective of English teachers' perceptions* (Master Thesis, Qingdao University).

Newton, J. (2016). *Cultivating intercultural competence in tertiary EFL programs*. Crossing Borders in Language Teaching and Business Communication: Proceedings of the 11th ELT conference at AE Chaoyang University of Technology, 1-22.

Nickerson, C. (2022). "Interpretivism paradigm & research philosophy". *Simply Sociology*, 5.

O'Dowd, R. (2007). *Online intercultural exchange: An introduction for foreign language teachers*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.

Ogan, A., Alev, V. & Jones, C. (2009). "Advancing development of intercultural competence through supporting predictions in narrative

video". *International Journal of Artificial Intelligence in Education*, 19(3), pp. 267-288.

Onalan, O. (2005). "EFL teachers' perceptions of the place of culture in ELT: A survey at four universities in Ankara/ Turkey". *Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies*, 1(2), pp.215-235.

Rodriguez, I. & Caranza, T. (2017). *We are promoting intercultural competence through cross-cultural projects and literature*. In F. Ramos, (Ed.), *Proceedings of the International Colloquium on Languages, Cultures, Identity in school and society*, 79-85.

Saeidi, M., & Zamanian, J. (2017). "Iranian EFL teachers' perceptions, practices, and problems regarding raising students' intercultural awareness". *International Journal of English Linguistics*, 7(4), pp. 257-266. DOI:[10.5539/ijel.v7n4p257](https://doi.org/10.5539/ijel.v7n4p257)

Sercu, L. (2005). *Teaching foreign languages in an intercultural world*. In L. Sercu (Ed.), *Foreign language teachers and intercultural competence* (pp. 1-18). Clevedon, Ohio: Multilingual Matters.

Sinicrope, C., Norris, J., & Watanabe, Y. (2007). "Understanding and assessing intercultural competence: A summary of theory, research, and practice". *Second Language Studies*, 26(2), pp.1-58.

Tran, Thao & Seepho, Sirinthorn. (2016). "The Development of an Intercultural Communicative Language Teaching Model for EFL Learners". *Thai TESOL Journal*. 29. pp.73-93.

Ware, P. (2005). *"Missed" communication in online communication: tensions in a German-American telecollaboration*. *Language, Learning & Technology*. Retrieved March 31, 2007, from <http://ilt.msu.edu/vol9num2/ware/>

Wendt, M. (2003). *Context, culture, and construction: Research implications of theory formation in foreign language methodology*. In M. Byram & P. Grundy (Eds.), *Context and culture in language teaching and learning* (pp. 92-105). Clevedon Hall, Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.

Worawong, K., Charttrakul, K. and Damnet, A. (2017). "Promoting intercultural competence of Thai university students through role-play". *Advances in Language and Literary Studies*, 8(6), pp. 37-43.

Yunlong.H. (2014). "Constructing Intercultural Communicative Competence Framework for English Learners". *Cross-Cultural Communication*, 10(1), pp. 97-101. DOI: [10.3968/j.ccc.1923670020141001.3970](https://doi.org/10.3968/j.ccc.1923670020141001.3970)

Zhang, Xiaochi & Zhang, Jinjing. (2015). "English Language Teaching and Intercultural Communication Competence". *International Journal for Innovation Education and Research*. 3, pp. 55-59.

Zhang, X. & Zhou, M. (2019). "Interventions to promote learners 'intercultural competence: A meta-analysis". *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 71, pp. 31-47.

Zhen Zhen. (2020). *A survey of Chinese culture teaching English Class of senior high school—based on M City No.1 Senior High School* (Master Thesis, Mudanjiang Normal University).