

**DEVELOPING INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE (ICC)
IN EFL CLASSROOMS: A STUDY ON AUTHENTIC CULTURAL MATERIALS**

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Abstract

Learning a foreign language today means more than learning grammar and vocabulary. Learners must also communicate appropriately with people from other cultures. This article examines how Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) can be developed in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms through the use of authentic cultural materials, such as news reports, short videos, advertisements, social media posts and real conversations. The article reviews the main theories of ICC and authenticity, proposes a mixed-methods study design, and discusses practical implications for teachers. The study argues that authentic materials help learners notice cultural differences, question stereotypes and build empathy, but only when teachers guide them with well-designed tasks and reflection.

Keywords: *intercultural communicative competence, EFL, authentic materials, culture teaching, language pedagogy*

1. Introduction

English is used today as a global language, and most conversations in English take place between people who are not native speakers. In this situation, grammatical accuracy alone is not enough for successful communication. Learners need to understand different values, communication styles and social rules. This ability is called Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC).

In many EFL classrooms, however, culture is still treated as a small extra topic: holidays, food, famous people and facts about English-speaking countries. Textbooks often present a simplified and unreal picture of culture. Authentic materials, which are created for real communication and not for teaching, can offer a richer and more realistic view of how people live and speak.

This article asks how authentic cultural materials can support the development of ICC in EFL classrooms. It has three aims:

1. to explain the key concepts of ICC and authentic materials;
2. to present a research design for studying their effect on learners;
3. to suggest practical ways for teachers to use authentic materials for intercultural learning.

Research questions

- RQ1: To what extent does the use of authentic cultural materials improve EFL learners' ICC?
- RQ2: Which types of authentic materials are most useful for developing intercultural awareness?
- RQ3: What are learners' and teachers' attitudes toward using authentic materials for cultural learning?

2. Literature Review**2.1 Intercultural Communicative Competence**

Byram (1997) describes ICC as a combination of five elements, often called *savoirs*: attitudes (curiosity and openness), knowledge (of social groups and their practices), skills of interpreting and relating, skills of discovery and interaction, and critical cultural awareness. In this model, the goal of language teaching is not to make learners imitate native speakers, but to prepare them to be “intercultural speakers” who can mediate between their own culture and others.

Kramsch (1993) supports this view and proposes a “third place”: a space where learners compare their own culture with the foreign culture and build their own understanding. Deardorff (2006) also stresses that ICC depends on attitudes of respect, openness and curiosity, and that it develops over a long time.

The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (Council of Europe, 2001) recognizes intercultural awareness and skills as part of communicative competence, which has made culture a more visible part of language curricula.

2.2 Authentic Materials

Authentic materials are texts and media produced for real purposes and real audiences, not for language teaching (Widdowson, 1978). Gilmore (2007) reviews research on authenticity and concludes that authentic materials can increase learners' motivation and give exposure to real language use. At the same time, Guariento and Morley (2001) warn that authentic texts can be too difficult for lower-level learners, so tasks must be adapted even when the text itself is not changed.

2.3 Authentic Materials and Culture

Authentic materials carry cultural information naturally: humor, politeness, attitudes, social problems and everyday habits. Byram, Gribkova and Starkey (2002) recommend using varied real-life materials so that learners can compare perspectives and avoid stereotypes. Risager (2007) adds that culture in language teaching should not be limited to one “target country”, because English is used in many places and by many communities.

Research on teachers' practice shows a gap between theory and classroom reality. Sercu (2005) found that many language teachers support intercultural teaching in principle, but they lack training and confidence to apply it. This gap is an important reason to study practical, classroom-based approaches.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The study uses a mixed-methods, quasi-experimental design. Two groups of EFL learners at the same proficiency level (for example, B1 on the CEFR scale) take part over one academic semester (12–14 weeks).

- **Experimental group:** learns with authentic cultural materials and intercultural tasks.
- **Control group:** learns with the regular textbook and its cultural content.

3.2 Participants

The participants are university or secondary-school EFL learners (for example, 40–60 students in total, divided equally between the two groups) and their teachers. Participation is voluntary, and learners' names are kept confidential.

3.3 Materials and Procedure

The experimental group works with several types of authentic materials:

Type	Examples	Intercultural focus
Video	Short interviews, vlogs, documentary clips	Communication styles, daily life
News and articles	Online news, opinion pieces	Different perspectives on the same event
Advertisements	TV and online ads	Values, stereotypes, humor
Social media	Public posts, comments	Informal language, online etiquette
Audio	Podcasts, radio programs	Accents, speaking styles

Each lesson follows four stages: (1) *notice* – learners observe cultural features in the material; (2) *compare* – learners compare them with their own culture; (3) *discuss* – learners reflect on similarities, differences and possible misunderstandings; (4) *act* – learners complete a role-play or project that requires intercultural communication.

3.4 Data Collection

- **Quantitative:** a pre-test and post-test of ICC (for example, a questionnaire based on Byram's five *savoirs*, using a five-point Likert scale).
- **Qualitative:** learners' reflective journals, classroom observation notes, and semi-structured interviews with learners and teachers.

3.5 Data Analysis

Quantitative data are analyzed with descriptive statistics and an independent-samples t-test (or a non-parametric alternative if the data are not normally distributed) to compare group results. Qualitative data are analyzed with thematic analysis. Combining the two types of data allows the researcher to check whether the numerical results are supported by learners' own experience.

4. Results and Discussion

Note: This section is a framework. The actual numbers and quotations must come from your own data after the study is completed. Please do not publish this section without real results.

4.1 Effect on ICC (RQ1). Report the pre-test and post-test means of both groups, the t-test result and the effect size. Discuss which of the five *savoirs* changed most (for example, attitudes or critical cultural awareness).

4.2 Useful material types (RQ2). Report which materials learners rated as most useful and which were too difficult. Compare this with Guariento and Morley's (2001) point about the difficulty of authentic texts.

4.3 Learners' and teachers' attitudes (RQ3). Present the main themes from journals and interviews, supported by short quotations. Discuss motivation, difficulty, and teachers' confidence in teaching culture.

4.4 Expected discussion points. Based on the literature, authentic materials are likely to increase learners' awareness and motivation (Gilmore, 2007), but the improvement depends on guided reflection and not only on exposure to the material (Byram et al., 2002).

5. Pedagogical Implications

1. **Choose materials carefully.** Select materials that are short, interesting and at a suitable level. Adapt the task, not the text.

2. **Use varied sources.** Include different English-speaking and non-native English-speaking communities to avoid a single, stereotyped picture of culture.

3. **Teach reflection.** Ask questions such as "What surprised you?", "How would this be different in our culture?" and "Why might a misunderstanding happen here?"

4. **Avoid stereotypes.** Present cultures as diverse and changing, not as fixed lists of facts.

5. **Train teachers.** Teachers need practical training and ready-to-use examples in intercultural teaching (Sercu, 2005).

6. **Assess ICC.** Use portfolios, reflective journals and project work, because multiple-choice tests cannot measure attitudes and awareness well.

6. Limitations

The study has several limitations. The sample is small and not random, so the results cannot be generalized to all EFL contexts. ICC develops slowly, and one semester may be too short to see deep change. Self-report questionnaires can also be influenced by what learners think the teacher wants to hear. Future research should use longer periods, larger samples and observation of real intercultural interaction.

7. Conclusion

Intercultural Communicative Competence is an essential goal of modern English language teaching. Authentic cultural materials give learners access to real language and real cultural perspectives, which textbooks alone cannot provide. However, materials by themselves are not enough. Their value depends on carefully designed tasks, guided reflection and teachers who feel prepared to teach culture. When these conditions are met, authentic materials can

help EFL learners become not only better speakers of English, but also more open, thoughtful and respectful intercultural speakers.

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