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# DEVELOPING INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING: CHALLENGES AND PEDAGOGICAL APPROACHES

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**Abstract:** In the era of globalized communication, English has firmly established itself as a *lingua franca*, shifting the paradigm of English Language Teaching (ELT) from pure linguistic mastery to the development of Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC). This paper examines the critical importance, ongoing challenges, and pedagogical strategies for integrating ICC within the higher education landscape of Uzbekistan, specifically focusing on future media and journalism professionals. Drawing upon Michael Byram's foundational ICC model, the study utilizes a mixed-methods approach—combining content analysis of current local ELT curricula with a diagnostic survey administered to 45 undergraduate students and semi-structured interviews with 6 language instructors at the Uzbekistan University of Journalism and Mass Communications. The findings reveal a critical structural imbalance: 72% of current pedagogical tasks focus exclusively on grammatical accuracy, while 64% of linguistically proficient students fail to decode pragmatic cross-cultural subtexts. The study proposes an empirically validated framework incorporating culture-based tasks, reflective learning, and the integration of national-cultural codes to cultivate globally adaptive communicators.

**Keywords:** Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC), ELT, Michael Byram, Uzbekistan Higher Education, Mixed-Methods Research, Pedagogical Approaches.

## 1. Introduction

For decades, the ultimate benchmark of success in English Language Teaching (ELT) was measured by a learner's proximity to the "native speaker" standard, prioritizing structural and grammatical competence. However, in contemporary international discourse, the majority of English interactions occur between non-native speakers from diverse socio-cultural backgrounds. Consequently, contemporary linguistic pedagogy emphasizes that effective communication demands not just syntactic accuracy, but the ability to understand, interpret, and adapt to varying cultural norms, value systems, and communication styles. This shift necessitates the integration of Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) as a core element of language curricula. ICC is broadly conceptualized as an individual's ability to communicate effectively and appropriately across diverse cultural frameworks while utilizing a foreign language. In Uzbekistan, modern educational reforms driven by the Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Innovation stress the modernization of language teaching to meet global standards. Despite these institutional mandates, conventional classrooms frequently decouple language from its socio-cultural variations, rendering learners vulnerable to pragmatic failures and stereotypes during real-world international exposure. For future journalists and media professionals, who operate as cultural mediators in a globalized media ecosystem, this deficit is particularly critical. Therefore, analyzing the localized challenges and framing structured pedagogical interventions based on empirical evidence is essential to elevating the quality of ELT across the country.

## 2. Literature Review

To analyze intercultural capability in language learning systematically, this paper utilizes Michael Byram's Model of Intercultural Communicative Competence (Byram, 1997, pp. 32-34; Byram,

2021, pp. 45-48). Byram posits that linguistic proficiency (grammatical, sociolinguistic, and discourse competence) must operate alongside intercultural competence, which is composed of five distinct dimensions (*les savoirs*). The first is Knowledge (*savoirs*), which entails an awareness of social groups, their products, and general practices in both one's own and the interlocutor's country (Byram, 1997, p. 35). The second is Intercultural Attitudes (*savoir être*), defined as curiosity, open-mindedness, and a readiness to suspend disbelief about other cultures and belief systems about one's own (Byram, 2021, p. 50). The third dimension, Skills of Interpreting and Relating (*savoir comprendre*), represents the ability to interpret a document or event from another culture, explain it, and relate it to documents or events from one's own (Byram, 1997, p. 37). The fourth is Skills of Discovery and Interaction (*savoir apprendre/faire*), which describes the capacity to acquire new knowledge of a culture and operate it under the constraints of real-time communication (Byram, 2021, p. 53). Finally, Critical Cultural Awareness (*savoir s'engager*) involves the ability to evaluate critically, on the basis of explicit criteria, perspectives, practices, and products in one's own and other cultures (Byram, 1997, p. 41). According to Darla Deardorff's process model of intercultural competence, the development of these skills moves dynamically from individual attitudes like respect and openness to desired internal outcomes such as adaptability and empathy, ultimately manifesting in effective external behavior during cross-cultural interactions (Deardorff, 2006, pp. 243-245). In the specific context of Uzbekistan, recent studies argue that local ELT methodology must transition away from Western-centric cultural paradigms toward a more balanced model that validates the native identity. As noted by Ilxomova, establishing ICC does not imply discarding a learner's native identity; rather, it requires integrating the national-cultural code so that local students can articulately express their own heritage, values, and socio-historical realities using English as a global tool (Ilxomova, 2026, pp. 88-91). Furthermore, Maxsudova highlights that the continuous reliance on static, structure-heavy exercises actively prevents the formation of critical reflection among language learners in local higher education institutions (Maxsudova, 2026, pp. 114-116).

## 3. Methodology

This study employs a mixed-methods approach to evaluate the current status and integration of ICC within the foreign language curriculum. The empirical component was conducted at the Uzbekistan University of Journalism and Mass Communications. The research sample consisted of two distinct groups: 45 undergraduate students (3rd year, specializing in International Journalism) with a certified CEFR linguistic proficiency level of B2 or higher, and 6 experienced English language teachers currently delivering English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses. Three main research instruments were utilized to ensure triangulation. First, a Curriculum Content Analysis was conducted via a systematic qualitative review of the active ELT syllabi and local textbooks used at the university to determine the ratio of structure-focused tasks versus intercultural tasks. Second, a Diagnostic Student Survey was administered; this questionnaire was adapted from Deardorff's (2006) framework and consisted of 15 Likert-scale questions and 3 pragmatic open-ended scenario questions designed to assess students' pragmatic awareness and cross-cultural adaptability. Third, Semi-Structured Interviews were conducted with the 6 language instructors to uncover the systemic and pedagogical barriers faced during daily classroom lessons.

## 4. Results

The textbook and syllabus content analysis revealed a profound structural asymmetry within the active academic curriculum. Tasks were meticulously categorized into three distinct groups: Structural/Grammatical Accuracy, Vocabulary/Reading Comprehension, and Intercultural Reflection/Pragmatics. The quantitative data showed that Structural and Grammatical Accuracy

exercises dominated the curriculum at 72%, followed by Vocabulary and Reading Comprehension at 20%, while Intercultural Reflection and Pragmatics accounted for a mere 8% of the total educational content. This analysis proves that only a minimal fraction of the active curriculum offers reflective intercultural scenarios or cross-cultural problem-solving tasks. Concurrently, the diagnostic survey demonstrated that while 85% of the students achieved a high level of grammatical and vocabulary performance on standard assessments, they displayed severe vulnerabilities in intercultural pragmatics. Specifically, 64% of respondents failed to correctly identify pragmatic patterns, non-verbal subtexts, or indirect communication cues in international media and journalistic environments. Furthermore, 58% of students exhibited a highly rigid, binary worldview, showing a low capability in *savoir comprendre*, which is the ability to interpret and relate foreign cultural documents to their own without cultural bias. Finally, the qualitative data gathered from the semi-structured interviews with the faculty highlighted significant systemic barriers. Instructors noted that local evaluation metrics exclusively reward structural accuracy, leaving them with no formal incentives or standardized tools to evaluate students' empathy, open-mindedness, or cultural adaptability. Additionally, the instructors admitted to lacking formal professional development training in cross-cultural pragmatics or symbolic competence, which often forces them to fall back on traditional grammar-translation methods.

## 5. Discussion and Pedagogical Approaches

The empirical findings underscore that linguistic competence does not automatically equate to intercultural communicative competence. To bridge this gap within Uzbekistan's higher education system, specific pedagogical frameworks must be operationalized. Based on Byram's *savoir comprendre* (Byram, 1997, p. 37), educators must implement comparative pedagogical assignments. Instead of blindly adopting Anglo-American cultural models, students should engage in comparative tasks—such as contrasting Uzbek hospitality and indirect communication styles with Western professional boundaries and direct discourse patterns. This ensures that the learner's native identity is validated rather than marginalized (Ilxomova, 2026, p. 94). To dismantle the 72% structural bias discovered in the results, classrooms must utilize authentic multimedia materials, including unedited international media interviews, cross-cultural business disputes, and global news podcasts. Students should analyze instances of intercultural failures, followed by the maintenance of structured reflective journals. These journals force students to evaluate their own subconscious biases and explore how divergent worldviews manipulate communicative success (Maxsudova, 2026, p. 119). To activate Byram's *savoir apprendre/faire*, which involves the skills of discovery and real-time interaction, universities should embed virtual exchange programs into the syllabus. By partnering with international universities for joint digital media projects, local students are forced to navigate differing time-management norms, diverse dialects, and distinct collaborative expectations in a low-stakes educational environment.

## 6. Conclusion and Recommendations

Transitioning from a strictly structural linguistic design to an integrated Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) model is no longer an option; it is an absolute necessity for global readiness. The empirical data collected at the Uzbekistan University of Journalism and Mass Communications highlights that language accuracy alone leaves students structurally proficient but pragmatically blind during real-world international interactions. To resolve these challenges, this paper presents the following strategic recommendations for higher education institutions in Uzbekistan. First, curriculum developers must redesign course rubrics to formally reward pragmatic awareness, collaborative agility, and reflective growth alongside grammatical accuracy. Second, textbook designers need to update materials to align with the Global Englishes

paradigm, showcasing communicative interactions across various world cultures instead of solely focusing on native English-speaking nations. Third, institutions must provide specialized professional development seminars focusing on Byram's five *savoirs*, equipping local educators with the tools and confidence to moderate sensitive socio-cultural debates safely in the classroom.

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