# EFL TEACHERS' ATTITUDE TOWARDS INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE

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**Abstract**

Linguistic competence in language teaching has attracted the attention of many intercultural scholars. However, in the modern globalization era where people are technologically connected, equipping the learners with linguistic competence may not be the overall solution to ensuring intercultural communicative competence (ICC). Furthermore, appropriateness and effective communication are vital in providing an effective language learning process. This study has investigated the attitude of Prizren University EFL teachers towards promoting ICC in the classrooms and the strategies they employ in promoting the ICC. The study involved 35 Prizren University EFL teachers, full-time and part-time, with a teaching experience in different cultural backgrounds and who have mastered the course descriptions. The study employed structured questionnaire with open-ended questions. The questionnaire was divided into two major parts, with the first part seeking to find the attitude of the EFL teachers towards ICC in the classroom and the second part seeking to find out the strategies the participants used to promote ICC in the classrooms.

*Keywords:* **EFL, ICC, linguistic competence, communicative competence, EFL teachers.**

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## Introduction

In the 21st century, intercultural competence (IC) is regarded as one of the necessities for developing globally culturally aware individuals. Therefore, one of the primary goals of ICC in English language training programs entails educating students to become intercultural speakers. The concept of communicative competence, which forms the foundation of intercultural competence, was introduced by Hymes in 1966 as a response to earlier grammar-focused approaches to language learning. Hymes argued that the language use extends beyond grammatical rules to include the ability to communicate effectively in social and cultural context (Hymes, 1972). Meanwhile, the overall development of ICC has already become one of the new teaching concepts that can penetrate all facets of linguistic teaching activities (Zhang, 2017). Undeniably, to enable students to develop ICC, it is imperative for language educators, particularly those who teach English as the foreign language, to ensure that they are proficient intercultural speakers with sufficient experience and confidence. In the globalization setting, English has been utilized as a universal medium for passing information amongst individuals from diverse multicultural and multilingual environments.

Consequently, it has become essential for students to master both intercultural competence and linguistic competence. Therefore, they must pay close attention to understanding and boosting ICC (Zhang, 2017). On the other hand, many ESL educators are incredibly competent in English and have good credit for linguistic and cultural knowledge in the targeted language. As a result, they are likely to achieve communicative proficiency in intercultural communication. Despite the proficiency of many ESL instructors in English and their solid understanding of linguistics and cultural knowledge, incorporating intercultural content into English language education is still ignored by them (Fantini, 2018). Additionally, they have little experience in different intercultural settings, and their interactive relationships with foreign individuals are prone to be simple (Thao & Tai, 2017). Consequently,

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these factors contribute to EFL teachers' incompetence in accomplishing tasks in intercultural education and intercultural communication.

Álvarez (2020) reveals that the development of ICC is a goal that is effectively shared among educators and researchers in the intercultural and languages sector. There is much to know about learning a foreign language other than just knowing the language for reading and speaking. Álvarez (2020) shows that learning a foreign language also helps ensure proper communication with people from different cultural backgrounds. The researchers and foreign language teachers have been interested in determining the most reliable and attainable methods to help English learners develop their ICC and the most specific objectives of fostering ICC aptitude. According to some educators, the development of ICC is a continual process that involves focusing on three criticalcriteria: knowledge, communicative aptitude and attitude and intercultural teaching. Vrontis et al. (2020) mention that the first level encompasses knowledge of the language capability of the focus culture, linguistic awareness, culture of the target country, and general awareness of the culture. Vrontis et al. (2020) point out the second level as the apropos to the communicative aptitude, the ability to use verbal and non-verbal communicative messages, communication strategies, and social-cultural competence. The third level involves attitude that comprises empathy in critical cultural awareness and intercultural communication. These teaching objectives reveal that the ICC foundation's emotional, behavioral, and cognitive levels have been successfully employed in teaching the foreign language.

### Literature Review

Most of the previous discussions on the EFL teachers reveal that they have bad experiences and resources in the ICC, especially in intercultural interaction at personal experience, which are vital in determining the teaching methodology. For instance, in the Rezaei and Naghibian (2018) study, it was determined that if the EFL teachers

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were competent communicators, especially in intercultural communication, they would be more comfortable talking to the junior learners about their communication competence. Therefore, there is a need to examine the current situations involving EFL teachers in the ICC. While Jiang, Soon and Li (2021) point out several barriers to the development of the ICC in the Asian context such as heavy workload, a lack of clear guidelines, and limited opportunities for overseas study, these challenges may not be as prevalent in other regions. In Europe, for instance, strategies for promoting ICC have been well established for decades, largely driven by the Council of Europe and the European Union. While challenges may still exist, such as time constrains and varying institutional support, many European countries have long prioritized the integration of intercultural communication into EFL teaching. Therefore, enhancement of the ICC among students requires a clear understanding of the concepts by the teachers undertaking the courses. The teachers should therefore be provided with a clear understanding of ICC and how to apply it in language teaching to promote their teaching classrooms effectively. Thus, the study aims to investigate how these established strategies are being applied in Kosovo context.

Chomsky drew a central distinction between an individual's knowledge of a language rule and the actual usage of language in real situations. Moreover, the first Chomsky referred to as competence and the second was performance. He further argued that linguistics should deal with competence study rather than restricting it to performance. According to Chomsky's theory of linguistic competence, competency is the distinctive aptitude of a speaker to create indefinite decisions, understand them, and recognize grammatical ambiguities and mistakes (Chomsky, 1986). However, as language teaching evolved, scholars like Dell Hymes and Michael Byram recognized the limitations of focusing solely on grammatical competence. Building on Hymes' work, Byram (1997) expanded the concept of competence to include intercultural elements, arguing that "communicative competence involves not only linguistic competence but also

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the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations." This shift broadened the scope of language education, emphasizing that learners must be able to navigate both linguistic and cultural complexities in real-world interactions. Byram's model of **Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC)** builds on communicative competence by including critical cultural awareness, intercultural attitudes, and skills for interacting across cultural boundaries, making it highly relevant in today's globalized world.

Furthermore, Avgousti (2018), points out that communicative competence encompass the speaker's social and grammatical knowledge, indicating proper language use. Communicative competence consists of the possible, the feasible, the social value and meaning, and the occurrences. Swain and Canale (1980) identified the four facets of communicative competence. The fours aspects include grammatical competence, which is the ability to create and know grammatically correct utterances, social-linguistic competence, which is the ability to understand the social value and meaning and create an appropriate utterance and discourse competence, which involves producing coherent and cohesive discourse a strategic competence that involves repairing the miscommunication and solving the communication issues such as contextual guessing, background knowledge activation, and self-correction. Nevertheless, several questions have been raised about the communicative competence model because it relied on the norms of the native speakers and its inability to realistically use English as the lingua franca. This led to the introduction of the ICC, which focuses on the cultures of the native and non-native speakers and perceives English as a global language (Enisa & Gunes, 2019).

## Methodology

The study uses a quantitative research approach to explore how EFL teachers at the University of Prizren in Kosovo feel about ICC and the strategies they use to promote it. The main method of research was structured questionnaire to gather data to understand teacher's com-

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petence of ICC and its implementation in classroom. This approach allows detailed exploration of teachers' perspectives, providing rich insights into the challenges and strategies in integrating ICC in TEFL education.

The study involved a total of 35 EFL teachers from the University of Prizren, including 22 full-time and 13 part-time teachers. The participants comprised 18 males and 17 female teachers with diverse backgrounds in TEFL in various cultural settings. This diverse participant's experience enabled the research to capture a wide range of experiences and attitudes towards ICC.

### Data Analysis

The responses from the questionnaire were generated and deeply analyzed. Then categorized into three groups: teachers' competence toward ICC, teachers' methodology in applying ICC in classroom, and challenges faced in while promoting ICC in the classroom setting.

*Findings and Discussion*

| Familiarity with ICC | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Very familiar | | 12 | 35 | 34.30% |
| Moderately familiar | | 28 | 35 | 80% |
| Basic understanding | | 7 | 35 | 20% |
| **Importance of Promoting ICC** | Rated as very/ extremely important | 32 | 35 | 91.40% |

**Table 1.**

The data revealed that the majority of the EFL teachers (28 out of 35) are moderately familiar with the concept of ICC, with 12 teachers being very familiar which emphasize the awareness of the importance of intercultural skills in language teaching. On the other hand, 7 teachers admitted having only a basic understanding of

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ICC, suggesting that there is still a need for professional development in this area.

| Attitude Toward ICC Integration | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Favorable | ICC seen as a valuable addition to teaching | 24 | 35 | 68.60% |
| Neutral | ICC viewed with indifference or uncertainty | 11 | 35 | 31.40% |

**Table 2.**

On the question of the importance of promoting ICC in the EFL classroom, a high majority of participants (32 out of 35) rated it as either very important or extremely important which means that being interculturally competent is as crucial as being linguistically competent.

According to the teachers' responses, promoting ICC can be beneficial for students, fostering their awareness, engaging them in cross cultural interactions and making them successful in multicultural world

These benefits correspond with Fantini's (2009) view that ICC is crucial for effective communication in the 21st century. However, some teachers expressed concerns about implementing ICC, mainly because of already over packed curriculum.

Besides emphasizing the importance of ICC implementation, there are teachers who have the opposite attitude. While 24 teachers reported a favorable attitude towards ICC, 11 teachers expressed a more neutral stance. The latter group summed some difficulties that they would face such as limited time, lack of resources, and insufficient institutional support as barriers to effectively incorporate ICC into their lessons.

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The mixed attitudes observed in this study reflect the complex nature of teaching. Teachers who viewed ICC favorably tended to be those who had received training or professional development in intercultural education, suggesting that attitudes may be shaped by the availability of relevant resources and support. This finding is supported by Deardorff's (2006) framework, which posits that the development of ICC in educators is a prerequisite for fostering it in students.

Teachers claimed several challenges when teaching cultural lessons, being forced to cover a rigorous curriculum, and students' hesitation of engagement in intercultural topics. Meeting standardized testing requirements is another barrier that often leaves little room for activities that focus on intercultural skills. This is especially common in large classes where teachers have limited time to individually pay attention on improving students' intercultural competences

Additionally, some teachers noted that students' stereotypes about other cultures can be a barrier to promoting ICC. These findings are consistent with previous research, which has identified similar challenges in integrating intercultural education into language teaching (Byram & Feng, 2005). Therefore these teachers pointed out the need for strategies to engage students more effectively in intercultural learning and to address and dismantle stereotypes in a constructive manner.

Several teachers pointed out the institutional support as well, including inadequate training possibilities, insufficient teaching materials, and a curriculum that does not explicitly prioritize ICC.

Additionally, a few educators stated that the Kosovo educational system fails to adequately acknowledge the significance of ICC which indicates that curriculum design and educational policy need to change in order to better support the objectives of intercultural education. The results collaborate Deardorff (2011), who argue that in order to successfully integrate ICC into educational institutions, systemic adjustments are necessary.

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According to the study, EFL teachers at the University of Prizren use a variety of techniques to support intercultural communication (ICC). These tactics include introducing intercultural subjects into language sessions, utilizing real materials that represent a variety of cultures, and encouraging students to talk about their own cultural experiences.

Some teachers also reported using role-play and simulations as a way to enhance students' intercultural skills. These activities allow students to practice real-life communication scenarios in a safe and controlled environment, thereby increasing their confidence in interacting with people from different cultural backgrounds. The use of these interactive methods reflects an understanding of ICC as a practical and experiential competence that goes beyond theoretical knowledge.

However, not all teachers were equally successful in implementing these strategies. Those who faced challenges in promoting ICC often cited a lack of access to appropriate materials and resources. This finding underscores the need for better institutional support and resource development to facilitate the effective teaching of ICC.

Several educators mentioned technology as an approach to link students with international peers through virtual exchanges and cooperative projects which enabled them to engage in real-world cross-cultural encounters while also closing the knowledge gap between theory and practice. The use of technology to support ICC is consistent with current pedagogical trends that highlight the value of global connectivity and digital literacy in the classroom.

### Conclusion

The study found that although ICC's significance in language teaching is widely acknowledged, implementing it into classroom setting faces a number of obstacles, including a lack of institutional support and instructors' familiarity with ICC based on the responses we received on the questionnaire.

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The results show that EFL instructors at the University of Prizren, who understand the importance of ICC, have generally positive attitudes toward its promotion. The study also point out important challenges to the successful application of ICC, such as time restraints, curricular requirements, a lack of sufficient resources, and possibilities for professional development.

Despite these difficulties, educators have used a range of techniques to include intercultural content in language classes, including the use of authentic resources, interactive techniques like role-play and simulations, and more. Technology has also shown promise as a means of improving ICC, but its application requires further assistance and training.

From the research, it is obvious that in order to improve teachers' comprehension and use of ICC, they must continue their professional development. It also demands more systemic and institutional support in order to establish the conditions necessary for the successful promotion of ICC. One way to do this would be to prioritize intercultural education in curriculum revisions.

### Apendix

**Research Questionnaire
(For Semi-Structured Interviews)**

**Section 1: Demographic Information**

1.  Name (Optional):
2.  Gender:
    *   Male
    *   Female
    *   Prefer not to say
3.  Age:
    *   20-30
    *   31-40
    *   41-50
    *   51 and above

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4. Employment Status:
   - Full-time
   - Part-time
5. Years of Teaching Experience:
   - 1-5 years
   - 6-10 years
   - 11-15 years
   - 16 years and above
6. Please list the courses you currently teach and briefly describe their focus.

## Section 2: Attitudes towards Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC)

7. How familiar are you with the concept of Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC)?
   - Not familiar
   - Somewhat familiar
   - Very familiar
8. In your opinion, how important is promoting ICC in the EFL classroom?
   - Not important
   - Slightly important
   - Moderately important
   - Very important
   - Extremely important
9. How would you describe your attitude towards integrating ICC into your teaching practice?
   - Unfavorable
   - Neutral
   - Favorable
10. What do you believe are the main benefits of promoting ICC in the classroom? *(Follow-up: Could you provide specific examples from your experience?)*

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11. What concerns, if any, do you have about incorporating ICC into your teaching? *(Follow-up: How do you address these concerns?)*

## Section 3: Challenges in Promoting ICC

12. What challenges have you encountered when trying to promote ICC in your classroom? *(Follow-up: Can you provide specific instances where these challenges affected your teaching?)*

13. Do you believe there are institutional or systemic barriers that hinder the promotion of ICC in your classroom? If yes, please elaborate.

14. How do your students typically respond to activities or lessons aimed at promoting ICC?

## Section 4: Strategies for Promoting ICC

15. What strategies do you currently use to promote ICC in your classroom? *(Follow-up: Can you describe how these strategies are implemented?)*

    How do you adapt your teaching materials and methods to address the diverse cultural backgrounds of your students?

16. How do you assess the development of ICC in your students? *(Follow-up: Can you provide examples of assessment methods or activities?)*

17. What additional resources or support would help you better promote ICC in your classroom?

18. In your opinion, what are the most effective ways to enhance ICC among EFL teachers and students at the University of Prizren?

## Closing Questions

19. Is there anything else you would like to add regarding your experience with or views on promoting ICC in the EFL classroom?

20. Would you be interested in participating in future training related to this topic?

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