



# Portraying Indonesian EFL Teachers' Perceptions and Teaching Practices on Intercultural Communicative Competence

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**Abstract.** Fostering Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) in the EFL milieu has attracted considerable worldwide scholars' interest. Despite the myriads of literature on ICC in the EFL settings, integrating ICC into EFL instruction is still underexplored in the Indonesian context, especially in the eastern part of Indonesia. To fill the empirical lacuna, the current study seeks to portray Indonesian EFL teachers' perceptions of ICC and explore how these teachers give culturally laden instruction in their teaching praxis. Six English teachers from private and state-run schools were recruited to participate in this study. Open-ended interviews were made to amass the data. Findings show that most participants are unfamiliar with the postulation of ICC. Different lengths of teaching experience, educational backgrounds, and schools' geographical spaces have resulted in different models of culturally laden instructions and interculturality was not explicitly taught in most teachers' classrooms. Their instruction mainly focused on linguistic aspects using authentic materials from inner-circle countries or textbooks endorsed by the curriculum. The research findings recommend that teachers be trained to make culturally-embedded instruction explicit and be exposed to cultural diversity through more intercultural encounters.

**Keywords:** Teachers' perception · teachers' praxis · ICC

## 1 Introduction

Rapid globalization, economic growth, massive migration, and advanced technology have placed English's prominent standing as lingua franca [1], resulting in an escalating number of non-native speakers of English worldwide. This requires these communicators from diverse linguistic and sociocultural contexts to possess ICC (Intercultural Communicative Competence) to engage in and communicate effectively across different sociocultural and linguistic circumstances [2, 3].

This shift has attracted teachers and scholars' interest worldwide in fostering ICC in their instruction. Lidicoat [4] argues that ICC should be promoted in EFL classrooms. English teachers and educators need to expose their students to different English varieties [5] and cultures from inner, outer, and expanding circles-countries [6] to broaden

and enrich students' cultural repertoire to effectively function in intercultural communication which is defined as the ability to interact effectively and appropriately with people from other cultures [7, 8]. Further, Byram et al. [9] categorize ICC under five dimensions: "knowledge, attitudes, skills of interpreting and relating, skills of discovery and interaction, and critical cultural awareness".

In the Indonesian context, the Ministry of Education and Culture issued regulation Number 22 of 2020 on *Profil Pelajar Pancasila Berkebinekaan Global* in view of preparing students to be global citizens, which poses a challenge for teachers to assist students in learning both home cultures and global cultures. In the long run, these students are expected to be deeply seated in local cultures yet to remain open-minded and able to navigate across varied cultural contexts. ICC should be extensively promoted across Indonesia as a culturally and linguistically diverse nation to minimize and prevent sociopolitical challenges, namely racism and religious conflicts. Teachers at the frontline of education are called to build students' intercultural understanding and communication. In doing so, teachers should be reflective by "empowering" themselves to constantly question their teaching practices because what they "think, know, believe, and do" affects their day-to-day "professional decision-making" [10, 11]. Studies [12–17] exploring teachers' perceptions of ICC across the globe have a foreground that teachers could articulate the close intertwinement between language and culture well and sound out of the importance of incorporating culture into the instruction. However, these beliefs have yet to be translated into culturally embedded instruction.

In Indonesia, some studies have addressed teachers' perceptions of interculturality [18–20]. Kidwell [18] explored novice EFL teachers' beliefs toward teaching culture. Her findings classified teachers into two groups: those who encourage students to conserve the host cultures and guard them against foreign cultures and expose students to different cultures to help them navigate intercultural interaction and develop respect and openness towards other cultures. Munandar and Newton [19] contend that state policy sparks profound impacts on education and subsequently dictate teachers' teaching practices, creating discrepancies between their beliefs and practices. Hasanah and Gunawan [20] explored two novice EFL teachers understanding and belief about ICC. The findings from this study revealed that these teachers believed that ICC has no significant influence on language proficiency development. These teachers were found to have relatively limited knowledge about ICC, and their instructions have not sufficiently addressed ICC. In contrast to [20], this present study involved teachers from diverse teaching backgrounds (public schools and private schools) with different lengths of teaching experience. This study took place in the eastern part of Indonesia, particularly in the North Sulawesi province, where the integration of ICC in the classroom has remained underexplored. The numerous studies on Indonesian teachers' perception of interculturality and similar previous studies [18–20] are generally Java-centric. The research context under investigation was devoted to filling the abovementioned empirical void and providing general insight into how and where to start incorporating ICC into the instruction. In this scenario, the current investigation aims to answer the following questions:

1. What are teachers' perceptions of interculturality in their EFL classroom?
2. How do teachers manage culturally laden instruction in their teaching praxis?

## 2 Method

Framed in a qualitative case study [22], this present study aimed to portray Indonesian EFL teachers' perception of ICC and explore how these teachers structure culturally-laden instruction in their teaching praxis. The case study was employed to thoroughly investigate teachers' understanding and practices of ICC instruction in a natural setting. Selected through convenience sampling, the research participants included six teachers (four females and two males) aged between 27 and 49 who were selected from state-run and private schools in North Sulawesi province, Indonesia. Two teachers held Master's degrees, one was pursuing a Master's study, and the rest (three teachers) had Bachelor of Arts (BA). Semi-structured interviews were used to elicit in-depth information about the teachers' perceptions and teaching praxis toward developing ICC. Prior to the interviews, the researchers developed an interview guide with a set of open-ended questions grounded in the research questions and the principles of integrating ICC proposed by Baker [23], Byram [7], Munandar and Newton [20]. This interview guide was piloted to two teachers and amended afterward for more accuracy. The teachers signed consent letters to acknowledge their approval of research involvement. Depending on participants' discretion, the interviews were conducted in English or Indonesian via Zoom to avoid language barriers and allow flexibility in sharing their views. Each interview took 20–40 min, fabricating 180 min of audio data. In compliance with ethical considerations, the informants' participation was strictly voluntary and their identities remained anonymous.

The interviews were videotaped, audio recordings were transcribed, and the Indonesian excerpts were translated into English. After transcribing the interview recordings, the researchers read all the transcriptions, coded the emerging theme, interpreted the data, and wrote up the findings supported by the selected excerpts. The first research question was coded based on Bryam's ICC framework, and the second research question was grounded in Baker and Newton's iCLT principles.

## 3 Findings and Discussion

### 3.1 Teachers' Perception Towards ICC

All participating teachers define ICC as one's ability to understand and communicate across varied cultural settings. P2 furthered that ICC is necessary to prevent unessential disputes in intercultural communication.

*“From my understanding, Intercultural Communicative Competence, ICC in short, refers to the ability to understand different cultures and use this knowledge and understanding to communicate successfully with people from other cultures. More importantly, it is our ability to adapt and navigate ourselves in different cultures that we encounter without creating unnecessary conflicts or misunderstandings (P2).*

When these respondents were asked further about what elements construct a good intercultural communicative speaker, these teachers frequently defined such speaker

**Table 1.** Teachers' understanding of interculturality

Participant	The understanding of the intercultural communicative competent speaker	Emerging themes
P1	To know the cultures of our interlocutors	Knowledge (K)
P2	To have sufficient knowledge and respect toward other cultures	Knowledge and attitude (K, A)
P3	To have knowledge and attitude	Knowledge and attitude (K, A)
P4	To observe and listen attentively and to respect our interlocutors without having prejudice	Attitude (A)
P5	To have the attitude: to be polite and respectful	Attitude (A)
P6	To have the attitude: to be polite and respectful	Attitude (A)

within knowledge and attitude domains. Grounded in Bryman's ICC framework, the researchers utilized the following codes: attitudes (code A), knowledge (code K), skills of interpreting and relating and skills of discovery and interaction (code S), and critical cultural awareness (code CA) to classify participants' elaboration on ICC. Table 1 describes the teachers' understanding of what it takes to be interculturally communicative speakers.

One of the teachers' respondents, P1, mentioned that knowing cultures is crucially essential for successful intercultural communication. P1, for example, mentioned, "*People need to dig out by looking for information about their interlocutors' cultures in the communication*". These three teachers (P4, P5, P6) shared another domain, attitude, that an intercultural communicative speaker should have. P4, for instance, shared, "*When someone talks to you, you need to observe and listen to this person attentively. You have respect for your interlocutors without having prejudice beforehand*". P2 and P3 associated intercultural communicative competent speakers with having knowledge and respect. He said, "*Well, the most obvious thing is to have sufficient knowledge and respect for other cultures*" (P2). These findings point out that the teachers were hardly familiar with the skills of interpreting, relating and skills of discovery and interaction, and critical awareness, indicating their lack of familiarity with ICC. P1, P2, P5, and P6 admitted that this was the first time they had heard this term. P1 even mentioned that the interview made him aware that culture could be integrated into EFL instruction.

### 3.2 The Variety of Teaching Praxis in Incorporating Cultures into EFL Instruction

Although these teachers articulated the robust relationship between language and cultures, their praxis in incorporating cultures into their class varies to a large extent, as summarized in Table 2.

**Table 2.** Teachers' teaching praxis toward interculturality

<b>Emerging themes</b>	<b>Activities in incorporating cultures and interculturality into regular instruction</b>
Instilling good habit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rules and procedures in the classroom like hand signals, clothing style, and manners in asking question (P4)</li> <li>• Greetings and politeness (P3, P5, P6)</li> </ul>
Extra-curricular activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students taking part in traditional music and dances extracurricular activities (P1)</li> </ul>
Using authentic materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Impersonating characters in movies from native speaker contexts (P2, P5)</li> <li>• Explaining idioms and slang (P2)</li> </ul>
Comparing host and target language cultures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Asking students to do observation (P3)</li> <li>• Sharing personal experiences (P3, P5) living overseas (P3)</li> <li>• Giving explanation about cultural aspects (P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6)</li> </ul>
Exposing target language and global cultures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Listening to teachers' presentations and reading some materials about certain countries during Book-Week (P4)</li> <li>• Pen palling and storytelling projects and Christmas celebration performances in the Bridge program (P4)</li> <li>• Raising students' awareness about cultural diversity in Indonesia through <i>Pekan Nusantara</i> (P4)</li> </ul>

P3, P4, P5, and P6 always reminded their students to pay attention to politeness and manners when they talk and behave, as highlighted by P5 “*We are Indonesians, we are polite and friendly*”. P1 and P6 addressed the interculturality by explaining to the students that there were some inappropriate questions that were not supposed to be asked to native speakers for the first time. P6 taught introduction and greetings to graders 7. She shared, “*I gave them a set of questions like how to greet, leave-taking, etc. In my belief, asking salary and marital status to native speakers is considered rude*” (P6). P2 and P5 utilized authentic materials like songs, movies, poems, and games ingrained in native speakers' countries like American and British to engage students in the instruction. They both rarely used textbooks recommended by the curriculum. P2 described how he managed his instruction, “*The activity for the students is to try to copy what they see in the movie scenes; to impersonate the characters in the movies. During the lesson, there would be an explanation about the meaning of behind the word/sentences*”. Similarly, P5 shared the same practice focusing on linguistics aspects such as pronunciation and vocabulary. She said, “*Apart from reading and singing, my students and I analyzed the meaning of the songs and poems. They have something behind these songs and poems. I showed my students how to pronounce particular words from YouTube*” (P5). In addition, she

explained English varieties (British and American) to her students in terms of vocabulary, such as the differences between soccer and football. She shared some stories about her friends living abroad having difficulties understanding non-native English speakers with heavy accents. P3 and P4, to some extent, incorporated cultures into their instruction by drawing students' attention to the differences between the host and native-speaker cultures. P3 narrated her teaching praxis as follows.

*I taught a report text to ninth graders. At that time, the topic was the supermarket. I asked them to visit and observe a supermarket, before the next meeting. Then, in the following meeting, I would ask their opinion about the supermarket, such as what differences the supermarket has with "warung", what items they find in the supermarket, how it runs, and how it looks like. I drew my students' attention between our host culture (Indonesia) and British culture. I said to them this is a major difference that we have. When buying, they put emphasis on honesty. In abroad, in some supermarkets, you do not need to meet the cashier. You just put the money and take the stuff and change on your own. I shared with them about my experience when I was living in a boarding house in Indonesia. My friends and I wrote down things that we bought and put the money.*

She explained to her students that the differences between these cultures lied in honesty. In a similar vein, an effort to bring interculturality had been executed in some ways by P4. Every October, in his school, they held "Pekan Nusantara" where the students worked hand in hand in groups to make a presentation and posters about particular ethnicities. These students were dressed in traditional outfits and performed traditional songs and dances before the visitors (friends, teachers, and parents). They also served local cuisines to the guests. P4 was selected to take part in the Bridge program with one of the sister schools in Perth, Australia. He engaged his students in some programs sponsored by the Bridge program. His students exchanged letters in English, recorded videos in storytelling performances in English and Indonesian, and watched Christmas celebration performances delivered by friends from Australia. Moreover, these students got exposed to global cultures through Book Week held annually. In February, this year, these students got exposed to foreign cultures from Finland, South Africa, Canada, India, and Australia by listening to teachers' presentations and reading the materials about these countries for one week. On one particular day, they wore a traditional outfit from one of these countries.

P1, P3, P4, and P6 mostly used materials from the textbooks informed by the curriculum. P2 and P5 made use of authentic materials originating from Anglophone countries. All participants did not incorporate culture into their assessment, leaving a holistic focus on linguistics aspects. P3 incorporated culture as an attitudinal component into after the lesson ended. After asking students to observe supermarket and *warung* (a small family-owned business) and explain how honesty is perceived in western and Indonesian cultures, she asked her students to show their honesty in the test. "At the end of the class, I gave them a quiz and left the class and would like to see how honest they were without having me around them" (P3).

Teachers had taken the roles of material deliverer, designers, and motivator. P4 performed his role as a cultural teacher and mediator when his students experienced

culture shock. In one of his lessons, the students were assigned to take part in pen pal projects and they were disappointed because Australian students did not share their social media accounts. He shared his experience as follows.

*The most noticeable differences lied in privacy matter. Indonesians' students happily shared themselves including their personal social media accounts in their letters sent to students in Australia. They were disappointed when these Australian students did not share their personal accounts. This experience helped them to notice the existing differences and reflect on why these Australians valued privacy. As a teacher, I need to help these students to understand and prepare themselves better in communicating by knowing this value (P4).*

This joint activity has helped students to be aware of cultural differences and highlighted the importance of teachers as intercultural mediators in their instruction.

The findings show that the teachers shared a common definition of ICC. Although some of these teachers only came across the term ICC during the research, it was clear that they had some understanding of ICC based on its etymology. However, when the participants were asked further about what element constructed an intercultural communicative competent speaker, none of the participants perceived ICC as theorized in Byram's ICC, that is the aggregate of knowledge, attitude, and skill. The peripheral concern with intercultural attitude and skill is affirmed in a previous study that document teachers' partial understanding of ICC [13]. Teachers agreed that interculturality should be addressed in their instruction. This finding confirms previous studies done across the globe [13–18] that underscore a huge gap between reported awareness and the actual praxis of ICC integration. What teachers' belief is not directly implemented in their day-to-day instruction, apparently because teaching culture is perceived as teaching appropriate behavior dictated by host cultures. This finding is in line with previous studies [19, 20] advocating the customs of host cultures as the guiding principle in teaching cultures. The research findings demonstrate that culture and interculturality are not explicitly integrated into EFL instruction. The instruction has mainly focused on enhancing students' linguistics competence, and therefore teachers are likely to be unfamiliar with ICC. The cultures that teachers exposed to the students were centered on target language cultures-Anglophone cultures: the cultures of native speakers of English. This finding is coherent with previous research [24] focusing on the dominance of teaching English cultures. The research findings provide several accounts for the teachers' partial understanding and explicit praxis of ICC integration in their language class. The first plausible reason is that teacher education institution has yet to introduce the concept and pedagogy of ICC to student teachers. Second, stakeholders have not provided sufficient training, materials, and facilities supportive to ICC instruction and integrating ICC into EFL class. The last possible argument is that teachers do not have sufficient exposure to interculturality. These findings highlight some workable activities to bring interculturality into the classroom, among others, to engage students in online cultural encounters by taking part in cultural exchanges and exposing them to global cultures. Teachers are suggested to collaborate with their colleagues and students from abroad to organize joint meetings to initiate cultural exchanges and projects. Teachers could be encouraged to

firstly help the students to be aware of the diversity in their host cultures and move to explore cultural diversity in Anglophone and non-Anglophone contexts.

## 4 Conclusion

This present study has addressed the dearth of evidence of teachers' perception and teaching practice towards interculturality beyond Java-centric cultural backgrounds. The research findings evidence that teachers have an impartial understanding of interculturality and their instruction primarily aims to enhance students' language proficiency using Anglophone-driven materials. Online-joint meetings should be integrated into regular EFL instruction to promote interculturality with students across geographical boundaries. The present study highlights some worth-considering implications for EFL instruction. First, more training and intercultural encounters should be conducted to assist teachers in explicitly incorporating cultures into their instruction and expose them to cultural diversity. Interculturality also needs to be introduced and promoted in teacher education institutions. There are, however, several research limitations that should not go unnoticed, one of which is the use of interview only as the data collection technique. Future researchers are suggested to employ an onsite classroom observation to gain a deeper understanding.

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