

The Role of Intercultural Communication Competence in Second-Language Teaching: Implications for Us Tesol Programs.

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Abstract

The concept of intercultural communication competence (ICC) has become a leading foundation in second-language learning, particularly in multilingual and multicultural classrooms in the United States. Since TESOL programs are becoming increasingly responsive to diverse student populations, a teacher's capacity to promote meaningful cross-cultural awareness has become a significant determinant of learners' engagement, language proficiency, and overall communicative competence. The article explores the conceptual background and pedagogical and practical issues of ICC in second-language teaching and presents ICC as a vital component of modern-day TESOL programs in the United States. Using the frameworks of Byram ICC, the Process Model of Deardorff and the most recent sociocultural studies, the article reveals how ICC contributes to the achievement of culturally inclusive pedagogy, teacher-student relationships, and pragmatic competence of learners. The research also assesses the current state of ICC integration in U.S. TESOL programs, its strengths, gaps, and the structural issues of teacher-training institutions. It also examines social changes, such as greater linguistic diversity, global mobility, and equity-based educational requirements, which call for a more robust embedding of ICC models in TESOL preparation. Pragmatic suggestions include redesigning the curriculum, planning assessments, implementing experiential learning in the community, and providing focused professional development. The article ends with a conception of a progressive model for integrating ICC into TESOL programs, focusing on sustainable, quantifiable, and pedagogically applicable aspects. The results highlight that intercultural competence is no longer a pleasant add-on but a legacy of effective second-language teaching in the American context.

Keywords: Intercultural communication competence, TESOL programs, second-language teaching, cultural pedagogy, teacher education.

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1. Introduction

The rapid shift in globalization has transformed the linguistic and cultural environment of the American classroom, making English language education the focal point in a learning environment that is becoming increasingly heterogeneous. Migration flows,

international student mobility, and the development of multilingual societies have created educational contexts in which students bring complex cultural identities, communicative norms, and linguistic repertoires. These

changes require second-language instruction to go beyond grammar, vocabulary, and structural competence

and to include intercultural sensitivity and communicative flexibility. According to recent educational studies, successful language teaching in a multicultural setting should be based on pedagogical models that equip learners to mediate between culturally mediated sensemaking processes (Senyshyn, 2019; Goncalves et al., 2020).

Intercultural Communication Competence (ICC) has consequently become a pillar attribute of second-language instruction. ICC describes the attitudes, knowledge, and interactional skills necessary for individuals to communicate effectively and appropriately across cultural boundaries. ICC helps teachers to make an assessment of the communicative practices of learners, control cultural misunderstandings, and offer inclusive learning experiences, in which sociocultural resources of students are recognized and appreciated (Hagqvist et al., 2020; Jimenez, 2020). The issue of ICC has become even more significant as U.S. schools become culturally responsive and equity-driven in their pedagogies to accommodate the growing heterogeneity of English learners. The literature on culturally sustaining education emphasizes that the teaching of a second language should be grounded in the principles of pedagogical empathy, cultural humility, and recognition of the cultural prosperity of the learning community (Jimenez, 2020; Leung and Lopez-McKnight, 2020).

The discussion of the importance of ICC in second language instruction is also enhanced by changing demands in teacher education. The world, and especially the United States, is undergoing a paradigm shift in TESOL programs, with an emphasis now on pedagogical models that equip teachers with skills in intercultural interaction, online communication, and global Englishes. Attitude studies of TESOL practitioners indicate that teachers are becoming more aware of the necessity to introduce globalized attitudes into the teaching of language and replace monolithic conceptions of a standard form of English with more pluralistic and culturally-based practices (Cameron and Galloway, 2019; Galloway and Numajiri, 2020). Similar debates in teacher education research emphasize the need for language teachers to have not only a high degree of linguistic and methodological knowledge but also to be interculturally sensitive and critically reflective (Tatto, 2021; Fischer et al., 2022).

In the U.S., demographic and policy changes have transformed TESOL programs in significant ways. The

growing number of English learners in K-12 and higher education environments has increased the need for teacher preparation programs that develop high levels of intercultural competence. In addition, the recent experience with digital and hybrid modes of teaching, which was intensified by the COVID-19 disruptions, proved that new intercultural flexibility was needed by teachers, particularly in situations involving a combination of communicating with learners online in the context of various cultural and technological backgrounds (Konig et al., 2020; Deng et al., 2021; Ruiz-Alonso-Bartol et al., 2022). These changes demonstrate the necessity of TESOL curricula that emphasize ICC as a primary professional skill at the center of educational realities in the modern world.

Despite this growing understanding, there are still significant gaps between the teaching of language and intercultural requirements in most TESOL programs in the United States. Research on teacher readiness indicates that preservice teachers tend to have incomplete or inadequate preparation in culture, communication norms, and intercultural pragmatics (Karim et al., 2019; Alda et al., 2020). Although language proficiency and methodological training are often prioritized, ICC is often perceived simply as an auxiliary, rather than as a component of professional formation discussed in an integrated manner. This incongruity poses problems for early-career professionals, who must operate in the classroom where learners perceive communicative cues through culturally diverse schemes and expectations for interaction (Micheal et al., 2021).

In addition, current studies caution that TESOL programs are usually slow to respond to broader societal and educational demands for culturally responsible and socially-justice-oriented instruction. According to scholars, language teachers should adopt a systematic approach to questioning identity, power, and representation, and to understanding how cultural processes mediate language learning opportunities (Nguyen and Zeichner, 2021; Napan et al., 2020). Lacking a specific focus on ICC, teachers are likely to misinterpret learners' behaviors, perpetuate cultural stereotypes, or develop instructional strategies that favor culturally diverse learners.

2. Theoretical Bases of intercultural communication competence.

The concept of Intercultural Communication Competence (ICC) has become a key building block of

the modern-day second-language education, as the interaction between language skills and cultural knowledge, on the one hand, and mobility on a global scale, on the other, becomes more and more interdependent. In TESOL, ICC is not only a non-essential proficiency but a fundamental aspect of communicative efficacy especially that language classrooms in the United States are growing to be more culturally and linguistically heterogeneous. Studies in the cross-disciplinary context of sociolinguistics, psychology, intercultural studies, and digital learning all confirm the importance of considering the cultural structures that produce meanings, interaction, and identity in learning and teaching (Goncalves et al., 2020; Sanchez-Hernandez and Baron, 2022). In this part, the author identifies the main elements of ICC, discusses the theoretical texts behind it and also the importance of ICC in relation to second-language acquisition.

2.1 Intercultural Communication Competence Defined.

ICC may be widely thought of as the skill of communicating appropriately and effectively with people of other different culture. Definitions may be different; however, researchers are more or less in agreement in acknowledging five fundamental components which include knowledge, skills, attitudes, internal outcomes and external outcomes (Deardorff's Model).

Knowledge is called cultural awareness, sociolinguistic norms and the knowledge of the communication styles difference between cultures. In TESOL it consists of global

Englishes awareness, discourse norms and cultural diversity in pragmatics (Cameron and Galloway, 2019; Galloway and Numajiri, 2020).

Skills include not only interpretive, but also interactional ones, e.g., observing, analyzing, listening, and changing communication patterns. The research points out that more intercultural competent teachers can scaffold culturally responsive interactions and minimize miscommunication (Hagqvist et al., 2020).

Attitudes are the basis of ICC and these are openness, curiosity, empathy, and readiness to suspend judgment. The studies of teacher identity and cultural pedagogy demonstrate that such attitudes are required to reach the multilingual learners and break ethnocentric assumptions that may exist in the classroom (Napan et al., 2020; Jimenez, 2020).

The internal consequences include the change of attitudes, the growth of cultural flexibility, and negotiation of cultural meanings. External outcomes are the ability to communicate well and in a proper manner. It is particularly apparent in multicultural learning settings where educators have to act within the frames of unspoken rules in interaction, power distance, and culture-grounded expectations regarding communication (Senyshyn, 2019).

These elements combined make ICC a cohesive competence, including knowledge, feelings, and actions- a needed skill of language teachers.

ICC Component	Description	Relevance to TESOL (with citations)
Knowledge	Understanding cultural norms, sociolinguistic rules, and cross-cultural communication styles.	Includes awareness of Global Englishes, discourse norms, and cultural diversity in pragmatics (Cameron & Galloway, 2019; Galloway & Numajiri, 2020).
Skills	Interpretive and interactional abilities such as observing, analyzing, listening, and adapting communication.	Enables teachers to scaffold culturally responsive interactions and reduce miscommunication (Hagqvist et al., 2020).

Attitudes	Openness, curiosity, empathy, and willingness to suspend judgment.	Essential for reaching multilingual learners and counteracting ethnocentric assumptions (Napan et al., 2020; Jimenez, 2020).
Internal Outcomes	Development of cultural flexibility, shifts in perspective, and the ability to negotiate cultural meanings.	Supports teachers' reflective growth and intercultural sensitivity in diverse learning environments.
External Outcomes	Effective and appropriate communication across cultural boundaries.	Evident in multilingual classrooms where teachers must navigate unspoken norms, power distance, and culturally based expectations (Senyshyn, 2019).

Table 1. Core Components of Intercultural Communication Competence (ICC)

2.2 Theoretical and Pedagogical Formulations of ICC.

The construction, evaluation, and teaching practice of ICC in the fields of teacher education and TESOL are guided by several models that are, to varying degrees, established.

2.2.1 Byram Model of Intercultural Communicative Competence.

The framework by Byram has been quite popular in teaching a second language and it focuses on five savours:

- Attitudes (savoir-etre)
- Knowledge (savoirs)
- Interpreting and relating (savoir-comprendre) skills.
- Discovery, interactivity (savoir-apprendre/faire) skills.
- Critical cultural awareness (savoir s'engager).

This model is an education-based, structured, and adequate to the objectives of teacher training, and it has been relevant in informing curricula in global Englishes and cross-cultural pedagogy (Galloway and Numajiri, 2020).

2.2.2 Process Models and Pyramid of Deardorff.

The Deardorff model is among the most empirically validated models of ICC. It underlines attitudes as guiding and results in the creation of knowledge and abilities, which, in turn, generate internal and external products. The process model emphasises that ICC is continuous, developmental, and experience-informed, a claim supported by research on experience-based

fieldwork in teacher education (Nguyen and Zeichner, 2021). This is the model followed by many U.S. universities in evaluating intercultural development among pre-service teachers.

2.2.3 Bennett Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS).

Bennett conceptualizes ICC as a continuation of different stages of ethnocentrism (denial, defense, minimization) toward ethnorelativity (acceptance, adaptation, integration). This process of development is consistent with other studies that have found that teacher students tend to come to TESOL programs with a low level of intercultural awareness due to the monocultural experiences of schooling and need to be guided in their development to the intercultural empathy level (Karim et al., 2019; Fischer et al., 2022).

2.2.4 Intercultural Sociocultural Theory and Pragmatics.

Intercultural pragmatics theories can emphasize how language users establish meaning in various cultural situations, with an accent on speech acts, politeness, and discourse strategies (Sanchez-Hernandez and Baron, 2022). The sociocultural theory introduces the mediated social interaction and the influence of the cultural tools, whether linguistic, symbolic, or digital, in the process of communicative development (Reinhardt, 2019; Deng et al., 2021). Collectively, these frames point to the fact that ICC is created during real interaction, reflection practice, and culturally situated activities.

2.3 ICC when it is relativized in the context of language acquisition.

ICC is a central aspect of the process of language acquisition by learners, including meaning construction and the development of communicative competence.

2.3.1 Connection between Culture and the use of language.

Culture cannot be divorced from language. The use of cultural norms in the expression of politeness, disagreement, formality, humor, and emotion cannot be entirely conveyed through grammar instruction. The studies indicate that the spread of English and the emergence of multiple identities prompt TESOL teachers to incorporate cultural diversity into their teaching (Cameron and Galloway, 2019; Boysen et al., 2022).

2.3.2. Cultural Schemata, Identity and Communicative Meaning.

Messengers are interpreted through cultural schemata, internalized patterns of expectations and interpretations that learners have. Miscommunication may occur when teachers presuppose common schemata that students do not share (Sun et al., 2023). Besides, the identity re-crystallization through the acquisition of language, and the understanding of the emotional, social, and political aspects of multilingual identity work should be acknowledged by culturally responsive educators (Jimenez, 2020; Leung and Lopez-McKnight, 2020).

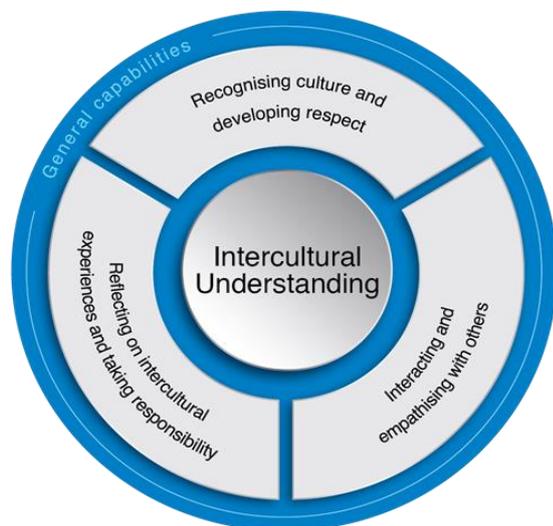


Figure 1: The Importance of Cultural Competence in Translation and Interpretation

2.3.3 Relevance to pragmatic and Sociolinguistic Competence.

One of the main aspects of overall communicative competence is pragmatic competence- knowledge of how language can be used in the most appropriate way in a given context. ICC enhances learners' pragmatic awareness, which is the ability to understand cultural context, identify meanings embedded in it, and adapt communicative behavior to situational demands (Sanchez-Hernandez and Baron, 2022). Sociolinguistic competence, in turn, also relies on knowledge of cultural norms of speech styles, politeness, and register.

Online communication presents new intercultural challenges and opportunities, and the digital learning environment also supports the necessity of ICC (Ruiz-Alonso-Bartol et al., 2022; Salas-Pilco et al., 2022). Educators need to help students maneuver in such spaces with cultural sensitivity.

3. Intercultural Communication in Second Language Teaching: Dimensions Mainstream

Intercultural communication competence (ICC) is a multidimensional construct that influences how second language learners assign meaning, interact, and develop identities in multilingual contexts. In U.S. TESOL programs, ICC is no longer considered an incidental aspect of linguistic competence, but an explicit pedagogical focus, especially with the growth of cultural diversity at the K-12 and tertiary education levels (Cameron and Galloway, 2019). The four key dimensions of ICC, namely attitudinal foundations, cultural knowledge, interactional skills, and classroom dynamics that define the success of intercultural pedagogy in unison are described in the following subsections.

3.1 Attitudinal Foundations

The attitudinal dimension is generally regarded as the psychological heart of ICC. It involves openness, empathy, curiosity, and tolerance for ambiguity, and it determines the interpretation of cross-cultural encounters among teachers and learners. Attitudinal readiness reinforces the desire to suspend judgment, a competence that is consistently associated with favorable learner identities and fair classroom engagement (Goncalves et al., 2020). Being open allows learners and teachers to view unknown cultural signals as learning resources rather than threats, and curiosity encourages learners to explore more about linguistic and cultural diversity.

Empathy (especially intercultural empathy) helps the educator navigate the emotional and experiential frame

of the multilingual learner. Empathy and culturally responsive dispositions are demonstrated to benefit rapport-building and reduce implicit bias in teacher-education research (Karim et al., 2019). On the same note, ambiguity tolerance is also required in communicative situations where meanings are negotiable and culturally dependent. Cross-cultural mentoring research indicates that educators with high ambiguity tolerance can better cope with diverse classroom demands, thereby interacting more smoothly with students of diverse languages (Hagqvist et al., 2020).

In the case of TESOL programs, attitudinal backgrounds need to be reinforced through specific reflections, being exposed to more communities, and coursework that questions essentialist assumptions. In the case of community-based fieldwork, especially, such experiences have been found to instill attitudes that align with language teaching with a social-justice orientation (Nguyen and Zeichner, 2021). Therefore, attitudinal competence is the foundation on which other ICC components are anchored.

3.2 Knowledge and Awareness of Culture

The cognitive aspect of ICC is cultural knowledge or the cognition of surface culture (behaviors, customs, communication, and so on) and deep culture (values, beliefs, views of the world). Good teaching of a second language asks educators to go beyond superficial cultural characteristics to an interpretation of the cultural frames in which communicative norms, politeness strategies, power relations, and identity negotiation are formed (Sanchez-Hernandez and Baron, 2022).

An important feature of this dimension is that it should not be based on stereotypes, ethnocentrism, or cultural essentialism, which deform learners' cultural representations. According to teacher education research, essentialist or monolithic understandings of culture are a barrier to the effectiveness of pedagogical practice and pose the threat of supporting unequal structures in the classroom (Leung and Lopez-McKnight, 2020). In addition, according to scholars in TESOL, knowledge related to culture should not be static but dynamic and relational, as the practices of culture are constantly changing due to globalization, migration, and technological mediation (Galloway and Numajiri, 2020; Reinhardt, 2019). Educators should also understand the influence of cultural wealth on learners' identities. The knowledge of community-cultural-wealth pedagogy

reveals that migration histories and family stories, as well as participation networks in the community, are valuable forms of capital that affect classroom engagement and the communicative behaviour displayed by students (Jimenez, 2020). The acknowledgment of these types of cultural knowledge will allow TESOL teachers to create instruction that is culturally sustaining rather than assimilative. Comprehensively, the development of cultural knowledge in TESOL programs would involve intertwining sociolinguistics, intercultural pragmatics, reflective inquiry, and exposure to authentic cultural stories through mobility programs, online communication, or local community relationships.

3.3 Interactional Skills

The ICC behavioral dimension, known as interactional competence, involves intercultural listening, speaking, negotiation, and conflict management skills. The skills play a crucial role in negotiating breaks in communication, pragmatic differences, and interactional norms influenced by culture. In second language learning, the misunderstanding is not limited to language, it is frequently a result of the difference in expectations regarding politeness, turn-taking, directness, or nonverbal cues those aspects of culture, which are ingrained within cultural frames (Sun, Lasser, and Lee, 2023).

Intercultural listening means focusing not on the linguistic message but on the cultural context, implicit meanings, and emotional shades as well. Research on teacher education suggests that organized intercultural communication can enhance pre-service teachers' listening and mediation abilities, making them more sensitive to the needs of diverse learners (Boysen et al., 2022). Likewise, intercultural speaking competence is the ability to adapt the communicative style, adjust the register, and demonstrate cultural sensitivity in the process of communication.

The other important interactional skill is dealing with misunderstandings and cultural conflict. Disagreements can stem from differences in cultural norms regarding power, peer relations, classroom activities, or feedback. Research on intercultural change in a college-level environment demonstrates that overt mediation practices alleviate anxiety among international learners and improve their ability to negotiate the norms of academic communication in the United States (Senyshyn, 2019; Ruiz-Alonso-Bartol et al., 2022).

The TESOL programs should hence actively prepare teachers to understand the cultural origins of communication failures and avenues for resolving misunderstandings through negotiation, clarification, and meta-communication. These skills cannot be done away with in intersecting multilingual classes where cultures and languages meet.

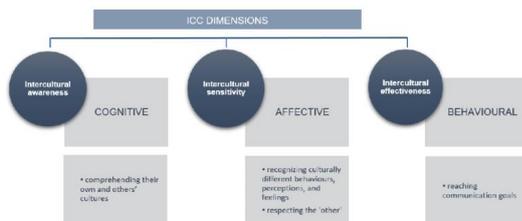


Figure 2: Dimensions-of Intercultural Communication Competence (ICC)

3.4 ICC and Classroom Dynamics

The last aspect of ICC concerns the impact of intercultural processes in the classroom-on-classroom dynamics, including safety, inclusivity, power relations, and participation. To build culturally safe, inclusive learning environments, teachers must be deliberate in their design, ensuring that all students feel valued, respected, and able to contribute. Research on transformative, culturally rooted pedagogy shows that safe spaces enable identity affirmation and foster student engagement (Napan et al., 2020).

One of the major intercultural factors is power distance especially between the teacher and the student. In cultures, teachers are regarded as unquestioning authority in other collaborative or egalitarian relationships they are not. Such differences do not always reach early-career teachers, mainly because ICC is not well prepared, and this occurred during the rapid transition to online teaching during the COVID-19 period (Konig, Jager-Biela, & Glutsch, 2020). Teachers who have not received explicit ICC training might not understand culturally conditioned behaviors such as silence, avoidance of direct eye contact, or reluctance to challenge authority.

There are also many different norms of classroom participation between cultures. High-context or collectivistic students might be more satisfied with group-based involvement, while individualistic students might be more satisfied with direct verbal interaction. To eliminate these disparities, the application of movement-

based/embodied learning strategies, which have been emphasized in early childhood and second-language learning settings, can better diversify these modes of participation than just verbal interaction (Padiar-Ruz et al., 2022; Kalogirou, Beauchamp & Whyte, 2019). To equip educators to handle such dynamics in TESOL programs, the training would include coursework exploring sociocultural theories of learning, critical pedagogy, classroom ethnography, and culturally responsive practice. By integrating them, the teachers will be able to prepare to create a classroom in which intercultural dialogue flourishes, and the learners will be able to make full use of the available linguistic and cultural resources.

4. The U.S. Context: Why ICC is important to TESOL Programs.

The current surge of American classroom cultural, linguistic, and ideological diversity has made the concept of Intercultural Communication Competence (ICC) an indispensable aspect of teacher preparation in U.S. TESOL programs. Since English remains a global language used by diverse communities and identities, TESOL teachers should not only be provided with pedagogical knowledge but also with the intercultural competence and communicative flexibility they need to address learners' multidimensional needs. ICC allows teachers to create meaningful, inclusive, and culturally anchored language-learning experiences that align with modern educational expectations and accreditation standards.

4.1 Demographic and Sociopolitical Factors.

The US has been undergoing a long period of demographic change as both K-12 and higher education students are becoming multilingual. Today, classes include English learners who are immigrants, students with refugee backgrounds, legacy speakers, and international students participating in academic programs in the U.S. These demographic changes demand TESOL teachers who can perceive cultural diversity as an asset rather than an obstacle to teaching. Research indicates that, as globalization transforms the communicative needs of English, educators must operate in increasingly heterogeneous environments, addressing various accents, language repertoires, and cultural requirements (Cameron and Galloway, 2019; Karim et al., 2019).

The U.S. learning environments are also largely affected by migration and the resettlement of refugees. Students with interrupted formal schooling, trauma, and culturally informed patterns of learning are found in the communities of several states, and they do not comply with mainstream U.S. schooling. To assist such learners, the teacher should possess empathy, cultural awareness, and adaptive communication skills, which are competencies closely associated with ICC (Senyshyn, 2019; Nadeem et al., 2020). Massive international student enrolment in higher education has added further linguistic and cultural layers, necessitating that TESOL teachers promote the acquisition of English and cross-cultural adaptation.

Furthermore, a sociopolitical conflict surrounding race, identity, and immigration also affects learners' participation, belonging, and access to favorable learning environments. According to scholars, educational spaces are strongly influenced by socio-political discourse; therefore, teaching practice should be reflective and equity-focused to overcome systemic inequities (Leung and Lopez-Mcknight, 2020). Community cultural wealth frameworks demonstrate that learners' histories, migration stories, and cultural capital significantly shape their language-learning patterns (Jimenez, 2020). The programs of TESOL should thus equip teachers to view these complex dynamics through an intercultural perspective, whereby students' cultural aspects need to be acknowledged and taken into consideration.

4.2 Culturally Responsive Instructional Requirements.

The idea of culturally responsive teaching has become a critical priority in U.S. educational institutions seeking to become equitable and inclusive. As the communicative base of culturally responsive pedagogy, ICC helps teachers understand the sociocultural aspects of their learners, manage various classroom expectations, and structure instruction that supports linguistic identity (Nguyen and Zeichner, 2021). The culturally sustaining pedagogies that deepen students' knowledge of heritage languages and their experiences of identity communities have become increasingly emphasized in teacher education programs as primary elements of good teaching.

The creation of ICC can help TESOL teachers learn to interpret learners' behavior in a cultural context, create learning communities, and promote the use of multilingual materials that reinforce classroom activities.

The current studies on intercultural and Indigenous pedagogies show that culturally based learning contexts enable students and deepen teachers' knowledge of different worldviews (Napan et al., 2020; Boysen et al., 2022). On the same note, the body of research on community cultural wealth highlights that teachers should be trained to incorporate students' migration capital and experiences into their teaching design (Jimenez, 2020).

Also, ICC promotes the development of pragmatic language among the teachers. Pragmatic competence- the understanding of how language works socially and culturally- is what leads to success in academic, social, and professional worlds. Nevertheless, U.S. classes typically emphasize grammatical correctness at the expense of pragmatic consciousness (Sanchez-Hernandez and Baron, 2022). To contextualize linguistic forms, present real-life communication norms, and address differences in politeness strategies, discourse styles, and culturally specific interaction patterns, culturally responsive teachers apply ICC. With the growing popularity of technological communication, it is also of utmost importance that teachers learn how cultural influences shape perceptions of multimodal communication tools, including emojis and digital discourse practices (Sun et al., 2023; Reinhardt, 2019).

4.3 Multicultural Classroom Teacher Dilemmas.

Nevertheless, U.S. teachers encounter numerous difficulties when teaching multicultural populations, even in the current context of increasing diversity. Cultural differences in nonverbal signals, norms of participation, eye contact, and expectations often lead to miscommunication. Without ICC, educators are likely to misinterpret silence, hesitation, or assertiveness, leading to mismatches in expectations, ineffective feedback, or even a lack of intentionality that marginalizes individuals (Goncalves et al., 2020; Hagqvist et al., 2020).

Implicit bias is also reflected in classroom practices. Unless teachers are exposed to intercultural experiences, they may be prone to deficit-based assumptions about multilingual learners, which may have implications for grading, classroom relationships, and the understanding of effort or ability (Millei, 2019; Micheal et al., 2021). ICC training assists educators in recognizing personal biases, developing reflective communication patterns, and building stronger relationships with learners from marginalized or foreign cultures.

The other difficulty is the loopholes in practical training. The learners of English are not always able to understand culturally-situated features of communication- humour, politeness rules, directness, or idiomatic forms of expression. ICC prepares educators to incorporate culturally aware pragmatics into the school curriculum, equipping students to become more competent in communicative knowledge aligned with U.S. sociocultural standards (Sanchez-Hernandez and Baron, 2022). These challenges are further complicated by the growing importance of digital platforms in language learning, as students can only explore different online communication styles (Sun et al., 2023).

These issues were increased by the spontaneous transition to online education brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic. Educators with well-developed digital communication skills and ICC were more effective at keeping students engaged and at managing cross-cultural communication in online settings (Konig et al., 2020; Ruiz-Alonso-Bartol et al., 2022). Therefore, it is possible to say that ICC is applicable both in traditional and technology-based learning environments.

4.4 Institutional Expectations and Standards of Accreditation.

The U.S. TESOL programs are designed to work within the accreditation systems that prioritize intercultural preparedness more. Some of the competencies emphasized by the TESOL International Association include cultural responsiveness, advocacy, sociocultural awareness, and the design of instruction grounded in perspectives on global Englishes (Galloway and Numajiri, 2020). These professional practices make ICC a fundamental mandate towards teacher performance in multilingual situations. In a very similar way, the accreditation of teacher preparation programs also involves education agencies such as the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP), which requires teacher preparation programs to actually demonstrate their ability to address the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse learners (Fischer et al., 2022; Tatto, 2021). This involves incorporating coursework, practicum learning, and assessment tools that measure intercultural preparedness.

It is also anticipated that institutions will become innovative to adapt to changing educational needs and integrate new educational tools, including learning analytics, online learning, AI-assisted learning, and community-based fieldwork to enhance more effective

intercultural learning experiences (Deng et al., 2021; Salas-Pilco et al., 2022; Ning et al., 2022). Program review. According to program evaluation, U.S. TESOL programs have undergone a shift, with them now being held accountable for equipping teachers with the professional, pedagogical, and intercultural skills required to work in culturally complex classrooms (Karim et al., 2019). Against this changing environment, ICC-centered teacher education is urgently needed as an essential source of teacher professionalism and effectiveness (Tatto, 2021; Zapata, 2022).

5. State of the ICC Integration in U.S. TESOL Programs.

Despite growing recognition of intercultural communication competence (ICC) as a fundamental part of effective second-language teaching in U.S. TESOL programs, its implementation in curricula remains uneven. The idea of culturally responsive and globally oriented teacher preparation is supported by national and institutional expectations, but there is still significant diversity in the conceptualization, teaching, and assessment of ICC across programs. Recent research supports the idea that educators must have strong intercultural preparation in order to explore multicultural classrooms, changing linguistic ecologies, and globalized communication practices (Cameron and Galloway, 2019; Galloway and Numajiri, 2020). The subsections below discuss prevailing trends in the curriculum, the most commonly used pedagogical processes, and the structural limitations that continue to curtail the development of ICC in teacher training.

5.1 Curriculum Design Trends

In most TESOL programs in the U.S., ICC is slowly creeping into mission statements, program outcomes, and accreditation standards. Nonetheless, the rate and extent of committed ICC study are quite different. In other institutions, ICC is incorporated into more extensive multicultural education or sociolinguistics courses, and few institutions have courses specifically dedicated to intercultural communication or culturally responsive pedagogy. This reflects trends in teacher education research worldwide, as the alignment of curricula with intercultural or global competence requirements has been irregular and largely relies on institutional priorities or faculty knowledge (Alda, Boholano & Dayagbil, 2020; Fischer et al., 2022).

As ICC integration in programs becomes stronger, intercultural competence is likely to be situated within the frames of more comprehensive approaches to global Englishes, pragmatics teaching, and culturally sustaining pedagogy — topics gaining greater recognition in TESOL studies (Sanchez-Hernandez and Baron, 2022). However, even in those situations, ICC is often taught across more than one course rather than being provided vertically aligned as a coherent strand of the curriculum. The studies on teacher preparation indicate that student teachers are unable to transfer theory into practice in the classroom due to fragmented or peripheral ICC exposure (Karim et al., 2019; Konig, Jager-Biela, and Glutsch, 2020). This means most novice TESOL practitioners enter the profession with partial or superficial training in intercultural communication

5.2 Pedagogical Strategies that are usually applied.

5.2.1 Theory-Based Instruction

The majority of TESOL programs are based on background readings in intercultural communication theory, critical pedagogy, and sociocultural approaches to language learning. This theoretical background is crucial, as ICC entails knowledge of cultural schemas, identity negotiation, power relations, and communicative norms (Goncalves et al., 2020). Nevertheless, a richly theoretical instruction may be too abstract in the absence of field-based or hands-on learning experiences. Other critiques along the same line have been raised against related disciplines, including nursing and health sciences, where teachers have observed that students who have completed theoretical training on ICC are not adequately equipped to manage an actual intercultural experience (Hagqvist et al., 2020; Micheal et al., 2021).

5.2.2 Cross-Cultural Communication Modules.

Programs involving communication styles, nonverbal behavior, cultural value orientations, or case studies of intercultural misunderstandings are often incorporated into many programs. These modules can be quite compatible with larger global Englishes strategies that emphasize the multiplicity of English use worldwide and the necessity of more flexible communicative repertoires (Galloway and Numajiri, 2020). More and more, the digital means and online platforms facilitate cross-cultural interaction, and research indicates that the mediated interactions contribute to cultural awareness and reflective conversation among teacher candidates

(Deng, Shen, and Chan, 2021; Sun, Lasser, and Lee, 2023; Shih, Diao, and Chen, 2019).

5.2.3 Reflective learning and Experiential Learning.

Reflective practices, including journaling, self-reflection, guided self-reflection, and narrative inquiry, are also core to ICC pedagogy. Such practices prompt teachers to explore their cultural assumptions, positionalities, and patterns of communication. This learning is enriched by field experiences in the community, where the student teacher will gain an understanding of how the theory is applicable in a real intercultural setting by encountering multilingual community partners (Nguyen and Zeichner, 2021; Jimenez, 2020). These models of experience align with the general findings in research on transformative and cultural pedagogy, where authentic engagement leads to more profound changes in intercultural attitudes and abilities (Napan, Connor & Toki, 2020; Millei, 2019).

Technology-enhanced experiential learning (such as collaborative online international learning (COIL), virtual exchange, and social media-mediated communication activities) is also used in TESOL programs, as supported by recent research in digital second language pedagogy (Reinhardt, 2019; Ruiz-Alonso-Bartol et al., 2022). These strategies increase exposure to intercultural experiences, particularly in institutions with low international mobility.

5.3 Structural Limitations

Even as this has continued to improve, several structural limitations still obstruct full ICC intervention in U.S. TESOL programs.

5.3.1 Unstable Standards in Different Institutions.

In contrast to content areas with well-defined national benchmarks, ICC standards remain uneven across teacher education programs. Cultural competence can or may not be reflected in the state licensure expectations. A similar disparity is identified in research on teacher education worldwide: intercultural and socially responsive competencies are frequently recommended but rarely enforced (Tatto, 2021; Boysen et al., 2022). This has led to a difference in quality of the programs, and exposing students of ICC is more about institutional vision than systemic necessity.

5.3.2 Shortcomings of the Evaluation of ICC.

The evaluation of ICC is one of the most difficult aspects of TESOL preparation. There are validated measures, including the Intercultural Communication Competence Scale, which Goncalves et al. (2020) tested, but most programs rely on reflections, self-ratings, or portfolio artifacts, which have low reliability. This aligns with general patterns in which ICC is recognized as significant but measured unevenly across disciplines (Senyshyn, 2019). Without sound assessment mechanisms, programs find it difficult to track progress, identify gaps, or plan specific interventions.

5.3.3 Faculty Training Gaps

A large number of TESOL faculty have effective linguistic and pedagogical knowledge and little to no formal preparation in intercultural communication, cultural studies, or global Englishes models. Teacher professionalization-related studies indicate that instructor competency significantly influences the intercultural orientation of teacher preparation programs (Tatto, 2021). Moreover, the rapid transition to online and hybrid instruction, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, revealed inequalities in faculty preparation for digital intercultural pedagogy (Konig et al., 2020; Salas-Pilco, Xiao, and Hu, 2022). The gaps in faculty training are contributing to program inconsistency and to the limited modeling of the ICC in instructional practice.

Limitation	Description	Implications for TESOL Programs
Unstable Standards Across Institutions	ICC benchmarks vary widely among teacher preparation programs. Some states integrate cultural competence into licensure, while others do not. Research shows that intercultural and socially responsive competencies are recommended globally but rarely mandated (Tatto, 2021; Boysen et al., 2022).	Inconsistent standards produce unequal program quality; ICC exposure depends more on institutional priorities than systemic requirements.
Weak ICC Evaluation Mechanisms	Despite validated tools such as the Intercultural Communication Competence Scale (Gonçalves et al., 2020), many programs rely on reflective writings, self-report scales, and portfolios, which have low reliability. Similar inconsistencies appear across disciplines where ICC is valued but measured unevenly (Senyshyn, 2019).	Programs lack accurate data to track teacher development, identify gaps, or design targeted ICC interventions.
Faculty Training Gaps	Many TESOL instructors possess strong linguistic and pedagogical expertise but limited training in intercultural communication, cultural studies, or Global Englishes frameworks. The shift to online learning further exposed disparities in digital intercultural pedagogy skills (König et al., 2020; Salas-Pilco et al., 2022).	Insufficient faculty expertise leads to inconsistent modeling of ICC, reduced program coherence, and limited adoption of culturally responsive teaching practices.

Table 2: Structural Limitations Affecting ICC Implementation in U.S. TESOL Program

6. ICC Competencies required of Effective TESOL Teachers.

The Intercultural Communication Competence (ICC) has emerged as an aspect of teachers' effectiveness in modern U.S. TESOL programs. With the increasing multilingual and multicultural aspects of the classroom, educators are required to master a set of competencies that enable them to navigate multicultural environments, create inclusive

learning conditions, and promote learners' communicative growth. These competencies can be extended beyond the language proficiency to include cultural knowledge, pedagogical flexibility, interpersonal awareness, and ethical reflexivity. According to recent scholarship, more effective teachers who show high ICC are better positioned to reach diverse learners, alleviate misunderstandings, and develop

culturally based instruction (Goncalves et al., 2020; Senyshyn, 2019).

6.1 Linguistic-Cultural Awareness.

Good teachers in TESOL need not only a solid combination of linguistic, pragmatic, and cultural skills, but also skills that help them prepare the learners to communicate in diverse sociocultural environments. Understanding how pragmatics and discourse norms interact with cultural expectations can help a teacher shift away from grammar-based teaching and assist students in developing communicative competence in the real world (Sanchez-Hernandez and Baron, 2022). This involves understanding the influence of cultural backgrounds on communication styles, politeness norms, nonverbal behavior, and contextual meaning. The studies of global Englishes also note that it is critical to decentrate the norms of native speakers and to train the learners to operate in various forms of English and in intercultural situations (Galloway and Numajiri, 2020; Cameron and Galloway, 2019). The role of a teacher is therefore to take language and culture as an indivisible and developing resource in the learning process.

6.2 Culturally Responsive Pedagogical Skills.

Another skill that teachers in the field should possess is the ability to formulate pedagogical techniques that accommodate cultural differences and learners' diverse needs. Culturally responsive pedagogy is an instructional approach in which teaching is scaffolded to align with learners' lived experiences, acknowledge their cultural endowment within the community, and recognize their multilingualism (Jimenez, 2020). Some techniques proven effective for increasing engagement and inclusiveness include differentiation, multimodal instruction, and embodied or experiential learning (Padial-Ruz et al., 2022; Boysen et al., 2022). In addition, digital solutions, such as collaborative tools, virtual learning, and cultural simulation, offer new opportunities to support cross-cultural learning when properly integrated (Deng, Shen, and Chan, 2021; Reinhardt, 2019). Pedagogical flexibility, based on cultural awareness, is thus essential for effective TESOL teachers.

6.3 Interpersonal and Relational Competence.

ICC is centered on interpersonal competence. Educators operating in a cross-cultural environment have to master the art of meaning negotiation, deal with ambiguity, and establish trusting relationships with learners with

different communicative norms than their own. Related to mentoring and support for international students in their studies, the researchers emphasize the roles of empathy, active listening, and relational flexibility in intercultural interactions (Hagqvist et al., 2020; Senyshyn, 2019). This involves drawing through the contrasting anticipations regarding classroom engagement, power distance and teacher authority-aspects that sufficiently affect second language learning practices. Even minor communicative signs may be drastically different across cultures, as Sun, Lasser, and Lee (2023) demonstrate in their research on the interpretation of emojis, thus supporting the idea that teachers need to work with cultural sensitivity in the interpretation and mediation of meaning.

6.4 Reflective and Ethical Competence.

Lastly, ICC demands long-term self-reflection and ethics. Teachers of TESOL also have to examine their own cultural assumptions, positionality, and possible prejudices, which requires continuous reflexive practice to ensure a fair learning environment (Leung and Lopez-McKnight, 2020). This involves becoming culturally humble and deliberately de-centering their worldview to make room for students' identities and perspectives. As the examples of transformative learning methods have shown, reflective practice can help teachers to overcome deficit thinking and develop more inclusive and socially just pedagogies (Napan, Connor & Toki, 2020; Nguyen and Zeichner, 2021). Ethical ICC, therefore, turns out to be not merely an ability, but an occupational characteristic that can be used in teaching in different contexts of U.S. TESOL.

7. Pedagogical proposals for integrating ICC in the TESOL classrooms.

Intercultural communication competence (ICC) in U.S. TESOL classrooms cannot be developed by accident but must be explicitly designed, with culture as part and parcel of language acquisition rather than an add-on. The effective strategies entail the use of culturally-based curriculum design, interaction-based approach methodologies, and assessment measures that reflect intercultural development in the learners. The subsequent strategies outline effective ways to incorporate ICC into day-to-day teaching.

7.1 Culturally Situated Lesson Planning.

Culturally situated lesson planning lays special emphasis on designing learning activities that draw on the lived

experiences, identities, and backgrounds of the community that multilingual learners share. It is also consistent with community cultural wealth pedagogy, which emphasizes the need to legitimize students' migration backgrounds, language repertoires, and social-cultural resources in the classroom (Jimenez, 2020). Teachers can include activities that use students' home narratives, students' transnational communication practices, or texts that are significant across different cultures in TESOL classrooms. The practices also promote intercultural awareness, as they not only increase the relevance of the language but also make learners cultural informants, thereby alleviating the teacher's cultural assumptions (Nguyen and Zeichner, 2021; Napan et al., 2020). Engagement and self-efficacy have also been found to improve in various learning settings through culturally grounded lesson planning (Micheal et al., 2021).

7.2 ICC-Infused Communicative Language Teaching (CLT).

Communicative Language Teaching has remained a central pillar of TESOL teaching, and its intercultural potential is enhanced when it is transformed to focus on sociolinguistic variability and global Englishes. Intercultural pragmatics included in CLT: the analysis of politeness norms, turn-taking patterns, and culturally

specific speech acts contributes to teaching learners how meaning changes across different cultural situations (Sánchez-Hernández and Barón, 2022). The literature on global Englishes also proposes that exposing students to different accents, varieties, and communication patterns helps them build versatile communicative repertoires required for genuine intercultural interactions (Galloway and Numajiri, 2020; Cameron and Galloway, 2019).

7.3 Intercultural Task-Based Language Teaching.

Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) offers a natural way of intercultural learning, where students' activities are seen as purposive and interaction-supporting. Intercultural TBLT activities may involve situations in which there is cultural ambiguity to be interpreted, the mutual negotiation of meaning when there is a difference in communication patterns, or the collective brainstorming of issues that involve a cultural dilemma. These tasks enhance sociocultural knowledge and enhance lingual development. In a study conducted on drama-based and embodied learning, it is also important to note that experiential activities can be used to promote intercultural sensitivity and enhance vocabulary learning (Kalogirou et al., 2019; Padiál-Ruz et al., 2022), which makes it clear that TBLT may also contribute to the improvement of the intercultural aspect of cognitive and affective directions of ICC.

Component	Description	Intercultural Benefits
Culturally Ambiguous Tasks	Activities that require learners to interpret unclear or unfamiliar cultural cues.	Builds sociocultural awareness and strengthens interpretation skills in intercultural contexts.
Negotiation of Meaning	Interactive tasks that involve resolving differences in communication styles and expectations.	Enhances communicative flexibility and supports ICC through collaborative meaning-making.
Cultural Dilemma Problem-Solving	Group tasks where learners analyze, discuss, or resolve culturally embedded dilemmas.	Develops critical cultural reasoning and empathy in diverse communicative scenarios.
Experiential Learning Activities	Drama, movement-based tasks, and embodied learning techniques (Kalogirou et al., 2019; Padiál-Ruz et al., 2022).	Promotes intercultural sensitivity, improves vocabulary development, and deepens affective engagement with cultural perspectives.
Purposeful Interaction Tasks	Real-world, goal-oriented communicative tasks central to TBLT.	Integrates linguistic development with intercultural competence, fostering both language proficiency and cultural adaptability.

Table 3: Key Features and Benefits of Intercultural Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT)

7.4 ICC Approaches of a Digital and Media nature.

Technology-based strategies increase intercultural possibilities beyond the physical classroom. Projects such as virtual exchanges, telecollaboration, and cross-border online projects enable students to communicate with intercultural diverse peers in real communication settings. Studies indicate that digital intercultural tools may contribute to the development of cross-cultural knowledge, promote learning in groups, and engage in reflective conversation (Deng et al., 2021; Reinhardt, 2019). Moreover, activities that can be developed through media, such as analyzing the use of emojis worldwide or interpreting multimodal online communication, provide insights into the influence of cultural norms on digital communication practices (Sun et al., 2023). These are among the strategies that align with the Education 4.0 principles, which focus on flexible, technology-enhanced learning (Alda et al., 2020).

7.5 Implementation of ICC Assessment in Classroom Practice.

The evaluation of ICC must include methods for assessing attitudinal, behavioral, and interactional growth among learners. Performance-based methods such as intercultural conversations, reflective portfolios, practical role-play, and online interaction records provide deeper feedback than traditional tests. Valid ICC scales, such as those created by Goncalves et al. (2020), provide a structural framework for measuring intercultural attitudes, knowledge, and skills. Formative assessment methods such as reflective journals and peer feedback cycles help students track their progress and become more intercultural self-aware. The student transition into a multicultural learning space is also a research approach, and the structural reinforcement helps sustain ICC development (Senyshyn, 2019).

8. Empowering ICC in TESOL Teacher Education Programs.

Intercultural communication competence (ICC) in teacher preparation for TESOL in the U.S. requires a systematic reorganization of coursework, field experiences, reflection mechanisms, and faculty development. Teacher education courses need to foster greater cultural competence, sociolinguistic sensitivity, and the skills of managing complex intercultural relations, which current studies of teacher preparation and globalized language teaching continually highlight

in relation to the growing diversity of English language learners (Cameron and Galloway, 2019; Galloway and Numajiri, 2020).

8.1 ICC Depth Curriculum Redesign.

The vital step that is necessary to shift ICC to the status of a core professional requirement is the substantive redesign of TESOL curricula. Even though the number of programs offering culture-related modules in isolation is extensive, these modules are usually optional rather than required, resulting in unequal competencies at graduation. Research on teacher preparation has shown that ICC-related learning becomes meaningful when it is integrated into theoretical, pedagogical, and practicum courses rather than treated as a supplement (Karim et al., 2019; Alda et al., 2020). Maintaining ICC's integration across sociolinguistics and methods coursework, assessment courses, and practicum courses will ensure intercultural perspectives are part of the instructional choice at all times.

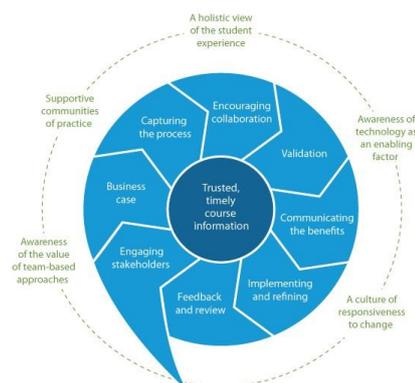


Figure 3: International Centre for Curriculum & Research Development (ICCRD)

8.2 Community-Engaged Learning and Fieldwork.

ICC growth is fueled by authentic field engagement. Community-based practicums, particularly those in multilingual and immigrant communities, afford pre-service teachers the opportunity to build empathy, cultural humility, and adaptive communication strategies. Studies on teacher education have consistently reported that exposure to culturally diverse settings can improve intercultural sensitivity and foster identity as a social-justice-oriented teacher (Nguyen and Zeichner, 2021; Senyshyn, 2019). Community-oriented activities like this are also in line with the general demands of experiential learning within culturally sustaining pedagogy (Jimenez, 2020; Napan et al., 2020).

8.3 Reflective Resources and Portfolios.

Reflective practices are structured to enhance ICC by connecting experience and conceptual knowledge. Pre-service teachers are challenged to critically analyze their biases, communication patterns, and cultural assumptions through journals, guided reflection prompts, and self-assessment tools such as ICC growth maps. The models that promote reflection have been reported to facilitate transformative, equity-oriented learning among teachers (Friedman, 2019; Boysen et al., 2022). ICC portfolios also show a history of growth over time, enabling evidence-based assessment.

8.4 Professional Development in Teacher Educators.

ICC integration should be made sustainable, with teacher educators themselves well prepared with strong intercultural knowledge. Professional development trajectories, such as intercultural workshops, certification in intercultural competencies, and inquiry groups, facilitate peer collaboration and empower faculty to model and mentor ICC. The new studies emphasize that teacher educator competency has a direct impact on the quality of pre-service preparation and the school capacity to teach culturally responsively (Tatto, 2021; Fischer et al., 2022). Faculty training also ensures alignment with changes in pedagogical innovations, such as digital intercultural tools (Deng et al., 2021; Salas-Pilco et al., 2022).

9. Obstacles to the Successful Use of ICC in TESOL.

Although intercultural communication competence (ICC) is widely acknowledged as a fundamental aspect of effective second-language teaching, several barriers have continued to restrict its inclusion in the U.S. TESOL program. An overly full, time-based curriculum is one of the key limitations, as the necessary elements of lingo, pedagogy, and assessment are already vying with each other. It is also a problem that programs can hardly identify specific modules to focus on intercultural learning, particularly when accreditation schemes emphasize technology and instructional skills rather than cultural ones (Ning et al., 2022; Tatto, 2021). Consequently, ICC is often added rather than treated as a pedagogical strand.

The second obstacle is associated with resistance to change and discomfort when speaking about culture, especially among those instructors who are afraid of

being exploitative of cultural groups or provoking delicate dialogue. As the research indicates, more experienced educators might not be willing to engage in a profound learning about sociocultural issues due to uncertainty, insufficient conceptual background or fear of student responses (Jimenez, 2020; Leung and Lopez-Mcknight, 2020). This resistance undermines the possibility of transformative, culturally responsive pedagogy.

Institutional designs are also involved in problems, especially the absence of reasons to motivate faculty to participate in ICC-related professional development. The mandated training or research productivity may be a priority for teacher educators, thereby decreasing their interest in training in intercultural competence (Fischer et al., 2022; Boysen et al., 2022). Making matters worse is the lack of adequate training materials, such as exposure to culturally diverse field placements, mentoring, and current training materials. The lack of exposure to multilingual settings deprives preservice teachers of the opportunity to practice ICC skills, as noted in local and international teacher education settings (Karim et al., 2019; Senyshyn, 2019).

Together, all these obstacles recognize the necessity of systemic, structural and pedagogical changes to make ICC a central, quantifiable, and sustainable component of TESOL preparation.

10. A Prospective Model of the ICC Embedding in U.S. TESOL Programs.

10.1 Core Principles

Three main principles, sustainability, measurability, and relevance should be the pillars of a proactive ICC integration model. Sustainability involves integrating ICC in coursework, practicum experiences, and assessment- as opposed to such courses being a one-off elective. Measurability entails creating rubrics, performance tasks, and reflection frameworks that align with the validated ICC constructs, as suggested in intercultural communication competency studies (Goncalves et al., 2020). Relevance will keep ICC development aligned with modern educational realities, such as multilingual classrooms, digital communication norms, and global Englishes (Galloway and Numajiri, 2020; Cameron and Galloway, 2019).

10.2 Recommendations at the Program Level.

At the program level, TESOL departments need to embrace multi-layered integration that links theory, practice, and assessment. Intercultural communication models, sociolinguistics, and pragmatics ought to be introduced during theoretical courses (Sanchez-Hernandez and Baron, 2022). The practicum experiences should be carefully structured to expose preservice teachers to cultural diversity or to virtual interactions, based on evidence that community- and field-based learning fosters cultural responsiveness (Nguyen and Zeichner, 2021; Deng et al., 2021). Portfolios, reflective journals, and classroom simulations are assessment strategies that should record intercultural development. Digital tools and multimodal communication practices can also be integrated into the programs, based on findings highlighting the importance of online interaction and media literacy in intercultural meaning-making (Reinhardt, 2019; Sun et al., 2023).

10.3 Policy Recommendations

At the policy level, TESOL organizations are urged to promote reforms to national standards and state certification that clearly define the ICC outcomes. By aligning TESOL preparation with broader trends in equity, diversity, and social justice in the education sector, it will be possible to establish institutional responsibility and reduce program variability (Alda et al., 2020; Konig et al., 2020). ICC coursework, supervised multicultural practicum hours, and documented intercultural assessment may be required for state licensure. This set of reforms will make ICC a structural requirement, rather than an optional or peripheral competency.

11. Conclusion

This research shows that intercultural communication competence is a key factor in the pedagogical effectiveness of second-language instruction in U.S. TESOL programs. ICC also helps teachers navigate cultural differences, embrace linguistic diversity, and create inclusive classrooms that reflect the sociolinguistic realities of current classrooms. The literature demonstrates that incorporating ICC into teacher education enhances learners' engagement and the development of pragmatism, and aligns with current global Englishes pedagogy (Cameron and Galloway, 2019; Galloway and Numajiri, 2020).

The implementation of ICC continues to face challenges, such as curriculum overload, faculty resistance, and a

lack of training facilities, despite its significance. These obstacles suggest that ICC's disjointed or discretionary strategies cannot continue to be used. Rather, it needs a holistic, future-thinking model, one that is based on sustainability, measurable and relevant. The integration of ICC into coursework, practicum experiences, web-based learning platforms, and evaluation models can greatly enhance teachers' intercultural preparation.

Collaboration among the TESOL departments, accreditation bodies, and state certification agencies will be necessary to implement program- and policy-level recommendations. Studies of teacher education redesign also point to the idea that sustainable change is possible only when it is structured through the institution's long-term commitment and the understanding of intercultural pedagogy as a professional value (Tatto, 2021; Fischer et al., 2022).

To sum up, ICC is not a desirable skill but a prerequisite to training language teachers who are competent enough to address the cultural and communicative needs of 21st-century classrooms. The U.S. TESOL programs thus need to develop powerful, systemic models that inculcate intercultural competence as a quantifiable outcome of teacher education. In this manner, not only will educational equity be promoted, but the teaching of a second language will also be promoted.

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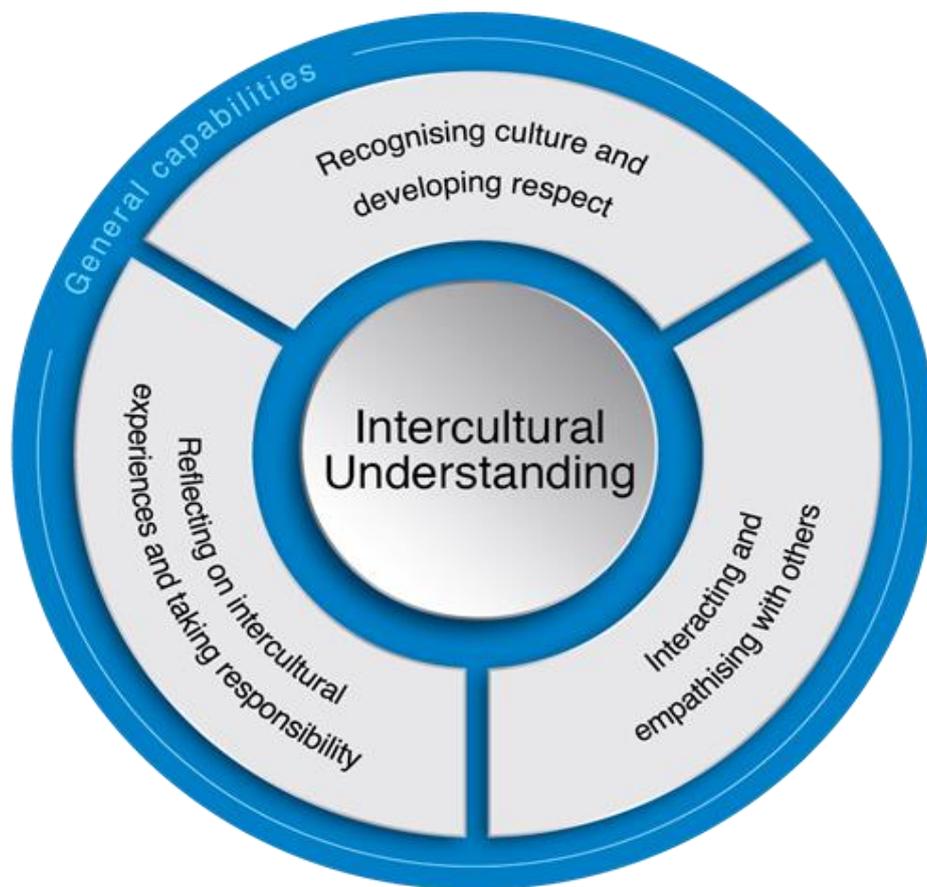


Figure 1: The Importance of Cultural Competence in Translation and Interpretation



Figure 2: Dimensions-of Intercultural Communication Competence (ICC)



Figure 3: International Centre for Curriculum & Research Development (ICCRD)