

English as a lingua franca and Intercultural Language Teaching in EFL Contexts

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Abstract

English as a lingua franca has many pedagogical implications for the field of foreign language teaching and teaching English as a foreign language, especially the deemphasize on the native-speaking cultural model. As a better alternative to the NS model, the present paper aims to discuss three key issues, the integration of non-native cultures into the EFL classroom to enrich EFL students' cultural knowledge and to consider non-native speaking countries as a model, highlight the importance of the non-essentialist understanding of culture as a concept in such an integration, and, to consider a "glocal" cultural model as a second better alternative. Resources were gathered from previous literature and Byram's model was considered while analyzing the resources gathered. The study makes propositions based on the findings of this study.

Keywords: EFL; English; foreign language; glocal cultural model, intercultural language teaching; lingua franca.

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1. Introduction

There is an unceasing number of research articles piling up covering the necessities of developing the EFL learners' intercultural communicative competence (ICC) and how to achieve such a goal. This also covered other subjects in this field such as issues regarding the integration of culture, and why it is important to incorporate such an element in the EFL classroom (Byram, 1997; Crozet & Liddicoat, 1997; Fantini, 2000; Corbett, 2003; Deardorff, 2006; Purba, 2011; Aydemir & Mede, 2014). Indeed, to claim that there is a need to develop EFL learners' that can communicate effectively and appropriately in English is a major understatement (Ghaffour, 2022).

Foreign language learners (FLL) are now expected to have a set of critical attitudes of tolerance and acceptance towards different cultures, a set of skills to be able to interpret and understand foreign cultures, and to have sufficient knowledge baggage of different people (Byram, 1997; 2002; 2009; 2021). Responding to such a need, scholars in the concerned field presented different models of what constitutes "intercultural competence" to guide TEFL skate holders and EFL teachers in the task of building intercultural speakers (Deardorff, 2006; 2009; Fantini, 2009). Among the predominant models of intercultural communicative competence, Byram's (1997) model has made its name one of the most influential models of ICC around the globe (Dasli, 2011).

1.1. Purpose of study

As a better alternative to the NS model, the present paper aims to discuss three key issues, the integration of non-native cultures into the EFL classroom to enrich EFL students' cultural knowledge and to consider non-native speaking countries as a model, highlight the importance of the non-essentialist understanding of culture as a concept in such an integration, and, to consider a "glocal" cultural model as a second better alternative.

2. Materials and Methods

This study used a literature review method to conclude this study. Data were gathered from previous studies and theories were analyzed as well. This study is descriptive.

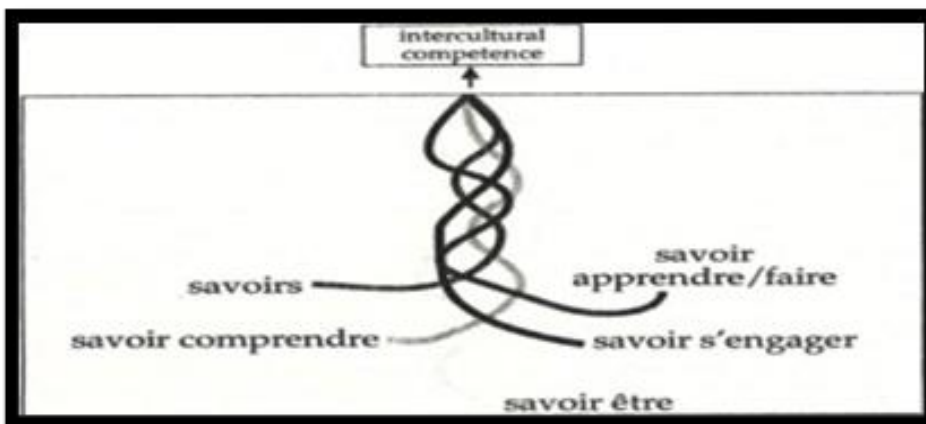
3. Results

Byram's model is now used in several universities and by countless teachers to design courses to help FLL develop intercultural competence and is used to assess such a development as well. However, this model was criticized by scholars as it conceptualized culture from an essentialist perspective and deemed culture to be static and homogenous (Ghaffour, 2022). Regardless, this model depicts what is required from FL learners in the context of globalization and what EFL teachers should strive to achieve to train competent intercultural speakers (Corbett, 2003). Moreover, this model represents the groundwork for promising projects, including but not restricted to education for intercultural citizenship (Wagner & Byram, 2017).

According to Byram (1997), an intercultural speaker is a person who possesses intercultural competence, which is composed of 5 different dimensions (savoirs, savoir comprendre, savoir apprendre/faire, savoir s'engager, savoir être) as shown in figure 1, which enables them to use the English language according to context, and ultimately avoid been perceived as a fluent fool. (Bennett, 1997) Indeed, as a response to the forces of globalization and the call for the internationalization of higher education, we are now expected to train ourselves and students that can take part in this one big village that is divided by geographical lines on a map compromising what the modern-day defines as nations, and to solve world-wide issues such as injustice, racism, and Islamophobia. (Hanne, 2018) This notion of the

intercultural speaker and international justice warrior, is strictly related to the “education for intercultural citizenship” pioneered by Byram, (2008; 2014) wherein “learners can, in addition to learning active citizenship in their own country, acquire the knowledge and skills necessary to act in a community which is multicultural and international, and comprises more than one set of cultural values, beliefs, and behaviors.” (Wagner & Byram, 2017, p. 3)

Figure 1
Byram's (1997) Model of Intercultural Competence



Interestingly, Byram's (1997) model is indeed fluid and dynamic in the sense that despite the author presenting culture and nation relationship as a cause-and-effect rapport wherein one is affected by the other and vice-versa, the model does not necessarily advocate for one specific context of convenience, or what culture to emphasize and what culture to neglect. For instance, scholars around the globe, from China to the United States, including the MENA region and Europe, relied on this model to design courses and assess the development of intercultural competence across different contexts. However, the majority of these studies, despite differing in context and goals to some extent, mostly integrated aspects of the American or British cultures and neglected other cultures. Moreover, many studies did not emphasize the theories and understandings of culture as a concept, which leads to the culturalist conception and eventually leads to stereotyping cultures or neglecting sub-cultures within societies.

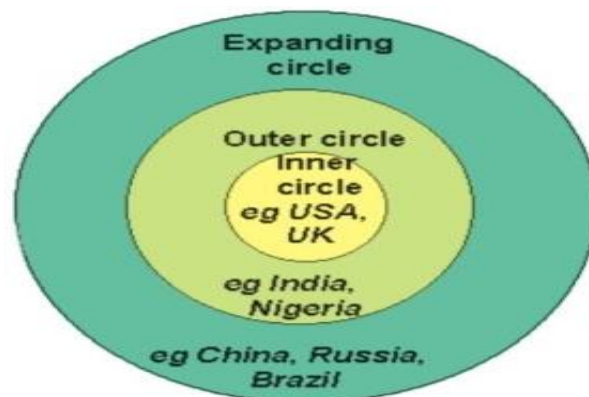
These issues from a theoretical point of view, seem to be inherent gaps within the model, for instance, Byram (1997) refers to cultures from the culturalist standpoint, however, other issues such as neglecting the rich mixture of cultures around the globe and merely emphasizing two or three cultures, are more concerned with the philosophies and beliefs of the practitioners of the model. There seem to be still an idea immersed that English is still the property of the native-speaking countries, and therefore, put the native speaker as the ideal which EFL learners should strive to look alike, which contradicts the beliefs of Byram, and many other pioneers, that of putting the intercultural speaker on the pedestal instead. Additionally, researchers from different contexts voiced concerns regarding the limitations of competence, a concern that perhaps intercultural competence has limits when people are faced with drastically different worldviews.

On the other hand, in the current context of internalization, it has become evident that English is no longer the property of the native-speaking countries, it is now considered a lingua franca (ELF), a language that people use across nations and regions to communicate with one another. As Firth (1996) has argued, “A lingua franca is a contact language’ between persons who share neither a common native tongue nor a common (national) culture, and for whom English is the chosen foreign language of communication.” (p.

240) Indeed, according to Kachru & Nelson (2001), “English is the most widely taught, read, and spoken language that the world has ever known” (p. 6) This sudden and fast blow-up of English is the great cause of the emergence of the teaching English as a foreign language field, wherein non-native speaking countries were faced with the urgent need to train students that can communicate in English, especially English students, to remain updated with the drastic changes going on around the world. Subsequently, the rise of this international language brought out many implications for TEFL today. To start with, considering ELF shifted the goal of TEFL from considering the native speaker goal, which is quite an unrealistic aim (Byram, 1997), to considering the intercultural speaker as the ultimate goal. Moreover, the ‘ideal’ intercultural speaker must no longer follow or adapt to the inner-circle countries (see figure 2), let alone adopt an entire culture to be socially and academically accepted. However, the current literature indicates that researchers are still insisting on developing their EFL learners’ intercultural competence and English language skills relying on native-speaking cultures as a model. This paper advocates the integration of non-native cultures into the EFL classroom (from the outer and expanding circles) to (a) enrich EFL students’ cultural knowledge and consider non-native speaking countries as a model, (b) highlight the importance of considering native-speaking countries from a non-culturalist point of view, and (c) considering a “glocal” cultural model. We believe such an inquiry is important and it has a significant spot in the field of foreign language learning and teaching as intercultural competence is undoubtedly necessary and must be scrutinized.

Figure 2

Kachru's three circles of English, (“English language”, n.d.)



3.1. Non-native EFL classroom

As we noted in the introduction, English has now become a lingua franca (ELF), and there is a need to consider ELF to remain on track with the TEFL literature, as it has been the talk of the town recently. Moreover, considering ELF as an international language (EIL) has in-more depth implications for EFL classrooms. To teach German, for instance, is simpler than teaching English today as German is mainly used by Germans, and familiarizing students with German culture plays a pivotal role because that is how they would make sense of the language. That is to say, the German language is strictly related to the German language. However, since English is used by almost the entire world currently, and scholars are in favor of considering ELF, we cannot rely on native-speaking countries to make sense of the language, as it is not theirs entirely anymore. Scholars in the concerned field are also arguing that linguistic competence and grammar rules should depend on a non-native modal. Therefore, we are keen to also consider a non-native model for the ELT materials, especially the cultures we emphasize in the classrooms.

Among the reasons we are advocating for considering non-native speaking cultures as models in TEFL classrooms, is to enrich the EFL learners’ cultural knowledge as much as we can, and to able them to detect

what scholars call the cultural content schemas” and make sense of them to figure out meanings in texts. To make sense of the schema theory, think of it as what a native speaker would understand from the following text, which is written by an Algerian, “Whenever an elderly gets on a bus, I pass out”.

Native speakers, from the USA, or Britain, would find difficulties making sense of this text. Whilst it an Algerian would easily identify the cultural schema in the text above, that of “whenever an elderly gets on a bus and I am sitting, I have to pretend I am sleeping or else it would extremely rude because it is expected of me as part of this community to do this”. Natives’ confusion about the current text is mainly because texts themselves hold no meaning, it is our “cultural background” that helps us depict texts and understand the intended meanings. Yet, understanding the meaning as intended is what intercultural competence strives to achieve, that intercultural speaker level wherein an EFL student can take any EIL text and scrutinize it, detect the culture schema, and receive the intended message. This is generally difficult to achieve and requires the reader to know the assumptions the writer is making of fun and the reader has to also understand the assumptions intended by the writer.

If we had to train intercultural speakers that can do the task mentioned above, they must possess different skills, critical attitudes, and a good load of cultural knowledge, and most importantly, can interact and know about different cultures as argued by Byram (1997). In an ideal world, you are faced as a teacher with a classroom full of students, who are all willing to learn about other cultures, therefore possess the critical attitudes, and have the necessary skills to some extent to become autonomous learners of cultures in the long run, however, unless these students are a search engine, chances are they lack information in the cultural knowledge department. Therefore, EFL teachers hold the responsibility to a great extent in cultivating their learners with the cultural knowledge necessary and are accountable to bring “cultural diversity” to the classroom. Luckily, incorporating mixed cultural knowledge can be done if we include non-native-speaking countries, whether they be from the expanding circle, or the outer circle. As the goal is not to learn English from a native-speaker model but to rather work on developing skills and detecting cultural schemas in different texts. Ideally, an intercultural speaker can join a room full of people of different cultural backgrounds and act as a mediator and switch the room to a third culture place wherein people inside are mutually respected.

Issues regarding making sense of texts prevail in the EFL classroom if we had to consider a non-native model. As people, we should have a reference to make sense of texts and convey messages and get the intended meanings across, especially in intercultural contacts. Moreover, we need to know what constitutes appropriateness, as having no cultural basis for texts is equally, or worse damaging to adhering to the pragmatics of the native speakers. However, intercultural communicative competence, alongside cultural and linguistic diversity as EIL is enough to overcome this obstacle. As it has been argued by Canagarajah (2007),

The form of English is negotiated by each set of speakers for their purposes. The speakers can monitor each other’s language proficiency to determine mutually the appropriate grammar, phonology, lexical range, and pragmatic conventions that would ensure intelligibility. (p. 925)

Therefore, the EFL students are encouraged to rely on their cultural identity to make sense of the messages in the EFL or EIL classrooms, if they are willing to partake in intercultural contacts that suit both interlocutors. The issue of cultural diversity within ELT materials is not a matter of how we should help our students to make sense of meanings and how to detect cultural schemas, but it is more of a question of acquiring as much knowledge about other cultures and having to critically reflect upon their own cultures using a myriad of cultures around the world. Indeed, if the EFL learners can detect the culture schema in the American and British cultures, which they certainly would do at a given period, they are more likely to critically reflect and engage in the self-reflection process as they were used to or would have facing other

cultures. Moreover, they would engage in more complicated and different layers of “finding what is appropriate” in the EIL classroom, which is beneficial in cultivating their ICC.

3.2. Non-native-speaking countries from an anti-essentialist point of view

In the fields of cultural studies and anthropology, it is a well-known fact that scholars went through it all when it comes to defining terms such as culture. Defining culture is perhaps an easier task as compared to the ontological and epistemological understandings of culture, wherein scholars also differed in several schools of thought. As of this paper, we are surely advocating for the adoption of the anti-essentialist point of view of culture. As argued by Ghaffour (2022), the anti-culturalist conceptualization of cultures benefits the process of intercultural language teaching to a great extent, and it is the best fit for an EIL classroom and EFL classroom in a globalized world like ours when cultures intersect all the times across nations. Indeed, if we had to consider the nation-driven conceptualization of culture, then we are surely doing sub-cultures and immigrants disfavor, as people nowadays belong to different cultural affiliations under the same national affiliation. Think of it as a Muslim Indonesian from a conservative country living in the United States, or a Caucasian from the Netherlands living in a Muslim conservative country such as Saudi Arabia, there is always a list of clashes between the individual’s cultural identity and the country’s cultural identity, perhaps these two individuals would only agree with about ten percent of what constitutes the nation “national cultural identity”.

The EIL and EFL classrooms should be filled in with a myriad of cultures, as we advocated earlier. Howbeit, to develop competent intercultural speakers, and not reinforce stereotypes based on nations, we should incorporate foreign cultures in a non-essentialist manner. This goes beyond what scholars define as the big culture (big c) and small culture (small c), as it deals with the way we select and the assumptions we make of others, whether that be in the visible culture layer or the hidden one. Indeed, we can focus on the hidden culture of the iceberg, however, it would still not be enough if we bring essentialist and determinist perceptions of other cultures, we are promoting stereotypes and prejudice rather than promoting the “cultural diversity” within the classroom.

Cultures, and nations all around the world, are dynamic and ever-changing. There is no consistent uniformity or holistic news wherein all people of that given society can be categorized. If we had to teach culture as a bulk of knowledge and as a national culture, then we would do it at the expense of cultural diversity within that society (Ghaffour, 2022). Thus, teaching EFL students cultural knowledge does not mean either teaching them a bulk of knowledge or teaching them specific literature, as that would mean either teaching them already outdated material or to be outdated material, but the task of the EFL teacher in the EIL classroom is to put his or her students into contact with as many cultures as possible and allow them to grasp the knowledge by self-reflecting on their own and the target culture. This includes authentic and updated material from the target culture wherein students can grasp all the different cultural schemas in the material and at the same time remain on track with the new lexical and conventional development of that given culture.

Moreover, authentic material does not include information about or references to a specific part of that culture, but it treats culture as one element wherein the EFL learner has the freedom to immerse deeply in that culture and understand it fully. To illustrate this point, think of it as an EFL teacher teaching his or her classroom a novel from 2016 to familiarize the EFL learners with that culture. If the teacher allows enough time, the use of the L1 when necessary, and group work, the EFL students are more likely to grasp more information and make sense of the novel at a deeper level than the teacher introducing and explaining the novel from his or her point of view. Besides, self-reflection and group work allow the students to detect the cultural schema and make references to them to understand the changes in the target culture as of 2022, wherein if the teacher explains the novel from their understanding and their way

without the students interacting with one another, chances are, the students are less likely to grasp as much information as they would from teamwork. This is mainly because each student represents a culture, (Ghaffour, 2022) wherein each student has different thoughts and different assumptions about the texts, therefore, group discussions represent different cultures dealing with one text and each culture has its understanding and can make its references of the text.

In short, including non-native speaking cultures in the EFL and EIL classroom, can enrich language learning and the intercultural language teaching process. The EFL teachers should consider treating and incorporating cultures from a non-essentialist and non-determinist understanding to avoid stereotyping and prejudice against other cultures, as well as neglecting the cultural diversity within nations, which surely would cause the learners cultural clashes and communication breakdowns as a result of neglecting the hidden patterns in the visible culture.

3.3. Considering a “glocal” culture as a model

Due to the widespread American and British cultures over the past decades, some scholars have become skeptical about the exposure of different local cultures to such values and norms and the impact they might have on the learners. Some think it is a beneficial thing for non-natives, whereas others hold a protectionist stand. (Appadurai, 1996) This is well echoed in *The Cultural Politics of English as an International Language* by Pennycook (2017) in,

Several writers have pointed to a far broader range of cultural and political effects of the spread of English: its widespread use threatens other languages; it has become the language of power and prestige in many countries, thus acting as a crucial gatekeeper to social and economic progress (p. 13)

From a non-linguistic point of view, the exposure of local cultures to English is perhaps as equally impactful as compared to the linguistic practices within the local society, because it is a well-documented fact that exposure to a foreign language means the exposure to the culture of the language carries as well, as the language is a vehicle to the culture in a way. However, this does not mean the American or British cultures are entirely inappropriate to teach in some contexts around the globe, it is rather a question of relativity, in the sense that the stakeholders, the teachers, the parents, and the students are the ones that decide what to deem as appropriate and what is inappropriate to teach to learners. As a result, the notion of “glocalization” emerged, wherein the goal is to create a link to be found between the local, and the global cultures, to find the middle ground, which is what scholars label as the glocal.

Considering the pursuit of the “global” cultural model, we can take Muslim countries as an example. To begin, we must point out the fact Muslims consider the Quran and the Sunnah as their primary sources when it comes to their beliefs and practices. The holy Quran is the speech of Allah SWT, which Muslims believe is divine and holds no inconsistencies whatsoever, whereas the Sunnah is the reported speech and actions of the prophet Muhammed peace be upon him, the leader, and the teacher of the Muslims. The Muslims’ beliefs in the divine command theory and the assumptions that the Quran and the Sunnah are the sources and the moral compass for them put the cultural norms aside as they are subjective and open to change across times and places. This is the main reason why Muslims hold the same practices and beliefs across time and place.

Eventually, these conventional beliefs among Muslims make Muslim countries and societies alike to some extent, let us consider a simple example to clarify this idea. When it comes to greetings, people across cultures differ and have different assumptions of what constitutes “an appropriate greeting”, however, for Muslims across times and places, “Salam Alaikum”, which means “peace be upon you” is the standard greeting style which all Muslims agreed on. This is one of the many teachings of the prophet Muhammed peace be upon him, and this example is just to name one among many. These shared beliefs,

norms, and values make the task of finding the “glocal” cultural model easier for Muslims, as they already have a ground base to work with.

Considering a “glocal” cultural model is perhaps not an easy task for other contexts. However, the philosophy behind this notion still holds. There is a task to find the middle ground between a society’s local needs, and the global needs for them to remain on track with the outer world. Some scholars believe that the glocalization of the teaching and the ELT materials is the solution to achieve such an aim. And this is what we are inclined to do. Moreover, we believe that the native-speaker model should be neglected anyhow because it does not serve the local needs of many contexts. Besides, the task of forming intercultural speakers is to train learners that can retain their own cultural identity and still partake in intercultural encounters without the need to “adopt” the personality, the walking style, and the greeting style of the native speaker.

In the same respect, the curriculum takes into consideration the sociopolitical aspect of the country. Indeed, in a country like Algeria for instance, wherein study abroad students are mostly from African countries, the native-speaking countries are irrelevant to the curriculum. A global culture in such a context, wherein the target African country, and the Algerian cultures are put forward together is a better choice, as it would serve the needs of both countries, and they eventually form another World English. This idea has been discussed to a low extent and some EFL teachers are advocating for such a stand, (e.g.: Ghaffour, 2022), however, most EFL teachers and researchers are still considering the native-speaker model.

To summarize, we believe in considering a glocal cultural model, wherein the local culture and the target culture, as well as the global English culture, are all combined to find a common shared glocal culture. This glocal culture serves the needs of the local nation and the target nation to a great extent, as it is shaped and tailored around their English capacities, and socio-political needs. Moreover, excluding the native-speaking countries’ cultures from some contexts is also a considerable idea, as there is no need to promote one culture at the expense of other cultures, and perhaps this would prevent the unnecessary McDonaldization of the entire world.

4. Conclusion

Research lately has been in the favor of considering English as a lingua franca (ELF) and English as an international language (EIL). This assumption is followed by several implications, especially in the field of foreign language teaching (FLT) and English as a foreign language teaching (TEFL) as there is an issue of understanding the concept of culture, as well as an issue regarding which culture we are incorporating in the EFL classrooms.

To achieve each nation’s needs and create a curriculum and ELT material that is context-bound, acceptable, and appropriate to teach in that given context, we proposed to first, consider cultures from a non-essentialist understanding, and second, to consider a “glocal” cultural model wherein the local and target culture, as well the global English culture do not unnecessarily crash and create confusion among the learners on the long run.

Moreover, we have pointed out the need to consider including non-native-speaking cultures, as logically, not every nation, or EFL student, is interested in native-speaking cultures, or is willing to have contact with them in the future. Still, we are not advocating for the absolute neglect of the NS cultures,

but we are rather pointing out the need to relativize our needs and priorities and give the deserved value to each culture when it is due.

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