

## **CULTURE AS THE FIFTH LANGUAGE SKILL: REFRAMING SECOND LANGUAGE TEACHING IN THE ERA OF GLOBAL ENGLISHES**

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### **Abstract**

The inseparable relationship between language and culture has long been recognised in second language acquisition research. However, contemporary developments in English as an International Language, multilingualism, and intercultural communication have renewed debates on the extent to which cultural knowledge should be integrated into English language teaching. This paper examines the role of culture in second language teaching and learning, with particular emphasis on English language education. Drawing on contemporary literature in applied linguistics, intercultural communicative competence, and English as a Lingua Franca, the paper argues that linguistic competence alone is insufficient for meaningful communication without an understanding of the cultural contexts that shape language use. The discussion explores the influence of culture on vocabulary development, listening comprehension, speaking proficiency, and reading comprehension, demonstrating that cultural knowledge enhances learners' ability to interpret meanings, negotiate intercultural interactions, and communicate appropriately in diverse contexts. The paper further examines pedagogical strategies for integrating cultural learning into second language classrooms through culturally responsive teaching, authentic materials, intercultural tasks, and reflective learning activities. While acknowledging the increasing globalisation of English and the multilingual realities of contemporary societies, the paper maintains that effective language instruction should not promote cultural assimilation but rather foster intercultural awareness, critical cultural understanding, and respect for cultural diversity. It concludes that integrating culture into second language instruction contributes significantly to communicative competence, learner engagement, and intercultural effectiveness. Consequently, language educators should adopt pedagogical approaches that balance learners' local cultural identities with exposure to diverse cultural perspectives, thereby preparing students to participate successfully in increasingly interconnected global communication environments.

**Keywords:** Culture, Second Language Learning, English Language Teaching, Intercultural Communicative Competence, English as a Lingua Franca, Cultural Awareness, Communicative Competence

### **Introduction**

Language and culture have long been recognised as mutually constitutive phenomena that shape how individuals communicate, construct meaning, and participate in society. Language serves not merely as a system of grammatical rules or lexical items but also as a repository of cultural values, beliefs, traditions, and social practices. Consequently, successful second language learning extends beyond mastering vocabulary and grammatical structures to include understanding the cultural norms that influence language use in authentic communicative situations. This interdependence has remained one of the most enduring themes in applied linguistics

and second language acquisition, with scholars consistently arguing that language learning is inherently a process of intercultural learning (Byram, 1997; Kramersch, 1993; Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013).

English occupies a particularly significant position within this discourse because of its unprecedented global spread. As the principal language of international communication, diplomacy, higher education, scientific research, commerce, digital technology, and transnational mobility, English functions not only as a second language in many multilingual societies but also as a global lingua franca connecting speakers from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds (Rose & Galloway, 2019; Galloway & Rose, 2021). In Nigeria, English performs multiple roles simultaneously—as the official language, the principal medium of education, the language of government and administration, and an important instrument of national integration among more than five hundred indigenous languages. These diverse functions make English language education central to learners' academic success, professional development, and participation in global networks.

Despite its prominence, the teaching of English as a second language continues to generate important pedagogical questions concerning the place of culture in language instruction. While there is broad agreement that language and culture are interconnected, scholars differ regarding the nature and extent of cultural content that should accompany language teaching. Early approaches frequently advocated exposing learners primarily to the cultures of native English-speaking countries, assuming that communicative competence required familiarity with the social norms of these communities (Byram, 1997; Kramersch, 1993). However, the emergence of English as an International Language and English as a Lingua Franca has challenged this perspective by recognising that English is increasingly used among multilingual speakers whose interactions occur outside traditional native-speaker contexts (Jenkins, 2015; Galloway & Rose, 2021). Contemporary scholarship therefore emphasises intercultural communicative competence rather than imitation of native-speaker norms, encouraging learners to negotiate meaning across diverse cultural settings while maintaining their own cultural identities.

Recent developments in applied linguistics further reinforce the need to reconceptualise culture within second language education. Globalisation, migration, international education, digital communication, and increasing linguistic diversity have transformed the contexts in which English is learned and used. Learners now interact with speakers from numerous cultural backgrounds through virtual exchanges, international academic programmes, professional collaborations, and social media platforms. These realities require language education that prepares learners to communicate effectively across cultures, appreciate cultural diversity, and critically reflect on both their own cultural assumptions and those of others (Baker, 2021; Porto & Houghton, 2020). Accordingly, contemporary English language teaching increasingly embraces culturally responsive pedagogy, intercultural learning, multilingual perspectives, and authentic communicative experiences that reflect the realities of global communication.

Within multilingual contexts such as Nigeria, integrating culture into English language teaching assumes additional significance. Learners bring rich linguistic and cultural experiences into the classroom, and these experiences inevitably influence language acquisition, interpretation, classroom interaction, and communicative behaviour. Ignoring learners' sociocultural backgrounds may limit meaningful engagement with language learning and reduce opportunities for developing intercultural competence. Conversely, recognising both local and global cultural

perspectives enables learners to connect new linguistic knowledge with existing experiences while cultivating openness towards other cultures (Gay, 2021; Hammond, 2021). Such an approach supports inclusive classrooms in which cultural diversity becomes a pedagogical resource rather than a barrier to learning.

The influence of culture extends across all dimensions of language learning. Vocabulary often reflects culturally specific concepts and values; listening comprehension depends upon familiarity with contextual references and shared assumptions; speaking requires sensitivity to sociocultural conventions governing politeness, interaction, and discourse; while reading comprehension frequently demands background knowledge of historical, social, and cultural contexts. Consequently, learners who possess strong grammatical knowledge but limited cultural awareness may still encounter significant difficulties in interpreting meaning or participating effectively in authentic communication. Developing communicative competence therefore requires integrating linguistic knowledge with intercultural understanding, pragmatic awareness, and contextual sensitivity.

Against this background, this paper examines the place of culture in second language teaching and learning, focusing on English language education. Rather than viewing culture as an optional supplement to language instruction, the paper argues that cultural learning constitutes an essential component of communicative competence. It explores the influence of culture on major language skills, reviews contemporary perspectives on intercultural language education, and discusses pedagogical strategies that enable teachers to integrate cultural learning into second language classrooms while respecting learners' own cultural identities. Ultimately, the paper contends that effective English language teaching in the twenty-first century should cultivate learners who are not only linguistically proficient but also interculturally competent, culturally reflective, and capable of participating confidently in multilingual and multicultural communication.

### **Objectives**

The primary objective of this paper is to examine the role of culture in second language teaching and learning within the context of contemporary English language education. Specifically, the paper seeks to:

1. Examine the theoretical relationship between language and culture in second language acquisition.
2. Analyse the influence of culture on the development of the four language skills—listening, speaking, reading, and writing.
3. Evaluate contemporary pedagogical approaches that integrate culture into English language teaching, including intercultural communicative competence, Global Englishes, and culturally responsive pedagogy.
4. Highlight the implications of culture-integrated instruction for English language teachers, curriculum developers, and language education policy.

### **Methodology**

This study adopts an integrative narrative literature review to examine the role of culture in second language teaching and learning. Relevant literature was sourced from peer-reviewed journals, scholarly books, and policy reports indexed in databases. The review prioritised publications from 2020–2025, while retaining seminal works that underpin contemporary scholarship. Studies were selected based on their relevance to intercultural communicative competence, Global Englishes, culturally responsive

pedagogy, and English language teaching. The literature was synthesised thematically to identify key trends, theoretical perspectives, and pedagogical implications.

### **Theoretical and Conceptual Framework**

The integration of culture into second language teaching has evolved from a peripheral concern to a central issue in contemporary applied linguistics. Earlier approaches to language teaching tended to privilege grammatical competence and structural accuracy, treating culture as supplementary knowledge that could be introduced after learners had mastered the linguistic system. However, advances in second language acquisition, intercultural communication, and sociocultural theories of learning have demonstrated that language cannot be separated from the cultural contexts in which it is produced, interpreted, and negotiated. Consequently, contemporary English language teaching increasingly adopts theoretical perspectives that recognise communicative competence as encompassing linguistic, sociocultural, pragmatic, and intercultural dimensions (Baker, 2021; Porto & Houghton, 2020). This paper draws primarily on Byram's Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) model, Kramsch's Language–Culture Theory, and contemporary perspectives on English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) and Culturally Responsive Pedagogy (CRP). Together, these complementary perspectives provide a comprehensive framework for understanding the dynamic relationship between language learning and culture in multilingual classrooms.

### **Intercultural Communicative Competence**

One of the most influential theoretical models linking language and culture is Byram's (1997) theory of Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC). Unlike earlier communicative competence models that focused primarily on grammatical and sociolinguistic accuracy, Byram argues that effective language users require the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to communicate appropriately across cultural boundaries. According to this perspective, language learners should not merely imitate native speakers but should develop the capacity to function as intercultural speakers who can negotiate meaning among individuals from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

The ICC model comprises five interrelated components, commonly referred to as the *savoirs*: attitudes (*savoir être*), knowledge (*savoirs*), skills of interpreting and relating (*savoir comprendre*), skills of discovery and interaction (*savoir apprendre/faire*), and critical cultural awareness (*savoir s'engager*) (Byram, 1997). These dimensions collectively enable learners to understand cultural diversity, interpret unfamiliar communicative practices, critically evaluate cultural assumptions, and engage respectfully with people from different cultural communities.

Within English language teaching, ICC shifts instructional emphasis from acquiring native-speaker competence to developing intercultural mediation skills. This orientation is particularly relevant in multilingual societies such as Nigeria, where English functions primarily as a language of communication among speakers with diverse cultural and linguistic identities. Rather than encouraging learners to abandon their own cultural identities, ICC supports reciprocal understanding between local and global cultures, thereby promoting mutual respect, intercultural dialogue, and communicative flexibility (Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013; Baker, 2021).

Recent studies further demonstrate that integrating intercultural competence into language curricula enhances learners' motivation, critical thinking, empathy, and communicative confidence. Learners exposed to intercultural pedagogies are generally better equipped to interpret culturally embedded meanings, avoid misunderstandings,

and participate effectively in increasingly diverse academic and professional environments (Porto & Houghton, 2020; Baker, 2021; Peng, 2022).

### **Kramersch's Language–Culture Theory**

Complementing the ICC framework is Kramersch's theory of language and culture, which conceptualises language as both a product and a producer of culture. Kramersch (1993, 1998) argues that every linguistic expression reflects particular cultural meanings, social relationships, historical experiences, and systems of value. Consequently, language instruction cannot be reduced to teaching vocabulary and grammar because linguistic forms derive much of their communicative significance from cultural contexts. Kramersch introduced the notion of a "third place," where language learners develop intercultural identities by negotiating between their own cultural experiences and those represented in the target language. Rather than replacing one culture with another, learners construct new perspectives that allow them to interpret multiple cultural realities critically and empathetically. This concept remains highly relevant in contemporary English language education because learners increasingly communicate with interlocutors from diverse linguistic backgrounds rather than exclusively with native speakers.

The theory further suggests that classroom instruction should encourage learners to compare cultural practices, examine differing worldviews, and reflect critically on cultural assumptions embedded in language. Such reflective engagement enables learners to appreciate diversity while simultaneously strengthening awareness of their own cultural identities. Recent scholarship continues to validate Kramersch's position, particularly in multilingual educational contexts where language learning serves intercultural rather than assimilationist purposes (Risager, 2021; Baker, 2021).

### **English as a Lingua Franca and Global Englishes**

The rapid internationalisation of English has significantly reshaped theoretical perspectives on language and culture. English is no longer owned exclusively by native-speaking communities but functions as a global means of communication among speakers representing diverse linguistic, cultural, and national backgrounds. This development has given rise to the theories of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) and Global Englishes, both of which challenge traditional assumptions that English language teaching should exclusively promote British or American cultural norms (Jenkins, 2015; Galloway & Rose, 2021). From the ELF perspective, communicative success depends less on conforming to native-speaker norms than on achieving intelligibility, intercultural sensitivity, and communicative adaptability. Learners therefore require strategies for negotiating meaning, accommodating cultural differences, and collaborating with multilingual interlocutors whose linguistic practices may differ substantially from conventional native-speaker models.

Global Englishes similarly advocates an inclusive understanding of English language teaching that recognises linguistic diversity and multiple legitimate varieties of English. Rather than presenting culture as belonging exclusively to English-speaking nations, this perspective encourages learners to engage with a broad spectrum of global cultures while maintaining pride in their own cultural identities (Rose & Galloway, 2019; Galloway & Rose, 2021). These perspectives are especially significant within the Nigerian context, where English functions primarily as an official language among multilingual citizens and increasingly serves international communication within Africa and beyond. Consequently, English language teaching should prepare learners for intercultural interactions across diverse cultural settings instead of limiting instruction to traditional native-speaker contexts.

### **Culturally Responsive Pedagogy**

The present study also draws upon the principles of Culturally Responsive Pedagogy (CRP), which emphasises recognising learners' cultural experiences as valuable educational resources rather than obstacles to learning. Gay (2018, 2021) defines culturally responsive teaching as an approach that incorporates learners' cultural knowledge, experiences, communication styles, and community values into instructional practice to improve academic engagement and achievement. Within second language education, culturally responsive pedagogy encourages teachers to connect English language instruction with learners' existing linguistic repertoires and sociocultural realities. Instead of presenting English culture as inherently superior, teachers facilitate dialogue between local and global cultures, enabling learners to appreciate cultural diversity while affirming their own identities. Such an approach enhances learner participation, promotes inclusivity, and reduces cultural alienation frequently associated with second language learning. Gay, (2021) & Hammond (2021) demonstrates that culturally responsive classrooms improve learner motivation, classroom participation, communicative confidence, and intercultural awareness, particularly within multilingual and multicultural educational settings. These findings support the argument that effective English language teaching should build upon learners' cultural resources rather than requiring them to suppress their linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

Taken together, these theoretical perspectives converge on several important assumptions. First, language and culture are inseparable dimensions of human communication. Second, communicative competence extends beyond grammatical knowledge to include intercultural awareness, sociocultural sensitivity, and pragmatic understanding. Third, English language teaching should prepare learners for communication in multilingual and multicultural environments rather than exclusively within native-speaker contexts. Finally, learners' own cultural experiences constitute valuable resources that should inform classroom instruction rather than being marginalised. These assumptions provide the conceptual foundation for the present paper. They support the argument that integrating culture into second language teaching enhances learners' ability to interpret meaning, negotiate intercultural interactions, and communicate effectively across diverse social contexts. Consequently, the subsequent discussion examines how cultural knowledge influences the development of vocabulary, listening, speaking, and reading skills, as well as the pedagogical implications for English language teaching in multilingual societies.

### **Culture and Second Language Learning: Influence on Language Skills**

The relationship between language and culture extends beyond theoretical discussions to the practical realities of language learning. Language is acquired, interpreted, and used within specific cultural contexts that shape how meanings are constructed and communicated. Consequently, second language acquisition involves not only learning grammatical structures and lexical items but also developing the sociocultural knowledge required for effective communication. Contemporary research increasingly recognises that successful language learning depends upon learners' ability to understand the cultural assumptions underlying linguistic expressions, discourse conventions, and communicative practices (Baker, 2021; Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013).

From a sociocultural perspective, language learning is fundamentally a process of participation in culturally organised systems of communication. Learners acquire linguistic competence through interaction with texts, speakers, and communicative situations that are themselves culturally situated. Consequently, cultural knowledge

facilitates the interpretation of meaning, while the absence of such knowledge often results in misunderstanding despite grammatical accuracy (Kramersch, 1993; Baker, 2021). This observation has become even more significant in multilingual societies where learners routinely navigate interactions involving multiple linguistic and cultural identities. Byram (1997) Porto & Houghton (2020) opines that culture should not be regarded merely as factual information about festivals, food, or historical events. Rather, culture encompasses shared beliefs, values, behavioural norms, communicative conventions, and ways of interpreting experience that influence every aspect of language use. Accordingly, integrating cultural understanding into language instruction enables learners to interpret meaning more accurately, respond appropriately to communicative situations, and negotiate intercultural interactions with greater confidence. The influence of culture is particularly evident across the four major language skills—vocabulary development, listening comprehension, speaking proficiency, and reading comprehension. These dimensions remain central to English language teaching and continue to provide useful pedagogical entry points for integrating cultural learning into classroom practice.

### **Culture and Vocabulary Development**

Vocabulary constitutes one of the clearest points of interaction between language and culture because lexical items frequently embody culturally specific meanings that cannot be understood through direct translation alone. Words often reflect historical experiences, social relationships, religious beliefs, value systems, and patterns of everyday life. Consequently, lexical competence requires learners to understand not only denotative meanings but also the cultural associations that accompany language use. Many English expressions illustrate this relationship. Idioms such as *break the ice*, *spill the beans*, or *once in a blue moon* derive their meanings from shared cultural conventions rather than from the literal meanings of individual words. Similarly, terms of address, greetings, expressions of politeness, and forms of humour vary considerably across cultures and frequently resist literal translation. Learners who possess grammatical competence but lack cultural awareness may therefore misunderstand intended meanings or use vocabulary in socially inappropriate ways.

Colour symbolism remain pedagogically useful because they demonstrate how cultural meanings attached to lexical items vary across societies. For instance, white commonly symbolises peace, weddings, or purity in many Western societies, whereas in several East Asian cultures it has traditionally been associated with mourning. Likewise, colours such as red may signify celebration and prosperity in one cultural context while representing danger, conflict, or political symbolism in another. Such differences illustrate that vocabulary learning inevitably involves understanding culturally constructed meanings rather than memorising isolated lexical equivalents. Within multilingual classrooms such as those found in Nigeria, learners frequently draw upon indigenous linguistic and cultural knowledge when interpreting English vocabulary. This interaction between local knowledge and the target language can either facilitate comprehension or generate semantic transfer that affects interpretation. Teachers therefore need to encourage learners to compare cultural meanings across languages while recognising that different cultural communities may attach distinct symbolic values to the same lexical items. Baker (2021) research in intercultural vocabulary instruction further suggests that authentic texts, digital media, literary works, and corpus-informed learning activities enable learners to appreciate the cultural dimensions of vocabulary more effectively than decontextualised word lists.

Such approaches promote deeper lexical competence by connecting vocabulary learning with authentic communicative contexts.

### **Culture and Listening Comprehension**

Listening is often regarded as one of the most challenging skills in second language acquisition because successful comprehension depends upon far more than recognising individual words or grammatical structures. Listeners must simultaneously interpret contextual clues, infer speakers' intentions, understand cultural references, recognise discourse conventions, and process implicit meanings. Consequently, cultural background knowledge plays a significant role in determining listening success. Learners frequently devote considerable effort to improving listening through repeated exposure to recordings yet continue to experience comprehension difficulties. While limited vocabulary and grammatical knowledge undoubtedly contribute to these challenges, contemporary research indicates that insufficient sociocultural knowledge often constitutes an equally significant obstacle. Listeners interpret spoken language by drawing upon prior knowledge of social practices, institutional structures, historical events, humour, popular culture, and everyday communicative routines. When these cultural references are unfamiliar, comprehension becomes considerably more demanding.

For example, understanding news broadcasts, academic lectures, documentaries, interviews, podcasts, or everyday conversations frequently requires familiarity with culturally specific assumptions that speakers leave implicit. References to educational systems, sporting traditions, political institutions, public holidays, or historical events may be immediately understood by members of one cultural community but remain obscure to international learners. Consequently, comprehension depends upon integrating linguistic processing with cultural interpretation. Contemporary English language teaching increasingly addresses this challenge by exposing learners to diverse English varieties and authentic listening materials representing different cultural contexts. Such exposure prepares learners for real-world communication in which English functions as an international language rather than a language associated exclusively with native-speaking communities (Galloway & Rose, 2021). Teachers can further support listening development by activating learners' background knowledge before listening tasks, discussing relevant cultural contexts, and encouraging reflection on similarities and differences across cultures.

### **Culture and Speaking Proficiency**

Speaking proficiency extends beyond accurate pronunciation, grammatical correctness, and lexical knowledge to include the ability to participate appropriately in culturally situated interactions. Effective oral communication requires speakers to understand how social relationships, politeness conventions, turn-taking practices, non-verbal communication, and discourse expectations differ across cultures. Consequently, communicative competence is inseparable from intercultural competence. Linguistic accuracy alone does not guarantee successful communication. This observation remains highly relevant within contemporary intercultural communication research. Speakers may produce grammatically correct English yet unintentionally appear impolite, overly direct, distant, or inappropriate because they apply interactional norms derived from their first language and culture. Misunderstandings frequently arise not from incorrect language forms but from differing cultural expectations regarding greetings, requests, compliments, apologies, disagreement, eye contact, silence, and conversational distance.

For example, expressions considered polite in one cultural context may appear excessively formal or unusually indirect in another. Likewise, patterns of interruption, conversational pauses, humour, or personal disclosure differ considerably across societies. Effective English language teaching should therefore provide learners with opportunities to explore these pragmatic dimensions of communication through role-play, simulations, intercultural discussions, project-based learning, and interactions with speakers from diverse cultural backgrounds. Successful speaking should be evaluated in terms of intelligibility, adaptability, and intercultural effectiveness rather than conformity to idealised native-speaker norms (Jenkins, 2015; Galloway & Rose, 2021). Such an orientation is particularly appropriate for multilingual societies like Nigeria, where English primarily facilitates communication among speakers with different first languages.

### **Culture and Reading Comprehension**

Reading involves considerably more than decoding written symbols or recognising grammatical structures. It is an interactive cognitive process through which readers combine linguistic knowledge with background experiences to construct meaning from texts. Consequently, cultural knowledge frequently determines how effectively learners interpret written materials. Many reading difficulties arise not because learners fail to recognise vocabulary or grammatical patterns but because they lack the cultural knowledge necessary to interpret contextual meanings. Literary texts, newspaper articles, advertisements, speeches, opinion pieces, and academic writing frequently contain implicit references to historical events, religious traditions, political institutions, social conventions, and cultural practices that readers must understand to achieve full comprehension. For instance, English literary works often assume familiarity with biblical allusions, historical figures, folklore, or cultural metaphors. Similarly, newspaper editorials may refer to political institutions or public events without providing explicit explanations because writers assume readers already possess the relevant background knowledge. Learners unfamiliar with these cultural references may correctly decode the language while misunderstanding the intended message.

Regional pronunciation differences among Nigerian learners also illustrates the broader influence of linguistic and cultural backgrounds on literacy development. Although contemporary applied linguistics would interpret such variations primarily through the lens of multilingual phonological transfer rather than culture alone, the example nevertheless demonstrates that learners' first-language experiences inevitably shape second-language processing. Teachers are encouraged to activate learners' background knowledge before introducing new texts, provide cultural scaffolding where necessary, and facilitate critical discussions comparing local and global perspectives represented in reading materials (Grabe & Stoller, 2020; Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013). Such practices not only improve comprehension but also promote intercultural awareness and critical literacy.

### **Pedagogical Implications for English Language Teaching**

The preceding discussion demonstrates that culture is not an optional component of second language instruction but a fundamental dimension of communicative competence. Consequently, effective English language teaching requires pedagogical approaches that deliberately integrate linguistic and cultural learning throughout classroom practice. Rather than presenting culture as isolated information about festivals, food, or traditions, contemporary language education emphasises the development of intercultural competence through meaningful engagement with authentic communicative situations. This pedagogical orientation

equips learners to participate effectively in multilingual and multicultural environments while maintaining respect for their own cultural identities. English language teaching should prepare learners for communication within a linguistically diverse world rather than exclusively within native-speaker contexts. As English increasingly functions as a global lingua franca, learners require the ability to negotiate meaning across cultures, appreciate linguistic diversity, and respond appropriately to intercultural communicative challenges (Galloway & Rose, 2021; Baker, 2021). These realities have significant implications for curriculum design, instructional practice, classroom interaction, and assessment.

### **Promoting Intercultural Communicative Competence**

A primary objective of contemporary English language teaching should be the development of learners' intercultural communicative competence alongside linguistic proficiency. This requires classroom practices that encourage learners to explore cultural similarities and differences, examine multiple perspectives, and critically reflect on their own cultural assumptions. Teachers should therefore create opportunities for learners to compare communicative practices across cultures rather than presenting any single cultural norm as universally appropriate.

For example, classroom discussions may examine how greetings, requests, apologies, compliments, expressions of disagreement, and politeness strategies differ across societies. Such comparative activities enable learners to recognise that communicative behaviour is shaped by cultural expectations rather than fixed linguistic rules. Through guided reflection, learners gradually develop the flexibility required to adapt their communication to different intercultural contexts. This pedagogical approach is consistent with Byram's (1997) conception of the intercultural speaker, who possesses not only linguistic competence but also the ability to interpret cultural meanings, mediate between different perspectives, and engage respectfully with cultural diversity. Recent empirical studies similarly demonstrate that intercultural tasks contribute to increased learner confidence, empathy, critical thinking, and communicative effectiveness (Baker, 2021; Porto & Houghton, 2020).

### **Implementing Culturally Responsive Teaching**

Effective language instruction should also recognise learners' own cultural experiences as valuable educational resources. Culturally responsive pedagogy acknowledges that students enter the classroom with rich linguistic repertoires, community knowledge, and lived experiences that can facilitate second language learning. Rather than viewing indigenous languages and local cultures as obstacles to English acquisition, teachers should employ them strategically to support comprehension, participation, and critical reflection (Gay, 2021).

Within multilingual societies such as Nigeria, culturally responsive teaching may involve selecting classroom examples drawn from learners' social environments, encouraging comparisons between indigenous languages and English, and incorporating culturally familiar themes into communicative activities. Such practices enhance learner engagement while reducing the cultural distance that learners sometimes experience when English is presented exclusively through foreign cultural contexts. Furthermore, recognising learners' identities contributes to more inclusive classroom environments where diversity is regarded as an educational asset. Recent educational research consistently associates culturally responsive instruction with improved learner motivation, participation, academic achievement, and intercultural awareness (Hammond, 2021; UNESCO, 2024). Consequently, English language teachers should cultivate classroom environments that validate learners' cultural identities while broadening their understanding of global cultural diversity.

### **Principles for Integrating Culture into Language Teaching**

The integration of culture into second language instruction requires deliberate pedagogical planning rather than incidental exposure to cultural information. Contemporary scholarship suggests that effective intercultural language education is guided by several interrelated principles. First, teachers should recognise culture as a dynamic, evolving, and socially negotiated phenomenon rather than a fixed body of knowledge. Accordingly, instruction should enable learners to develop both cultural knowledge and the communicative skills required to participate appropriately in diverse intercultural contexts. Second, cultural learning should be incorporated into classroom assessment. Beyond evaluating linguistic accuracy, teachers should encourage learners to reflect on intercultural experiences, demonstrate cultural understanding, and apply appropriate communicative strategies in authentic situations. Reflective journals, portfolios, presentations, and project-based assessments provide valuable opportunities to evaluate intercultural development alongside language proficiency. Third, teachers should recognise that intercultural competence develops progressively through cycles of observation, participation, reflection, and critical interpretation. Their role extends beyond transmitting cultural information to facilitating learners' exploration of cultural meanings and encouraging informed comparisons between local and global perspectives.

Equally important is the creation of inclusive classroom environments characterised by mutual respect, openness, and collaborative learning. Teachers who model intercultural curiosity and share appropriate personal experiences can foster meaningful dialogue while encouraging learners to value both their own cultural identities and those of others. Finally, instruction should acknowledge the cultural diversity that learners bring into the classroom. Recognising individual cultural identities not only promotes learner engagement but also supports culturally responsive teaching by positioning learners' experiences as valuable resources for language learning rather than barriers to communication.

### **Using Authentic and Multimodal Learning Resources**

The selection of instructional materials significantly influences learners' cultural development. Traditional textbooks remain important resources for language instruction; however, they often provide limited representations of cultural diversity or continue to privilege particular English-speaking communities. Contemporary language education therefore advocates supplementing textbooks with authentic materials that expose learners to a wider range of linguistic varieties, communicative practices, and cultural perspectives. Authentic resources may include newspapers, podcasts, documentaries, interviews, films, speeches, literary texts, blogs, websites, social media content, digital storytelling, and multimedia presentations. Such materials enable learners to observe how English functions in genuine communicative contexts while simultaneously developing awareness of cultural diversity.

Digital technologies have further expanded opportunities for authentic intercultural learning. Virtual exchanges, collaborative online international learning (COIL), videoconferencing, discussion forums, and educational social media platforms allow learners to interact directly with speakers from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. These experiences move cultural learning beyond textbook descriptions towards authentic intercultural communication, thereby strengthening both language proficiency and intercultural competence (O'Dowd, 2021). Teachers should nevertheless guide learners in critically evaluating digital content, recognising stereotypes, and appreciating the diversity that exists within every cultural community.

Authentic materials should therefore serve not merely as sources of information but also as catalysts for critical reflection and intercultural dialogue.

### **Instructional Resources for Developing Cultural Awareness**

The effectiveness of culture-integrated language teaching depends substantially on the quality and diversity of instructional resources. While textbooks continue to provide the structural foundation for many English language programmes, they should not constitute learners' sole exposure to cultural content. Research has shown that commercially produced textbooks frequently present simplified or limited representations of English-speaking cultures and may inadequately reflect the multilingual and multicultural realities of contemporary English use. To address these limitations, teachers should complement prescribed textbooks with authentic and multimodal resources that expose learners to diverse linguistic varieties and intercultural perspectives. Such resources include newspapers, magazines, literary texts, films, documentaries, podcasts, websites, blogs, social media content, digital storytelling, television broadcasts, and authentic public documents. Classroom activities may also incorporate interviews with members of different cultural communities, ethnographic observations, virtual exchanges, museum visits, and analyses of historical, political, and media texts.

Authentic children's literature, songs, rhymes, folktales, and oral traditions are particularly valuable in introducing younger learners to cultural meanings embedded in language. For older learners, project-based learning, corpus-informed activities, and collaborative online international learning (COIL) initiatives provide opportunities to engage directly with authentic intercultural communication. Rather than relying exclusively on textbook representations of culture, teachers should encourage learners to examine multiple cultural perspectives, question stereotypes, and compare cultural practices critically. Such an approach promotes intercultural awareness while reflecting the multilingual realities in which English is increasingly learned and used as a global language.

### **Integrating Culture Across the Four Language Skills**

Culture influences vocabulary development, listening comprehension, speaking proficiency, and reading comprehension. Consequently, cultural learning should not be confined to separate lessons but embedded throughout all language skills. Vocabulary instruction should extend beyond dictionary definitions to include cultural connotations, metaphorical meanings, idiomatic expressions, and pragmatic usage. Listening activities should expose learners to different English varieties and communicative contexts while encouraging them to interpret cultural references embedded within spoken discourse. Speaking tasks should incorporate role-plays, simulations, debates, interviews, and collaborative projects that require learners to negotiate intercultural interactions. Reading instruction should encourage learners to analyse texts critically by considering the cultural assumptions, values, and perspectives represented within written discourse.

Writing instruction likewise benefits from cultural integration. Learners should be encouraged to adapt their writing for different audiences, recognise cross-cultural differences in rhetorical organisation, and produce texts that demonstrate sensitivity to intercultural communication. Collectively, these practices reinforce the understanding that language skills develop most effectively when integrated with meaningful cultural contexts.

### **Encouraging Reflective and Critical Cultural Learning**

Contemporary approaches to intercultural education emphasise that learners should not merely acquire factual information about other cultures but should also

develop the capacity for critical cultural reflection. Reflection enables learners to examine their own assumptions, recognise cultural complexity, and challenge stereotypes that may hinder intercultural communication. Teachers can facilitate reflective learning through journals, portfolios, case studies, intercultural incidents, classroom discussions, and collaborative projects requiring learners to analyse authentic communicative situations. Such activities encourage learners to consider multiple perspectives and appreciate the dynamic nature of culture rather than viewing cultural groups as homogeneous or static. Critical reflection also prepares learners to participate responsibly in increasingly interconnected societies where communication frequently occurs across linguistic, cultural, religious, and national boundaries. This objective aligns closely with contemporary educational priorities emphasising global citizenship, intercultural dialogue, and inclusive education (UNESCO, 2024).

### **Teacher Preparation and Professional Development**

The successful integration of culture into English language teaching depends substantially upon teacher preparation. Teachers require not only linguistic expertise but also sufficient intercultural knowledge to facilitate meaningful classroom discussions, address cultural misconceptions, and design learning experiences that promote intercultural competence. Teacher education programmes should therefore include modules on intercultural communication, multilingual education, culturally responsive pedagogy, pragmatics, discourse analysis, and Global Englishes.

Continuous professional development should similarly expose practising teachers to contemporary research, digital pedagogies, and innovative instructional strategies for integrating culture into language learning. In multilingual contexts such as Nigeria, teacher preparation should additionally emphasise strategies for balancing learners' indigenous linguistic identities with the communicative demands of English as an international language. Such preparation equips teachers to promote additive multilingualism rather than cultural or linguistic replacement, thereby supporting more inclusive and socially responsive language education.

### **Implications for Curriculum and Assessment**

The integration of culture into language teaching also has important implications for curriculum development and assessment. Curriculum designers should ensure that cultural learning outcomes are explicitly embedded within language programmes alongside linguistic objectives. Rather than treating culture as supplementary content, curricula should specify intercultural competencies that learners are expected to develop throughout the learning process.

Similarly, assessment practices should evaluate learners' ability to interpret cultural meanings, demonstrate pragmatic awareness, and communicate effectively in intercultural situations. Performance-based assessment, reflective portfolios, presentations, simulations, project work, and collaborative tasks may provide more authentic evidence of intercultural competence than traditional grammar-focused examinations alone. Such an assessment orientation reflects contemporary understandings of communicative competence and aligns English language education more closely with the realities of global communication.

### **Conclusion**

This paper has demonstrated that culture is an indispensable component of second language teaching and learning, shaping how language is understood, interpreted, and used in authentic communicative contexts. Drawing on contemporary perspectives such as Intercultural Communicative Competence, Global Englishes, English as a Lingua Franca, and Culturally Responsive Pedagogy, it argues that communicative competence extends beyond grammatical and lexical proficiency to

include intercultural awareness, pragmatic sensitivity, and critical cultural understanding. The paper highlights that culture permeates all four language skills—listening, speaking, reading, and writing—thereby reinforcing the inseparability of language and culture in effective second language education. In the context of English as a global language, the findings support a shift from traditional native-speaker models towards intercultural approaches that prepare learners to communicate successfully across diverse linguistic and cultural settings while maintaining their own cultural identities.

Pedagogically, the paper underscores the need for culture-integrated curricula, culturally responsive teaching, authentic learning resources, and assessment practices that value intercultural competence alongside linguistic achievement. For multilingual contexts such as Nigeria, these approaches provide a framework for balancing global communicative demands with local cultural realities, thereby fostering inclusive and meaningful language learning. Ultimately, embedding culture throughout second language instruction is essential for developing globally competent, culturally responsive, and effective communicators in an increasingly interconnected world.

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