

EXPLORING EFL TEACHERS' BELIEFS, ATTITUDES, AND CLASSROOM PRACTICES IN THE INTEGRATION OF INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE

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Article Info	Abstract
Article History Received: January 2026 Revised: February 2026 Accepted: July 2026 Published: October 2026	<i>Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) has been widely acknowledged as an essential component of English language teaching; however, limited studies have examined how EFL teachers' beliefs and attitudes shape its practical integration in Indonesian senior high school classrooms. This study addresses this gap by exploring teachers' beliefs, attitudes, and classroom practices in fostering ICC. A qualitative case study was conducted in a senior high school in Lima Pulu Kota Regency involving three English teachers selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, non-participant classroom observations, and syllabus document analysis, and analyzed using Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis framework. The findings revealed three major themes: (1) teachers' strong belief in the inseparable relationship between language and culture, (2) the use of a comparative cultural approach emphasizing everyday cultural practices, and (3) the implicit rather than systematic integration of ICC in teaching practices and syllabi. While teachers demonstrated positive attitudes and incorporated cultural elements through authentic materials and contextualized expressions, implementation relied largely on individual initiative rather than explicit curricular guidance. These findings underscore the need for structured ICC-focused teacher training and clearer curriculum frameworks. However, the study is limited to a small sample in one school context. Future research involving broader contexts is recommended.</i>
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INTRODUCTION

English language learners today are increasingly expected to communicate effectively not only across linguistic boundaries but also across cultural contexts. Over the past decades, language education has gradually shifted from emphasizing grammatical accuracy toward fostering communicative competence, and more recently, Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) (Cong-Lem, 2025; Mootoosamy et al., 2024). This shift reflects the growing recognition that successful communication requires more than mastery of vocabulary and syntax. As English functions as a global lingua franca used by speakers from diverse cultural backgrounds (Kantamas et al., 2024), learners must be equipped with the ability to interpret meanings, negotiate differences, and interact appropriately in intercultural encounters. In this regard, ICC has emerged as a fundamental dimension of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction.

ICC refers to the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately with people from different cultural backgrounds (Tsatzali et al., 2025). It encompasses attitudes of openness and respect, knowledge of cultural practices and perspectives, as well as skills to interpret, relate, and engage across cultures (Munezane, 2021). Teaching for ICC therefore involves more than introducing cultural facts; it requires creating opportunities for learners to compare cultures, reflect on values, and develop sensitivity toward diversity. Without such competence, learners may demonstrate grammatical proficiency yet struggle in authentic communication due to misunderstandings rooted in cultural differences (Cancino, 2023). For this reason, integrating ICC into EFL classrooms is not merely an additional component but an essential element of meaningful language education.

Despite its recognized importance, the practical implementation of ICC in classroom settings remains complex. Teachers often encounter challenges in translating intercultural objectives into concrete instructional strategies (Achieng, 2023; Ma, 2025). While research highlights the potential of authentic materials, comparative cultural discussions, and contextualized communicative tasks in fostering ICC (Hicham et al., 2025; Mitrulescu & Negoescu, 2024), these strategies are not always systematically embedded in classroom practice. Studies also indicate that teachers' implementation of ICC frequently depends on their personal beliefs, professional experiences, and individual initiative rather than explicit curricular frameworks (Mohamad & Nurkamto, 2025; Rohmani & Andriyanti, 2022). This suggests that teachers' internal perspectives play a decisive role in shaping how intercultural elements are introduced and sustained in learning activities.

In the Indonesian context, the integration of ICC presents additional layers of complexity. English instruction in many schools continues to prioritize linguistic accuracy and examination performance, often leaving intercultural dimensions underemphasized (Munandar & Newton, 2021; Hapsari et al., 2022). Although textbooks may contain cultural references, such content is sometimes limited in depth or presented in a superficial manner (Bahri & Agustina, 2023). Furthermore, systemic constraints such as large class sizes, curriculum demands, and assessment-oriented instruction create practical barriers to the meaningful incorporation of intercultural learning (Laksono et al., 2024). Consequently, while ICC is theoretically valued, its classroom realization may remain fragmented or implicit.

Given these conditions, examining teachers' beliefs and attitudes becomes particularly important (Sun et al., 2022). Teachers' beliefs influence instructional decisions, material selection, and classroom interaction patterns (Li & Ma, 2025; Fukuda et al., 2024). Their attitudes toward cultural diversity and intercultural learning may determine whether ICC is treated as central or peripheral in their teaching practices. While previous studies have explored cultural content in textbooks or investigated teachers' general perceptions of ICC (Ariawan et al., 2022; Lestariyana et al., 2025; Sihombing & Nguyen, 2025), fewer studies have simultaneously examined teachers' beliefs, attitudes, and their reflection in classroom practices and teaching syllabi within Indonesian senior high school contexts. This gap highlights the need for a more integrated exploration that connects cognitive perspectives with observable pedagogical actions.

Therefore, this study seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of how EFL teachers' beliefs and attitudes shape the integration of ICC in classroom practices. By situating the investigation within a senior high school context in Indonesia, the study aims to contribute to ongoing discussions on how intercultural competence can be meaningfully operationalized in EFL instruction. Accordingly, this study addresses the following research questions: What beliefs do EFL teachers hold regarding the importance of Intercultural Communicative Competence in their classrooms?; What attitudes do teachers demonstrate toward integrating intercultural elements into their teaching practices?; and How are teachers' beliefs and attitudes reflected in their classroom practices and teaching syllabi?

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research approach with a case study design (Creswell & Poth, 2018) to explore English teachers' beliefs, attitudes, and classroom practices in integrating Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) into EFL instruction. A qualitative approach was selected because the study seeks to understand participants' perspectives, interpretations, and lived experiences in depth (Phoenix et al., 2018). The case study design was chosen as it allows for an in-depth exploration of complex educational phenomena within a bounded system (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In this study, the "case" refers to the implementation of ICC within a specific senior high school context in Lima Pulu Kota Regency. This approach is particularly suitable for examining the dynamic relationship between teachers' internal beliefs and their observable classroom practices, as it enables the researcher to capture contextual influences, instructional realities, and institutional constraints simultaneously. Since teachers' beliefs and attitudes are shaped by local curriculum demands, school culture, and classroom conditions, a case study design provides the depth necessary to understand these interconnected dimensions holistically.

Research Participants or Population and Sample

The participants consisted of three English teachers from a senior high school in Lima Pulu Kota Regency, Indonesia. Purposive sampling (Creswell, 2013) was employed to select participants who could provide rich and relevant information related to the research objectives. The selection criteria included: A minimum of five years of teaching experience, Active involvement in senior high school EFL instruction, and Demonstrated variation in approaches to integrating cultural elements in their teaching.

The variation in instructional approaches was initially identified through informal consultation with the school administration and preliminary discussions with teachers regarding their use of cultural materials and classroom strategies. The selected teachers represented differing emphases on cultural content, ranging from explicit comparative cultural discussions to more implicit integration through texts and classroom activities. This variation allowed for a more nuanced understanding of how beliefs and attitudes toward ICC are reflected in practice. Although the sample size was limited to three teachers, it was considered appropriate for a qualitative case study, which prioritizes depth of exploration over generalizability. The focus was to obtain detailed insights into individual perspectives and classroom enactment rather than statistical representation.

To provide a clearer overview of the participants' professional backgrounds, Table 1 presents their teaching experience and instructional level. All three teachers have more than five years of experience teaching English at the senior high school level, with teaching experience ranging from seven to ten years. This range indicates that the participants possess substantial professional exposure to curriculum implementation and classroom practices, including the integration of cultural elements in EFL instruction. Their relatively established teaching careers further support the credibility of their perspectives and classroom practices examined in this study.

Table 1
Teaching Experiences

Teacher Code	Teaching Experiences (Years)	Level Taught
T1	7	Senior High school
T2	10	Senior High school
T3	8	Senior High school

Instruments

Data were collected through three primary instruments: semi-structured interviews, non-participant classroom observations, and document analysis. Each instrument was designed to address specific research questions and to enable methodological triangulation. The combination of these instruments allowed the researcher to examine teachers' beliefs, attitudes, and classroom practices from multiple perspectives, thereby enhancing the depth and credibility of the findings.

Semi-structured interviews adapted from Batunan (2023) were conducted to explore teachers' beliefs and attitudes regarding Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC), particularly in relation to the first and second research questions. The interview protocol included guiding questions concerning teachers' definitions of ICC within their teaching context, their perceptions of its importance in EFL classrooms, and the ways they integrate cultural elements into their lessons. This flexible format enabled participants to elaborate on their experiences and reflections while maintaining alignment with the research objectives. Each interview lasted approximately 30 to 45 minutes and was conducted via video call.

Non-participant classroom observations were carried out to examine how teachers' beliefs and attitudes were reflected in their actual instructional practices, addressing the third research question. An observation checklist was developed to focus on the presence of cultural content in teaching materials, the use of comparative cultural discussions, the incorporation of authentic materials such as songs, texts, or videos, and opportunities provided for intercultural reflection. Each observation lasted between one and two hours. Field notes were taken to document teacher–student interactions, instructional strategies, and contextual classroom dynamics that illustrated the integration of ICC.

In addition, teachers' syllabi and selected teaching materials were analyzed to identify explicit or implicit inclusion of ICC elements. The document analysis focused on cultural topics, communicative tasks, comparative activities, and references to intercultural objectives within lesson plans and instructional materials. This analysis helped determine the extent to which teachers' stated beliefs and attitudes were reflected in their planned instruction. Triangulation was conducted by systematically comparing data across interviews, observations, and documents. For instance, teachers' stated beliefs in interviews were cross-checked with observed classroom practices and documented lesson plans. By examining consistencies and discrepancies across these data sources, the study enhanced its credibility and ensured that interpretations were supported by converging evidence rather than a single source of data.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2017) thematic analysis framework. The analysis followed six systematic phases. First, the researcher familiarized herself with the data through repeated reading of interview transcripts, observation notes, and teaching documents. Second, initial codes were generated by identifying meaningful segments related to teachers' beliefs, attitudes, and the integration of ICC in classroom practices. Third, related codes were grouped into broader categories to search for emerging themes.

The fourth phase involved reviewing the themes to ensure internal coherence and clear distinctions between categories. During this stage, themes were refined by re-examining the coded extracts and the entire dataset. Fifth, the themes were defined and named to capture their conceptual essence and relevance to the research questions. Finally, the report was produced by selecting representative excerpts from interviews, observation notes, and documents to support each identified theme.

Coding was conducted across all three data sources, and patterns were compared to ensure consistency in interpretation. Themes were refined through iterative analysis to ensure that they accurately represented the data. The triangulation process further strengthened the

analytic rigor by confirming that emerging themes were supported by converging evidence from interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis.

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Research Findings

This section presents the key findings of the study (See table 2). Overall, the data analysis revealed three major themes related to teachers' beliefs, attitudes, and classroom practices in integrating Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC). First, teachers demonstrated a strong belief in the inseparable relationship between language and culture. Second, they expressed positive attitudes toward integrating intercultural elements, particularly through comparative cultural approaches. Third, although ICC was present in classroom practices and teaching syllabi, its integration was often implicit rather than systematically structured. These themes emerged consistently across interview data, classroom observations, and document analysis.

Table 2
Key Findings of the Study

Major Theme	Description	Supporting Evidence
Belief in Language–Culture Interconnection	Teachers view language and culture as inseparable	Interview excerpts (T1, T2); classroom discussions
Comparative Cultural Approach	Teachers compare Indonesian and target cultures	Observations of greeting expressions, fable comparisons
Implicit Integration of ICC	ICC included but not systematically structured	Syllabus analysis; absence of explicit ICC objectives

English Teachers' Beliefs About ICC in EFL Classrooms

In the process of teaching English in EFL classrooms, teachers' beliefs about ICC play a crucial role. Interviews and analysis reveal that three teachers in Lima Pulu Kota Regency have diverse views on the best ways to integrate culture into learning. They show an awareness that culture is not merely an add-on, but an integral part of language learning. T1, T2, T3 agreed: *“ICC cannot only focus on American culture. Students need to understand various cultures to enhance their language skills.”*

This view indicates that all teachers disagree with the idea that the target culture is limited to American culture. They believe ICC, should be more inclusive, encompassing elements from various cultures to enrich students' understanding. Regarding the relationship between language and culture, one teacher expressed that culture and language are closely interconnected. T2 said: *“Language is a reflection of culture. Teaching language without culture is like teaching something empty.”*

This statement shows that this teacher considers culture inseparable from language, even though some feel the focus of ICC does not have to be solely on specific beliefs, such as values or taboos. In another discussion, T3 shared her views on the importance of direct experience in understanding the target culture. She said: *“It would indeed be better if students could learn culture directly in the target country, but that is not always possible.”*

This teacher acknowledges that while living in the target country provides valuable experience, cultural learning can still be achieved through teaching materials, digital media, or other interactions. Most teachers agree that material cultural elements, such as food and clothing, are easier to teach to students compared to more abstract aspects.

“Students more quickly understand culture through things they see or experience, like food or transportation” (T1).

However, some also emphasize the importance of introducing monumental culture, such as art or famous figures, as they are considered to enhance students' knowledge of the target culture's history and achievements. Additionally, perceptions of textbooks as sources of

cultural information vary. Some teachers feel that the books they use are inadequate in providing cultural information. T1 revealed: *"I feel the textbooks are too focused on grammar and do not provide enough space for ICC."*

This view encourages them to seek other sources, such as social media or videos, to complement ICC in the classroom. When asked about the impact of the target culture on Indonesian culture, most teachers believe that learning foreign cultures will not threaten local culture. *"If taught correctly, students will actually appreciate their own culture more."* T2 explained. This shows a positive attitude towards teaching the target culture as a way to broaden students' horizons without losing their local identity.

English Teachers' Attitudes Towards ICC in EFL Classrooms

Most teachers demonstrate a deep understanding of the importance of teaching the cultural impact on language. T1, for instance, describes how she explains the differences in everyday expressions between Indonesian and English to her students. She emphasizes that expressions like "selamat makan" in Indonesian have no direct equivalent in English. This teacher believes that introducing these differences helps students understand how culture influences the way people speak. She mentions, *"I am not just teaching a language, but also teaching how to interact appropriately in the target culture."*

Similar sentiments were found among most other teachers, who express that they strive to explain the cultural impact on word choice and expressions in English. T1 and T2 view language as more than just a communication tool but as a cultural mirror that must be understood holistically. Teachers in Lima Puluh Kota Regency tend to use a comparative cultural approach in their teaching. They state that it is important to teach students how Indonesian culture differs from the culture of the target language-speaking countries. T3 explains: *"For example, in English, we say 'have a good meal' before eating, while in Indonesia, we say 'selamat makan'. This gives students insight that language reflects different cultural values"*

From these interviews, it is clear that teachers believe that by comparing two cultures, students can more easily understand the differences and similarities in communication styles. For some teachers, this approach is also a way to foster respect for cultural differences. One teacher states, Comparing cultures is not just about language, but also about understanding and accepting different values. The majority of teachers show that they strive to provide students with information about the target culture through various sources, whether they come from readings, personal experiences, or media. T3 shared her personal experience teaching English culture by saying, *"I always try to tell my students about things I read or hear about English culture. For example, I once talked about how the English celebrate Christmas differently from us in Indonesia."*

This teacher recognizes that information from various sources can enrich student learning. Some teachers also express that they feel it is important to provide relevant and up-to-date cultural information. However, they also realize that textbooks often do not provide enough cultural information. T3 adds: *"Textbooks often only provide general overviews, so I need to look for other information to provide a richer cultural context."*

For many teachers, ICC is not just about knowing customs or traditions but also about teaching how culture affects the way people communicate. For example, T1 explains: *"I believe culture is very important in building effective communication. Without understanding culture, students might use language inappropriately or disrespectfully in certain contexts."* This shows that these teachers see ICC as part of a broader communication skill that involves understanding the social context of language use. Although the majority of teachers agree that culture is an integral part of language teaching, there are some differences in beliefs about how culture should be taught. Some teachers assert that ICC should focus on monumental aspects such as famous figures, art, or historical buildings, as they believe this gives an

overview of a country's cultural identity. T2 said, *"Introducing students to great figures or works of art can provide a deeper understanding of a culture's values and history."*

However, other teachers also oppose the idea that ICC should focus only on monumental aspects. T1 explains: *"For me, culture is about everyday life. How people speak, how they interact with each other, that is also part of the culture that we need to teach."* This shows that there are varied views among teachers regarding the focus of ICC. In addition, T1, T2, T3 disagree with the statement that to learn the target culture, students must live in the target language-speaking country. They believe that although living in the target country can enrich experiences, students can still learn about culture through media, books, or even relevant local experiences.

Teachers' Beliefs and Attitudes in Their Teaching Syllabi

Regarding the application of teachers' beliefs and attitudes, their teaching syllabi were analyzed to determine whether cultural elements are reflected explicitly or implicitly. From the analysis of three teachers' syllabi, all teachers included cultural elements, although some elements appeared only implicitly. For instance, T1 and T3 provided learning materials on everyday expressions in Western culture, such as greetings, farewells, thank-yous, apologies, requesting attention, checking understanding, and giving praise for good performance. They also taught the use of these expressions in relevant conversational contexts, such as requesting or stating opinions, giving instructions, and responding to introductions. Learning activities like listening, mimicking, and demonstrating conversations were also listed in the syllabi, emphasizing the importance of correct pronunciation, intonation, and appropriate use of stress.

Additionally, T1 included materials on time, dates, months, and years. The teacher taught the differences in how time is mentioned in English and Indonesian, although she did not always provide concrete examples of these differences in the syllabi. In the syllabi of T2, cultural elements appeared implicitly through narrative texts (fables), containing stories from two different cultures. For example, T2 included two different fable texts—an Indonesian fable titled "Mousedeer and Crocodile" and a fable titled "A Fox in Sheep's Clothing" from the target culture.

Furthermore, the inclusion of songs in the syllabi of T1 and T2 demonstrated the implementation of aesthetic elements in learning. Songs were used to help students understand cultural aspects through music media, integrating language learning with broader cultural elements. Based on the collected data, most cultural elements were still reflected in the teachers' teaching practices, whether through topics, activities, texts, or dialogues. The sources used by teachers, whether from books or other materials, were reflected in the syllabi they prepared.

Classroom Observations: Incorporating Cultural Elements in Teaching Practices

Classroom observations reveal how teachers integrate the cultural elements from their syllabi into everyday teaching. In T1 and T3's classes, for example, students engaged in exercises using common English expressions, such as greeting classmates or giving opinions. The teacher had students practice conversations using these expressions in real-life scenarios, connecting language to more realistic cultural contexts. In T1's class, the teacher discussed how time, dates, and months are expressed differently in English and Indonesian. Students practiced making sentences that accurately describe time and dates, while comparing the differences between the two languages. In T2's classes, learning activities centered around fable texts from two different cultures. The teacher read both texts and led discussions on the cultural values within the stories. Students compared these stories and discussed how different cultures are represented in the narratives. This activity introduced students to various worldviews, enhancing their language and cultural understanding.

Additionally, in T1 and T2's classes, songs from the target culture were used as part of the learning process. For instance, in T1's class, the song "Happy Birthday" was used to teach students expressions used in Western birthday celebrations. This activity helped students not only understand the language but also engage with the cultural elements in the song. These classroom observations demonstrate that teachers not only design syllabi with cultural elements but also actively incorporate them into the learning process. By using texts, songs, and cultural activities, they create more meaningful learning experiences, connecting language with culture on a deeper level.

Discussion

This study provides a deeper understanding of how Indonesian senior high school EFL teachers conceptualize and implement Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) in their instructional practices. The findings suggest a complex dynamic between teachers' conceptual endorsement of ICC and the practical realities of classroom implementation. Although teachers consistently expressed strong beliefs in the inseparability of language and culture, the integration of ICC in teaching practices tended to be implicit and situational rather than systematically embedded in curriculum design. This discrepancy highlights an important interpretive insight: awareness of ICC does not automatically translate into structured pedagogical integration.

The teachers' strong belief in the interconnectedness of language and culture resonates with foundational perspectives on ICC, particularly the view that communicative competence necessarily involves intercultural understanding (Byram, 1997; Cong-Lem, 2025). Participants recognized that effective communication extends beyond grammatical accuracy to include cultural sensitivity, perspective-taking, and contextual appropriateness. This aligns with recent research emphasizing that ICC enhances learners' ability to navigate global interactions meaningfully (Lee et al., 2023). However, while conceptual alignment with ICC theory was evident, classroom implementation remained largely dependent on individual teacher initiative. This finding supports Laksono et al. (2024), who argue that systemic and curriculum-related constraints often limit the institutionalization of intercultural learning in Indonesian contexts.

Another significant finding concerns the comparative cultural approach employed by teachers. Classroom observations revealed that teachers frequently encouraged comparisons between Indonesian culture and target-language cultures. This practice reflects pedagogical strategies highlighted in recent ICC scholarship (Tsatzali et al., 2025), where intercultural reflection is fostered through contrastive cultural analysis. Such practices indicate a meaningful attempt to promote intercultural awareness rather than merely transmitting factual cultural information. Nevertheless, the absence of explicit intercultural learning objectives in syllabi suggests that these practices were not systematically planned as part of a coherent intercultural framework. ICC appeared as an embedded component within communicative activities rather than as an articulated instructional goal.

The findings also reveal an important structural implication: without explicit curricular guidance, ICC integration risks remaining fragmented. Teachers demonstrated positive attitudes and willingness to incorporate intercultural elements, yet institutional documents did not consistently articulate ICC outcomes or assessment criteria. This reinforces the argument that sustainable ICC integration requires alignment across beliefs, instructional practices, and curriculum policy. The study therefore contributes to the growing body of literature advocating a shift from incidental cultural exposure toward structured intercultural pedagogy.

In terms of practical implications, the findings suggest that teacher education programs should move beyond conceptual discussions of ICC and provide concrete pedagogical models, lesson-planning frameworks, and assessment strategies. Professional development initiatives could focus on translating theoretical ICC components into observable classroom practices.

Furthermore, curriculum developers may consider explicitly embedding intercultural objectives into national or school-level syllabi to ensure systematic implementation. Such structural support would help bridge the gap between teachers' positive beliefs and consistent pedagogical practice.

This study also opens several avenues for future research. First, expanding the participant pool across different regions and educational levels would provide broader insight into contextual variations in ICC integration. Second, longitudinal research could explore how teachers' ICC practices evolve over time, particularly after participating in targeted professional development programs. Third, incorporating students' perspectives would enrich understanding of how ICC integration influences learners' intercultural awareness and communicative competence. Finally, future studies could examine assessment practices to determine how intercultural learning outcomes can be evaluated in measurable and pedagogically meaningful ways.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that Indonesian senior high school EFL teachers hold strong beliefs about the inseparable relationship between language and culture and express positive attitudes toward integrating Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) into their teaching. However, despite this conceptual endorsement, the implementation of ICC in classroom practice remains largely implicit and insufficiently structured within formal curricular frameworks. This gap between belief and systematic integration underscores a central challenge in advancing intercultural pedagogy in EFL contexts. The findings highlight the need for a more coordinated approach to ICC integration that aligns teacher cognition, instructional practice, and curriculum design. Teacher training programs should incorporate practical modules that translate ICC theory into classroom-ready strategies, including intercultural task design, reflective activities, and assessment tools. Rather than presenting ICC as an abstract concept, professional development initiatives should emphasize how intercultural objectives can be embedded explicitly into lesson planning and evaluation.

At the policy level, curriculum developers and educational authorities are encouraged to articulate clear intercultural learning outcomes within national and school-level syllabi. Explicit inclusion of ICC objectives, supported by assessment guidelines, would provide teachers with structural guidance and reduce reliance on individual initiative. Such alignment would foster a more systematic and sustainable integration of intercultural learning. Ultimately, the key takeaway from this study is that positive teacher beliefs alone are insufficient to ensure meaningful ICC implementation. Sustainable intercultural pedagogy requires institutional support, explicit curricular frameworks, and targeted professional development. By addressing these structural dimensions, EFL education can move beyond incidental cultural exposure toward a more deliberate and transformative model of intercultural communicative competence.

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INFORMED CONSENT STATEMENT

Participation in this study was entirely voluntary. All participants were informed about the study's purpose, procedures, potential risks, and benefits before participation. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained throughout the research process. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw at any time without penalty, and informed consent was obtained before data collection.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data supporting the findings of this study are not publicly available because of privacy, confidentiality, and ethical considerations concerning the participants. Reasonable requests for access may be submitted to the corresponding author and will be considered on a case-by-case basis, subject to applicable ethical requirements and approval from the relevant institutional ethics review board.

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