

Integrating Cultural Contexts in English Language Teaching: A Model for Enhancing Learner Engagement

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Abstract

This study explores the integration of cultural contexts into English Language Teaching (ELT) as a method for enhancing learner engagement, language proficiency, and intercultural competence. As globalization increases, language learners must not only develop linguistic abilities but also become culturally aware and capable of communicating across diverse cultural boundaries. Through classroom observations, teacher interviews, and material analysis, this study examined the pedagogical approaches of teachers who effectively incorporated cultural content into their English lessons. The findings reveal that incorporating authentic materials—such as films, music, news articles, and role-play activities—encouraged active participation, improved language skills, and fostered a deeper understanding of cultural diversity among students. Moreover, students demonstrated increased motivation when lessons were culturally relevant and interactive, allowing them to connect personal experiences with language learning. The study also identified challenges faced by educators, such as limited resources and a lack of professional development opportunities, which hinder the consistent integration of culture into teaching. Despite these challenges, the results underscore the necessity of including cultural content to foster global competence and critical thinking in language learners. The study concludes that for effective ELT, cultural contexts should be deliberately and systematically integrated, with additional support for teachers through training, resources, and curriculum flexibility. This approach has the potential to enhance the relevance and effectiveness of English education while preparing students to thrive in a culturally diverse and interconnected world. Further research is recommended to assess the long-term benefits of cultural integration in language learning.

Keywords: cultural integration; English Language Teaching; intercultural competence; learner engagement.

1. INTRODUCTION

In today's globalized world, English language teaching (ELT) has transcended traditional methods, focusing not only on grammar and vocabulary but also on the broader cultural contexts that shape language use. Language learning, historically confined to mastering grammatical structures and vocabulary, now requires deeper engagement with cultural contexts to ensure effective communication in a variety of

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global settings (Parmaxi, et.al., 2020). While language can be seen as a system of rules, culture encompasses the values, norms, and experiences of speakers, which influence how language is used (Pakaja, 2023). As cultures collide in increasingly interconnected spaces, understanding the cultural frameworks that shape language becomes paramount. English, being the global lingua franca, is spoken across diverse contexts, and each cultural influence introduces distinct idiomatic expressions, conversational practices, and stylistic norms that differ based on culture. Thus, integrating cultural contexts in ELT is vital, as it helps learners engage more meaningfully with English in real-world communicative situations (Nguyen et al., 2021). Without addressing this aspect, students may face challenges in using language effectively outside of the classroom, particularly in international or multicultural contexts.

Language and culture are intrinsically intertwined. According to Byram (2008), language is not only a means of communication but also an expression of the beliefs and values of a community. Every language carries the weight of its speakers' cultural contexts—communication norms, social etiquettes, and ways of thinking about the world (Hardini, S., & Sitohan 2019). For example, English speakers from the United States may approach communication with a sense of individualism and directness, while British speakers might favor indirectness and politeness strategies (Al-Khatib, 2021). Teaching English without addressing these cultural nuances may leave learners linguistically proficient but socially unaware (Cho et al., 2019). Incorporating cultural knowledge into ELT allows students to understand not just the "how" of language but the "why" behind communication patterns and conventions (Liu, 2020). This approach enhances learners' understanding of how words, expressions, and behaviors are linked to cultural values, facilitating better communication and fewer misunderstandings.

Cultural contexts in English language teaching are crucial not only for linguistic mastery but also for building intercultural competence. Intercultural competence refers to the ability to understand, communicate, and effectively interact with people across cultures (Sharifi et al., 2019). Research has shown that students who engage with cultural materials and contextualized learning are better prepared to navigate multicultural environments, both in social and professional settings (Stephens et al., 2019). In this context, learning about different cultures while studying a language is not only enriching but also practical, as it helps students engage in cross-cultural communication with sensitivity and awareness (Shadiev et al., 2024). For example, students learning English may struggle with American humor or British understatement without understanding the cultural contexts that inform these communication styles (Banasik-Jemiłniak & Kałowski, 2022). Thus, integrating cultural content encourages students to expand their communication strategies and adapt to a range of social contexts, equipping them with vital skills for global communication and fostering a greater appreciation of diversity.

This model of integrating cultural contexts into English language teaching can be implemented through a variety of methods designed to bring cultural dimensions into the classroom. Researchers suggest that authentic materials, such as literature, film, music, and media, serve as effective tools for exposing learners to the varied cultural settings in which English is used (Sánchez-Auñón et al., 2023). These materials allow students to engage with language as it is actually spoken in different cultural contexts, bringing greater authenticity and relatability to lessons. In addition, incorporating active learning techniques such as case studies, debates, role-play, and simulations enables students to confront cultural differences firsthand, fostering critical thinking and problem-solving skills. These interactive activities have been shown to increase student participation and deepen their understanding of not only the language but also

the societal norms and practices associated with that language (García & Kleifgen, 2020). By bridging language learning with real-life cultural contexts, teachers can foster dynamic and responsive teaching environments that engage students on multiple levels (Karimova, et al., 2024).

Engaging learners through cultural content in ELT does more than just improve language proficiency. According to Nortvedt et al., (2020), research on cultural dimensions, cultural differences shape cognitive patterns and learning behaviors, thus highlighting the importance of culturally responsive teaching practices. Activities such as class debates, interactive discussions on current cultural issues, or simulated cross-cultural exchanges encourage students to participate actively, connecting their language skills to broader social and cultural themes (Beribe, 2023). Learning through these contextual experiences promotes both language learning and social cognition, while fostering greater empathy and respect for diverse cultural perspectives. According to Brown et al., (2022), creating a learning space where students reflect on and challenge their cultural assumptions prepares them for the increasingly multicultural environments they will encounter in both personal and professional spheres. Thus, the benefits of this approach are twofold: students gain language skills that are practical and situationally relevant, while also developing cultural competence, thus fostering engagement in more meaningful and reflective learning practices.

The integration of cultural contexts in ELT also offers important benefits for educators, enabling them to foster more dynamic, responsive, and contextually relevant teaching practices. Educators who incorporate cultural content into their teaching methods are better able to engage students and support a learning environment that reflects the diversity of experiences students bring to the classroom (Day & Beard, 2019). As advocated by Semião et al., (2023), this approach recognizes and respects students' own cultural backgrounds, fostering an inclusive classroom environment where diverse worldviews are valued. Teachers can create learning experiences that are not only engaging but also culturally responsive, ensuring that lessons resonate with students and help them form connections between their own cultures and those they are learning about. Integrating cultural contexts encourages students to broaden their understanding of the world and helps them develop a more expansive, globally-minded perspective on language and communication. Furthermore, incorporating cultural content makes teaching more dynamic by incorporating real-world examples that challenge students' preconceptions while simultaneously improving their language proficiency (Nilimaa, 2023).

Ultimately, integrating cultural contexts into English language teaching enhances the educational experience by fostering greater engagement, intercultural awareness, and language competence. As Barrot, (2019) suggests, the future of ELT lies in embracing culturally contextualized approaches that enable learners to bridge linguistic and cultural divides. The model presented encourages learners to see language as a tool for deeper cultural understanding rather than just an academic pursuit. This approach gives students the confidence to use the English language not only in its grammatical and linguistic form but also in the cultural frameworks through which it functions. Teachers who adopt this model can create classrooms that are not only inclusive but also transformative, helping students develop the linguistic and intercultural skills needed to succeed in a globalized world (Zein et al., 2020). This framework equips students with the tools needed to navigate diverse cultural spaces and prepares them for effective communication in multicultural contexts, an essential skill in today's interconnected society.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The integration of cultural contexts into English language teaching (ELT) has received considerable attention in recent years, particularly as globalization continues to increase cultural exchanges. Various scholars argue that language learning goes beyond mastering grammatical rules and vocabulary, emphasizing the importance of incorporating cultural awareness into the language classroom. This shift in focus acknowledges that language learners should acquire more than just linguistic proficiency. Cultural understanding allows learners to communicate meaningfully and appropriately in different contexts, taking into account the role culture plays in language use. Language educators and theorists argue that the cultural components of a language are crucial not just for fluency but for real-life, effective communication (Qasserras, 2023). As English has become a global lingua franca, its teaching should reflect diverse cultural dimensions that extend beyond native-speaking norms and embrace the multicultural nature of English today.

2.1. Theoretical Foundations of Cultural Integration in ELT

Cultural integration in ELT is grounded in the understanding that language is not merely a set of grammatical rules and vocabulary but a social tool deeply embedded in the cultural norms and traditions of the people who speak it. According to Trouche et al., (2023), culture and language are interconnected, with language usage shaped by both social context and cultural frameworks.. Cultural integration, therefore, does not just mean introducing students to cultural facts, but rather equipping them with the tools to interpret and navigate cultural contexts in meaningful ways. Language & Ardi, (2022) further enhances this view by framing cultural competence as a vital component of language acquisition, focusing on intercultural competence, which allows learners to critically compare cultural contexts and adjust their communication accordingly. Rajendran et al., (2020) model of intercultural competence emphasizes the importance of building cultural self-awareness, knowledge, and the ability to engage with other cultures in a respectful and flexible manner. As cultural literacy becomes intertwined with language proficiency, learners are better equipped to handle communication across cultures.

2.2. Practical Approaches to Integrating Culture into Language Teaching

There are several practical methods for integrating cultural contexts into the ELT curriculum. One approach is the use of authentic materials, which provide real-world language experiences and facilitate an understanding of the cultural backgrounds that shape how language is used. Authentic materials—such as books, films, songs, podcasts, social media posts, and news articles—offer insights into the idiomatic expressions, humor, and communication styles of the target culture (Asif & Gouqing, 2024). As students interact with such materials, they begin to recognize how language functions in practical, everyday situations. Zidny et al., (2020) argues that incorporating these materials helps students bridge the gap between formal classroom language and the language used by native speakers in their natural environment. This approach, beyond providing just linguistic competence, enhances cultural awareness by showcasing how language constructs identity, norms, and worldviews. Interactive methods like role-playing and simulation are also powerful tools. By placing students in simulated cultural situations, they are required to adapt their language usage in real time and understand how language varies based on context (Parmaxi & Demetriou, 2020). Furthermore, case studies and group discussions about different cultural issues challenge learners to think critically about the intersections of language, identity, and culture, promoting an integrative form of learning that is both cognitive and affective.

These methods help students explore cultural diversity firsthand, boosting engagement and learning retention.

2.3. Impact on Learner Engagement

Numerous studies have demonstrated that the integration of cultural content significantly increases learner engagement, making language learning not only more interesting but also more relevant. [Monroe et al., \(2019\)](#) discusses how learners are more motivated when their lessons include cultural elements that resonate with their personal interests or global concerns. By learning about real-world topics and global issues, students can more easily connect their language lessons with what is happening around the world. A major appeal of incorporating culture into ELT is that it helps students relate their learning to both their local environment and the wider international context. Cultural topics, such as festivals, art, history, or current global events, can evoke students' curiosity and build a deeper emotional connection to the language. When students engage with such topics, they can connect emotionally, not just intellectually, with the material. Research by [Rose et al., \(2021\)](#) reveals that exposing students to authentic cultural materials increases their motivation because it allows them to see English not as an isolated subject but as a tool for engaging with the world. It transforms learning from a repetitive process of grammar drills to an enjoyable, interactive experience that stimulates thinking and discussion about important social and cultural issues. As engagement increases, students tend to persist longer with their language studies, leading to better long-term learning outcomes. Furthermore, the deeper cognitive involvement stimulated by cultural themes has been shown to enhance language acquisition, particularly in terms of vocabulary and pragmatic language use ([Hiver et al., 2024](#)).

2.4. Effectiveness of Cultural Integration on Language Proficiency and Intercultural Competence

Incorporating cultural context into language learning is more than just enhancing engagement; it also has significant effects on language proficiency and intercultural competence. [Byram et al. \(2002\)](#) found that language learners who studied in cultural contexts were better able to interpret social cues, understand non-verbal language, and navigate various communication settings, making them more competent in cross-cultural communication ([Khan et al., 2023](#)). Exposure to cultural practices helps learners understand the nuance of communication, from formal registers to more colloquial exchanges, increasing both their fluency and the effectiveness of their communication. According to [Wang et al., \(2021\)](#), learners are able to pick up not only vocabulary and structure but also cultural strategies, such as how to give and receive compliments, negotiate meaning, or resolve conflicts using culturally appropriate methods. In language learning, proficiency extends beyond the correct use of grammar to include understanding the cultural implications of certain words or phrases. This includes understanding idiomatic expressions, regional dialects, and the subtleties of humor. As language proficiency is enhanced through such cultural integration, learners simultaneously develop intercultural competence, defined by ([Kwame & Petrucka, 2021](#)) as the ability to communicate effectively and respectfully across cultures. The awareness of diverse cultural norms enables learners to adapt their language use, whether they are talking to someone in a formal business setting, socializing informally with peers, or participating in a cross-cultural exchange.

2.5. Challenges and Considerations in Implementing Cultural Integration

While cultural integration has obvious advantages, its implementation in the classroom presents several challenges that teachers need to consider. A significant concern is the risk of oversimplification or stereotyping when teaching about other

cultures. [Steketee et al., \(2021\)](#) warns that overly generalized or one-sided cultural portrayals can lead to misunderstandings and perpetuate misconceptions. To mitigate these risks, it is essential that teachers offer students a diverse range of perspectives and avoid making cultural judgments. As [Bitsóí et al., \(2023\)](#) suggest, teachers should aim to present multifaceted depictions of cultures, highlighting internal diversity and the complexity of social, political, and economic factors that shape culture. Moreover, teachers must ensure that culturally sensitive topics—such as race, religion, and gender—are approached with respect and care. Another challenge relates to the diversity of student backgrounds. Because students in many language classrooms may come from varied cultural backgrounds, teachers must strike a balance in addressing different viewpoints, ensuring that all students feel respected and included ([Qasserras, 2023](#)). Additionally, educators must develop strategies to encourage students' cultural awareness without alienating those whose perspectives may differ from the dominant culture in the classroom. Teachers who are adequately trained in intercultural pedagogy can navigate these issues, creating an environment that fosters respect, open discussion, and the free exchange of ideas, all while using culture to enrich the language learning process.

3. METHOD

This study employs a qualitative research design to explore the integration of cultural contexts in English language teaching (ELT) and its potential to enhance learner engagement. The research focuses on understanding how cultural elements within the language learning process can promote a deeper connection between learners and the English language. The study combines both theoretical and empirical data, utilizing classroom observations, interviews with teachers, and analysis of language teaching materials. This comprehensive approach aims to explore the practical implications of integrating culture into ELT, the methods used by teachers, and the impact on students' motivation and intercultural competence. In this method section, we describe the participant selection, data collection procedures, and analysis strategies used to address the research questions.

3.1. Participants

The participants in this study include both English language teachers and students from diverse educational backgrounds. The teachers involved are experienced professionals currently teaching English in primary, secondary, or higher education institutions. The participants were selected based on their inclusion of cultural content in their teaching practices, either through their curricula or extracurricular activities. A purposive sampling method was used to choose 10 teachers who employ cultural integration in their ELT strategies. Additionally, 50 students, enrolled in various English language courses at universities and language institutes, were selected through convenience sampling. These students come from different socio-cultural backgrounds, including those with both local and international experiences. The choice of teachers and students enables the study to gain insight into various teaching contexts and learner experiences in integrating cultural contexts into language learning.

3.2. Data Collection

Three primary data collection methods were employed: classroom observations, interviews, and material analysis.

- a. **Classroom Observations:** A series of 10 classroom observations were conducted to examine the ways in which culture is integrated into teaching practices. These observations were guided by a checklist that included categories such as cultural

content in lesson plans, use of authentic materials, activities promoting intercultural competence, and methods to engage students with cultural issues. Observations also focused on how teachers facilitated discussions on cultural topics, how students interacted with these topics, and the methods used to assess learners' understanding of culture in the language learning process. Observers paid particular attention to student engagement and participation in tasks related to cultural themes, such as role plays, cultural debates, and discussions of cultural products like movies, literature, or music. Each observation session was recorded in detailed field notes and supplemented with video recordings when possible.

- b. **Interviews:** Semi-structured interviews were conducted with both teachers and students. Teachers were asked about their strategies for incorporating cultural content into lessons, challenges they face in doing so, and the impact they have observed in terms of learner engagement and outcomes. Specific questions explored the teachers' beliefs about cultural integration, their teaching practices regarding cultural awareness, and the types of resources they use. Interviews with students focused on their experiences learning English through cultural contexts, the effects of cultural learning on their motivation, and their perceptions of the relevance of culture in language learning. These interviews were designed to capture the personal views and experiences of both groups and allow for in-depth exploration of the impact of cultural content.
- c. **Material Analysis:** In this phase, a detailed analysis was conducted on the teaching materials used in classrooms. This included reviewing textbooks, supplementary materials, online resources, and multimedia content. The materials were analyzed based on their cultural representations, authenticity, and relevance to the course goals. The analysis focused on whether the materials accurately portrayed various cultures and included diverse perspectives, as well as how well they aligned with the learning objectives of language proficiency and intercultural competence. The study also examined whether the materials helped students gain deeper insights into cultural differences and bridge communication gaps with speakers from different cultural backgrounds.

3.3. Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using a combination of thematic analysis and content analysis.

- a. **Thematic Analysis:** The first stage of analysis involved transcribing all interviews and categorizing responses by themes related to cultural integration, teaching practices, and student engagement. Themes were generated from the data using an inductive approach, meaning that categories were created based on patterns in the responses rather than being predetermined. This process allowed for the identification of key issues and insights related to the integration of cultural context into language teaching, student motivation, and intercultural competence development.
- b. **Content Analysis:** For the classroom observation and material analysis, content analysis was applied to identify and quantify the presence of cultural themes in classroom activities and teaching resources. Key categories of cultural integration—such as the use of authentic materials, discussions of cultural differences, and the inclusion of multicultural perspectives—were identified and coded. The data from both classroom observations and the materials analysis were compared to examine how effectively teachers were integrating cultural content and the extent to which students engaged with this content.

3.4. Validity and Reliability

To ensure the validity and reliability of the data, triangulation was employed. This involved combining multiple data sources (classroom observations, interviews, and material analysis) to cross-verify findings and enhance the credibility of the results. Additionally, member checking was used, where participants (both teachers and students) reviewed preliminary findings and provided feedback on the accuracy and clarity of the interpretations. This process helped refine the analysis and ensure that the conclusions drawn from the data reflected the experiences and perspectives of those involved in the study. Further, peer debriefing was carried out with other researchers to ensure that the research process and findings were rigorously scrutinized. Finally, the research design was flexible, with ongoing reflection on potential biases and adjustments made to the study's focus as new insights emerged from the data collection phase.

4. RESULT

This section presents the findings from the study, which explored how the integration of cultural contexts into English language teaching (ELT) enhances learner engagement, intercultural competence, and language proficiency. The results are divided into three sections corresponding to the data sources: classroom observations, teacher and student interviews, and the analysis of teaching materials. The detailed findings include both qualitative and quantitative insights, illustrating the varied levels of cultural integration in ELT, the responses of teachers and students to these cultural elements, and the role of teaching materials in facilitating cultural learning. These findings highlight the importance of integrating cultural contexts in ELT for fostering higher learner motivation, deeper engagement, and increased cultural awareness.

4.1. Classroom Observations

In the classroom observations, which spanned 10 diverse teaching contexts across different education levels—primary, secondary, and higher education—several notable trends emerged. It became apparent that cultural integration strategies varied in complexity and effectiveness. Teachers frequently used cultural discussions as entry points to practice language skills, incorporating topics such as international holidays, cross-cultural communication, global environmental issues, and the arts. Some teachers showcased cultural materials that reflected the interests of their students, focusing on global topics, while others used very traditional or region-specific content. Observations revealed that the incorporation of authentic materials—such as news clips, advertisements, films, and music—was particularly effective in enhancing both engagement and language learning. Authentic resources helped bridge the gap between classroom English and real-world language use, which led students to see language learning as more dynamic and practically applicable.

For instance, in one classroom, students watched a documentary film that compared cultural aspects of educational systems in the United States, Japan, and France. This viewing prompted a vibrant group discussion, where students shared personal experiences about school systems in their own countries, highlighting both differences and similarities in pedagogical practices. This interaction gave students the opportunity to engage with culturally relevant issues, enhance their listening and speaking skills, and observe cultural nuances in communication styles. Additionally, several teachers utilized role-play activities where students had to perform tasks or

communicate in scenarios situated within cultural contexts that were unfamiliar to them. These exercises encouraged deeper engagement by enabling students to take on roles from different cultural perspectives, improving their understanding of both language and intercultural relations.

The findings revealed that students who participated in culturally enriched lessons were more motivated and demonstrated higher engagement levels. In classrooms that integrated culture more extensively, students were found to be more involved, whether in structured activities like group discussions or in less formal learning opportunities, such as sharing personal stories related to cultural norms. However, in classrooms where cultural integration was sporadic or superficial, student participation was generally lower, and many students expressed a lack of interest in discussing topics they felt disconnected from. The use of culturally relevant materials and tasks increased learner motivation, particularly when the content was seen as relatable or tied to current global issues, helping them make meaningful connections between the language being learned and the world outside the classroom.

4.2. Interviews

Teachers' Interviews: Interviews with the 10 teachers revealed that those who successfully integrated cultural contexts into their teaching not only considered it an enriching tool for language acquisition but also believed it played a central role in broadening students' global perspectives. Teachers often spoke about the importance of providing students with access to diverse viewpoints, which they felt would enrich their personal and academic lives. One teacher stated, "By integrating cultural elements, I give my students the chance to look beyond just grammar rules and learn about how language is used to express identity and navigate cultural spaces. It makes the lessons much more interesting for them." Teachers also reported that engaging students with real-world materials, such as international news stories, advertisements, and multimedia content, helped contextualize lessons and make English more meaningful.

Additionally, many teachers observed a significant impact on students' motivation when they connected cultural content to students' lived experiences. Teachers acknowledged that by weaving intercultural elements into lessons, they fostered a greater sense of global citizenship. However, they also noted challenges, particularly with curricula that are rigidly structured or have limited flexibility to incorporate culture-rich content. Some teachers admitted to feeling constrained by time limits in their syllabi and struggled to balance cultural instruction with the core language skills students are expected to master. In such cases, teachers reported that although they saw cultural integration as beneficial for student engagement, it was often deprioritized in favor of meeting standard language learning objectives.

Students' Interviews: The student interviews provided rich insights into the impact of cultural integration on engagement and motivation. Students expressed that learning English through cultural contexts made the lessons more interactive, interesting, and relevant. One student remarked, "When we do projects about festivals or music from other countries, it gives me a better sense of how the language works and what it means in different places. It's not just vocabulary, but understanding what it stands for in the world." Many students appreciated being exposed to a broad spectrum of cultural issues, as it not only helped improve their English but also widened their view of the world.

However, some students did face challenges with specific cultural topics, particularly when the issues involved were sensitive, such as cultural misunderstandings or political topics. A small group of students reported feeling uneasy or hesitant to participate in discussions about cultures with which they were unfamiliar. Despite this, most students found these conversations valuable in broadening their perspectives, even if they were initially uncomfortable. Students commented that they became more adept at addressing cultural differences and navigating new and potentially contentious topics over time. For example, a student shared, “At first, I didn’t feel confident talking about cultural differences, but after discussing it more, I started seeing how important these topics are for understanding other people. English is more than a language; it’s a tool for global communication.”

4.3. Material Analysis

The analysis of teaching materials yielded compelling results regarding the role of cultural content in promoting student engagement and facilitating deeper learning. Textbooks and traditional materials, though comprehensive in language skills coverage, were often found to have limited cultural integration. Most textbooks analyzed provided simple lessons about basic cultural information, such as the names of landmarks, well-known historical events, or common customs from English-speaking countries. These materials did not always engage students with more contemporary or diverse cultural themes that might resonate more with modern-day learners.

In contrast, online and multimedia materials showcased a broader and more inclusive range of cultural content. The analysis revealed that the most engaging materials often incorporated global news, digital media culture, and up-to-date cultural movements, offering students the chance to learn about contemporary international issues, language use, and intercultural communication in a way that traditional textbooks could not. For instance, materials like online blogs and interactive websites not only featured contemporary cultural debates but also encouraged students to contribute their views and connect these issues to their own lives. This type of material facilitated the application of language to real-world problems and provided a richer, more immersive cultural context. A key observation was that students engaged more with authentic media, as it appeared more realistic and aligned with the types of language they would need in everyday communication.

The review of multimedia materials also found that visual and interactive resources played a crucial role in student engagement. Videos, podcasts, and music all captured students' attention more effectively than static text and prompted deeper discussions about global issues. Such materials allowed teachers to introduce culturally diverse viewpoints and connect language to issues that were relevant to students' lives. Teachers who used these materials consistently reported higher levels of student interest and class participation. However, despite their effectiveness, the accessibility and quality of these materials sometimes posed challenges for teachers, especially in resource-constrained environments where access to current multimedia resources may be limited.

The results of this study demonstrate the positive effects of integrating cultural content into English language teaching, not only for enhancing learner engagement but also for promoting broader intercultural competence. The classroom observations revealed that cultural integration increased student participation and motivation when

teachers incorporated authentic materials and applied interactive methods. Interviews with both teachers and students confirmed that exposure to culturally rich content not only improved language proficiency but also expanded students' global understanding, making language learning more meaningful. The materials analysis indicated that while traditional textbooks offered limited cultural exposure, digital and multimedia resources provided richer, more dynamic cultural contexts that students found engaging and relevant. Despite some challenges, such as the time required to adapt curricula and the difficulty in finding diverse resources, cultural integration was widely recognized as a crucial tool for teaching English effectively.

5. DISCUSSION

The findings of this study reveal that integrating cultural contexts into English Language Teaching (ELT) significantly boosts learner engagement, language proficiency, and intercultural competence. As seen in the classroom observations, interviews, and material analysis, the deliberate inclusion of cultural elements allows students to better relate to the content and experience English as more than just a language—they encounter it as a tool for interacting with and understanding different cultures. This discussion expands on the interpretation of the study's findings, situating them within existing literature, and discusses the implications for ELT pedagogical practices. Moreover, it explores the challenges that arise and provides recommendations for more effective implementation of culturally rich language learning practices.

5.1. Cultural Contexts as Catalysts for Enhanced Engagement

A central result of this study is the enhanced learner engagement observed in classrooms where teachers integrated cultural contexts. As seen in the classroom observations, the use of authentic materials, such as news articles, films, music, and role-playing exercises, sparked increased participation, motivation, and enthusiasm among students. This supports the theories of O'rinbekovna, (2019), who emphasize that exposing students to authentic cultural materials facilitates their understanding of language as it is used in real-world communication. These resources provided students with exposure to diverse linguistic expressions, social contexts, and intercultural nuances that textbooks often fail to offer. By presenting students with real, culturally-grounded English content, such as international documentaries or online blogs, teachers gave students the opportunity to move beyond memorizing vocabulary and grammar rules to applying English in diverse, culturally complex environments. As one teacher pointed out, "Engaging with authentic content brings language learning to life. It helps students understand that language isn't just a set of rules, but a bridge to connect with the world."

Moreover, interactive learning activities, such as role-playing, debates, and group discussions about cultural customs or festivals, also proved to be effective in stimulating interest and involvement in lessons. This finding aligns with research by Hussein et al., (2024), who highlight that interactive and student-centered learning activities create dynamic environments in which students actively construct their knowledge rather than passively receiving information. In these activities, students engaged with material by discussing cultural topics they found interesting or challenging, such as music genres, education systems, or even cross-cultural etiquette. These moments of active engagement led to greater retention of language skills because students were not merely memorizing facts but actively applying them to real-life scenarios. Role-play exercises in particular made the use of language functional and

emotionally engaging, thereby supporting the findings of [Qasserras, \(2023\)](#), which asserts that language and culture must be taught together for effective learning to occur.

The study also confirmed that in classrooms where cultural integration was approached deliberately, students were far more inclined to participate, thus highlighting the importance of culturally relevant instruction. This was particularly true when the cultural content was relatable to the students' lives. On the other hand, classrooms where cultural context was omitted or treated as an add-on often saw lower participation rates and students expressed a certain level of apathy towards the content. As research by [Chawla, \(2020\)](#) suggests, students will naturally be more engaged in language learning when it connects to their personal experiences, concerns, and curiosity about the world around them. Thus, the consistency with which teachers incorporate cultural elements becomes key to maintaining high levels of interest throughout the course. Without this consistency, even well-designed lessons might fall flat if the cultural content is merely an afterthought or a few scattered lessons in an otherwise conventional curriculum.

5.2. Enhancing Intercultural Competence

Beyond engagement, integrating culture into language lessons was also found to significantly foster intercultural competence in students. Students reported gaining greater understanding and respect for cultures beyond their own, demonstrating not only language mastery but also an evolving awareness of global interconnectedness. As outlined by [Khan et al., \(2023\)](#), the acquisition of intercultural competence involves much more than recognizing cultural facts—it is about using language as a tool for intercultural understanding, while negotiating cultural meanings and behaviors in different social contexts. Interviews with students confirmed this perspective, with many commenting that lessons on cultural practices made them reflect on their own assumptions and biases, often challenging previously held views. These kinds of critical reflections are precisely the type of learning Byram encourages, suggesting that education should aim to expand a student's horizons, enabling them to critically engage with cultural diversity in a respectful and informed manner.

The intercultural discussions promoted by teachers, whether focused on global educational systems or celebrating international holidays, prompted students to adopt perspectives and discuss values associated with different societies. Not only did these activities promote linguistic interaction, but they also fostered the intellectual tools necessary to critically examine global phenomena, engage in cross-cultural dialogue, and avoid oversimplified interpretations of cultural practices. For instance, some students shared how their views of societal structures like gender roles or individual rights evolved after engaging with perspectives from other countries. This shift toward deeper intercultural understanding is echoed in recent research by [Pezzulo et al., \(2019\)](#), who points out that intercultural competence is often an indirect byproduct of language education when it is used as a communicative tool in meaningful interactions.

While students gained much from these discussions, the study also identified some discomfort in addressing certain cultural differences, especially among students less exposed to diversity outside their own communities. Similar findings have been presented in the work of [Kim et al., \(2019\)](#), who observes that intercultural competence doesn't develop easily without facing and embracing discomfort. The moments of unease that some students reported—such as when confronted with unfamiliar cultures or topics they had not previously questioned—are essential in building critical cultural awareness. Instead of avoiding these tensions, teachers must facilitate productive, open-minded conversations that allow students to explore and appreciate cultural differences while cultivating an understanding that cultures are not monolithic.

5.3. Pedagogical Approaches and Teacher Practices

The ability to integrate cultural contexts into ELT successfully depends heavily on the teacher's expertise and approach to pedagogy. Our findings revealed that teachers who effectively incorporated culture did so with thoughtful planning and a genuine commitment to making learning more dynamic. Teachers were observed using diverse materials, such as online exchanges with students from other countries, virtual tours of cultural sites, and the inclusion of recent international news. These resources allowed students to engage in authentic discussions, and they motivated students by connecting language learning to meaningful, real-world contexts. As [Halim & Hashim, \(2019\)](#) highlights, integrating technology in the classroom enhances engagement while also offering greater access to global content. Digital tools like podcasts, interactive websites, and language learning apps that emphasize cultural context helped bridge gaps, particularly in cases where traditional resources were insufficient.

However, many teachers faced challenges integrating culture into lessons due to strict curricular requirements and resource limitations. Many voiced concern over how time constraints often forced them to focus on language forms (grammar, vocabulary) at the expense of cultural content. Additionally, teachers encountered difficulties finding the resources they needed, particularly in areas where access to the internet and global digital media was limited. This mirrors the findings in studies by [Yu et al., \(2024\)](#), which identify resource scarcity as a major challenge in implementing culturally rich ELT in certain educational contexts. Despite these limitations, teachers with a strong interest in cross-cultural teaching found ways to adapt existing resources, creating their own materials and drawing on local resources (e.g., community members or regional cultural exchanges) to promote cultural awareness alongside language skills.

This highlights the importance of professional development programs aimed at training teachers not only in language pedagogy but also in culturally responsive teaching. The teachers who were successful in cultural integration were often those who had access to additional support networks—whether through training workshops, online teaching communities, or curriculum flexibility—that enabled them to curate cultural content. Supporting teachers in these ways is essential for ensuring that cultural integration does not remain an afterthought in language instruction but becomes a foundational aspect of effective, globally aware teaching practices.

5.4. Material Analysis and the Need for Diverse Resources

The comparative analysis of materials showed that traditional English textbooks frequently prioritized grammar, vocabulary, and academic knowledge while offering minimal cultural insight. Although many textbooks provided information about Western culture, their portrayal of culture was often limited and outdated. In contrast, materials like documentaries, websites, and interactive media engaged students by showing contemporary, diverse cultural perspectives from around the world. These findings resonate with [Lim et al., \(2022\)](#) study, which stresses the need to use modern, multimedia resources that reflect the diverse realities of English speakers in various parts of the world. Media that addresses cultural conflict, social media trends, and current global issues creates a more vibrant and engaging language learning environment compared to traditional methods, often stilted by theoretical or historical accounts.

The students' high levels of engagement with real-world materials, such as blog posts and online videos, reflect the growing shift toward using digital media as a primary source for language input. Visual materials, including film clips and infographics, enriched the learning experience by incorporating auditory, visual, and kinesthetic elements, all of which supported a range of learning styles. As [Nicolaou et al., \(2019\)](#)

states, modern teaching resources must be able to address the learner's diverse needs, which can best be achieved through multimedia. These findings challenge the reliance on traditional texts by suggesting that culturally diverse and authentic materials should become mainstream resources for ELT. However, as the study shows, issues like digital accessibility and time-consuming preparation by teachers remain challenges. Ensuring that resources for diverse cultural teaching are both widely available and easy for teachers to access must be a priority for educational policymakers.

6. CONCLUSION

This study highlights the significant impact of integrating cultural contexts into English Language Teaching (ELT) to improve learner engagement, language proficiency, and intercultural competence. By incorporating cultural elements, teachers can transform traditional English lessons into dynamic, real-world learning experiences that motivate students and connect them to the global landscape. Students were observed to actively engage with authentic materials, such as films, news articles, and role-play activities, which made the content feel more relevant and enjoyable. These materials helped students not only practice language skills but also gain insight into diverse cultural practices, norms, and values, thus fostering their intercultural awareness. This aligns with existing research that supports the idea of language education as a means of cultural exploration and understanding. Teachers who embraced culturally responsive pedagogies, such as focusing on current global issues or facilitating cross-cultural discussions, were able to create inclusive classroom environments where learners were encouraged to critically analyze different viewpoints and express their perspectives. Such practices not only bolstered language abilities but also cultivated global citizens capable of communicating across cultures. However, challenges like resource limitations and the need for adequate training for teachers in cultural integration were also identified. To effectively implement culturally inclusive teaching, there needs to be systemic support in terms of accessible resources, professional development, and curriculum flexibility. Ultimately, this study confirms that cultural integration in ELT is crucial for enhancing both linguistic competence and students' ability to navigate a multicultural world. Moving forward, further research is necessary to explore the long-term effects of culturally infused curricula on student development and its potential to shape future language education practices. By investing in culturally aware teaching strategies, education systems can better equip learners with the skills and competencies needed for success in a globalized society.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author declares that there is not conflict of interests.

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