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## ENGAGING ENGLISH: CULTIVATING INTEREST IN LANGUAGE LEARNING THROUGH INTERCULTURAL CONNECTIONS IN PRIMARY EDUCATION

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### *ABSTRACT*

*Over the span of the last decades, academics delving into intercultural competence have commonly acknowledged the intricate and dynamic nature of this concept. Nonetheless, debates persist regarding its definition, methods for enhancement, and notably, the contribution of English language instruction to its cultivation.*

**Key words:** *authentic materials, emails, video calls, pedagogical implementations, role-playing, simulations, multimedia projects, multicultural recipe blog, producing short films, or designing virtual museum exhibits.*

For half a century, the concept of intercultural (communicative) competence has been widely studied in different fields where interacting with other cultures is a central concern<sup>[1]</sup>. English, as the undisputed global lingua franca, is the most widely used language for intercultural communication. However, merely teaching English vocabulary and grammar is insufficient. To truly engage students in language learning, educators must foster their curiosity about other cultures and encourage meaningful interactions.

To cultivate interest in language learning through intercultural connections, primary education teachers can adopt the following strategies:

1. **Incorporate Authentic Materials:** Use real-world materials such as songs, videos, stories, and news articles from different cultures. For example, students can listen to traditional folk songs from various countries or read folktales in English translation.

2. **Virtual Exchange Programs:** Collaborate with schools in other countries for virtual exchange programs. Students can communicate via video calls, emails, or shared projects. This provides an authentic context for language use and promotes intercultural understanding.

3. **Cultural Show-and-Tell:** Encourage students to share aspects of their own culture with classmates. They can bring in artifacts, photos, or prepare short presentations about their family traditions, festivals, or customs.

4. **Role-Playing and Simulations:** Create scenarios where students take on different cultural roles. For instance, they can simulate ordering food in a foreign restaurant or negotiating a business deal with international partners.

Even as the objective of English language instruction has shifted from mimicking "native speakers" to fostering intercultural communication skills, practical applications in classrooms have yet to reach their full potential. This is particularly evident in approaches that empower students to engage in global communication while preserving their native or traditional languages and cultures. This article proposes an updated model of "productive bilingualism," which emphasizes simultaneous and mutual enrichment of "native" and "additional" linguistic and cultural identities. We describe a four-step pedagogy that cultivates the "productiveness" of intercultural competence and its effects. The four steps are:

1. **Learning about Cultural Differences:** Students explore various cultural practices, traditions, and customs from different parts of the world. For example, they might learn about Chinese New Year celebrations, Japanese tea ceremonies, or Mexican Day of the Dead festivities.

**2. Deconstructing Cultural Differences:** Students critically analyse stereotypes and biases related to different cultures. They engage in discussions about cultural norms, values, and communication styles. For instance, they might discuss misconceptions about British politeness or Indian family structures.

**3. Reconstructing Knowledge and Attitudes:** Students actively reflect on their own cultural backgrounds and how these shape their perceptions. They learn to appreciate diversity and recognize the value of intercultural interactions. For instance, they might compare their own family traditions with those of their classmates.

**4. Seeking Creative Solutions to Communication Problems:**

Students participate in cross-cultural communication activities. They engage in role-playing scenarios, simulations, and collaborative projects that require them to find innovative ways to bridge cultural gaps. For example, they might work together to create a multicultural recipe book or organize a virtual cultural exchange with students from another country<sup>[2]</sup>.

Students engage in cross-cultural communication activities using IT and AI tools:

- **Virtual Cultural Exchange:** Partnering with students from other countries via video calls or online platforms to discuss shared interests, traditions, and daily life.

- **AI Language Learning Apps:** Using AI-powered language apps that adapt to individual learning styles and provide culturally relevant content.

- **Multimedia Projects:** Collaborating on digital projects (e.g., creating a multicultural recipe blog, producing short films, or designing virtual museum exhibits).

When students actively engage with intercultural content and participate in meaningful interactions, they develop a deeper appreciation for language learning. They become more open-minded, empathetic, and adaptable. Moreover, their language skills improve as they learn to navigate diverse communication styles and contexts<sup>[3]</sup>.

English language teachers play a crucial role in fostering intercultural competence. By integrating cultural content, promoting critical thinking, and providing opportunities for authentic communication, educators can inspire students to embrace language learning as a gateway to understanding the world.

In conclusion, "Engaging English" goes beyond grammar rules and vocabulary lists. It invites students to explore, connect, and appreciate the richness of cultures while mastering the English language.

### LIST OF LITERATURE:

1. [Promoting Intercultural Competence in English Language Teaching: A ...](#)
2. [Introduction: Interculturality and the English Language Classroom](#)
3. [Integrating intercultural communicative competence into an online EFL ...](#)