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## International experiences in developing intercultural competence in pre-service teacher education programs

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**Annotation** *This article analyzes international experiences in developing intercultural communicative competence in pre-service teacher education programmes. In particular, it examines theoretical and practical studies related to Morocco, Taiwan, Oman, Spain, virtual exchange projects, study abroad programmes, and European initiatives.*

**Keywords** *Intercultural communicative competence, pre-service teachers, teacher education programmes, international experience, English language teaching*

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## Bo'lajak o'qituvchilarni tayyorlash dasturlarida madaniyatlararo muloqot kompetensiyani rivojlantirishga doir xalqaro tajribalar

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**Annotatsiya** *Mazkur maqolada bo'lajak o'qituvchilarni tayyorlash dasturlarida madaniyatlararo muloqot kompetensiyasini rivojlantirishga doir xalqaro tajribalar tahlil qilinadi. Xususan, Marokash, Tayvan, Ummon, Ispaniya, virtual almashinuv loyihalari, xorijda o'qish dasturlari hamda Yevropa tashabbuslariga oid ilmiy-amaliy tadqiqotlar ko'rib chiqiladi.*

**Kalit so'zlar** *Madaniyatlararo muloqot kompetensiya, bo'lajak o'qituvchilar, o'qituvchilarni tayyorlash dasturlari, xalqaro tajriba, ingliz tilini o'qitish*

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## Международный опыт развития межкультурной компетенции в программах подготовки будущих учителей

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**Аннотация** *В данной статье анализируется международный опыт развития межкультурной коммуникативной компетенции в программах подготовки будущих учителей. В частности, рассматриваются научно-практические исследования, связанные с Марокко, Тайванем, Оманом, Испанией, проектами виртуального обмена, программами обучения за рубежом, а также европейскими инициативами.*

**Ключевые слова** *Межкультурная коммуникативная компетенция, будущие учителя, программы подготовки учителей, международный опыт, преподавание английского языка*

## Introduction

The professional role of teachers has changed significantly in the twenty-first century. Teachers are no longer expected only to deliver subject knowledge, manage classroom activities, and assess students' academic performance. They are increasingly required to prepare learners for communication in multilingual, multicultural, and globally connected contexts. This is especially important in English language education, where English is used not only as a foreign language, but also as a global means of communication among people from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

Intercultural competence refers to the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations. It includes openness toward cultural diversity, knowledge of social and cultural practices, skills of interpreting and relating, skills of discovery and interaction, and critical cultural awareness (Byram, 1997; Deardorff, 2006). In teacher education, this competence is particularly important because future teachers are responsible for creating inclusive classrooms, selecting culturally appropriate teaching materials, avoiding stereotypes, and guiding learners toward respectful intercultural communication.

Recent international frameworks confirm the growing importance of intercultural and global competence in education. The OECD defines global competence as a multidimensional construct involving knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values applied to global issues and intercultural situations. PISA 2018 data showed that 76% of students across OECD countries reported learning about different cultures at school, which

demonstrates that intercultural learning is already present in many education systems, although its implementation varies across contexts (OECD, 2018/2024).

International experience shows that intercultural competence should not be treated as a decorative element of teacher education. It should be embedded in methodology courses, teaching practice, lesson planning, material evaluation, reflective writing, microteaching, and international collaboration. In Uzbekistan, the inclusion of the course "Developing Intercultural Competence" in PRESETT programmes also shows that intercultural preparation is becoming an important component of pre-service English teacher education.

Intercultural competence is now widely viewed as a professional requirement for future teachers. Classrooms are becoming more diverse due to migration, globalization, digital communication, international education, and increasing contact between cultures. Even in classrooms that may appear culturally homogeneous, learners can differ in terms of region, social class, family values, religious background, language experience, gender expectations, and exposure to global media. For English language teachers, intercultural competence is particularly important because English is no longer associated with only one national culture. Learners may use English to communicate with speakers from Asia, Europe, Africa, the Middle East, or Latin America. Therefore, future English teachers should avoid presenting English-speaking cultures as a single fixed model. Instead, they should help learners understand English as a language of intercultural communication.

International research suggests that pre-service teachers often have positive attitudes toward cultural diversity, but they may lack practical intercultural skills. For example, they may support the idea of tolerance but still struggle to design intercultural lessons, evaluate cultural materials, mediate misunderstandings, or challenge stereotypes. This shows that intercultural competence must be taught systematically rather than assumed to develop naturally.

### **Literature review**

A recent study on pre-service teacher education syllabi in Spain found that intercultural competence training remains scattered across curricula and that teaching qualifications do not always provide sufficient preparation for cultural diversity. The study highlights the need for teachers to identify and prevent prejudice and stereotypes in educational contexts (Martín-Gutiérrez et al., 2025).

One important case comes from Morocco. Echcharfy (2022) investigated intercultural awareness among Moroccan EFL pre-service teachers using Byram's model of intercultural competence. The study showed that participants generally had positive attitudes toward cultural diversity. However, their knowledge of Moroccan and American cultures was limited, and they lacked mediation skills and critical cultural awareness. This finding is important because it shows that positive attitudes alone are not enough. Pre-service teachers may be open to diversity, but they still need training in how to interpret cultural situations, compare perspectives, and guide learners through intercultural communication. Teacher education programmes should therefore move beyond general discussions of tolerance and include tasks that develop analysis, reflection, and mediation.

Another useful example comes from Taiwan. Chien (2022) explored Taiwanese pre-service English teachers' intercultural awareness through lesson design. The study

used textbook evaluation, lesson plans, self-evaluation, peer and expert feedback, videos, and reflection notes. The findings showed that textbook evaluation helped participants identify visual cultural elements and linguistic features in teaching materials. However, the participants had difficulty evaluating the authenticity and appropriateness of cultural concepts and designing effective intercultural practice and production activities. This case demonstrates that intercultural competence must be connected to pedagogical decision-making. Future teachers should not only identify cultural elements in textbooks, but also ask deeper questions: Whose culture is represented? Is the representation authentic or stereotypical? Does the material encourage comparison and reflection? Is the cultural content relevant to learners' local context? Such questions help pre-service teachers become critical users of teaching materials.

Virtual exchange is another important international practice. Syahrin, Akmal, Spromberg, and DePriest (2023) studied a virtual exchange project between pre-service teacher education students at Dhofar University in Oman and students at Tulane University in the United States. The participants communicated virtually during one semester through digital tools such as email, WhatsApp, Google Drive, and Zoom. The results showed improvement in self-assessed intercultural competence, especially in openness, communication skills, empathy, worldview, and self-awareness. However, the study also showed that virtual exchange did not automatically remove judgment or bias. This suggests that online intercultural contact can be valuable, but it needs to be supported by structured reflection, guided discussion, and teacher educator feedback. Without reflection, virtual interaction may remain superficial; with reflection, it can become meaningful professional learning.

Rets, Rienties, and Lewis (2023) also examined the relationship between pre-service teachers' development of intercultural

effectiveness and their experiences in virtual exchange. Their study analysed two virtual exchanges and included diary entries from participants. The researchers found that perceived intercultural learning was influenced by three factors: the ability to overcome challenges during exchange, the level of engagement with partners, and engagement with cultural difference.

This evidence supports the idea that intercultural competence develops through meaningful interaction, not passive exposure. Simply placing students in an international online project is not enough. Pre-service teachers need purposeful tasks, reflection journals, follow-up seminars, and opportunities to analyse communication problems.

Study abroad programmes are often considered one of the most effective ways to develop intercultural competence. However, research shows that their effectiveness depends on reflection and pedagogical support. Huang, Cheung, and Xuan (2023) conducted a meta-analysis of 16 studies on the impact of study abroad on pre-service and in-service teachers' intercultural competence. The analysis found that study abroad had a positive small-to-medium effect on teachers' intercultural competence, with an effect size of 0.34. This finding suggests that international mobility can support intercultural growth, but it should not be treated as automatically transformative. Study abroad becomes more educationally powerful when participants receive reflective guidance before, during, and after the experience. Otherwise, it may remain a travel experience rather than a professional learning experience.

European policy initiatives also provide useful examples. The European Commission's Joint Research Centre reported on innovative approaches to developing teachers' intercultural and democratic competences. The project analysed 21 innovative case studies and produced policy recommendations and implementation guidelines for policymakers,

universities, schools, and non-formal education providers. This experience shows that intercultural competence is not only an individual teacher skill. It requires institutional support, curriculum development, assessment tools, mentoring, and whole-school approaches. Teacher education institutions should therefore create systematic opportunities for students to develop intercultural and democratic competences across their programmes.

### **Findings**

International experiences suggest several effective practices for developing intercultural competence in pre-service teacher education.

Reflective writing is one of the most widely used tools. Pre-service teachers can write cultural autobiographies, reflection journals, critical incident responses, and teaching-practice reflections. These tasks help them identify their own assumptions and understand how culture influences teaching and learning. Reflection also helps students connect theory with personal experience.

Critical incident analysis involves short classroom or communication scenarios where misunderstanding occurs because of cultural difference. For example, a learner may avoid eye contact, refuse to participate in group work, disagree indirectly, or remain silent during discussion. Pre-service teachers analyse possible interpretations and suggest culturally sensitive responses. This activity develops interpretation skills and prevents quick judgment.

Future teachers should learn to evaluate textbooks, visuals, dialogues, reading passages, videos, and digital resources from an intercultural perspective. They should examine whether materials present culture authentically, whether they include diverse voices, and whether they allow learners to compare cultures critically. Chien's study shows that this ability does not develop automatically and requires explicit training (Chien, 2022).

Virtual exchange can provide intercultural contact without physical mobility. Pre-service teachers may collaborate with international peers to discuss education systems, teaching methods, classroom values, youth culture, and teacher identity. However, evidence from recent studies suggests that virtual exchange should include clear objectives, guided reflection, and structured tasks in order to deepen intercultural learning (Rets et al., 2023; Syahrin et al., 2023).

Literature and media can help pre-service teachers explore identity, migration, cultural conflict, stereotypes, social inequality, and values. Short stories, poems, films, interviews, advertisements, news reports, and autobiographical narratives can expose students to diverse cultural voices. These materials encourage empathy, critical thinking, and intercultural comparison.

Pre-service teachers should be asked to design lessons with explicit intercultural aims. A lesson may include cultural comparison, analysis of stereotypes, perspective-taking, discussion of authentic materials, or reflection on communication styles. During microteaching, peers and teacher educators can evaluate how effectively intercultural objectives are integrated into the lesson.

The reviewed international experiences suggest that intercultural competence should be embedded across teacher education programmes rather than limited to one isolated course. It can be connected with methodology, practicum, literature, linguistics, educational psychology, classroom management, assessment, and research methods.

Teacher education institutions should provide opportunities for both theoretical understanding and practical application. Students need to learn key concepts such as culture, identity, stereotype, mediation, intercultural communication, and critical cultural awareness. At the same time, they need to practise applying these concepts through lesson planning, material evaluation, reflective

journals, classroom observation, and microteaching.

Assessment should also reflect intercultural learning outcomes. Instead of testing only factual knowledge about cultures, teacher educators can use portfolios, reflective essays, comparative analyses, teaching demonstrations, and project work. These forms of assessment are better suited to evaluating reflection, interpretation, and pedagogical application.

For contexts such as Uzbekistan, where "Developing Intercultural Competence" is included in PRESETT programmes, international experiences can provide useful models for strengthening course content, assignments, and assessment. The main goal should be to prepare future English teachers who can teach English not only as a language system, but also as a means of intercultural communication.

### **Discussion**

The international experiences reviewed in this article point to one major conclusion: intercultural competence develops best when teacher education combines knowledge, experience, reflection, and practice. Moroccan pre-service teachers showed positive attitudes but needed more support in mediation and critical cultural awareness. Taiwanese pre-service teachers could identify cultural elements in materials, but they struggled to design effective intercultural activities. Virtual exchange projects showed that online communication can support openness and empathy, but only when it is structured and reflective. Study abroad research demonstrated that international mobility has positive effects, but reflection is necessary for deeper learning. These findings suggest that teacher education should avoid superficial cultural teaching. Culture should not be reduced to food, festivals, national symbols, or famous places. Instead, future teachers should learn to work with deeper cultural dimensions such as values, communication styles, identity, power, inclusion, social justice, and classroom interaction.

Intercultural competence is also connected with inclusive education. Teachers who understand cultural diversity are better prepared to create classrooms where learners feel respected and represented. They are also more likely to challenge stereotypes, adapt materials, and encourage learners to communicate responsibly across differences.

### **Conclusion**

International experiences demonstrate that intercultural competence is a necessary professional quality for future teachers. In English language teacher education, it is especially important because English is used across many cultural contexts and serves as a tool for global communication. The reviewed studies show that pre-service teachers often value cultural diversity, but they need more

systematic preparation in critical cultural awareness, material evaluation, mediation, intercultural lesson planning, virtual communication, and reflective practice. The most effective teacher education programmes combine theory, guided reflection, authentic interaction, classroom-based practice, and assessment aligned with intercultural outcomes.

In conclusion, developing intercultural competence in pre-service teacher education means preparing teachers who can work beyond grammar and methodology. Such teachers can create inclusive classrooms, promote respect for diversity, help learners understand cultural difference, and prepare students to communicate responsibly in a culturally diverse world.

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