

# Study on the Permeation of Intercultural Communicative Competence in Secondary School English Reading Instruction

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**Abstract:** In today's interconnected world, fostering intercultural communicative competence (ICC) has become a critical goal of English education, with reading instruction serving as a key medium to achieve this aim. However, secondary school English curricula often prioritize linguistic skills over cultural understanding, leaving students underprepared for global communication. This study explores the integration of ICC into secondary school English reading instruction, addressing theoretical frameworks, existing challenges, and practical strategies for embedding cultural learning into reading practices. The research highlights the necessity of selecting culturally diverse reading materials, designing interactive and reflective tasks, and employing multidimensional assessment systems to cultivate students' cultural awareness alongside language proficiency. By analyzing gaps in current practices, such as limited cultural representation in materials and insufficient teacher training, the study proposes actionable approaches tailored to the needs of secondary education. These strategies not only enhance students' reading comprehension but also equip them to navigate complex intercultural interactions. This study concludes by emphasizing the importance of expanding cultural content, conducting empirical research to validate proposed methods, and exploring interdisciplinary approaches to strengthen ICC integration. The findings aim to provide educators, curriculum developers, and policymakers with practical guidance to foster globally competent learners capable of engaging in meaningful intercultural communication.

**Keywords:** Cultural Diversity; English Reading Instruction; Intercultural Communicative Competence; Secondary School.

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## 1. Introduction

In today's globalized world, intercultural communication has become a vital skill, with English serving as a key medium for fostering global dialogue. The ability to communicate effectively across cultural boundaries-known as Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC)-is not only essential for personal and professional growth but also a crucial goal in English language education. However, secondary school English teaching often emphasizes linguistic proficiency, such as grammar and vocabulary, while neglecting cultural awareness. Reading, as a fundamental component of language instruction, has immense potential for integrating ICC by exposing students to diverse cultural perspectives. Unfortunately, current English reading curricula rarely explore the cultural dimensions of texts, limiting students' ability to engage deeply with the material and develop global competence. This gap highlights the need for strategies that embed intercultural awareness into English reading instruction, aiming to cultivate students' cultural understanding and critical thinking skills.

This study aims to investigate the current integration of intercultural communicative awareness in secondary school English reading instruction and explore effective strategies for enhancing this integration. Specifically, the research will focus on how ICC can be embedded into reading lessons and assess its impact on students' cultural awareness and reading comprehension. By addressing these objectives, the study seeks to provide a more comprehensive teaching framework that balances linguistic skills with intercultural understanding. The findings are expected to offer actionable insights for educators, curriculum developers, and policymakers,

contributing to the development of English reading programs that foster globally competent students.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. The Concept of Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC)

Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) is a multifaceted ability that enables individuals to communicate effectively and appropriately across cultural boundaries. Byram's model (1997) outlines four essential components of ICC: attitudes, knowledge, skills, and critical cultural awareness. These elements collectively empower learners to understand, interpret, and navigate cultural differences in communication [1]. Fantini (2000) extends this model by emphasizing that ICC is not merely a set of static skills but an ongoing process that involves adaptability, empathy, and self-awareness [2]. Deardorff (2006) further highlights the role of reflective practice in ICC development, asserting that learners must critically evaluate their own cultural assumptions to truly achieve intercultural competence [3].

From a cognitive perspective, ICC involves understanding cultural norms, values, and communication styles. Affective dimensions include openness, respect, and curiosity about other cultures. Behavioral aspects focus on the ability to adjust communication strategies and actions in intercultural contexts [2]. ICC thus bridges the gap between linguistic proficiency and cultural understanding, making it an indispensable component of language education [4]. However, the effective integration of ICC in educational practices remains a challenge, particularly in secondary school settings, where teaching often emphasizes language mechanics over

cultural content [1].

## 2.2. The Role of ICC in Language Education

Language and culture are inherently interdependent; language serves as both a carrier of culture and a tool for understanding cultural norms. Scholars widely agree that integrating ICC into language education enhances students' ability to navigate multicultural environments. Byram (2000) underscores the importance of ICC in fostering linguistic competence, arguing that without cultural knowledge, language learning becomes superficial and disconnected from real-world application [1]. Similarly, Fantini (2006) asserts that students who develop ICC are better equipped to engage in meaningful communication, as they can interpret both explicit and implicit cultural cues in conversations and texts [2].

Reading, in particular, is identified as a key avenue for ICC integration. Studies by Grabe and Stoller (2013) highlight that cultural background knowledge significantly impacts reading comprehension, as it enables learners to contextualize and interpret texts more effectively [3]. This is supported by Jiang (2016), who emphasizes that incorporating cultural themes in reading instruction helps students understand the values, beliefs, and practices underlying the target language [5]. However, in many secondary school English programs, cultural content is often fragmented or superficial, limiting its impact on students' intercultural awareness and critical thinking abilities [4].

## 2.3. Current Challenges in Integrating ICC into English Reading Instruction

Despite its recognized importance, the integration of ICC into English reading instruction faces several persistent challenges. First, traditional teaching approaches in secondary schools heavily prioritize linguistic skills, such as grammar and vocabulary, often neglecting cultural contexts [5]. This results in reading lessons that focus on technical comprehension rather than engaging with the cultural dimensions of texts [4]. Furthermore, many educators lack adequate training in ICC-related pedagogy, leaving them ill-equipped to incorporate cultural content into their lessons effectively [1].

Another major barrier is the lack of culturally rich reading materials in secondary school curricula. Studies reveal that textbooks and supplementary resources frequently present a narrow, Western-centric perspective, failing to reflect the diverse cultural landscapes necessary for developing ICC [2]. Additionally, time constraints and examination-oriented teaching further limit opportunities for cultural exploration in reading instruction [4]. These challenges underscore the need for systemic changes in curriculum design, teacher training, and resource development to facilitate the meaningful integration of ICC in reading education.

## 2.4. Effective Strategies for Integrating ICC into Reading Instruction

A growing body of research highlights several strategies for effectively embedding ICC into English reading instruction. Project-based learning (PBL) is one such method, enabling students to explore cultural topics through collaborative research and presentations. Wu and Meng (2010) found that PBL fosters deeper engagement with cultural themes and enhances students' critical thinking and communication skills [5]. Cultural comparison is another effective approach, where

students analyze similarities and differences between their own culture and the target culture, fostering a nuanced understanding of cultural diversity [4].

The use of authentic materials—such as literature, films, and news articles—has also proven successful in ICC integration. Authentic texts provide students with real-world cultural insights, allowing them to connect language learning with everyday cultural practices [1]. In particular, critical discourse analysis of such materials can help students identify and challenge cultural stereotypes, enhancing their critical cultural awareness [2].

Formative assessments, including reflective journals, peer discussions, and group projects, play a crucial role in monitoring students' progress in developing ICC. Scriven (1967) emphasizes that formative evaluation encourages active participation and self-reflection, helping students internalize cultural knowledge and apply it in practical contexts [3]. These strategies collectively address the limitations of traditional reading instruction, paving the way for a more holistic approach to language education.

## 2.5. The Impact of ICC on Reading Comprehension

Integrating ICC into reading instruction has been shown to significantly improve students' reading comprehension. Grabe and Stoller (2013) argue that cultural knowledge enables learners to interpret texts beyond their literal meanings, facilitating a deeper understanding of themes, contexts, and nuances [3]. For example, culturally informed readers are better able to analyze characters' motivations, societal dynamics, and historical influences in literary works [2].

Critical discourse analysis, as proposed by Hazaea and Al-Zubi (2017), further enhances students' ability to engage with texts critically by examining how cultural ideologies shape narratives [2]. This analytical approach not only improves reading skills but also fosters a broader worldview, equipping students with the tools to navigate complex intercultural interactions [4]. Moreover, studies indicate that ICC-focused instruction increases students' motivation and interest in reading, as they find the material more relevant and meaningful to their own lives [1].

## 3. A Literature-based Research for Integrating Intercultural Communicative Awareness in English Reading Instruction

This study adopts a literature review approach to systematically examine domestic and international research on the integration of Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) into English reading instruction. By analyzing core theoretical frameworks, practical applications, and existing challenges, the study aims to propose optimized strategies tailored to the needs of secondary school English reading curricula. Unlike prior research that often focuses on higher education or vocational training contexts, this study emphasizes the unique requirements of secondary education, particularly in reading instruction, as a critical stage for fostering intercultural competence.

### 3.1. Theoretical Foundations

The research draws upon key ICC theoretical models that have significantly influenced the field of intercultural

education.

Byram's (1997) ICC model provides the primary theoretical framework for this study, highlighting four core components: attitudes, knowledge, skills, and critical cultural awareness. Attitudes reflect openness toward cultural differences, knowledge encompasses understanding cultural norms and contexts, skills involve interpreting and relating cultural phenomena, and critical cultural awareness enables reflective evaluation of one's own and others' cultures [1-2]. This comprehensive framework is particularly relevant to analyzing how cultural teaching can be embedded in English reading instruction.

Building upon Byram's model, Deardorff (2006) emphasizes the dynamic nature of ICC, underscoring the importance of reflective practice and adaptability. Deardorff's framework is especially pertinent in reading instruction, where students must critically analyze cultural narratives and adjust their perspectives to better understand the cultural dimensions of texts [3]. Additionally, Fantini (2000) extends the discussion by integrating cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions of intercultural competence, offering insights into how these elements can be developed through targeted reading tasks [2].

This study uniquely combines these theoretical perspectives with practical teaching considerations in secondary school contexts. By focusing on the dynamic interaction between culture and language in reading, this research seeks to bridge theoretical concepts with practical applications.

### **3.2. Current Practices of ICC in English Reading Instruction**

Existing research reveals significant gaps in the integration of ICC into English reading instruction, particularly at the secondary school level. Fenghua (2023) highlights that current English reading curricula often prioritize linguistic skills such as grammar and vocabulary while neglecting cultural content. When cultural topics are included, they are frequently limited to superficial representations of Western mainstream culture, such as festivals, historical figures, or traditions, offering little opportunity for students to engage with diverse cultural perspectives [1]. This limitation constrains students' ability to critically reflect on and appreciate cultural diversity.

Similarly, Liu (2018) argues that most reading instruction focuses on surface-level comprehension, leaving students with a minimal understanding of the deeper cultural meanings embedded in texts. The lack of culturally rich and authentic materials further exacerbates this problem [5]. Yan (2017) explores these challenges from a teacher's perspective, noting that many educators lack the necessary training and resources to effectively incorporate cultural teaching into reading lessons. Consequently, cultural instruction often remains peripheral or fragmented [4].

In contrast to previous studies, this research prioritizes cultural integration as a central element of reading instruction. By designing reading tasks that emphasize intercultural themes, such as cultural comparisons, case analyses, and reflective writing, this study seeks to deepen students' engagement with cultural content while enhancing their reading comprehension skills.

### **3.3. Challenges and Optimized Approaches**

Despite growing awareness of the importance of ICC,

several challenges hinder its effective integration into English reading instruction. Tang (2021) points out that traditional assessment methods focus heavily on evaluating students' linguistic accuracy while overlooking their cultural understanding and critical thinking skills [5]. Additionally, textbooks and supplementary materials often fail to represent diverse cultural perspectives, further limiting opportunities for intercultural learning [1].

To address these challenges, this study proposes a comprehensive pathway that integrates ICC with reading instruction through dynamic and interactive methods. For instance, the inclusion of authentic materials—such as international news, multicultural literature, and digital media—allows students to experience real-world cultural contexts and develop a nuanced understanding of intercultural dynamics [5-6]. Furthermore, reflective tasks such as cultural diaries and group discussions provide platforms for students to articulate their insights and critically evaluate cultural narratives.

### **3.4. Innovation and Distinctive Features**

This study contributes several innovations to the field of intercultural education in English reading instruction. First, it focuses on secondary education, a critical stage for shaping students' intercultural awareness, which has received relatively little attention compared to higher education. Second, the research emphasizes the role of reading instruction as a medium for cultural learning, proposing task-based activities that align cultural objectives with linguistic development. Finally, the study incorporates a multi-dimensional evaluation framework that assesses students' intercultural understanding alongside their reading proficiency, addressing a gap in existing assessment practices.

By synthesizing theoretical models with practical strategies, this research highlights the potential of intercultural teaching in fostering both cultural competence and academic skills. The proposed framework offers actionable insights for educators, curriculum developers, and policymakers seeking to enhance intercultural learning in secondary school English curricula.

This section demonstrates how a literature-based approach can illuminate the integration of ICC into English reading instruction. Through a thorough review of theoretical models, current practices, and challenges, this study proposes a comprehensive and innovative pathway for embedding intercultural awareness in reading lessons. By addressing the unique needs of secondary education, this research contributes to the broader goal of cultivating globally competent learners.

## **4. Practical Pathways for Integrating Intercultural Communicative Competence into English Reading Instruction**

Secondary school English reading instruction provides a critical platform for fostering both linguistic competence and intercultural communicative awareness (ICC). By carefully selecting reading materials, designing interactive activities, incorporating culturally relevant tasks, and implementing a multidimensional evaluation system, educators can effectively integrate ICC into reading instruction. This section outlines practical strategies to achieve this integration, supported by relevant literature and research.

## 4.1. Selecting Culturally Rich Reading Materials

The choice of reading materials significantly influences the cultural perspectives students are exposed to and the depth of their understanding.

### 4.1.1. Emphasizing Cultural Diversity

Reading materials should include diverse cultural perspectives, representing both mainstream and non-mainstream cultures. Current textbooks often focus excessively on Western cultural norms, neglecting the rich diversity of other regions and subcultures (Fenghua, 2023) [7]. Expanding beyond Anglo-American contexts to include texts from Africa, Asia, and Latin America can help students engage with a broader cultural spectrum. For instance:

(1) Literary texts: Short stories, poems, and novels that reflect diverse cultural narratives, such as Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* or Jhumpa Lahiri's *Interpreter of Maladies*, can provide students with profound insights into African and Indian cultures.

(2) Non-fiction texts: Articles on historical events, social movements, or everyday life in different countries can offer real-world cultural knowledge. For example, reading about Japan's tea ceremony can deepen students' appreciation for cultural traditions and symbolism.

### 4.1.2. Addressing Cultural Conflicts

To enhance students' understanding of cultural complexity, materials that address intercultural conflicts or highlight marginalized voices are essential. Texts focusing on immigration stories, racial inequality, or cross-cultural misunderstandings can foster critical thinking and empathy. For example, exploring immigrant experiences in texts like Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club* can help students understand the cultural challenges faced by diverse communities.

## 4.2. Designing Interactive and Culturally Relevant Activities

Interactive activities are vital for engaging students in cultural exploration while enhancing their critical thinking and communication skills.

### 4.2.1. Comparative Analysis and Discussions

Comparative activities encourage students to analyze cultural similarities and differences critically. After reading, students can discuss how cultural practices in the target text compare to those in their own culture. For example:

(1) Analyzing attitudes toward hospitality in texts from different cultures can reveal distinct social values.

(2) Discussing family roles in texts like *To Kill a Mockingbird* versus traditional Chinese family structures can deepen cultural awareness.

These discussions can be guided by open-ended questions, such as:

“What cultural values are reflected in the text, and how do they differ from your own culture?”

“How might these cultural differences influence communication in real-life situations?”

### 4.2.2. Role-Playing and Simulation

Role-playing activities allow students to practice intercultural communication in authentic contexts. For instance:

(1) After reading a text about cultural festivals, students can simulate a conversation between people from different cultures discussing their holiday traditions.

(2) A scenario-based activity could involve students resolving a cultural misunderstanding in a professional or social setting, such as planning an international event or addressing differing views on time management.

These simulations can help students internalize cultural norms and develop adaptive communication strategies, aligning with the goals of ICC (Byram, 1997) [8].

## 4.3. Incorporating Culturally Themed Reading Tasks

Tasks that integrate cultural themes into reading instruction enable students to engage deeply with texts while exploring the broader cultural context.

### 4.3.1. Background Research Assignments

After reading a culturally rich text, students can conduct research on the cultural elements mentioned in the story. For instance:

(1) Reading about the Maori haka in New Zealand could lead to research on its historical significance and contemporary uses.

(2) A text about Chinese New Year celebrations could prompt students to explore the symbolic meaning behind customs like red envelopes and dragon dances.

These tasks not only deepen cultural understanding but also improve research and analytical skills.

### 4.3.2. Project-Based Learning

Project-based learning (PBL) tasks provide opportunities for students to collaborate and create culturally meaningful outputs. Examples include:

(1) Festival Comparison Projects: Students research and present on two culturally distinct festivals, such as Diwali and Christmas, comparing their origins, practices, and social meanings.

(2) Literary Context Projects: Students explore the historical and cultural background of a text, such as the Harlem Renaissance in Langston Hughes's poetry, and present their findings to the class.

(3) Cross-Cultural Role-Play: Students adapt a story from the reading material into a modern-day cross-cultural setting, showcasing how cultural differences impact the narrative and characters.

PBL fosters collaboration, creativity, and critical cultural awareness, essential components of ICC (Deardorff, 2006) [8].

## 4.4. Implementing a Multidimensional Evaluation System

Assessment is crucial for measuring students' progress in cultural understanding and linguistic proficiency. A comprehensive evaluation system should combine formative and summative assessments to reflect the multidimensional nature of ICC development.

### 4.4.1. Formative Assessments

Formative assessments provide ongoing feedback and encourage reflection. Examples include:

(1) Cultural Reflection Logs: Students write about cultural insights gained from reading texts, noting how their perspectives evolve over time.

(2) Classroom Observations: Teachers assess students' participation in discussions and their ability to articulate cultural differences and similarities.

(3) Peer Feedback: During group activities or projects, students can provide constructive feedback on their peers'

contributions to cultural analysis and communication.

#### 4.4.2. Summative Assessments

Summative assessments evaluate students' overall achievement in cultural and linguistic learning. Examples include:

(1) Oral Presentations: Students present their findings from cultural research or PBL tasks, demonstrating their understanding of cultural nuances and their ability to communicate effectively.

(2) Scenario-Based Testing: Students are given a real-world intercultural scenario, such as planning a multicultural event, and assessed on their problem-solving and communication skills.

(3) Creative Writing Tasks: Students rewrite a story from a different cultural perspective, showcasing their understanding of cultural context and narrative adaptation.

By integrating culturally diverse reading materials, interactive activities, thematic tasks, and a robust evaluation system, secondary school English reading instruction can effectively foster intercultural communicative awareness. These strategies ensure that students not only develop their language skills but also gain the cultural sensitivity and adaptability necessary for effective global communication. This comprehensive approach provides practical guidance for educators and aligns with the broader educational goal of cultivating globally competent learners.

## 5. Research Conclusions and Recommendations

This study explores the integration of intercultural communicative awareness (ICC) into secondary school English reading instruction, addressing key theoretical foundations, current practices, challenges, and practical strategies. Based on the literature review and proposed pathways, this section presents the conclusions drawn from the study and offers actionable recommendations for educators, curriculum developers, and policymakers to enhance ICC integration in English reading education.

### 5.1. Research Conclusions

#### 5.1.1. The Necessity of ICC in English Reading Instruction

In today's globalized world, intercultural communication skills are essential for effective interaction in multicultural contexts. English reading instruction, as a core component of language education, provides a unique opportunity to expose students to diverse cultural perspectives. However, traditional reading curricula often prioritize linguistic proficiency over cultural understanding, leading to missed opportunities for fostering ICC. This study underscores the importance of integrating ICC into reading instruction to prepare students for global communication.

#### 5.1.2. Current Challenges in ICC Integration

Despite its significance, ICC integration in secondary school English reading instruction faces several challenges. These include the limited cultural diversity in reading materials, insufficient teacher training in intercultural pedagogy, and an overemphasis on exam-oriented teaching. These barriers hinder the effective development of students' cultural awareness and critical thinking skills.

#### 5.1.3. Effective Strategies for Embedding ICC

This study identifies practical strategies to integrate ICC into English reading instruction. Key approaches include

selecting culturally rich and diverse reading materials, designing interactive and culturally relevant activities, incorporating project-based learning tasks, and implementing a multidimensional evaluation system. These strategies ensure a balanced focus on language skills and cultural competence, fostering students' ability to understand, analyze, and respond to cultural differences.

### 5.2. Recommendations

#### 5.2.1. For Teachers

(1) Diversify reading materials: Teachers should supplement textbooks with culturally rich resources, including literary texts, non-fiction articles, and multimedia content that represent various cultural perspectives. This approach can help students engage with global issues and appreciate cultural diversity.

(2) Design culturally relevant tasks: Teachers should incorporate activities such as cultural comparisons, role-playing, and scenario-based simulations to encourage students to explore and reflect on cultural differences. These tasks can be integrated into regular reading lessons to enhance engagement and learning outcomes.

(3) Seek professional development: Teachers should participate in training programs focused on intercultural pedagogy to improve their ability to integrate cultural content into reading instruction. Collaborative workshops and peer mentoring can also support teachers in sharing best practices and resources.

#### 5.2.2. For Curriculum Developers

(1) Enrich cultural content in textbooks: Curricula should include reading materials that reflect diverse cultural narratives and address global challenges, such as sustainability and social equity. These materials should align with students' linguistic levels and cognitive abilities while encouraging critical engagement with cultural topics.

(2) Incorporate ICC goals into curricula: Explicit ICC objectives should be integrated into English reading curricula, ensuring a balanced emphasis on linguistic and cultural learning. Curriculum guidelines should also provide practical examples of how to achieve these objectives through lesson planning and assessment design.

#### 5.2.3. For Policymakers

(1) Support intercultural education policies: Education authorities should prioritize ICC development as a key component of English language education. This includes funding teacher training programs, developing resource libraries, and promoting international collaborations to share innovative teaching practices.

(2) Encourage innovative assessments: Policymakers should support the development of assessment frameworks that evaluate both linguistic and intercultural competencies. Such frameworks can include formative assessments, scenario-based testing, and project evaluations, providing a comprehensive understanding of students' progress.

### 5.3. Implications for Future Research

This study underscores the essential role of intercultural communicative competence (ICC) in secondary school English reading instruction, emphasizing its power not only in enhancing students' language skills but also in fostering their cultural awareness, empathy, and adaptability in an increasingly interconnected world. By integrating ICC into reading curricula, educators lay the foundation for students to become not just competent language users, but also global

citizens capable of navigating the complexities of diverse cultures and worldviews.

While the study provides valuable strategies for embedding ICC into secondary school English reading instruction—such as the selection of culturally diverse materials, the design of interactive tasks, and the development of comprehensive evaluation systems—there remain significant opportunities for further research. The limitations identified in this study, including the lack of cultural diversity in current materials, the need for teacher training, and the constraints of exam-oriented teaching methods, call for innovative solutions in future research.

Future studies should delve deeper into the implementation and impact of ICC across all areas of language education, including speaking, listening, and writing. Longitudinal research that tracks the long-term effects of ICC-focused instruction on students' intercultural competence will provide deeper insights into the sustained benefits of such an approach. Additionally, comparative studies across diverse educational systems and cultural contexts could further illuminate best practices for integrating ICC, offering a global perspective on how to equip students for cross-cultural communication.

In overcoming these challenges, future research holds the potential to refine and expand the teaching of ICC, ultimately shaping more inclusive, culturally responsive, and globally aware educational practices. As we continue to address the barriers to effective ICC integration, we not only enhance students' linguistic abilities but also prepare them to engage thoughtfully and respectfully with a complex, multicultural world. This effort is vital for cultivating a generation of learners who are not only skilled communicators but also responsible global citizens, equipped to thrive in the diverse and dynamic world.

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