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*PRE-SERVICE ENGLISH TEACHERS' ATTITUDES TOWARD AND
EXPERIENCE OF TEACHING CULTURE AND INTERCULTURAL
COMMUNICATION: A MIXED-METHODS CASE STUDY OF A
HUNGARIAN UNIVERSITY*

Abstract

Research into cultural awareness (Moran, 2001) and intercultural communication (ICC) (Byram, 2008) has gained increasing research attention in recent decades; however, their role within teacher education programs remains underexplored. This mixed-methods study investigates the extent to which culture and ICC are represented in English teacher education at the University of Pécs (UP) and explores pre-service English teachers' attitudes toward and experience of teaching these areas. Data were collected through a curriculum analysis of six English teacher education programs and a self-designed online questionnaire completed by 153 pre-service English teachers. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, while qualitative responses were examined through thematic analysis.

The findings indicate that culture is generally regarded as an important component of English language teaching, although it is typically allocated a limited proportion of classroom time. Participants most frequently associated culture with cultural products and practices, such as literature, traditions, holidays, food, and everyday life, while deeper cultural perspectives received considerably less attention. Teaching culture was commonly linked to audiovisual materials and communicative activities. In contrast, ICC emerged as a less familiar and less frequently taught domain. Participants reported uncertainty regarding its meaning and implementation, which may reflect the limited presence of intercultural training within current curricula. The study highlights the need for more systematic integration of culture, intercultural communication, and intercultural competence (Deardorff, 2006) development into English language teacher education.

Keywords: Teaching culture; Intercultural communication; Teacher education

Introduction

Hungarian cities and university campuses are becoming increasingly multilingual and multicultural, requiring teachers and students to be able to interact successfully and appropriately with culturally diverse interlocutors. Therefore, the success and inclusivity of multicultural education hinge on teachers' ability to develop learners' intercultural competence (Deardorff, 2006), cultural openness (Fekete, in press a), and empathy (Fernández-Corbacho et al., 2024) toward creating inclusive educational practices in their local contexts.

Language teacher education in Hungary usually focuses on teaching methodology, pedagogy, and classroom issues, preceded by foundational subjects in language development, literature, culture, history, and linguistics. University programs tend to prioritize developments in language teaching methodology by integrating communicative, task-based, content-and-language integrated learning (CLIL), and technology-enhanced teaching approaches, along with the study of classroom techniques, discourse analysis, and assessment practices into the curricula. Teaching culture (Moran, 2001) and intercultural communication (Byram, 2008), developing intercultural competence (Deardorff, 2006), multicultural teacher competence (Lin & Chung, 2024), or fostering inclusive education (Dezső, 2022; Egitim & Akaliyski, 2024) may remain optional or supplementary components in Hungarian teacher education.

To fill the above gap, the present study examines six English teacher education curricula at the University of Pécs (UP) as well as the statistical and textual data collected from 153 English teacher trainees via a self-designed online questionnaire examining pre-service English teacher trainees' attitudes toward and experience of teaching culture and intercultural communication (ICC) in their current or prospective language classroom.

Literature review

Teaching culture

Culture has been defined by many, resulting in a myriad of interpretations over the centuries. An early definition of culture from the 19th century was provided by Matthew Arnold (1867/2009), who distinguished between high culture and popular culture (or 'folkways'). High culture in this sense encompasses canonized artistic and intellectual products and endeavors, such as the arts and literature. The problematic aspect of this view was the argument that only a marginal part of society has culture, resulting in prejudice and discrimination against those outside this group (Spencer-Oatey, 2012). He put forth that these 'cultureless' social groups were bound to cause anarchy in society (Arnold, 1867/2009).

The ethnographic foundation of culture was laid down by the English anthropologist Edward B. Tylor (1871/1889), who equated culture and civilization and viewed it as a complex whole, including "knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society" (p.1). The German-born American anthropologist Franz Boas (1911/1938) further expanded this definition by viewing culture as the collective behavior of a social group, characterizing both the individual and the group, including the products of these activities and their role in the life of the group (p. 159). This definition signaled a shift toward viewing culture as a way of life. Boas's view of culture cautions against valorizing different cultures or distinguishing between high or low cultures or between civilized and uncivilized social groups. He argued that culture consists of everyday learned behaviors, habits, and traditions shared by a group. Raymond Williams (1958) took this view a step further and defined culture as "a whole way of life" (p. 344). He highlighted the qualities of the "common life" (p. 314) and "popular culture" (p. 325), resulting from the democratization

of society, industrialization, and mass communication, thus highlighting the emerging role of the working class in modern society. He concluded that culture is not elitist but ordinary, shared by all of society (Williams, 1958/1989).

The works of Tylor, Boas, and Williams pinpoint a shift from an elitist definition of culture to a democratizing understanding of culture, signaling economic and political changes in modern societies. With the democratization of science and knowledge at the turn of the millennium, culture is interpreted at the intersection of culture, society, and science (Márkus, 2017). Recent definitions of culture encompass broad interpretations, increasingly emphasizing the invisible values, beliefs, and cognitive assumptions that underpin culture as a lived way of life.

[Culture] is the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another.' Hofstede, 1994, p. 4

... the set of attitudes, values, beliefs, and behaviors shared by a group of people, but different for each individual, communicated from one generation to the next. Matsumoto 1996, p. 16

Culture is a fuzzy set of basic assumptions and values, orientations to life, beliefs, policies, procedures and behavioural conventions that are shared by a group of people, and that influence (but do not determine) each member's behaviour and his/her interpretations of the 'meaning' of other people's behaviour. Spencer-Oatey 2008, p. 3

A recent conceptualization of culture as a way of life that is also taught by professors teaching the course *Teaching Culture and Intercultural Communication* at UP, including the author of this paper, was coined by Moran.

Culture is the evolving way of life of a group of persons, consisting of a shared set of practices associated with a shared set of products based upon a shared set of perceptions on the world and set within specific social contexts. Moran, 2001, p. 24.

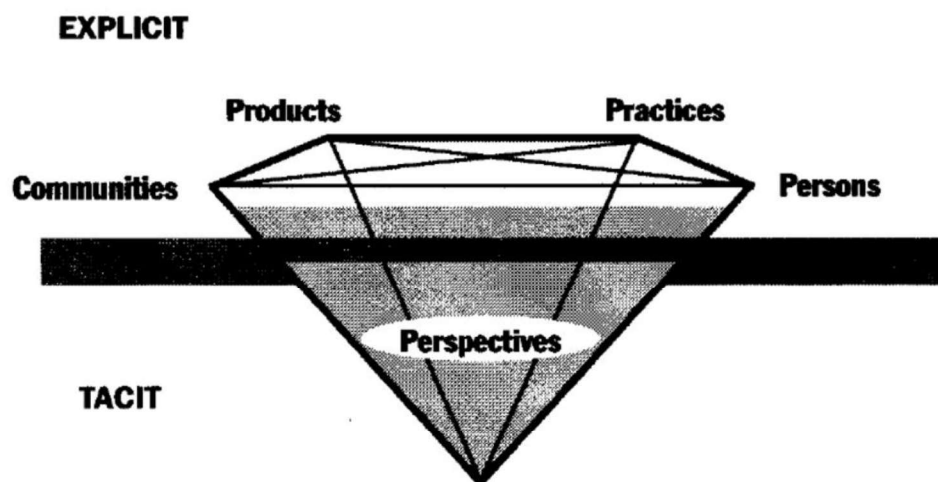
Moran's definition highlights the dynamic nature of culture as a way of life and identifies five universal dimensions of culture.

- 1) **Cultural products:** This dimension denotes the objects, systems, and entities that people in different cultures create and use, such as language, the system of education, law, politics, healthcare or religion, urban and natural environments, everyday objects, food, outfits, means of transport, money, etc. In short, this dimension highlights what 'things' people have and use in a culture.
- 2) **Cultural practices:** This dimension addresses how people behave, speak, think, feel, and live their daily lives using certain cultural objects, such as how language is used verbally and non-verbally with different interlocutors across situations, how emotions are expressed, how work and free time are spent, how children and the elderly are treated, how holidays are celebrated, etc.
- 3) **Cultural persons:** This dimension describes individuals who use certain cultural products, participate in certain cultural practices, and belong to certain cultural communities. For example, a rocker may wear vintage leather jackets, drive a motorbike, play an electric guitar, frequent local underground venues, and belong to a tight-knit subculture of classic metal enthusiasts.

- 4) **Cultural communities:** This dimension describes communities that participate in certain cultural practices, use certain cultural products, and consist of cultural persons. For example, a neighborhood dog park forms a "cultural community" where local dog owners and their dogs gather each evening to let their pets play, exchange training advice and dog anecdotes, carry leashes, tennis balls, and dog treats, and use shared park amenities.
- 5) **Cultural perspectives:** This dimension explains why individuals and communities participate in certain cultural practices and why they use certain cultural objects based on underlying values, assumptions, perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs. For example, let us examine the different cultural perspectives on food across cultures by contrasting the mainstream American perspective on food as a convenient, easily replaced commodity where waste is a byproduct of abundance and a comfortable lifestyle, with the traditional Hungarian perspective, treating food as a sacred result of hard labor and a valued possession in a time of need, thus producing a strong moral obligation to preserve and repurpose every leftover.

The iceberg representation of culture proposed by Moran (2001) (Figure 1) suggests that while cultural products, practices, persons, and communities are mostly visible to observers, the underlying cultural perspectives explaining why people act, think, believe, and feel the way they do in a certain culture stay hidden from observers.

Figure 1. The Iceberg of Culture



Source: adopted from Moran (2001, p. 28)

Language is an essential means of conveying information in communication. Describing cultural information as a way of life includes utterances and written descriptions of objects, entities, and persons, as well as their thoughts, beliefs, values, feelings, and behaviors (Fekete, 2020). Language is also a carrier of cultural content, such as literature, music, theater, and history. However, language also carries a great deal of implicit cultural information, encoded in each language, because every language is the cultural product of a distinct speech community agreed upon by convention (Kramsch, 1998). Linguistic relativity proposes that language shapes (but does not determine) thoughts and the information speakers must specify in different languages (Boroditsky, 2012). Therefore,

every language reflects the conventional interpretations of natural and social phenomena in the world agreed upon by its speakers. Post-structuralist researchers such as Kramsch (2009) and Fekete (2020) argue that every language offers a novel way of self-expression and way of thinking, shaping multilingual individuals' various personal and collective identities. Thereby, language learners can rid themselves of the cultural, linguistic, emotional, and behavioral constraints of their mother tongue (L1) and its culture by learning a new language (L2) that offers novel freedoms, emotions, behaviors, thoughts, and meaning-making processes that can transform not only identities but also entire lives.

Teaching intercultural communication

English used to be a foreign language (FL) just like French, German, or Italian. Foreign language education usually follows the 'native speaker norm' (Kabel, 2009), rendering native-like proficiency and flawless language use the ultimate goals of language instruction. FLs are usually limited to classroom environments, and the performance of teachers and learners is measured against the native speaker norm, oftentimes resulting in a sense of incompetence and inferiority in FL speakers who fall short of this expectation (Medgyes, 2017).

However, English today has become a lingua franca (ELF) (Jenkins, 2007, 2009), a mediator language between speakers of distinct mother tongues (L1). The goals of ELF use include successful communication and mutual understanding despite potential mistakes and errors in ELF interactions. With the development of nativized post-colonial English varieties, known as New Englishes or World Englishes, as well as distinct ELF varieties, English is no longer the sole property of native speakers (Dewey & Leung, 2010) but a symbol of world citizenship (Widdowson, 2012).

English has also become an international (Widdowson, 2012) and intercultural language (Byram, 2008), providing a bridge between different cultures and communities. Intercultural communication, introduced by Hall (1959), examines communication processes across cultural boundaries. On the other hand, intercultural competence refers to the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behaviors that enable effective and appropriate interaction in intercultural situations (Deardorff, 2006). Within language education, Byram (1997) introduced the concept of intercultural communicative competence, which integrates language proficiency with intercultural knowledge, skills, attitudes, and cultural awareness.

Intercultural communication is inherently linked to multiculturalism, which may be viewed in two interrelated ways (Szigeti, 2002). On the one hand, multiculturalism may refer to the mere coexistence of multiple cultures within society. On the other hand, multiculturalism may describe a culturally diverse society as a whole. Multiculturalism inherently addresses attitudes towards "difference", whether cultural, ethnic, social, religious or sexual. My observation of internationalized university classes at UP reveals a double-edged reality: while classrooms are culturally diverse, this cultural diversity merely reflects the passive coexistence of cultures with minimal interaction among them. This observation particularly describes the dynamic between Hungarian and international students.

Nevertheless, English as an intercultural language can lay the foundation for both multicultural and inclusive education (Lin & Chung, 2024) when paired with targeted interventions and inclusive pedagogies. Consequently, language education must extend beyond basic language development to actively foster cultural awareness, openness, empathy, and intercultural competence. This expectation, however, places a significant socio-educational responsibility on teacher education, teacher educators, and ultimately in-service teachers.

Empirical research

The analyses of English textbooks at the elementary school and university levels indicate that the cultural information included in English books is insufficient, and cultural representation is inconsistent (Elizondo-Gonzales, 2018; Gashi, 2021). A bias towards either American or British culture over other cultures via English as an international/intercultural language has been observed, indicating a marked preference for target language and culture representations. Research has revealed a lack of explicit focus on teaching culture in the English classroom; thus, culture remains a supplementary and marginal component of language education (Elizondo-Gonzales, 2018). The findings of the above studies suggest that teaching culture is often restricted to descriptions of cultural products and practices presented in the coursebook that do not invite students to share their own experiences or opinions on the topic, thus hampering experiential learning (Kolb, 1984) that could shape learners' (inter)cultural attitudes, perceptions, and beliefs.

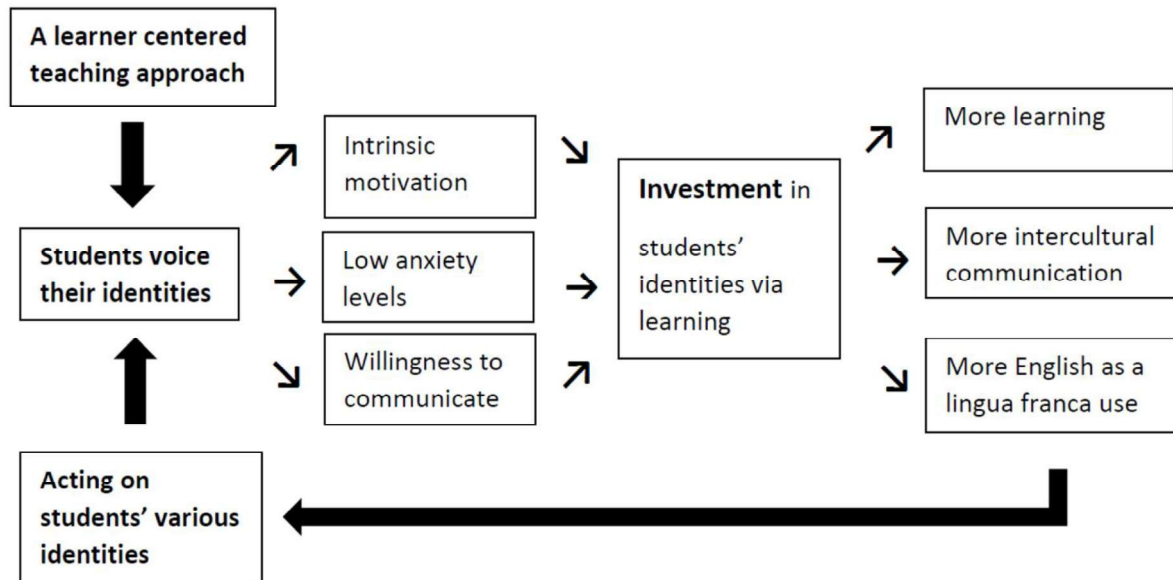
Regarding teaching intercultural communication, Lies Sercu and her colleagues (2005) conducted an international empirical survey across seven countries to assess how secondary school foreign language teachers conceptualize and implement intercultural competence development in their classes. Their findings revealed a pronounced gap between attitude and practice: while most teachers expressed strong, positive attitudes toward integrating intercultural communication in their practice, their actual classroom instruction remained heavily constrained by traditional linguistic priorities, for example, teaching grammar and vocabulary, and reliance on textbooks.

In the Hungarian context, studies have examined the intercultural competencies and intercultural sensitivity of medical students (Lucza et al., 2023; Németh et al., 2022), the development of English majors' intercultural communicative competence (Menyhei, 2013; Talbi, 2020), teacher trainees' beliefs about integrating the development of intercultural communicative competence in language teaching (Lázár, 2011), teacher educators' beliefs about pluricentricity in language education (Huber, 2025), the impact of language socialization and linguistic competence on intercultural communication frequency (Fekete, in press b), and the influence of language knowledge and language ideologies on multilingual and multicultural identity development (Fekete, in press c).

Furthermore, Dombi linked intercultural communicative competence to pragmatics (2020) and individual differences (2021), and Fekete (2022) introduced an identity-aware and learner-centered model of teaching and facilitating intercultural communication (Figure 2). Fekete's model draws on a pedagogy that encourages the

expression of students' various identities, thereby enhancing motivation and willingness to communicate while reducing language anxiety in the classroom. These favorable psychological conditions promote learners' investment in learning and facilitate intercultural communication, which, in turn, shapes their various identities.

Figure 2. Identity-based Model of Teaching and Facilitating Intercultural Communication



Source: adopted from Fekete (2022, p. 423)

In this study, Fekete (2022) implemented an educational-cultural intervention based on a pre-post test research design to measure university students' attitudes toward and perceptions of their peers' cultures in a multicultural classroom at UP. The results indicated quantitative and qualitative changes in students' perceptions of cultural stereotypes and preconceptions, thereby establishing an inclusive educational environment for multicultural education.

Research methodology

Research aim and context

The research was conducted at a Hungarian university with the aim of identifying pre-service English teachers' attitudes toward incorporating culture and intercultural communication into their current or prospective teaching practice, as well as the impact of their university courses on these attitudes and perceptions.

Regarding teacher education programs at UP, the current and the previous undivided English Teacher Education MA programs, lasting for 5 and 6 years, respectively, along with 3 part-time English teacher training MA programs, lasting for 2 or 3 semesters, are Hungarian-accredited programs for those wishing to teach in the Hungarian school system. Therefore, students enrolled in these programs are usually Hungarian. However, the English Instructor MA Program, lasting for two semesters, is open to both international and Hungarian students. Nevertheless, all the above programs might host students with diverse cultural backgrounds. The curricula of these 6 MA programs were

included in the document analysis that complemented the survey completed by pre-service English teachers at UP.

Research questions

The research seeks to answer six research questions (RQs) specified below.

- 1) What characterizes English teacher trainees' teaching experience and specialization?
- 2) What courses do the participants complete regarding teaching culture and ICC?
- 3) What characterizes their attitudes toward and experience of teaching culture in the language classroom?
- 4) What teaching methods and techniques do pre-service English teachers envision using to teach culture?
- 5) What characterizes their attitudes toward and experience of teaching intercultural communication?
- 6) What teaching methods and techniques do pre-service English teachers envision applying to teach ICC?

Participants

A total of 153 pre-service English teachers participated in the research via convenience sampling (Dörnyei, 2007). The participants' mean age was 22.5 years, and the gender ratio was quite balanced with 86 females (56%), 66 males (43%), and one non-binary student (1%). The majority (n=146, 95.5%) were Hungarian, while the international students (n=7, 4.5%) were from Russia (n=2), India, Malaysia, Turkey, and Germany (n=1 each), and one student did not indicate their country of origin. Regarding English proficiency levels, 3 students self-identified as native English speakers, 9 reported measured C2 proficiency level, 108 indicated measured while 3 noted perceived C1 proficiency level, and 32 reported measured while 5 indicated perceived B2 proficiency level. In summary, most respondents were at the C1 proficiency level in English at the time of the research.

Most respondents (n=121, 79%) were enrolled in the undivided teacher education MA program, 19 participants (12.5%) studied in the English Language Instructor international MA program, and 13 students (8.5%) majored in one of the three short-cycle, part-time MA teacher training programs. Regarding the year of their studies, 49 students (32%) were in their first year, 47 (31%) in their second year, 28 (18%) in their third year, 9 (6%) in their fourth year, 17 (11%) in their fifth year, and three (2%) in their sixth year.

Of the 121 participants enrolled in the 5- or 6-year MA program, 32 were in their first year, 46 in their second year, 28 in their third year, and 9 were in their fourth year at university. Since teaching practice starts in the third year of this program, students gain more teaching experience as they progress in their studies. Therefore, first and second-year students were not expected to have school-based teaching experience; however, they might have had teaching experience in other contexts.

Research instrument and procedures

Two research instruments were used in this research. The first instrument was an online questionnaire, designed by the researcher, to assess intercultural attitudes and experiences. It was administered to pre-service English teacher trainees via Google Forms in English owing to their high command of the language. The items included multiple-choice and open-ended questions, as well as demographic questions on country of origin, gender, age, study program, and English proficiency levels. The questionnaire items used in the research are available in Appendix B. The second data collection instrument was a collection of 6 documents retrieved from the university's website (specified in Appendix A), including the curriculum of the 6 MA programs the respondents were enrolled in.

Research methods and data analysis

The present research is mixed-methods in nature (Dörnyei, 2007), as it includes textual data and numerical data collected via the questionnaire and the six curricula. Descriptive statistics were calculated using the IBM SPSS software (version 30), and the qualitative data were coded and categorized to answer the research questions. The six curricula were analyzed as documents verifying the educational training English pre-service teachers receive regarding teaching culture and intercultural communication in the language classroom.

Results

English teacher trainees' teaching experience and specialization

This section presents English teacher trainees' teaching experience and specialization. Regarding their teaching experience, Table 1 shows that the majority (76.5%) had no teaching experience, followed by one year of teaching experience (9.2%) and two years of experience (4.6%). This finding is not surprising, as most students do not hold a job during their university years, and the only exposure to teaching for many is the compulsory teaching practice sessions. However, participants enrolled in the short-cycle teacher training programs were working adults, often holding a teaching job in another subject. Of the 153 students, 33 had completed at least one teaching practice, and 41 reported teaching activities outside the university.

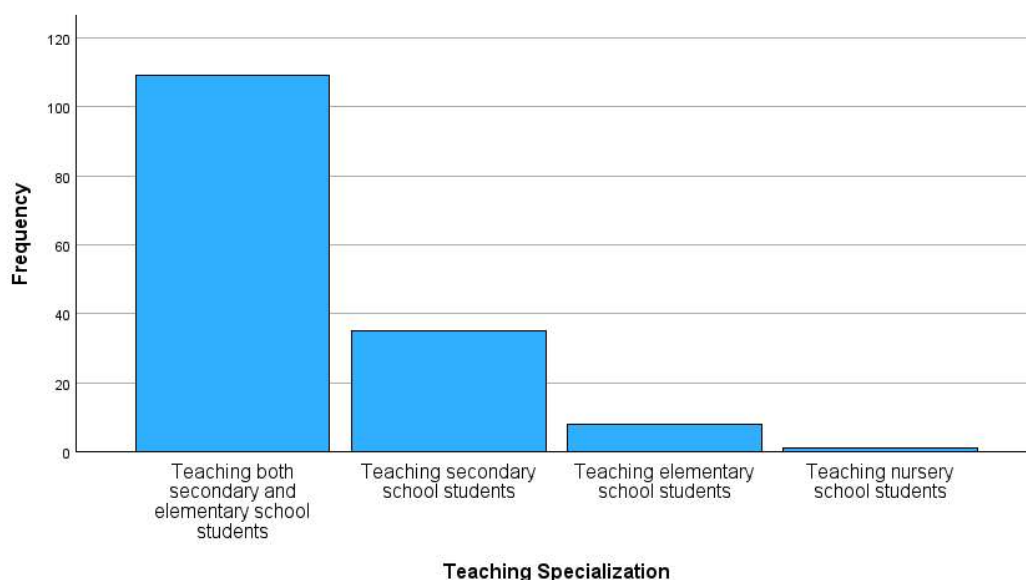
Table 1. Pre-service English Majors' Teaching Experience in the Order of Frequency

Years of Teaching Experience	<i>n</i>	%
0 years	117	76.5
1 year	14	9.2
2 years	7	4.6
6–10 years	5	3.3
4 years	4	2.6
21–30 years	2	1.3
5 years	2	1.3
16–20 years	1	0.7
3 years	1	0.7
Total	153	100.0

Source: Author's own data

Concerning teaching specialization (Figure 3), most students ($n=109$, 71.2%) were trained to teach in both secondary and elementary schools. However, a considerable number ($n=35$, 22.9%) opted to teach secondary schoolers, a few ($n=8$, 5.2%) chose elementary schoolers, and only one student (0.7%) indicated a desire to work with nursery school children.

Figure 3. Participants' Teaching Specialization

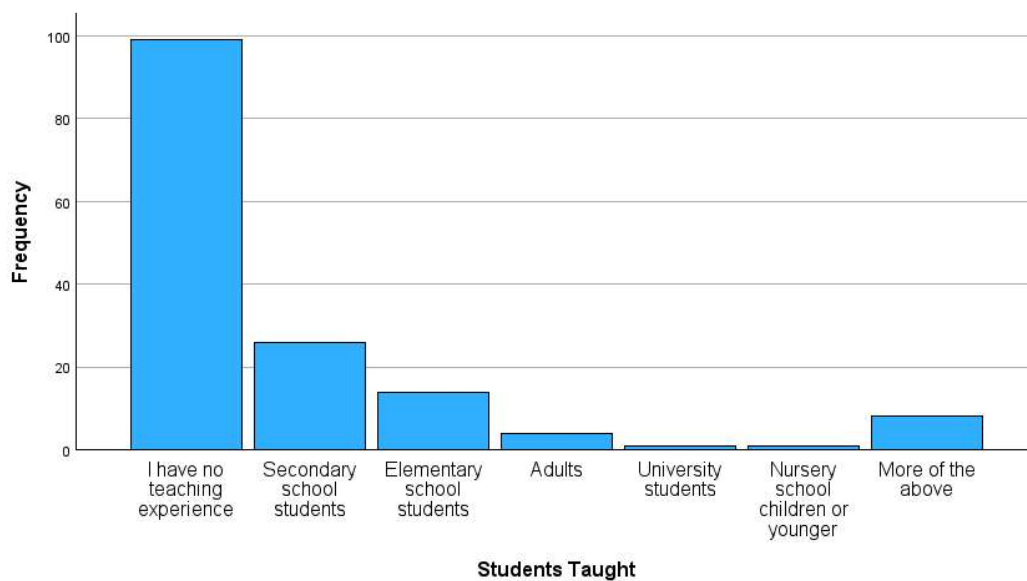


Source: Author's own data

Concerning their teaching experience with different student populations (Figure 4), the majority ($n=99$, 64.7%) reported no experience teaching any student group. Students had the most experience teaching secondary school learners ($n=26$, 17%), followed by experience with elementary school students ($n=14$, 9.2%). Experience teaching university students and nursery school children was noted by one student (0.7%) each. Finally,

teaching experience with diverse student populations was reported by eight respondents (5.2%).

Figure 4. Participants' Experience with Student Groups



Source: Author's own data

Educational training on how to teach culture and ICC that the participants receive in their degree programs

Regarding educational training on culture and ICC teaching, Table 2 presents the different courses pre-service English teachers complete in the various programs offered by UP.

Table 2. Courses That Pre-service English Teachers Complete in Different Degree Programs

Courses					
Degree program	<i>Introduction to Intercultural Communication</i> – Lecture	<i>Practicing Intercultural Communication</i> – Seminar	<i>Teaching Culture and Intercultural Communication</i> – Seminar	<i>World Englishes and ELF</i> Seminar	-
Full-time MA program 5 or 6 yrs 2017-2022	X	X	X		
Full-time MA program 5 yrs 2022-present			X	X	
English Instructor MA 2 semesters			X		
Part-time MA 1 2 semesters					
Part-time MA 2 2 semesters			X		
Part-time MA 3 3 semesters			X		

Source: Author's own data

Substantial differences in educational training were found across the teacher education programs offered by UP (Table 2). The most comprehensive preparation was provided in the previous undivided MA program (2017–2022), which included dedicated courses on intercultural communication (both a lecture and a seminar), and a seminar course on teaching culture and intercultural communication. In contrast, the current 5-year MA program (2022–present) offers a more limited training, including only two seminars: *Teaching Culture and Intercultural Communication* and *World Englishes and ELF*. The English Instructor MA program offers a single course on teaching culture and intercultural communication, while the part-time MA programs offer either no specific training in these areas or only one course on teaching culture and intercultural communication.

English pre-service teachers' attitude toward and experience of teaching culture in the language classroom

Table 3 shows students' educational experience with teaching culture in the language classroom. Students were allowed to choose more options in line with their experience. Not surprisingly, roughly half of the students (55%) reported no such experience, while every fourth student (26%) indicated completing a seminar course, and about one in five students (18%) mentioned attending a lecture course on the topic. Extramural activities were reported by 18 students (12%). Altogether, 15 students (9.8%) reported more than one training experience, most of which (14) included a lecture and seminar course on the topic.

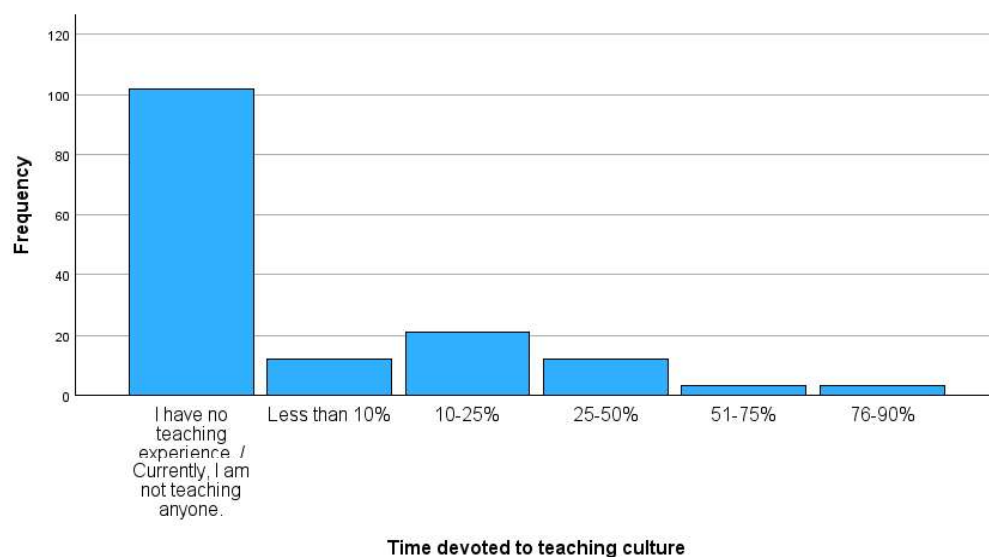
Table 3. Pre-service English Teachers' Educational Experience in Teaching Culture

Type of experience	<i>n</i>	%
No experience	84	55
Attending a university seminar	40	26
Attending a university lecture	28	18
Watching a couple of videos and/or doing some research on the topic	15	10
Attending a course outside the university (e.g., an online course, professional training, etc.)	3	2

Source: Author's own data

Figure 5 shows how much time the participants reported devoting to teaching culture in their teaching practice. Apart from students with no teaching experience ($n=102$, 66.7%), the majority ($n=21$, 13.7%) reported devoting 10-25% of teaching time to teaching culture, followed by less than 10% and 25-50% each ($n=12$, 7.8%). A total of six students (4%) indicated dedicating more than 50% of lesson time to teaching culture.

Figure 5. Reported Time Devoted to Teaching Culture



Source: Author's own data

Next, students were asked to explain the kind of cultural topics they would teach or had taught before in the English classroom (Table 4). The majority (n=109) reported not teaching any cultural topic due to a lack of teaching experience. The remaining students, however, reported a desire to teach high culture (n=62), popular culture (n=15), lifestyle (n=27), communication (n=9), cultural differences (n=7), and social issues (n=19). Only one student (0.7%) noted an exclusive focus on textbook-based cultural topics. Teaching cultural traditions, literature, and history were the most frequently cited topics within high culture. Popular culture mostly included movies, TV shows, music, dances, and fashion. Culture as a way of life was addressed in terms of food and cuisine, followed by daily and family life. Teaching greetings, social etiquette, language use, local vernaculars, and slang constituted aspects of communication that respondents would teach in the classroom. Teaching cultural diversity was mentioned by seven students in total. Various societal issues reported included religion, education, sports, and global challenges.

Table 4. The Respondents' Cultural Topic Ideas to Teach

Topics		Frequency
High culture	Holidays, traditions	30
	Literature	11
	History	11
	Famous sites	5
	Arts	4
	Traditional wedding	1
Pop culture	Movies, music, TV shows, dances	9
	Fashion	5
	Media, entertainment	1
Way of life	Food, cuisine	18
	Daily and family life	9
Communication	Greetings, language use, etiquette	9
Cultural differences	In general	5
	Cultural perspectives	2
Society	Social issues	4
	Religion	3
	Education	3
	Sports	3
	Global and environmental challenges	2
	Career and work	1
	Health	1
	Politics	1
	Technology	1
Textbook	Textbook-based cultural topics	1

Source: Author's own data

Some students provided a list of specific cultural and intercultural topics to teach.

High culture, low culture; culture shock; culture embedded in language; migration; nonverbal stuff; language as a barrier; acculturation.

History, idioms, slang, food and traditional dishes, traditions, festivals and holidays, customs, manners, media and entertainment

If I were teaching currently, I would teach: habits of English people, English arts (e.g., music), English cuisine, national costumes, cultural history of English-speaking countries, and teaching different accents and dialects.

Two students noted culturally sensitive topics such as “racism”, “minorities”, and “slavery”.

Specific holidays described by respondents usually included traditions celebrated in English-speaking countries, such as “Halloween” (n=3), “Thanksgiving” (n=3), “Christmas” (n=1), and “St. Patrick’s Day” (n=1), as well as landmarks such as “London” and New York (n=1). Teaching the cultures of the UK and the USA was mentioned by three students, while teaching the cultures of other countries in English was explicitly described by two students.

Target language culture: British and American holidays and traditions (Christmas, Halloween, Thanksgiving); daily life and school systems in English-speaking countries; famous landmarks and cities (London, New York, etc.).

Cultures around the world, cultural festivals around the world.

One student, however, found the cultural topics incorporated in English textbooks sufficient:

I've dealt with several types of textbooks, so each book probably covers 2-3 cultural topics.

Most cultural topics listed by the respondents did not specify whose culture they were going to teach, or whether they considered the lingua franca and intercultural nature of English today. Specific examples, however, included both English-speaking and non-English-speaking cultures.

Teaching methods and classroom techniques to teach culture

Students were asked to elaborate on their favored methods of teaching culture. Apart from 112 mentions of no teaching experience, Table 5 shows the teaching methods and techniques pre-service English teachers envisioned for teaching culture in the language classroom.

Table 5 Methods and Techniques to Teach Culture

Methods	Techniques	Frequency
Audio-visual stimuli N=46	Videos, films	27
	Song, music	6
	Pictures	4
	Listening tasks	4
	Presentations	4
	Documentaries	1
Communication N=25	Roleplays	8
	Discussions	7
	Interactive tasks	6
	Storytelling	2
	Showing dialects, new languages	2
Reading and writing N=15	Reading texts, stories, books	10
	Writing	2
	Vocabulary development	2
	Completing handouts	1
Gamification N=11	Online games	5
	Online quizzes	5
	Websites and apps	1
Experiential learning N=7	Trying traditional food and snacks	3
	Dressing in traditional outfits	1
	Demonstrations using objects	1
	Sharing personal experiences	1
	Understanding cultural perspectives	1
Specific topics N=2	Cross-country comparisons	1
	Wedding ceremonies	1
Classroom management N=6	Group and project work	4
	Independent study	2
Official documents N=2	Textbook-based cultural topics	1
	Curriculum-based cultural topics	1
Teaching methods N=2	Content and Language Integrated Learning	1
	Drama-based teaching and learning	1

Source: Author's own data

The most frequently cited classroom techniques indicate that cultural input was prioritized via audiovisual stimuli. Teaching language and cultural content indicated the use of CLIL; however, this teaching method was specified by a single student. Focusing on meaningful communication was the second most frequently reported technique, although it was not associated with communicative language teaching as a method. The most popular technique within this category was role play; however, only one student linked this activity to drama-based teaching (DBT). Reading and writing activities, along with gamification techniques, were moderately frequent in the responses. Experiential

learning, providing hands-on experiences with cultural products and practices, was the least frequently cited teaching approach. Trying traditional food and snacks was the most popular experiential learning technique. Two students mentioned specific cultural topics, and six students specified classroom management forms. Group work was mentioned most frequently, and independent study was linked to student research and student presentations. Two students highlighted compliance with official documents, including the textbook used and the curriculum.

Some students described complex, multimodal, and experiential learning experiences.

If I were teaching currently, I would teach in these ways: preparing national dishes or just tasting them if there is no opportunity to cook; getting dressed in national costumes; explaining habits of English people then to act out that habit in a role-play; to get a song played connected to English culture; showing pictures, tools etc. connected to cultural history; to speak in different dialects and practice it with the students.

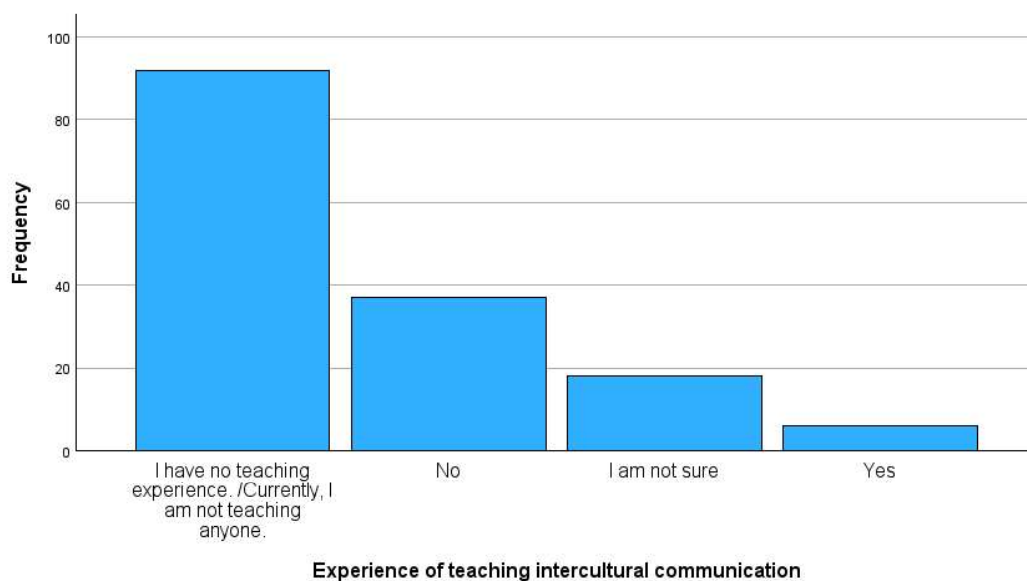
Students can share dishes from their cultures and use multicultural media such as books and videos. Hands-on activities, storytelling, and community involvement also help students engage with diverse cultural perspectives.

In summary, responses indicate either a lack of experience or a complex set of creative ideas for teaching culture, most probably reflecting their exposure to university courses on the topic.

Attitudes toward and experience of teaching intercultural communication

Figure 6 shows the proportion of students with experience teaching intercultural communication. Apart from 92 students (60%) lacking teaching experience, the majority (n=37, 24%) reported not teaching ICC, 18 students (12%) were unsure whether their teaching addressed ICC, and only 6 students (4%) confirmed their ICC teaching experience. Of the 61 students with teaching experience, only 10% reported ICC teaching experience.

Figure 6. Participants' Experience with Intercultural Communication



Source: Author's own data

Since it was expected that students would show limited experience teaching ICC, they were asked why they had not taught or would not teach it in the future. Of the 153 respondents, 135 (88%) reported no such experience, mostly because they were students in training. Three students reported experience teaching ICC, and two expressed their desire to teach it in the future.

During this semester, we are learning a lot about the topic, so I would like to include this field more and in a better way in the future.

The remaining students specified the reasons for not teaching ICC. One student reported not knowing how to teach ICC, and one did not know the meaning of the term. Two respondents complained about their students' low English proficiency levels, and one proposed that young learners were too young to be taught ICC.

They [Students] are not on that proficiency level to be able to [learn about it] yet.

Some of my students are pretty young or struggle with the basics of the language; I want them to enjoy learning it before I teach them such things.

Two students complained about the lack of time to teach ICC. One of them taught English to groups in a language school, and the other taught IT in English in a local secondary school.

These groups wanted to go abroad quickly, and I had 3 months to teach them the language. We do not have time for that [teaching ICC].

I teach English in relation to IT for a year for each class and must mainly focus on what is relevant to them (vocabulary of IT terms, basic grammar structures, formal letters, CVs, cover letters), so there is hardly any space left for creativity.

One student highlighted that ICC “is not part of the curriculum”. Another argued that they did not address ICC because they did not “teach in school”. Finally, two respondents expressed reluctance and felt unprepared to teach ICC.

It is not in my focus, nor is it my field of expertise.

I'm not a teacher yet, and even if I were, I don't think I'd qualify.

Although only a few students expressed their views explicitly, the student statements underscore the diversity of reasons for not including ICC in their teaching practice. While only two students expressed willingness to incorporate ICC in their future teaching practice, ten respondents showed reluctance for different reasons.

Teaching methods and classroom techniques to teach ICC

Table 6 shows the classroom techniques and cultural topics reported by the participants.

Table 6. Classroom Techniques and Topics to Teach ICC

Topics		Frequency
Techniques	Roleplays	5
	Discussions	4
	Watching videos	2
	Experiential learning	1
	Reading articles	1
	Authentic tasks	1
	Multimedia use	1
Topics	Politeness	5
	Sharing student experiences	3
	Cultural perspectives	3
	Cultural practices	2
	Body language and gestures	2
	Cross-country comparisons	2
	Hofstede's cultural dimensions	1
	Moran's 5 cultural dimensions	1
	Amy Cuddy's TED talk on body language	1
	Communication styles	1
	Greetings	1
	Humor	1

Source: Author's own data

The most frequently cited classroom techniques included roleplays and discussions, linked to drama-based and communicative language teaching. Experiential learning referred to “sharing cultural foods through potlucks,” and authentic tasks were equated with “real-life scenarios”. Concerning cultural topics, specific examples of teaching culturally appropriate politeness included a distinction between the usage of the words “British” and “English”, the inclusion of “please in most requests”, and “talking about

culturally sensitive, potentially racist, and generally problematic words and expressions". In conclusion, the specific examples reported by the 10 students with ICC teaching experience indicate their familiarity with the topic, probably resulting from their university courses.

Discussion

The findings provide valuable insights into pre-service English teachers' preparedness to teach culture and ICC at UP. Given that approximately three-quarters of the participants had no teaching experience at the time of data collection, the results largely reflect beliefs and intentions rather than established classroom practices. This finding is unsurprising, as most participants were still enrolled in teacher education programs (and many within the first two years) and therefore had limited exposure to extensive teaching practice. Nevertheless, their responses offer important indications of how future English teachers conceptualize culture and ICC and how university education may shape these perceptions.

Most participants were preparing to teach both elementary and secondary school learners; however, secondary education emerged as the preferred teaching context and the one in which students most frequently had teaching experience. This preference may partly explain the relatively strong emphasis on cultural content, as English language teaching at the secondary level often incorporates cultural topics alongside language development. The participants' educational preparation for teaching culture primarily originated from university lectures and seminars, suggesting that teacher education programs play a central role in shaping their understanding of culture and interculturality. However, the fact that intercultural (communicative) competence (Byram, 2008; Deardorff, 2006) development is not incorporated directly into any of the current curricula may explain pre-service English teachers' reluctance to teach ICC. The only course that is systematically included in all but one program is a seminar course on teaching culture and ICC.

Regarding the amount of lesson time devoted to culture, most participants would allocate between 10% and 25% of instructional time to cultural topics. This finding aligns with previous research (Elizondo-Gonzales, 2018) that culture is generally viewed as an important but supplementary component of language teaching rather than a central organizing principle of instruction. While pre-service English teachers complete a course called *Task-based Approaches to Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL)*, the integration of CLIL into teaching language and culture does not emerge in the responses. Considerable variation in responses also indicates a lack of consensus regarding the role of culture in English language teaching. Such differences may reflect broader tensions within the field between viewing language primarily as a linguistic system (Medgyes, 2017) and viewing language learning as a way of cultural learning and a process of intercultural engagement (Byram, 1997, 2008).

The cultural topics identified by participants reveal a strong preference for teaching cultural products and practices, such as holidays, traditions, literature, food, music, films, daily life, and communication etiquette. These findings align closely with Moran's (2001) model of culture, which distinguishes among cultural products, practices, perspectives,

communities, and persons. Participants demonstrated considerable awareness of products and practices, while cultural perspectives, describing underlying values, beliefs, assumptions, and worldviews that shape observable behavior, received very limited attention. Only a small number of respondents explicitly mentioned teaching values, attitudes, beliefs, or cultural viewpoints. Consequently, culture was frequently approached at the more visible levels of the cultural iceberg, whereas the less visible dimensions of culture remained largely unexplored.

A similar pattern emerges when considering the distinction between high culture (Arnold, 1867/2009) and culture as a way of life (Williams, 1958). High culture, including literature, history, arts, and famous landmarks, was among the most frequently cited cultural domains. This finding is understandable given that English teacher education programs traditionally include substantial coursework in British and American literature, history, and civilization. Exposure to these disciplines likely influences pre-service teachers' perceptions of what constitutes legitimate cultural knowledge. At the same time, many respondents also referred to food, daily life, family practices, and popular culture, reflecting a broader anthropological understanding of culture as a way of life. Although this represents a more contemporary view of culture, the prominence of high culture suggests that traditional perspectives continue to exert considerable influence on future teachers' conceptualizations of culture.

The findings also raise important questions regarding whose culture should be taught in contemporary English language classrooms. Most responses failed to specify this dimension of teaching culture. Of the few participants addressing this issue, three referred explicitly to British and American cultural traditions, landmarks, and holidays, reflecting a traditional target-culture orientation in English language teaching, and only two respondents mentioned teaching cultures beyond the English-speaking world. This finding appears somewhat inconsistent with contemporary perspectives on ELF and English as an intercultural language, which view English not as the property of native speakers (Dewey & Leung, 2010) but as an international language used among people from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds (Jenkins, 2009). From an ELF perspective, cultural learning should go beyond British and American cultures to include the diverse cultures of English users worldwide (Jenkins, 2014). The limited attention given to non-English-speaking cultures, therefore, suggests that many participants may still hold relatively traditional views of the relationship between language and culture.

The methodological findings reveal that audio-visual materials constituted the most frequently reported approach to teaching culture. Videos, films, music, pictures, and presentations offer learners rich opportunities to observe cultural products and practices in authentic contexts and are commonly recommended in language pedagogy. This finding suggests a preference for auditory and visual teaching/learning styles (Fleming & Mills, 1992). Communicative techniques such as roleplays and discussions formed the second most frequently cited category, reflecting the influence of communicative language teaching (Richards & Rodgers, 2014) embedded in the sociocultural model of language learning (Vygotsky, 1978). These activities should allow students to move beyond factual cultural knowledge toward interaction and meaning-making.

Nevertheless, relatively few participants explicitly connected these activities to the development of intercultural competence (Deardorff, 2006), critical or in-depth cultural awareness (Moran, 2001), or inclusive education (Lin & Chung, 2024).

Interestingly, experiential learning (Kolb, 1984) and gamification (Kapp, 2012) occupied a middle position among the reported teaching methods. Activities such as tasting traditional food, sharing personal experiences, or engaging with cultural artefacts have the potential to facilitate deeper cultural engagement by connecting learners emotionally and personally to cultural content and letting students voice their identities. Such identity-aware and learner-centered pedagogies have been proven to facilitate active engagement, motivation, and learning in the language classroom (Fekete, 2022). Their relatively limited presence in the responses may reflect the participants' lack of teaching experience rather than a lack of appreciation for experiential approaches. The examples provided by some respondents suggest considerable creativity and a willingness to incorporate multimodal (García-Barroso & Fonseca-Mora, 2023) and experiential learning (Kolb, 1984) opportunities into future teaching practice.

The results concerning intercultural communication reveal an even greater gap both in theoretical preparation and classroom implementation. The current curricula lack systematic theoretical or practical training in intercultural communication or intercultural competence development. Such training may be incorporated in other theoretical or methodological courses to some extent, probably depending on the teachers' specific pedagogical goals and requirements. Although culture was frequently mentioned as a part of English language teaching, very few participants reported actual experience teaching ICC. This finding aligns with previous research (Sercu et al., 2005), suggesting that teachers often feel more confident teaching cultural facts than facilitating intercultural learning. Culture may be perceived as a body of knowledge that can be transmitted, whereas ICC requires the development of attitudes, skills, critical reflection, and behaviors, which many teachers find more challenging to teach and assess.

Several participants reported uncertainty regarding the meaning of ICC or how it should be taught. Others perceived language proficiency, student age, curriculum requirements, or time constraints as barriers to implementation. These responses suggest that ICC may still be viewed as an optional addition rather than an integral component of language education. Such perceptions contrast with influential models of intercultural communicative competence, including those proposed by Byram (1997), which emphasize that language and intercultural competence are inseparable. From this perspective, language learning should not merely prepare learners to communicate accurately but also to interact effectively and appropriately with people from different cultural backgrounds (Deardorff, 2006).

The classroom activities reported by the small number of participants with ICC teaching experience indicate a more sophisticated understanding of intercultural learning. Roleplays, discussions, comparisons across cultures, analyses of cultural perspectives, and explorations of politeness conventions all correspond to key components of intercultural competence (Deardorff, 2006). Notably, some participants referred to Moran's cultural dimensions and Hofstede's framework, suggesting that

university courses have provided conceptual tools for teaching cultural differences. Furthermore, activities focusing on body language, communication styles, humor, and culturally appropriate language use move beyond teaching cultural facts toward developing intercultural awareness and interactional competence.

Conclusion and pedagogical implications

The findings of the document analysis suggest a gradual reduction in coursework dedicated to new developments in English language teaching across newer and shorter program formats, with explicit instruction in intercultural communication and World Englishes/ELF becoming less consistently available to pre-service English teachers.

The results of the questionnaire indicate that pre-service English teachers show emerging awareness of the importance of culture and intercultural communication, yet their understanding remains more developed in relation to culture than to ICC. Their conceptualizations of culture are strongly influenced by cultural products, practices, and high-cultural content, while deeper cultural perspectives and intercultural processes receive less attention. The results also indicate that traditional target-culture orientations continue to coexist with more contemporary understandings of culture as a way of life.

Given the omniscient role of English across the world, teacher education programs would benefit from placing greater emphasis on ELF, intercultural communicative competence, and the exploration of diverse global cultures. Such training could help future teachers move beyond transmitting cultural information toward facilitating meaningful intercultural learning experiences that prepare students for communication in culturally diverse contexts, as well as fostering inclusive educational practices.

Limitations and further directions

A major strength of the research is the use of mixed methods, including textual and statistical data, complemented by document analysis. However, self-reports may not be fully reliable; therefore, future research could include classroom observations or behavioral data collected from pre-service and in-service language teachers alike. In addition, interviews with diverse groups could shed more light on pre-service and in-service teachers' attitudes toward and experiences of teaching culture and ICC.

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Appendix

Appendix A

Degree program curricula analyzed in the research

Available at: <https://btk.pte.hu/hu/hallgatoinknak/tantervkereso>

Retrieved for this research on June 12, 2026.

- Curriculum of the current undivided teacher education MA program: [osztatlan angol nyelv és kultúra tanára ANGKONO222301.pdf](#)
- Curriculum of the previous undivided teacher education MA program: [osztatlan angol nyelv és kultúra tanára ANGKONO171801 1.pdf](#)
- Curriculum of the international English instructor MA program: [Angol nyelvoktató MT-ANYOTANMA232401.pdf](#)
- Curriculum of short cycle English teacher training MA program 1: [tanár - angol nyelv és kultúra tanára MT-OT-L-ANG60.SZE-242501.pdf](#)
- Curriculum of short cycle English teacher training MA program 2: [angol nyelv és kultúra tanára \(3 félév\) MT-OT-L-ANG90.UT-252601.pdf](#)
- Curriculum of short cycle English teacher training MA program 3: [tanár - angol nyelv és kultúra tanára MT-OT-L-ANG60.M-232401.pdf](#)

Appendix B

Questionnaire items included in the research

4. How old are you? (Open-ended question)
5. What is your gender? (Multiple-choice question)
6. Are you from Hungary? (Yes/no question)
7. Which country are you from if you are not from Hungary? (Open-ended question)
8. Describe your English proficiency level. Indicate your most recent achievement or your current proficiency level by choosing one option from the list below. (Multiple-choice question)
9. Are you an English teacher trainee? (Yes/no question)
10. Which degree program are you enrolled in? (Multiple-choice question)
11. Which year are you in at university? (Multiple-choice question)
12. As a teacher trainee, what is your teaching specialization? (Multiple-choice question)
13. How many years of teaching experience do you have? (Multiple-choice question)
14. What kind of teaching experience do you have? (Multiple-choice question)

15. What kind of students are you currently teaching or have you taught most recently?
(Multiple-choice question)
16. As a language teacher trainee, have you ever attended a course on how to teach culture in the language classroom? You may choose more options. (Multiple-choice question)
17. What kind of cultural topics do you teach in your English lessons/classes? List as many as you can think of. (Open-ended question)
18. How do you usually teach culture (e.g., the cultural topics you mentioned above)?
What kind of activities do you do? (Open-ended question)
19. How much time do you devote to teaching culture in your English lessons? (Multiple-choice question)
20. Have you ever taught intercultural communication in your English lessons/classes?
(Multiple-choice question)
21. How did you teach intercultural communication in your English lessons/classes?
What topics did you teach? What kind of activities did you do? (Open-ended question)
22. If you have never taught intercultural communication, please explain why. (Open-ended question)