

**An Investigation into the Development of Intercultural Competence in TEFL: A Study
of Master's Students' Perspectives**

Altynay Ibrayeva

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Education and Humanities

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in Teaching English as a Foreign Language

SDU University

Department of Language Teacher Education

June, 2025

Thesis Advisor:

PhD., assistant professor

Aidos Myrzabek

SDU University
Faculty of Education and Humanities
Department of Language Teacher Education

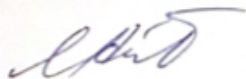
This is to certify that the Master's Thesis of

Altynay Ibrayeva

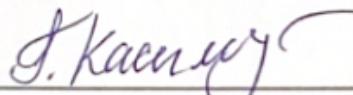
has met the thesis requirements of
SDU University

Kaskelen, 2025

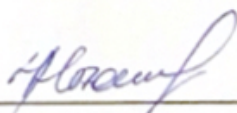
Approved by:




PhD., assistant professor
Aidos Myrzabek
Professor, Thesis supervisor



Phd., Doctor Gulzhaina
KASSYMOVA
Committee Chair



PhD., assistant professor
Akmarzhan NOGAIBAYEVA
Department Chair



PhD., associate professor Zhainagh DUISZBEKOVA
Dean, Faculty of Education and Humanities



AUTHOR AGREEMENT

The Author, I, Altynay Ibrayeva, hereby grant SDU University full and exclusive rights to reproduce the manuscript, make revisions, and reproduction. SDU rights include but are not limited to the following: (1) to reproduce, publish, sell, and distribute copies of the thesis, selections of the thesis, and translations and other derivative works based upon the thesis, in print, audio-visual, electronic, or by any and all media now or hereafter known or devised; (2) to license reprints of the thesis to third persons for educational photocopying; (3) to license others to create abstracts of the thesis and to index the thesis; (4) to license secondary publishers to reproduce the thesis in print or digital form, including electronic on-line databases; and (5) to license the thesis for document delivery. These exclusive rights run the full term of the copyright, and all renewals and extensions thereof.

I hereby accept the terms of the above Author Agreement and I sign.



19.06.2025

DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that this submission is entirely my own work, in my own words, and that all sources used in researching it are fully acknowledged and all quotations properly identified to my best extent. It has not been submitted, in whole or in part, by me or another person, for the purpose of obtaining any other credit, except where due acknowledgement is made in the thesis. I understand the ethical implications of my research, and this work meets the requirements of the Faculty of Education and Humanities Research Ethics Policy.

Ibrayeva Altynay



19.06.2025

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

I would want to sincerely thank my supervisor, Aidos Myrzabek, for his great direction, encouragement, and support over the whole research process. Their intellectual knowledge and helpful criticism really helped this dissertation to be successfully completed.

I would also want to thank the study participants, master's students, whose willingness to share their knowledge and experiences made this study possible. Investigation of intercultural competency development inside TEFL programs in Kazakhstan was based only on their participation.

During the research for my master's degree, my family and friends were supportive and encouraging. Particularly, their belief in me gave me the strength and drive I needed.

Finally, I would want to thank all the teachers and researchers whose work set the stage for mine. This dissertation reflects many voices, and I am grateful to add, in a modest manner, to the continuous conversation on intercultural competency in English language education.

Table of Contents

Abstract.....	1
Аңдатпа	2
Аннотация.....	3
CHAPTER 1 Introduction	4
1.1 Background of the Study	4
1.2 Problem statement.....	6
1.3 Aim and Objectives of the Study	7
1.4 Research Questions of the study	7
1.5 Significance of the Study	8
1.6 The Novelty of the Research.....	8
1.7 Thesis Outline	9
CHAPTER 2 Literature Review	11
2.1 Theoretical Framework of Intercultural Competence	11
2.1.1 Definition of Intercultural Competence	11
2.1.2 Models of Intercultural Competence	13
2.1.3 Core Principles of Intercultural Competence.....	15
2.2 Intercultural Competence in TEFL Context	17
2.2.1 Importance of Intercultural Competence in TEFL.....	17
2.2.2 Pedagogical Approaches to Intercultural Competence Development in TEFL.....	18
2.2.3 Challenges in Intercultural Competence Development in TEFL.....	20
2.3. Intercultural Competence in Kazakhstani TEFL Context.....	22

2.3.1 Intercultural Competence in Kazakhstani TEFL Programs	22
2.3.2 Challenges in Intercultural Competence Development in Kazakhstan.....	24
CHAPTER 3 Methodology	26
3.1 Research Design.....	26
3.1.1 Participants.....	26
3.1.2 Sampling	27
3.2 Data collection	27
3.2.1 Data collection tools	27
3.2.2 Data collection procedures.....	28
3.3 Data analysis	28
3.4 Ethical considerations	29
CHAPTER 4 Findings	31
4.1 Intercultural Competence Awareness	31
4.1.1 Perception of IC	31
4.1.2 Sources of Exposure	32
4.1.3 IC in English Language Teaching.....	33
4.2 Integration of IC in master's program	34
4.2.1 Curriculum gaps.....	35
4.2.2 Teacher's role in IC development.....	36
4.3 Challenges in IC development.....	37
4.3.1 Lack of academic training.....	37
4.3.2 Institutional limitations	38
4.3.3 Cultural barriers in teaching.....	39

4.4 Improvement suggestions	40
4.4.1 Curriculum change.....	40
4.4.2 Educator support	41
CHAPTER 5 Discussion	43
5.1 RQ1: How master’s degree students understand intercultural competence and perceive the development of it in the TEFL program?.....	43
5.2 RQ2: What are the main challenges students face in the process of IC development and application?.....	44
5.3 RQ3: What recommendations do master’s students suggest for the improvement of TEFL in Kazakhstan?	45
CHAPTER 6 Conclusion	47
6.1 Limitations and Contributions of the Study.....	48
References.....	50
Appendix A.....	55
Appendix B.....	56
Appendix C	57

An Investigation into the Development of Intercultural Competence in TEFL: A Study of Master's Students' Perspectives

Abstract

The current study aims to investigate the perspective of master's students on the development of intercultural competence (IC) in the Kazakhstani teaching English as a foreign language (TEFL) and to identify key challenges they face in practical application. The study involved ten working master's students enrolled in TEFL programs at two Kazakhstani institutions through purposive sampling. Semi-structured interviews were used in a qualitative research design to acquire detailed information about the experiences and reflections of the participants. The research questions were addressed through thematic analysis of the data. The findings reveal the theoretical intercultural competence awareness of students, yet there is a lack of structured and practical inclusion of intercultural aspects in their academic curriculum. Participants reported that little experiential learning and intercultural engagement are incorporated into core teaching modules, and that intercultural competence development is frequently restricted to quick discussions in elective courses. The insufficient academic training, strict curriculum, and lack of support from the institution emerged as key barriers to intercultural competence integration in teaching. The students suggested the incorporation of practical tasks and intercultural competence integration mechanisms in the TEFL courses. This study contributes to the growing body of literature on IC development in the Kazakhstani TEFL context.

Key words: intercultural competence (IC), teaching English as a foreign language (TEFL), Kazakhstan, pre-service EFL teachers, teacher education.

Ағылшын тілін шет тілі ретінде оқытудағы (TEFL) мәдениетаралық құзыреттілікті дамыту: магистранттардың көзқарастарын зерттеу

Аңдатпа

Ағымдағы зерттеу ағылшын тілін шет тілі (TEFL) ретінде оқытудағы мәдениетаралық құзыреттік дамуына магистранттардың көзқарастарын зерттеуге және олардың практикалық қолдануда кездесетін негізгі қиындықтарын анықтауға бағытталған. Зерттеуге мақсатты іріктеу арқылы екі қазақстандық оқу орнында шет тілі бағдарламасы бойынша оқитын және оқытушы ретінде жұмыс істейтін он магистрант қатысты. Қатысушылардың тәжірибесі мен көзқарасы туралы толық ақпарат алу үшін сапалы зерттеу жобасында жартылай құрылымдық сұхбаттар қолданылды. Зерттеу сұрақтары мәліметтерді тақырыптық талдау арқылы талданды. Нәтижелер студенттердің мәдениетаралық құзыреттіліктен хабардарлығын көрсетеді, бірақ олардың академиялық оқу жоспарында мәдениетаралық аспектілердің құрылымдық және практикалық түрде қамтылмауы жеткіліксіз. Қатысушылар негізгі оқыту модульдеріне тәжірибелік оқыту мен мәдениетаралық араласудың аз қамтылғанын және мәдениетаралық құзыреттілікті дамыту көбінесе элективті курстардағы жылдам талқылаулармен шектелетінін хабарлады. Жеткіліксіз академиялық дайындық, қатаң оқу жоспары және оқу орнының қолдауының болмауы оқытудағы мәдениетаралық құзыреттілік интеграциясының негізгі кедергілері. Студенттер TEFL курстарына тәжірибелік тапсырмалар мен мәдениетаралық құзыреттілік интеграциясының механизмдерін енгізуді ұсынды. Бұл зерттеу қазақстандық TEFL контекстінде мәдениетаралық құзыреттілікті дамыту бойынша әдебиеттердің көбеюіне ықпал етеді.

Түйін сөздер: мәдениетаралық құзыреттілік (IC), ағылшын тілін шет тілі ретінде оқыту (TEFL), Қазақстан, EFL даярлық мұғалімдері, мұғалімдердің білімі.

Исследование развития межкультурной компетенции в преподавании английского как иностранного языка (TEFL): изучение взглядов магистрантов

Аннотация

Цель данного исследования - изучить точку зрения студентов магистратуры на развитие межкультурной компетенции (МК) в казахстанском преподавании английского языка как иностранного (TEFL) и выявить основные проблемы в практическом применении. В исследовании приняли участие десять работающих магистрантов, обучающихся по программам TEFL в двух казахстанских учебных заведениях, с помощью целенаправленной выборки. Для получения подробной информации об опыте и размышлениях участников использовались полуструктурированные интервью в рамках качественного исследования.

Тематический анализ был использован при анализе полученных данных. Результаты исследования свидетельствуют о теоретической осведомленности студентов в области межкультурной компетенции, но при этом отмечается недостаточное структурированное и практическое включение межкультурных аспектов в учебную программу. Участники сообщили, что в основные учебные модули включено мало практического обучения и межкультурного взаимодействия, а развитие межкультурной компетенции часто ограничивается беглыми обсуждениями на факультативных курсах. Недостаточная академическая подготовка, строгий учебный план и отсутствие поддержки со стороны учебного заведения стали основными препятствиями на пути интеграции межкультурной компетенции в преподавание. Студенты предложили включить практические задания и механизмы интеграции межкультурной компетенции в курсы TEFL. Данное исследование вносит вклад в растущий объем литературы по развитию МК в казахстанском контексте TEFL.

Ключевые слова: межкультурная компетенция (МК), преподавание английского языка как иностранного (TEFL), Казахстан, дослужебные преподаватели EFL, педагогическое образование.

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

1.1 Background of the Study

The globalization of the education field requires readiness and intercultural skills in cross-cultural communication in diverse settings. The ability to effectively communicate with respect in an intercultural context is an essential interpersonal skill for professional success in every field of modern professions. Intercultural competence generally is the ability to construct effective communication, based on a cultural knowledge and skills of person (Deardorff, 2006). The intercultural capacity specifically plays an important role in the foreign language learning and teaching field, as it assists learners in the use of the targeted language. The field of teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) is changing from basic grammar and vocabulary teaching to incorporating cultural skills, too.

As English nowadays becomes a worldwide lingua franca, teachers of the language are required to prepare students for intercultural communication in a range of diverse settings, in addition to teaching basic grammar and vocabulary. As a result, the development of IC is becoming increasingly important in the training of language teacher courses worldwide. However, whether this competency is integrated within the curriculum, as well as the extent to which future educators intentionally develop and internalize it, remains a source of research and pedagogical interest.

To define intercultural competence, numerous theoretical models and frameworks have been proposed by worldwide scholars over forty years (Bennett, 1986; Byram, 1997; Deardorff, 2006; Fantini, 2007). These frameworks provide crucial insights into the comprehension, instruction, and evaluation of IC in classrooms. They highlight the cognitive, affective, and behavioral elements necessary for effective intercultural relationships.

Primarily, characteristics as self-awareness, openness, empathy, flexibility, and skills in managing conflicts in communication (Deardorff, 2006; Fantini, 2009).

However, implementing these models in practice, particularly in non-Western cultures, has significant issues. In many situations, language teacher education courses neglect to teach IC in educational programs, additionally, there is a limitation of suitable resources and insufficient support from the institute. There is a great amount of research in the investigation of intercultural awareness of learners and assessment of IC, yet there is a lack of investigation of postgraduate students' perception and challenges they face teaching in diverse settings, particularly in Central Asian countries such as Kazakhstan.

As a multilingual country with a broad variety of nations, Kazakhstan has implemented major educational reforms to develop its higher education system towards international standards. The government emphasizes the importance of encouraging multilingualism and establishing international relationships. In this setting, English teachers are becoming more required to prepare learners not solely for academic achievement, but also for active involvement in an interconnected, multicultural society. In the last ten years, the interest in IC has increased significantly, as a result, there are numerous significant studies in the Kazakhstani TEFL field (Smakova & Paulsrud, 2020; Kassymova et al., 2025). However, there is still a gap in the investigation of English major master's degree learners' IC development.

Master's program in TEFL plays an important role in the ongoing professional growth for teachers of English in Kazakhstan. These courses attempt to improve skills in instructional, scientific, critical thinking, and intercultural competency. However, it remains uncertain how IC is achieved and implemented in practice. The gap has significance due to student perceptions could offer useful information about the benefits and drawbacks of the present educational systems. Analyzing master students' awareness of IC, their teaching

experiences, and the problems they face can assist in enhancing the design and implementation of teacher education programs.

The purpose of this study is to fill these gaps through investigating Kazakhstani TEFL master's degree students' perspectives on the development of IC in TEFL. The research intends to explore already teaching students' IC awareness, challenges they face, and their perception of cultural integration in their programs. The research also hopes to assist in expanding a deeper view on intercultural competence development in TEFL, in addition to supporting the enhancement of more culturally responsive and internationally informed TEFL programs in Kazakhstan.

1.2 Problem statement

Intercultural competence (IC) has emerged as an important concern in language instruction, particularly within English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teaching contexts. The current literature emphasizes the need for intercultural competency development in the TEFL field, primarily to prepare future educators for teaching in culturally varied classrooms. There are numerous studies focused on teaching strategies, IC assessment tools, teachers' perception, and implementation of intercultural competency in practice.

Despite the increased focus on IC in foreign language education, there is still a lack of empirical studies on intercultural competence teaching and its utilization in TEFL master's programs, particularly in Kazakhstan. The local researchers mainly focused on the IC assessment strategies and more on undergraduate students, leading to a lack of studies centered on the postgraduate students' perspective. Furthermore, there is uncertainty in IC awareness of future educators, the challenges they face during teaching in diverse settings, and their knowledge of intercultural competence implementation mechanisms in EFL classrooms. The lack of context-specific research on these problems leads to a gap in the current Kazakhstani TEFL context.

The gap is important for solving several specific challenges. Firstly, the efficiency of current master's degree TEFL programs is uncertain, and they do not have knowledge of IC integration. Secondly, the future English educators' lack of acquaintance with IC can lead to an inability to foster intercultural awareness among students, continuing the cycle of culturally unaware educators. Finally, without the students' perception, challenges, and needs exploration, the English major program's modification aligned with new global settings is impossible. Addressing the gap may assist in teacher education programs' enhancement, alongside with development of a culturally sensitive future generation of teachers in Kazakhstan.

1.3 Aim and Objectives of the Study

The research aims to explore how TEFL master's degree students perceive intercultural competence development in TEFL programs in the Kazakhstani institutions. It examines how students conceive intercultural competence (IC) and how IC is integrated into the TEFL educational program. This study looks at possible advantages, challenges of IC in practice, and practical implementations to improve the teaching English as a foreign language in Kazakhstan.

Research objectives of the current study are:

1. Explore how master's degree students understand and perceive intercultural competence.
2. Identify challenges students experience in the development and application of IC in practice.
3. Provide recommendations for enhancing IC in Kazakhstani TEFL programs.

1.4 Research Questions of the Study

The research questions aligning with the aim of the study are as follows:

1. How master's degree students understand intercultural competence and perceive the development of it in the TEFL program?
2. What are the main challenges students face in the process of IC development and application?
3. What recommendations do master's students suggest for the improvement of TEFL in Kazakhstan?

1.5 Significance of the Study

This study provides possible implications for the improvement of intercultural competence (IC) in TEFL teacher education in Kazakhstan. By exploring master's degree students' perception of the integration in the TEFL program, the study offers qualitative findings on the present state of IC development in the Kazakhstani context. It reveals how a lack of knowledge and limited curricular focus on IC can affect the growth of culturally sensitive English educators. The findings of the present research can also assist in the improvement of master's English teacher programs, emphasizing intercultural competence as an essential skill of educators. The insights on students' faced challenges can assist curriculum designers, educators, and Kazakhstani institutions to create more effective culturally sensitive programs for future English teachers. As a result, leading to the formation of culturally competent educators who are capable of working in multicultural environments. Lastly, the study provides evidence-based recommendations that can be valuable for teachers in helping students to foster intercultural competence. The research contributes to ongoing educational adjustments and promotion of intercultural educational settings.

1.6 The Novelty of the Research

The research's novelty lies in the investigation of intercultural competence integration in Kazakhstani TEFL master's degree programs, specifically from the perspective of postgraduate students. Although there are numerous works on intercultural competence in the

TEFL context, there is still a gap in postgraduate students' perception studies in Kazakhstan. This study addresses the gap in existing literature by providing evidence-based findings on IC integration in the curriculum, experiences, and challenges of the practical implementation of it by student-teachers. The findings provide authentic insights and useful recommendations for Kazakhstani educational institutions and policymakers, also contributing to intercultural competence awareness.

1.7 Thesis Outline

The current thesis consists of six chapters, involving Introduction, Literature review, Methodology, Findings, Discussion, and Conclusion, and at the end with a list of References and Appendices.

In the first chapter, Introduction, the background of the study, problem statement, aims, and objectives of research with research questions have been identified. Significance and novelty of the current research have also been discussed.

In the second chapter, the literature of the significant researchers' works has been reviewed. The conceptual framework of intercultural competence, including definition, main IC models, and core principles, was reviewed to get a clear understanding of IC. The intercultural development, key pedagogical approaches, and challenges in the TEFL field were identified. Also, this chapter provides an overview of existing literature in the Kazakhstani TEFL context, including the current state, challenges, and identifies a literature gap in existing literature.

In the third chapter, the Methodology part of the research is described to provide precise information on this process. The methodology chapter outlines the qualitative design of the research, with information on purposive sampling of participants. It also includes a description of data collection tools and data analysis methods, alongside ethical consideration acknowledgement.

Next, the fourth chapter is dedicated to the findings of the study, based on research questions. The results of the study are based on collected responses from interviews. The main key findings, including the intercultural knowledge of students, perception on the development of IC in TEFL, and challenges they encountered, are provided.

The Discussion part provides a critical analysis of the findings, considering research questions and objectives. Also, a reflection on the implications of the findings with recommendations for further research has been provided.

The last chapter, the conclusion, summarizes the whole research, highlighting key findings and linking them to the research aim. The limitations of this study and final reflections on IC importance are also discussed. Also, it provides applications for future studies in a similar field of research.

CHAPTER 2

Literature Review

The intercultural competence (IC) development remains one of the main aspects of consideration in the field of education. Especially, developing IC is crucial for learners of English and generally in the context of teaching English as a Foreign Language. This chapter provides an analysis of the theoretical foundations of intercultural competence, integration, and development in the TEFL context, as well as an identification of relevant studies in the Kazakhstani educational field.

2.1 Theoretical Framework of Intercultural Competence

2.1.1 Definition of Intercultural Competence. The definition of Intercultural Competence has appeared in the science in the middle of the 20th century and has evolved significantly over the years. Originally, the concept was used in the context of cross-cultural adaptation to describe effective ways to properly behave in working or studying in a foreign country (Spitzberg & Changnon, 2009). With increasing globalisation and a growing concern for education and communication, the concept evolved to include affective, cognitive, and reflective elements (Byram, 1997; Deardorff, 2006; Fantini, 2007). The focus has broadened to ethical communication and the development of intercultural sensitivity and awareness. Over time, the concept acquired a consistent value in diverse fields, including linguistics, pedagogy, psychology, sociology, and management.

A definition of intercultural competence has been provided by numerous scholars over the years. The famous definition was stated by Hammer et al. (2003), who described IC as "the ability to think and act in interculturally appropriate ways". Similarly, Byram (1997) provided a well-known definition stating IC as "the ability to communicate and interact across cultural boundaries". Later, Byram (2002) added to that definition changes, describing IC as "the ability to ensure a shared understanding by people of different social identities, and

the ability to interact with people as complex human beings with multiple identities and their individuality”. He considers intercultural competence (IC) to incorporate cultural knowledge, attitudes, awareness, and a set of skills. Similarly, Deardorff (2006) describes IC as “the ability to develop targeted knowledge, skills, and attitudes that lead to visible behavior and communication that are both effective and appropriate in intercultural interactions”.

Appropriateness refers to compliance with cultural norms and context, and effectiveness means achieving the intended communicative goals. Also, Spitzberg and Changnon (2009) highlighted that intercultural competence is context-dependent, varying across situations.

The key definitions provided by earlier scholars serve as a basis for the understanding of the concept of IC. Alongside, later works add that IC is not just a set of skills; it’s always evolving through experience and reflection, highlighting its dynamic nature (Barrett, 2012). Furthermore, the key elements of IC nowadays include empathy, flexibility, listening, and acceptance of ambiguity (Byram et al., 2014). Overall, the evolution of the definition of intercultural competence reveals a transition from simple behavioral adaptation to a more complex, integrative approach that includes knowledge, attitudes, critical thinking skills, ethics, and willingness to open dialogue. Alongside, after a review of various definitions, there is a need to explore the main IC models to get a better understanding of the concept.

2.1.2 Models of Intercultural Competence. Intercultural competence is frequently connected with intercultural communicative competence (ICC) in models by numerous scholars. This review is based on dividing these models by types of focus to get a more expanded review. The IC models are divided into five primary categories according to their characteristics: compositional, co-orientational, developmental, adaptive, and causal processes (Deardorff, 2006).

In *compositional models*, intercultural competency is viewed as a collection of components including: attitudes, knowledge, skills, awareness, and motivation. The models include lists of abilities, qualities, and attributes that are considered to be beneficial for a person to be proficient in cross-cultural communication. For example, we can consider the well-known Fantini (2007) model, where IC consists of four interconnected elements: attitudes, knowledge, skills, and awareness. Also, several components have been identified in earlier work on the ICC model (Howard-Hamilton et al., 1998). Similarly, Hunter et al. (2006) identified cultural differences to compete globally and concluded that a person must first comprehend their own culture before attempting to understand another. Such models have the benefit of being easily adaptable in educational practice, enabling the creation of instructional curricula and instruments for competency evaluation. Compositional models are particularly useful for identifying the fundamental components of intercultural competence phenomena (Deardorff, 2006). Nevertheless, these models' limitation is that they lack consistency in expressing an individual's level of competence and focus on the theoretical framework for determining ICC.

On the other hand, *Co-orientational models* highlight the significance of consistent conceptualizations and interpretations among individuals in cross-cultural interactions. The primary goal of these types of models is to construct the comprehension of intercultural contact and its different forms, such as simplicity, empathy, and validity (Nadeem et al., 2018). Numerous researchers investigated a person's identification within and among communities and created the affecting model, which draws many parallels with other co-orientational models (Byram, 1997; Byram et al., 2002). Fantini's (2007) attempts covered sketching a number of the components that are eventually included in the semantics procedure to achieve co-orientation. Generally, the main features of co-orientational models include: emphasis on empathy and active listening, importance of cultural reflexivity, and

aspiration to create a common field of communication. These models are very useful in the examination of discussions, cooperative operations, and mediation. However, the co-orientational and compositional models overlook the importance of time when assessing intercultural communication ability, whether through irregular interactions or continuous relationships.

Developmental IC models mainly focused on the gradual development of intercultural sensitivity. These models are divided into discrete segments that progress the competence following the stated expectations. The most popular developmental model was established by Bennett (1986). His Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS) considers six stages of cultural competency: Denial, Defense, Minimization, Acceptance, Adaptation, and Integration. Also, we can highlight the intercultural maturity model by King and Baxter Magolda (2005). Their model suggested that a person's intercultural maturity develops through three stages: initial, intermediate, and mature. Alongside, the U-curve model added the term intercultural shock in the intercultural developmental process. At the time, this model was regarded to be the most prevalent developmental paradigm (Deardorff, 2009).

Furthermore, *Adaptational models* aim to describe how a person adjusts to a new cultural setting. These models' feature is that they firstly focus on the several participants of communication, then model the process of collective adjustment to emphasize the interaction between communicators (Nadeem et al., 2018). Earlier work by Kim (2001) highlights the significance of a person's mindset development throughout diverse intercultural communication, describing the interrelation of stress, adaptation, and intercultural competence development (as cited in Nadeem et al., 2018).

Finally, *Causal process models* aim to determine the cause-and-effect connections that contribute to the development of intercultural competence. These models contain components such as: input variables (prior experience, training); processes (reflection,

communication, and observation); and output results (successful intercultural behavior). The pyramid model of intercultural competence by Deardorff (2006) is one of the main examples of causal process models. Her work reflects a logical sequence of development of the intercultural competency, consisting following sequence: requisite attitudes; knowledge; skills; internal outcome; external outcome (Deardorff, 2006). Spitzberg and Chagnon's (2009) model highlighted that contextual and personal variables can influence a person's motivation. This framework provides quantifiable interaction results, including effectiveness, appropriateness, and relational satisfaction.

In conclusion, despite their differing aims, the models have a rational and practical connection: from fundamental (compositional models) to the maturation of empathy (developmental models), and the capacity to recognize others (co-oriented models) to the ability to adapt and thrive to novel cultural scenarios (adaptive models), resulting in an expanding viewpoint on the process of competence development in causal models. Each type of model emphasizes a certain degree and component of intercultural competence development, leading to a creation of complete portrayal of the ICC development.

2.1.3 Core Principles of Intercultural Competence. Throughout the models proposed by scholars, several core principles and components are constantly found in every study. The four main components of the core of intercultural competence include: attitudes, skills, knowledge, and behaviors (Barrett, 2012). Firstly, attitudes include respect, openness, and a willingness to learn about other cultures (Byram, 1997; Deardorff, 2006). Also, it includes tolerance to ambiguity without any prejudice and value of differences (Fantini, 2009). Hammer et al. (2003), in their Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI), also emphasize the affective dimensions of intercultural sensitivity as indicators of intercultural effectiveness.

The second important component includes a range of qualities needed for intercultural competence. The skills include the ability to listen, to observe, to interpret, to analyze, to

evaluate, and to relate in cross-cultural communication (Deardorff, 2006; Deardorff, 2009). Also, linguistic, sociolinguistic, and discourse skills, multiperspectivity, and managing breakdowns in communication (Barrett, 2012). Byram (1997) highlighted the significance of the ability to discover and to interpret from other cultures, then to relate information on one's own culture. Fantini (2009) emphasized skills flexibility, humor, patience, empathy, and abilities "to establish and maintain relationships, the ability to communicate with minimal loss or distortion, and the ability to cooperate to accomplish tasks of mutual interest or need".

Similarly, knowledge has been highlighted as a core component of intercultural competency. It encompasses knowledge about oneself and other cultures simultaneously. Deardorff (2006) emphasized cultural self-awareness, deep cultural knowledge, contexts, role and impact of culture, others' views, culture-specific information, and sociolinguistic awareness. On the other hand, Byram (1997) defines knowledge as the awareness of stereotypes, social groups, and the way they work and interact.

Lastly, behaviors include flexibility in cultural and communicative behavior, effective and appropriate communication, and having an action orientation to improve the general welfare with the capacity for conflict resolution (Barrett, 2012). Behaviors are considered internal and external outcomes of the intercultural competence developmental process (Barrett et al., 2014). Internal outcomes reflect a person's desired skills such as adaptability, empathy, and flexibility (Deardorff, 2006). External outcomes as successful communicative behaviors, are based on a person's attitudes, skills, and knowledge (Spitzberg & Changnon, 2009). Overall, core components construct the main principles of intercultural competence, such as reflexivity, ethical responsibility, respect, and empathy. The awareness of components and principles helps to a better vision of intercultural competence construction.

2.2 Intercultural Competence in TEFL Context

2.2.1 Importance of Intercultural Competence in TEFL. The development of intercultural competency in teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) remains one of the main concerns of this educational field. Intercultural competence is essential for learners' successful future in their professional career and general interaction in a multicultural environment. The importance of intercultural competence in language context has been established by Byram (1997), emphasizing linguistic and sociocultural aspects of intercultural competence. Language and culture are inseparable in foreign language teaching and learning, as language represents the cultural background of the speaker (Kramsch, 1993).

The importance of IC integration in TEFL is founded on several key benefits. Firstly, to foster cultural sensitivity and intercultural competence among learners. Learners must be capable of navigating cultural differences, interpreting nonverbal signals, and communicating effectively in the intercultural environment (Kim, 2020). Another benefit is an effective impact on the motivation of students. Learners show more interest in language when materials are associated with traditions, beliefs, lifestyles, and values of language (Anuyahong et al., 2024). Also, integrating cultural components in TEFL additionally assists students in enhancing their critical thinking abilities. Learners learn to distinguish stereotypes and assumptions through comparison, discovery, and analysis. Lastly, taking cultural aspects into account in teaching allows teachers to approach the process more flexibly, creating an inclusive atmosphere in the classroom, which ensures more effective and equitable learning.

Additionally, IC integration in TEFL supports deeper learning goals, including social inclusion, peace education, and global citizenship (Barrett et al., 2014). It promotes the growth of democratic, polite, and globally conscious people by encouraging students to examine their cultural presumptions. Overall, intercultural competence integration in language assists in creating an effective, inclusive, and globalized educational environment.

2.2.2 Pedagogical Approaches to Intercultural Competence Development in

TEFL. The integration of intercultural competence (IC) into Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) demands purposeful instructional methods that extend beyond standard grammar-based training. Byram's model of intercultural communicative competence is one of the widely used models (Byram, 1997). All five components, such as knowledge, skills of discovery and interaction, skills of interpreting and relating, attitudes, and critical cultural awareness, can be involved in teaching. For instance, teachers incorporate authentic cultural materials with real-life tasks, interactive activities, discussions on cultural diversity, and analysis of cultural events to foster all skills highlighted in Byram (1997).

Constructivist approaches are known to be useful specifically in intercultural competence integration, meaning learning through interacting with others and reflection. Constructivist approaches considered: task-based learning, project-based learning, experiential learning, and dialogue construction. An effective pedagogical approach for integrating IC in TEFL is through task-based learning, when activities include intercultural content. For example, letter exchanges, eTandem projects, or collaborative online international learning (COIL) programs allow learners to use English in real-world intercultural contexts, promoting skills of discovery, interpretation, and communication (O'Dowd, 2007). Strategies for experiential learning are also successful, particularly when they incorporate genuine interaction with diverse cultures. Learners get a direct look at cultural diversity through activities like online exchanges, international partnerships, or project-based learning involving global concerns.

Cultural integration in the curriculum through the use of diverse literature, media forms, and modern literary works helps to develop students' interest and reflect on their own culture. Also, literature, music, and media forms have been proven to enhance students' motivation and engagement (Anuyahong et al., 2024). Herrero and Vanderschelden (2019)

claim that using video materials from other cultures helps to develop cultural awareness through the understanding of feelings and experiences. Analysis of characters and their cultural features, in the process, develops students' interpreting and reflecting skills.

Additionally, the latest works emphasize on effectiveness of several methods in the integration of IC in TEFL. Firstly, comparative-analytic methods have been found effective (Kramsch, 2020). It includes tasks as analysis of cultural media texts, comparison of communicative styles in various lingual cultures, and critical reflection on stereotypes in teaching materials. Another effective method is interactive methods, including virtual exchanges (40-60% improvement in MC scores), role-plays with cross-cultural scenarios, and the 'cultural assimilators' method for solving communication problems (O'Dowd, 2021). Furthermore, project methods as service learning with a cultural component, intercultural research projects, and creation of digital cultural guides have been highlighted as effective. Reflective practices such as writing intercultural diaries, analyzing 'critical incidents', and compiling cultural biographies are emphasized (Byram, 2020). Finally, the modern researches emphasize the implementation of digital technologies, VR simulations of cross-cultural situations, digital discourse analyses in social networks, and using AI to personalize IC teaching and learning (Mohamed, 2024).

Overall, the integration of IC in TEFL programs is essential to prepare learners for intercultural communication. All methods and approaches serve the goal of increasing cultural awareness and the motivation of learners to engage in the study. However, there remain challenges in developing intercultural competency in TEFL.

2.2.3 Challenges in Intercultural Competence Development in TEFL. Intercultural competence development plays a crucial role in teaching English as a foreign language, however, the integration of cultural aspects in the curriculum and classroom settings causes challenges for teachers in this field. Numerous studies have been conducted on various ways of implementing culture in EFL settings, revealing several issues alongside benefits. To get a better understanding, this literature review divides the common main issues found in similar studies into pedagogical, institutional, and sociocultural.

Firstly, institutional challenges include the main issues such as curriculum construction and teacher training limitations. Recently, studies emphasized that university TEFL curricula mostly consider linguistic proficiency over intercultural aspects. The board study by Vo (2017) investigated over a hundred teachers' perceptions from six southern Vietnamese universities, revealing limited IC content in the curriculum. Similarly, earlier works highlighted that a lack of clear guides on assessing intercultural competence serves as a barrier for educators (Liton, 2016; Ho, 2011). Another issue is that teacher training programs are lacking, which causes educators' cultural knowledge limitation (Vo, 2017). Teacher preparation courses frequently emphasize language proficiency over cultural instruction, leading to a lack of guidance on the implementation of IC in the instruction.

The other category of issues is pedagogical barriers, including limited resources and textbooks unsuitability. Teachers are often limited by standard EFL textbooks that focus solely on linguistic aspects and present culture as a set of stereotypical facts – holidays, cuisine, or clothing – without the issues associated with intercultural communication concerning students' future profession (Liton, 2016). The limitation of time to integrate IC in the lesson has also been mentioned as a barrier by researchers (Vo, 2017).

Finally, sociocultural contextual issues as a lack of foreign environments for communication and students' attitude (Vo, 2017). In conditions of cultural isolation, it is more

difficult for students to practice intercultural communication and understand the real diversity of socio-cultural practices. Integration of cultural aspects can sometimes be complicated regarding students' attitude, particularly related to cultural, religious beliefs differences. Liton (2016) revealed that "learners have an adverse reaction towards foreign cultural elements in the text which are not relevant and compatible with their cultural values". However, learners showing little interest in cultural content are the lowest number in the study (Vo, 2017; Ho, 2011).

In conclusion, challenges include unclear instructions, a rigid curriculum, learner resistance, a lack of resources, and insufficient textbooks. To solve these issues, an intentional change in language education conceptualization is needed, involving an increased focus on teacher education, curriculum change, and interaction between cultures at both the administrative and class levels. As Byram (1997) and Deardorff (2006) repeatedly note, teaching language without culture is insufficient; true communicative ability demands intercultural skills.

2.3. Intercultural Competence in Kazakhstani TEFL Context

2.3.1 Intercultural Competence in Kazakhstani TEFL Programs. In the context of Kazakhstan, where the policy of trilingual education - “Trinity of Languages” is actively implemented and the aspiration for global integration is growing (Nazarbayev, 2007), the formation of IC through English language teaching emerged as an important educational goal. Language and cultural knowledge are deeply interconnected in the diverse cultures in Kazakhstan (Nurzhanova et al., 2014; Karimova et al., 2024). The goals of teaching English as a Foreign Language nowadays include preparing intercultural speakers with a high level of cultural sensitivity, who interact across cultures effectively (Kunanbayeva, 2013; Yaylaci & Islam, 2013). Despite the progressive goals, the academic literature points out many ambiguous aspects related to the implementation of ICC in TEFL practice. This review considers the main trends, approaches specific to the Kazakhstani educational setting, and teachers’ perception of IC.

The Byram (1997) model is widely used by Kazakhstani researchers, and it is used as a basis for curriculum planning and the development of intercultural assignments in TEFL. However, often educators lack a deeper understanding of the interconnectedness of the components of this model. The studies frequently highlight the gap between teachers’ perceptions and practical application. Smakova and Paulsrud (2020) conducted broad research on Kazakhstani EFL teachers’ understanding of IC and how it is incorporated into teaching practices. The results found that educators are aware of the concept of IC, yet its systematic incorporation in instruction is inconsistent, suggesting a need for improved, organized approaches and support systems. Similarly, Kassymova et al. (2025) investigated Kazakhstani EFL teachers' and postgraduate students’ attitudes and readiness for adopting an intercultural approach. The research revealed that, although teachers realize the importance of IC, there is a gap between their knowledge and practical practice.

Pedagogical approaches to cultural aspects of foreign languages in Kazakhstani education have increased in recent years. Nurgalynova (2024) surveyed 400 participants on the importance of cultural variety in improving language proficiency, with an emphasis on EFL teaching practices in Kazakhstan. The research discovered that EFL teachers often incorporate multicultural instructional methods, as employing various literary works, digital tools, and discussion tasks involving different cultural perspectives. Also, it was revealed that teachers typically choose informative activities over exploratory and interactive ones (Nurgalynova, 2024). These approaches promote an in-depth comprehension of the English language alongside with improvement of students' critical thinking and intercultural communication skills. Furthermore, Yelubayeva and Mustafina (2020) investigated the impact of collaborative technologies on the ICC development of linguistic students in Kazakhstan. The findings revealed that activities have a significant impact on language learners' personal and professional growth, resulting in an improved understanding of social and cultural concerns, ethics, and intercultural communication (Yelubayeva & Mustafina, 2020).

Additionally, extracurricular activities and exchange programs assist in the students' intercultural competence development. These activities create genuine environments for intercultural contact, resulting in increased communication skills and comprehension of cultures. Nurgali et al. (2025) investigated the influence of an intervention program on linguistics students in Kazakhstan, with an emphasis on the development of intercultural communication and leadership skills. The investigation discovered that such programs enhance learners' IC, underlining the value of experiential learning in developing cultural competencies.

In conclusion, the integration of intercultural competence in TEFL in Kazakhstan is a process in active development. The literature shows a positive attitude of teachers toward intercultural implementation in the EFL classroom. The willingness towards cultural

competence development in TEFL in Kazakhstan is a good indicator for further development. However, there are still several challenges regarding IC development in TEFL.

2.3.2 Challenges in Intercultural Competence Development in Kazakhstan. One of the main barriers to the development of IC in TEFL is the lack of understanding of the concept of intercultural competence by teachers and participants in the educational environment. Although the term ‘intercultural competence’ is used in policy documents and educational standards, its practical meaning and pedagogical application remain unclear for many practitioners. The EFL teachers show positive awareness and openness toward IC, however, they often lack readiness to implement it into practice due to a limited, clear understanding (Kassymova et al., 2025).

Another barrier faced by Kazakhstani EFL educators is a limitation of resources. The research revealed the limitations of EFL textbooks with proper cultural context and challenges in finding suitable materials (Nurgalynova, 2024). In a study by Smakova and Paulsrud (2020), 29.1% of respondents from 107 participants regarding challenges mentioned “the curriculum/course book is not appropriate for teaching culture”. It reveals that educators have to modify course books and prepare additional materials involving cultural knowledge (Smakova & Paulsrud, 2020). Difficulties of the IC implementation in practice were also connected with “limited access to relevant resources” (Kassymova et al., 2025).

An important challenge is the teacher’s deficiency of cultural context in teacher training programs. Most educators in the Kazakhstani English as a foreign language teaching field lack professional training in intercultural communication. Studies revealed this as one of the three most mentioned barriers in IC implementation, specifically insufficient knowledge and expertise on how to teach culture using proper and modern teaching methods in the English language (Smakova & Paulsrud, 2020). The findings may be especially concerning for EFL teachers because they show a significant need for additional training.

The other significant challenge in fostering IC in TEFL is the absence of genuine environments where learners have contact with people of different cultures in a meaningful way (Smakova & Paulsrud, 2020). Learners frequently learn the target language in courses with similar cultural and linguistic backgrounds, and teachers often implement their cultural background, not the targeted language's country culture. This restricts their experience to cross-cultural interaction in the actual world, something that's crucial for internalizing and implementing ICC. Furthermore, several issues were discovered, including curriculum development, cultural diversity, how students interpret assignments' cultural context, and social awareness (Yelubayeva & Mustafina, 2020; Nurgalynova, 2024; Karimova et al., 2024).

In conclusion, the literature study shows that intercultural competency (IC) is increasingly acknowledged as a key aspect of English language training, primarily in the Kazakhstani TEFL. The interest in ICC and IC has increased over the last ten years. Many scholars recognize intercultural competence as an essential part of the foreign language learning and teaching process. Kazakhstani educational institutions mostly show positive willingness toward culture integration and awareness of IC. Alongside it, several challenges were revealed regarding IC implementation in TEFL in Kazakhstani educational settings (Karimova et al., 2024). Many significant research studies were conducted regarding IC in EFL teaching, providing strategies and problem areas for further development. However, there is a lack of research on postgraduate students' perceptions of IC integration in TEFL master's degree programs. As a response, this study explores the perception of master's students enrolled in the English major regarding the development of cultural context in their program. The study hopes to determine the perception of students on IC development in English language teaching postgraduate programs.

CHAPTER 3

Methodology

This chapter covers research design, data collection, analysis procedures, and ethical considerations employed in this research. Describing the sampling method, participants, and data collection tools, too.

3.1 Research Design

This study aimed to address the gap in the under-researched topic of intercultural competency development in the TEFL master's program in Kazakhstan. To address the gap and to provide context-specific insights, the study investigated the master's students' perspectives on the integration of IC in their program, conceptual understanding, and live experiences of students.

Therefore, a qualitative research design was adopted as the most suitable. The qualitative design is primarily appropriate for studies to explore context-specific human experiences, and it provides an adaptable exploration of perceptions, where participants share their views in naturalistic settings (Creswell, 2014). To get primary data directly from participants, this study used semi-structured interviews as the main data collection tool. The semi-structured interviews provided an in-depth exploration of perspectives, and offered descriptive data from participants. The research design assisted in getting primary context-specific data, enabling the study to uncover participants' experiences and authentic views on IC in TEFL.

3.1.1 Participants. The participants of this study are ten postgraduate students enrolled in the English major master's degree program at two major Kazakhstani universities. The participants were selected for several reasons, such as experience in teaching, enrollment in a master's program, and willingness to participate in semi-structured interviews. The

postgraduate students' choice enabled research to get an in-depth view of IC development in advanced-level TEFL programs.

3.1.2 Sampling. The purposive sampling method was employed in this study to select participants with suitable experience. This sampling method is employed primarily in qualitative research for investigating specific phenomena or human experiences (Creswell, 2014). This study's sampling choice is based on its aim to collect rich, relevant, and in-depth insights answering research questions.

The participants' selection criteria included: current enrollment in an English major master's program; experience teaching English in diverse classroom settings; willingness to reflect on their experiences of IC development and implementation. The diversity in gender, teaching experience years, and age enriched the data, enabling broader insights on IC development in TEFL in Kazakhstan.

3.2 Data collection

3.2.1 Data collection tools. The semi-structured interview was chosen as a data collection tool for this study. The semi-structured interviews were used as a primary instrument to gather a deeper view of perception, experiences, and challenges students face during their IC development and application attempts. The semi-structured interviews serve to gather subjective feedback from participants on specific content (Creswell, 2014). The interview consists of open-ended questions aligning with research objectives, The interview protocol is presented in Appendix A.

Using follow-up questions during the interview helped participants to delve further into specific concerns. For instance, participants described not only specific challenges they faced, but also the way of handling these issues. The semi-structured framework helped to get relevant, rich, and detailed data for the study.

3.2.2 Data collection procedures. The data collection followed a structured participant-centered approach to maintain ethical standards and consistency. The procedures included participant selection, interview scheduling, and interview conduct in a blended way.

Participant selection was conducted directly with contact with two major universities, using social media, professional networks. All potential participants received information on the research purpose, content, selection criteria, and ethical protection information. Before interviews, ethical consents of students who fulfilled participation criteria were obtained via email (Appendix B).

Interviews were conducted in a blinded way, based on participants' availability. Online interviews were conducted through the Zoom platform, offline interviews took place in university offices. The interview schedule, time, and place were fully chosen for participants' convenience. The interview lasted 45-60 minutes and was fully in English, corresponding to the participants' communication language.

The interviews began with general questions to create a comfortable environment, narrowing to specific questions gradually. The semi-structured interviews included follow-up questions and covered all key themes, answering to research objectives. Each interview was audio-recorded with the participant's permission to capture all the details. The recordings were kept in a private file with access only to the interviewer, then they were transcribed in full text. Later, the collected data was implemented organization of thematic analysis. The data collection procedures provided an accurate base for addressing research questions.

3.3 Data analysis

The findings from the semi-structured interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis. The thematic analysis is a useful, systematic approach for qualitative data analysis, specifically to detect, interpret, and present key themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This

approach was selected due to the alignment with the research's aim: to get in-depth insights into several aspects as students' experiences, perceptions, and challenges.

Before data analysis, all interview recordings were transcribed to textual documents using the Turboscribe tool to provide accurate textual data for analysis. At the initial part of the analysis, all textual data were reviewed several times to gain a deeper understanding of the content. Additionally, the interesting ideas, points relevant to research objectives, and emerging common topics were noted.

As a result of repeated reviewing, initial codes that were relevant to the research aim were systematically labeled. To uncover patterns in responses, NVivo software was used in this stage. This tool assisted to organize data effectively and to recognize new patterns quickly. Later, initial codes were clustered in broader themes relating to the research aim and objectives. Subsequently, the four main themes that emerged through analysis were reviewed and defined.

The last step included organizing the themes to provide a coherent narrative, additionally, quotations of participants were used to enrich the reliability of findings. This analysis provided a deeper evaluation of responses, revealing valuable results in students' perspectives regarding intercultural competence development in TEFL. Also, structured analysis sheds light on the significance and applicability of IC in Kazakhstani master's programs.

3.4 Ethical considerations

This study followed ethical standards to protect participants' confidentiality with respect. Ethical approval from institutions was obtained before the data collection. The study participants received full, clear information about the research's scope and the rights of participation, as well as the right of withdrawal at any stage. Before interviews were conducted, informed consent was obtained from all participants.

All audio recordings were recorded with participants' permission, and the tapes were stored in files with only the researcher's access. To guarantee anonymity, the names of participants and universities were replaced with pseudonyms in transcriptions and the final report. The study follows ethical considerations to protect participants' privacy, minimize potential harm, and keep. Academic integrity in findings.

CHAPTER 4

Findings

This chapter presents findings of the study through the thematic analysis of perceptions of TEFL master's students on IC development in their program. The results are organized thematically and comparatively. The data derived from interviews was clustered in four main themes: (1) Intercultural Competence Awareness; (2) Integration of IC in master's program; (3) Challenges in IC development; (4) Improvement suggestions. Each theme has sub-themes, helping to understand findings broadly. Through the comparison of the findings between two universities, University A and University B, were included to emphasize differences and similarities.

4.1 Intercultural Competence Awareness

This theme was organized to explore TEFL master's students' IC understanding, personal definitions. This theme sheds light on intercultural competence awareness among TEFL master's students of two Kazakhstani universities. The findings are organized into three sub-themes: (1) Perception of IC, (2) Sources of Exposure, (3) IC in English Language Teaching.

4.1.1 Perception of IC. The responses showed a wide range of understanding of intercultural competence. Intercultural competence was understood as just cultural knowledge; some students defined it as the skill of effective communication across diverse cultures. Others connected the IC with the language proficiency.

“ I think Intercultural competence is more about effective communication with people of other cultures. Also, I think it's needed to create more comfortable dialogue among diverse cultures.”(Participant A2)

“I don’t know much about this term. But I heard it in some lectures, we never had a course dedicated only to IC... I think, it’s knowing cultural facts about other cultures, like foods, traditions, etc” (Participant B1)

The difference in findings of University A and University B revealed the gap in degrees of intercultural competence integration in educational programs for learners. Most learners from an international private university (A) showed more in-depth knowledge of intercultural competence, acknowledging components of it as flexibility and behavior. On the other hand, students from the state university (B) showed limited knowledge of intercultural competency. Also, some mentioned their interest in this topic:

“In my opinion, intercultural competence is a necessity for every modern person. I don’t know in detail about it, but I would like to deepen my knowledge later.”(Participant B4)

The students’ IC perception showed interesting insights, that generally students are aware of intercultural competence, but there is a lack of deeper knowledge of it. Learners were confused about the academic term name, but when the researcher explained the meaning of IC, they showed general acknowledgement.

4.1.2 Sources of Exposure. Participants were also asked about the sources of knowledge on intercultural competency. Learners described several concrete sources that will expand research insights. They mentioned university coursework, international exchange, personal exposure, and from lecturers.

“ I was in America with an exchange program, and only then did I realize how important cultural knowledge is in communication. Before, I didn’t notice the significance of it.” (Participant B5)

“ I heard about IC for the first time in my master’s program. We had a lesson about it in the course of trending approaches in teaching last semester. I was very interested in it.”(Participant A3)

Students who had an exchange in another country or worked abroad revealed more knowledge on intercultural competence than those who didn't have such an opportunity. It reveals the significance of international practice on the development of cultural awareness. Some participants highlighted the limited explanation by lecturers.

"I remember that we discussed IC in lectures, but it wasn't explained in connection with teaching, also, how we can implement it in lessons in the future wasn't explained." (Participant A4)

This provides the need for more practical lessons in TEFL master's programs in Kazakhstan. Only five participants mentioned university courses as a source of knowledge about IC. Mostly students from University A linked it with linguistic courses, yet most students from the state University B relied more on personal experiences. This leads to the issue of a lack of IC-dedicated lessons in Kazakhstani higher education.

4.1.3 IC in English Language Teaching. Another sub-theme regarding the perception of IC by master's students is the importance of it in teaching English. Most students connected the IC to the professional development of English teachers. Its importance was interconnected with fostering cultural awareness among their students and being prepared to solve possible cultural conflicts in the classroom.

"Cultural knowledge is especially needed for English teachers, because we teach a global language to culturally diverse students." (Participant A1)

"I think IC can be a really helpful skill for teachers of English, we must educate students not only in grammar, but also for their future cultural communication." (Participant B3)

Participant A2 shared an important experience from their teaching at university:

"I witnessed cultural conflict for the first time among my students recently. Several students had prejudices and a negative attitude towards exchange students from different

countries. I tried to solve the conflict, but it didn't help much. So, since I felt like I lacked teaching IC for my students.” (Participant A2)

All participants understood the importance of IC for teachers, especially for English teachers. They emphasized its value for teaching practices, yet most of them didn't know how to implement it in their teaching practice.

“I understand the importance of integrating cultural aspects in teaching, but I feel a little unprepared and didn't have knowledge about the ways of involving it in lessons” (Participant B4)

However, some students underestimated the importance of IC for Kazakhstani TEFL education. Participant B1 stated that:

“In my opinion, IC is more crucial for teachers in international universities or for those who teach foreigners. As for teachers in government schools like me, IC is not that needed, the main focus is more on teaching language for students.”

The responses on intercultural competence awareness provided diverse important insights on their perception of IC overall, their viewpoints on the importance of it for teachers of English. In comparison, students from the first university provided better knowledge on IC, suggesting that University A offers a slightly greater inclusion of IC in their educational settings. Overall, findings from this theme indicated the need for more inclusion of IC in Kazakhstan.

4.2 Integration of IC in master's program

The second theme provides findings on the students' perception of the IC integration in their programs and the role of teachers in it. Through analysis of transcripts, two main sub-themes emerged: (1) Curriculum gaps, (2) Teacher's role in IC development.

4.2.1 Curriculum gaps. The participants from both universities mentioned curriculum integration in their program. The difference primarily was the degree of integration of it in lessons, courses. Throughout the analysis, some gaps in the curriculum were revealed, too. The participants mentioned strong IC elements in lessons, as well as the lack of cultural aspects. For instance, participant A5 highlighted on great integration of IC:

“I remember we had a course on IC in the bachelor’s degree, also in the master’s program, we had lessons on IC and ICC, repeating theories and cultural importance.”

In contrast, some students from University B revealed an insufficient degree of IC in their programs.

“ We discussed intercultural relationships in some lessons, such as sociolinguistics, but we never had a course or lessons entirely on intercultural competence.” (Participant B3)

“ I had a professor who explained to us about it, but there was no integration of cultural tasks or lectures on IC.” (Participant B1)

This evidenced the subtle but significant difference in the curriculum designs of the two universities. Additionally, students mentioned some gaps in their programs.

“ The IC is common knowledge that we should already know in-depth, but there is no specific course on it in the master’s program.” (Participant A4)

“ Even though we had some lectures on it, there are no clear instructions on how to implement it in future teaching classes.” (Participant A1)

The lack of clear guidance on IC integration mechanisms leads to one of the main areas of challenge. The results reveal a potential for developing IC content more for master’s programs, and the success depends on curriculum enhancements. Comparing, both universities included IC in their lessons, but still, there is a lack of deeper guidance for future English teachers.

4.2.2 Teacher's role in IC development. The other sub-theme that emerged from the findings was the role of educators' navigation in the IC integration in lessons. The participants were asked about the effect of programs on their IC development, and most emphasized their educators' navigation. The instructor's knowledge, dedication, and pedagogical style frequently determined how well IC development succeeded. Students from both universities stated that some teachers included IC in their lessons; on the other hand, some teachers overlooked cultural aspects all.

“ In our lessons, the professor always mentioned the importance of IC and gave us articles from different countries to analyze. Also, she explained about world Englishes, which helped me to get a better view of internationality.” (Participant A5)

“The one professor gave us tasks on cultural context, despite it wasn't in the curriculum of his course. It increased interest among learners, but other teachers didn't teach this aspect.” (Participant B3)

These responses address the claim on teachers' great effect on learners' motivation and interest towards the intercultural competence development. Additionally, the teachers' aspirations to develop IC integration are limited by program instructions.

Participants also mentioned that teachers with abroad experiences were more capable and motivated to guide students on IC. These teachers included intercultural competence development tasks in their curricula more often than others.

“ The professor from abroad always mentioned cultural differences' effect on education. He used to say that it must be the main concern in teaching, the educational field, and curriculum construction.” (Participant A1)

This sub-theme reveals that students see teachers as the main source of IC development among students through integration in lessons. Additionally, the responses

reveal that professional development for teachers and curriculum adaptability can support teachers' IC integration in lessons.

4.3 Challenges in IC development

Participants were also asked about challenges they faced during IC development and application in their teaching practice. The findings revealed several constant difficulties mentioned through thematic analysis. The sub-themes that emerged from answers are: (1) Lack of academic training, (2) Institutional limitations, (3) Cultural barriers in teaching. The challenges reveal a balance between academic training and practical application of IC.

4.3.1 Lack of academic training. One of the main challenges mentioned by participants was inconsistent academic preparation. Most student-teachers highlighted that master's programs lack practical training for students in IC implementation. The strategies, practical application mechanisms, and tools for IC integration were insufficiently explained. This insufficiency in training affected students' confidence in the IC integration in classroom settings.

"I teach English to first-year university students; through teaching, there were challenges with the IC application. Mainly, I was unprepared to apply IC properly due to a lack of knowledge on the strategies and steps of it." (Participant A1)

"The theory of IC was very clear for me, but in applying it in a classroom, I didn't know where to begin. This made me realize that we never had practical training on IC application in the master's program." (Participant A2)

Participants from University A responded that theoretical preparation wasn't enough for practical application. Similarly, University B students emphasized on not readiness for the integration of it.

“ I understand the importance of fostering IC among my students, but I don’t know how to explain and integrate it into lessons. I didn’t have much practice during academic training. ” (Participant B3)

The lack of practice in IC integration affected young teachers’ professional confidence. However, some students mentioned lessons that integrated IC practical tasks during the master’s program.

“Most of our teachers gave tasks as reading about other countries, but only once did we have a task on evaluating the coursebook in a more culturally suitable way for learners. It was a fun task helping with IC integration practice.” (Participant A5)

Participants from both universities stated that there is a need for more practical training on IC in the master’s program in Kazakhstan. The real-world examples, strategies for implementation lead to broader issues in Kazakhstani teacher education programs.

4.3.2 Institutional limitations. Another barrier students faced in teaching practice was institutional limitations, such as strict curricula, focused mostly on assessments, and limited IC focus in textbooks. The prescribed structure of teaching only by a coursebook left little space for cultural integration.

“I work at school where we teach by a structured plan by the administration, and there is no time in the schedule to integrate cultural activities.” (Participant B4)

“ At my job, we must follow the coursebook and prepare assessments on the language proficiency of learners. This leaves a little space for IC integration in teaching.” (Participant A2)

This issue was especially evident in schools emphasizing a strict curricular support. Such settings view IC as a secondary topic rather than a primary instructional goal. Also, participants mentioned a lack of culturally relevant textbooks. The lack of resources provided by institutions makes it hard for teachers to foster IC among students.

“Most books don’t consider local cultural contexts and culture-focused themes. Most of them are limited to only grammar, vocabulary, and only UK culture.” (Participant B1)

These limitations force teachers to overlook intercultural competence in lessons and limit personal development.

4.3.3 Cultural barriers in teaching. In addition to institutional and training issues, several participants highlighted students’ cultural resistance in the classroom. Participants reported that discussion of culturally sensitive topics needs to be navigated carefully.

“Discussion of culturally sensitive topics sometimes can cause conflicts among learners with diverse backgrounds. So, I try to avoid it.” (Participant B4)

Additionally, participants mentioned that topics regarding gender roles, religion, and cultural problems are harder to discuss in controversial settings. They state that some students affected by cultural norms avoid open dialogue on cultural themes.

“When I tried to discuss cultural beliefs across diverse countries, some students negatively responded to it, and it offended students from that culture. That made me fear discussing such themes anymore.” (Participant A2)

Such barriers especially affect young teachers, making them fear making mistakes in culturally navigating learners in a diverse classroom. However, some respondents revealed their way of solving such problems.

“To avoid any sensitive topics, I usually choose easy topics, such as food, music, greetings of people. This helps me to explain to students cultural diversity without causing any conflicts.” (Participant A4)

In comparison, University A students showed more preparedness in solving challenges in IC integration. Overall, challenges faced by young teachers from both universities revealed the need for more practical training to prepare students to navigate institutional and cultural barriers.

4.4 Improvement suggestions

The last theme involves participants' constructive recommendations to enhance IC in the Kazakhstani TEFL context. The suggestions based on academic and teaching experiences can serve as valuable insights. Two key sub-themes emerged from findings: (1) Curriculum change, (2) Educator support.

4.4.1 Curriculum change. Curriculum construction has a significant impact on learners' professional growth. Participants primarily highlighted curriculum reform as a main recommendation. Most students suggested for curriculum with more intercultural components and practical tasks on IC integration.

“The change of master’s program curriculum can help learners to be prepared for teaching English in an intercultural environment. The practical tasks on IC integration are a necessity for now.” (Participant A5)

“We had some discussions on IC, but the more specific teaching on IC wasn’t considered.” (Participant B2)

The participants were asked to give recommendations for future improvements. Both university students mostly mentioned curriculum enhancement. The change suggestions had some differences among universities. The participants from University B asked for specific course creation; on the other hand, students from University A suggested more practical applications.

“We never had a specific course for intercultural competence development, so I was unaware of it. The creation of a separate course can be helpful for future English teachers like me.” (Participant B5)

“We had some courses and lessons about IC, theoretically we were acknowledged, but in teaching experience, it wasn’t enough. The more real-life tasks or IC teaching strategies in lessons can be useful for master’s degree learners.” (Participant A4)

Both university students suggested curriculum reforms for better IC awareness and to produce more culturally sensitive educators. The suggestions on curriculum changes were linked to the degree of IC integration in the master's program of each university.

4.4.2 Educator support. The other most suggested improvement was linked to the teacher's role and support. Several respondents mentioned the importance of providing educators with the necessary tools and knowledge for IC development. Several participants noted that there were some unprepared and uninterested teachers in IC integration in TEFL programs.

“Some professors explained or integrated cultural tasks in lessons actively, yet there were some educators who never included culture in lessons.” (Participant A5)

Several participants suggested professional development programs for TEFL teachers, including IC skills. Participants agree that an educator's capacity to demonstrate intercultural communication has a direct impact on students' competence. Participants also recommended institutional rewards for teachers who conduct international studies, assisting with IC development in TEFL.

“For professional development of teachers, institutions can support them with rewards. Maybe for research on intercultural themes.” (Participant B4)

Some students gave additional and broader suggestions on IC development in Kazakhstani TEFL. Recommending intercultural competency to be mandatory for language teachers as a learning outcome.

“I think intercultural competence can be officially included in learning outcomes for English language teacher programs. It can help to produce more culturally aware teachers.” (Participant A3)

The suggestions by participants mainly centered on improving the curriculum, experiential learning integration, and teacher professional training. It reveals that students understand the value of IC in the Kazakhstani TEFL context.

CHAPTER 5

Discussion

The discussion chapter includes findings of the research presented, aligning with research questions and comparison with the literature. The aim of the research lies in exploring the perception of students on IC integration in Kazakhstani TEFL master's programs. In-depth insights were revealed through students' experiences in academic and teaching practice. The findings on IC awareness of students, challenges in the development of IC, and suggestions from TEFL master's students are discussed in this section.

5.1 RQ1: How master's degree students understand intercultural competence and perceive the development of it in the TEFL program?

The findings on awareness of IC revealed that students have general knowledge, but show an insufficient level of deeper understanding of the concept of intercultural competency. The comparison between state and private universities showed a significant gap in the inclusion of IC in teaching programs. Students from the state university had limited knowledge; on the other hand, private international university students showed sufficient general IC awareness and stated university programs as a main source of knowledge. However, both university students revealed a shortage of in-depth knowledge regarding IC. This suggests more inclusion of IC courses as mandatory in teaching, as advised in previous research (Romanowski, 2017).

The insufficient level of integration of IC lessons in the Kazakhstani curriculum was highlighted by both university students. The lack of practical implementations in teaching IC integration strategies for future English teachers leads to the unpreparedness of young teachers. Some students revealed that they didn't have IC courses in their bachelor's studies. Additionally, results revealed the importance of the teacher's role in structuring the IC development of students. The findings suggest more practical tasks in teacher education

programs' curriculum. The results of this study are consistent with the findings of Kassymova et al. (2025), who highlighted the lack of emphasis on practical applications in Kazakhstani TEFL master's programs. In contrast to prior studies, the findings of the current research represent the voice of master's students, providing evidence-based insights from academic training and teaching experiences of participants.

5.2 RQ2: What are the main challenges students face in the process of IC development and application?

The findings of this study revealed key challenges students face in developing and applying intercultural competence in teaching practices. The barriers were linked to the lack of academic training, cultural resistance in the classroom, and institutional limitations. Most students highlighted the insufficient academic training, resulting in an inability to application of IC in their teaching experiences. It reveals that teacher programs in Kazakhstan teach mainly theoretically, resulting in culturally unprepared English educators. The findings align with the results of research by Smakova (2020), revealing that many educators in Kazakhstan, despite IC awareness, have problems with the integration of cultural aspects in lessons.

The institutional limitations involved a restrictive curriculum, insufficient support from the administration, and language-centered coursebooks. The absence of support for innovative teaching of IC is one of the main barriers for educators willing to integrate intercultural competence in lessons. The many educational institutions in Kazakhstan follow prescribed lesson plans that center on the language proficiency of students. This leads to an oversight of intercultural competence integration in classrooms. These findings align with previous research (Karimova et al., 2024), which similarly emphasized the issues as "outdated curriculum, insufficient supervision, and resistance to change".

The teachers revealed that the EFL coursebooks serve mainly as a tool for preparing state proficiency tests. The coursebooks for teaching English in many state institutions don't include cultural features of locals and intercultural competence teaching topics. It suggests more reforms in the curriculum and coursebooks in Kazakhstani institutions. The findings align with the results of research by Nurgalynova (2024), highlighting limitations of EFL coursebooks and limited access of English teachers to suitable resources in Kazakhstan. Moreover, the results agree with previous findings, recommending the inclusion of ICC qualities assessment in EFL coursebooks (Pinzon & Norely, 2020). While previous research had focused on problems of EFL teachers, these results suggest solutions, as preventing them through changes in teacher education programs.

5.3 RQ3: What recommendations do master's students suggest for the improvement of TEFL in Kazakhstan?

Curriculum enhancement and educator preparedness were key themes highlighted by participants regarding the improvement of intercultural competence (IC) development in TEFL master's programs. The findings revealed the emphasis on insufficient IC integration in the curriculum and recommendations on its reform. The intercultural content inclusion within the course can foster quality education and foster IC awareness among master's students. It aligns with the key model of ICC by Byram (1997), underscoring the importance of curricula to develop learners' IC. Participants also suggested for IC practical application tasks in curriculum design. Practical integration instructions can enhance the confidence of teachers in the application of IC in the classroom and the English teaching field in Kazakhstan.

Participants suggested improvements in support for teachers' professional development. The organization of additional courses on IC for EFL instructors and administrative rewards was recommended as a solution. These suggestions by students can enhance teachers' interest in IC integration alongside strengthening teachers' intercultural

strategies. It aligns with another key model of ICC by Bennett (1993), which highlights the educator as the main source of learners' intercultural views construction. These findings agree with previous research on IC integrations in EFL in Kazakhstan, recommending more intercultural inclusion in teaching English (Yelubayeva and Mustafina, 2020; Smakova & Paulsrud, 2020; Nurgalynova, 2024; Kassymova et al., 2025). These recommendations reveal students' desire to change the education system for more IC-integrated improvements.

CHAPTER 6

Conclusion

In this research, the master's degree students' perception of IC development in Kazakhstani TEFL was investigated. As mentioned previously, intercultural competence in Kazakhstani EFL has received much attention, however, the IC integration in master's programs has been largely ignored. The English teachers' IC awareness and its application in practice remain unbalanced. Therefore, studying the working graduate students' perspective is important for both the teacher education system and policymakers. This study aimed to explore the master's students' perspective on IC development in their teacher education program, also to identify key challenges they face in applying IC in practice. To address this goal, a semi-structured interview was conducted with ten participants from two Kazakhstani universities. Thereafter, the collected qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis.

The findings of the study revealed the foundational awareness of IC by most of the master's students; they stated the university as the main source of knowledge. Despite this, the participants mentioned a lack of practical application and integration strategies guidance in the TEFL curricula. In connection with this, students highlighted the impact of the educators on the IC development of learners, emphasizing the positive willingness of some teachers to foster IC.

Additionally, student-teachers provided insights into several challenges they faced in their teaching experiences. The key challenges in the application of IC were an insufficient level of academic training, institutional barriers, and cultural resistance of learners. Prescribed course lessons, limited access to resources, and a lack of support from the administration were the main institutional barriers students encountered in teaching. Regardless of the motivation and awareness of the value of intercultural learning, these difficulties prevented the students from integrating it into the classroom.

Participants also recommended practical improvements, as TEFL master's curriculum reform with more practical tasks and a specific course for IC. The changes in the TEFL master's program can foster IC awareness among students, resulting in a more culturally sensitive generation of teachers. Additionally, students suggested that more support for teachers, in the form of professional development training and institutional rewards, can enhance interest in IC among teachers.

6.1 Limitations and Contributions of the Study

The findings of the study contribute valuable insights, but the study has several limitations. The research sample size of ten people limits the generalizability of the findings. This research focused on getting in-depth insights from human experiences, not on generalizability, which led to the choice of a qualitative approach. Furthermore, using self-reported data from interviews can bring bias to the data collection, which could compromise the quality and application of the data. Another limitation is the usage of only one data collection tool; additional observation or document analysis would have strengthened the validity of the research. However, the semi-structured interviews provided rich, relevant descriptive data. The application of study results for large educational institutions is further limited by shifts in global educational structures, social standards, and institutions.

Considering these limitations, the present research could be expanded upon in future studies by including a more varied sample of participants from various institutions and geographical areas. A deeper understanding of how IC is viewed and applied at various educational levels could be provided by involving stakeholders like instructors, program coordinators, and legislators. Also, future research with a longitudinal focus on students' intercultural competence can explore the change of views and abilities of students as they advance in their education and enter the teaching profession. Conducting intervention-based research that evaluates particular approaches to incorporating IC into TEFL programs, like

intercultural modules, international partnerships, or reflective learning activities, would also be beneficial.

Despite its limitations, the study makes a significant contribution in several areas. In practical terms, the study offers useful evidence-based recommendations that can guide the creation of a TEFL curriculum in Kazakhstani institutions. By centering students' voices, the findings of the study reveal a gap in theoretical teaching and practical application of it. In terms of research input, it fills a gap in the existing literature by focusing on the experiences and views of TEFL master's students in Kazakhstan. It provides new empirical data to the discussion on how intercultural competency is perceived and developed in teacher education programs in Central Asian countries, thus improving the worldwide relevance of IC research. Overall, the study underscores the necessity of more deliberate and comprehensive IC integration in Kazakhstani TEFL programs to enhance the number of culturally sensitive English educators.

References

- Anuyahong, B., Songakul, K., & Rattanapong, C. (2024). Analyzing the role of culture in TEFL pedagogy and its implications for language teaching. *International Journal of English Language Teaching*, 12(4), 40–56.
<https://doi.org/10.37745/ijelt.13/vol12n44056>
- Barrett, M. D. (2012). Intercultural competence. *EWC Statement Series*, 2, 23-27.
<https://rb.gy/qsbjkk>
- Bennett, M. J. (1986). A developmental approach to training for intercultural sensitivity. *International journal of intercultural relations*, 10(2), 179-196.
[https://doi.org/10.1016/0147-1767\(86\)90005-2](https://doi.org/10.1016/0147-1767(86)90005-2)
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101.
- Byram, M. (1997). Byram, M. (1997). ‘Cultural awareness’ as vocabulary learning. *Language learning journal*, 16(1), 51-57. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09571739785200291>
- Byram, M., Gribkova, B., & Starkey, H. (2002). *Developing the intercultural dimension in language teaching: A practical introduction for teachers*. Language Policy Division, Directorate of School, Out-of-School and Higher Education, Council of Europe.
<https://rb.gy/rphxpg>
- Byram, M., Barrett, M., Lázár, I., Mompoin-Gaillard, P., & Philippou, S. (2014). *Developing intercultural competence through education*. Council of Europe Publishing.
<https://hdl.handle.net/10993/27136>
- Byram, M. (2020). *Teaching and assessing intercultural communicative competence: Revisited*. Multilingual matters. <https://shorturl.at/SQWES>
- Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (4th ed.). Sage.

- Deardorff, D. K. (2006). Identification and assessment of intercultural competence as a student outcome of internationalization. *Journal of studies in international education*, 10(3), 241-266. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1028315306287002>
- Deardorff, D. K. (Ed.). (2009). *The SAGE handbook of intercultural competence*. Sage Publications.
- Fantini, A. E. (2007). Exploring and assessing intercultural competence. <http://gwbweb.wustl.edu/csd>
- Fantini, A. E. (2009). Assessing intercultural competence: Issues and tools. In *The SAGE handbook of intercultural competence* (pp. 456-476). SAGE Publications, Inc. <https://rb.gy/ay7pyy>
- Hammer, M. R., Bennett, M. J., & Wiseman, R. (2003). Measuring intercultural sensitivity: The intercultural development inventory. *International journal of intercultural relations*, 27(4), 421-443. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0147-1767\(03\)00032-4](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0147-1767(03)00032-4)
- Herrero, C., & Vanderschelden, I. (Eds.). (2019). *Using film and media in the language classroom: Reflections on research-led teaching* (Vol. 73). Multilingual Matters.
- Ho, K. (2011). An intercultural perspective on teaching and learning in the Vietnamese EFL classroom. *University of Sydney Papers in TESOL*, 6(3), 43–69. http://faculty.edfac.usyd.edu.au/projects/usp_in_tesol/pdf/volume06/Article03.pdf
- Howard Hamilton, M. F., Richardson, B. J., & Shuford, B. (1998). Promoting multicultural education: A holistic approach. *College Student Affairs Journal*, 18(1), 5. <https://rb.gy/tppag1>
- Hunter, B., White, G. P., & Godbey, G. C. (2006). What does it mean to be globally competent? *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 10(3), 267-285. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1028315306286930>

- Karimova, B., Ailauova, Z., Nurlanbekova, Y., & Bazylova, B. (2024). Cultivating students' cross-cultural and linguacultural competences: Navigating challenges and opportunities. *Journal of Social Studies Education Research*, 15(3), 400–423.
<https://jsser.org/index.php/jsser/article/view/5852>
- Kassymova, G., Tulepova, S. & Bekturova, M. (2025). Enriching experiences: Unpacking Kazakhstani EFL teachers' attitudes and readiness for intercultural approach. *Cakrawala Pendidikan: Jurnal Ilmiah Pendidikan*, 44(1), 72-91. DOI:
<https://doi.org/10.21831/cp.v44i1.73305>
- Kim, D. (2020). Learning language, learning culture: Teaching language to the whole student. *ECNU Review of Education*, 3(3), 519-541.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/2096531120936693>
- King, P. M., & Baxter Magolda, M. B. (2005). A developmental model of intercultural maturity. *Journal of college student development*, 46(6), 571-592.
<https://dx.doi.org/10.1353/csd.2005.0060>.
- Kramersch, C. (1993). *Context and culture in language teaching*. Oxford University Press.
- Kramersch, C. (2020). *Language as symbolic power*. Cambridge University Press.
<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>
- Kunanbayeva, S. S. (2013). *The modernization of foreign language education: The linguocultural-communicative approach*. United Kingdom: Hertfordshire Press.
- Liton, H. A. (2016). Adopting the intercultural communication issue in teaching English. *Lingua Cultura*, 10(1), 1–6. <https://doi.org/10.21512/lc.v10i1.910>
- Mohamed, A. M. (2024). Exploring the potential of an AI-based Chatbot (ChatGPT) in enhancing English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teaching: perceptions of EFL Faculty Members. *Education and Information Technologies*, 29(3), 3195-3217.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10639-023-11917-z>

- Nadeem, M. U., Mohammed, R., & Dalib, S. (2018). Historical development and models of intercultural communication competence (ICC). <https://rb.gy/zud05q>
- Nazarbayev, N. (2007). New Kazakhstan in a new world address 2007. *Kazakhstanskaya Pravda*. No. 33(25278), 1 March. <http://www.adilet.gov.kz/en/node/7507>
- Nurgali, S., Osmanova, Z., Yergubekova, Z., Belassarova, Z., & Nurbek, M. (2025). Enhancing intercultural communicative and leadership competence: The impact of an intervention program on linguistics students in Kazakhstan. *Frontiers in Language Studies*, 7(3). <https://doi.org/10.30564/fls.v7i3.8805>
- Nurgalynova, S. M. (2024). Enhancing language competence through cultural diversity: Exploring EFL teaching strategies in Kazakhstan. *Eurasian Science Review*, 2(4), 143-148. <https://shorturl.at/MJWcH>
- Nurzhanova, A., Burbekova, S., & Mukhamadi, K. (2014). The development of Turkish students' lingua-cultural competence in learning Kazakh. *Procedia: Social & Behavioral Sciences*, 112, 532–537. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2014.01.1199>
- O'Dowd, R. (2007). Evaluating the outcomes of online intercultural exchange. *ELT journal*, 61(2), 144-152. <https://doi.org/10.1093/elt/ccm007>
- O'Dowd, R. (2021). Virtual exchange: Moving forward into the next decade. *Computer Assisted Language Learning*, 34(3), 209-224. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09588221.2021.1902201>
- Smakova, K., & Paulsrud, B. (2020). Intercultural communicative competence in English language teaching in Kazakhstan. *Issues in Educational Research*, 30(2), 691-708. <https://search.informit.org/doi/10.3316/ielapa.266358342762421>
- Pinzon, B. & Norely, A. (2020). Authentic materials and tasks as mediators to develop EFL students' intercultural competence. *HOW-A Colombian Journal for Teachers of English*, 27(1), 29-46. <https://doi.org/10.19183/how.27.1.515>

- Romanowski, P. (2017). *Intercultural communicative competence in English language teaching in Polish state colleges*. Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- Spitzberg, B. H., & Changnon, G. (2009). Conceptualizing intercultural competence. In *The SAGE handbook of intercultural competence* (pp. 2-52). SAGE Publications, Inc.
<https://doi.org/10.4135/9781071872987.n1>
- Vo, P. Q. (2017). Rethinking intercultural communication competence in English language teaching: A gap between lecturers' perspectives and practices in a Southeast Asian tertiary context. *i-manager's Journal on English Language Teaching*, 7(1), 20–28. <https://doi.org/10.26634/jelt.7.1.11404>
- Yaylaci, Y. & Islam, A. (2013). Teaching across cultures: Considerations for international language teachers in Kazakhstan. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 103, 900-911. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2013.10.412>
- Yelubayeva, P., & Mustafina, A. (2020). Developing Kazakh students' intercultural awareness and communication through collaborative technologies. *European Journal of Language Policy*, 12(2). <https://doi.org/10.3828/ejlp.2020.12>

Appendix A

Interview protocol



INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Introduction: Hello, my name is Ibrayeva Altyany, and I am a researcher working on a project about master's students' perception of IC development in TEFL. Firstly, thank you for agreeing to participate in an interview. Before the interview, can you confirm your permission for audio recording?

This interview will focus on your experiences of IC development and application in lessons.

If you are unfamiliar with the concept of IC, that's fine; we can discuss it in the process. Your responses will help to understand this topic and can be valuable in future improvements in teacher education in Kazakhstan. Let's start!

Interview questions:

Exploring IC Awareness

1. Can you please briefly introduce yourself and your experience in teaching or learning English?
2. Have you heard of the term intercultural competence? If yes, how would you describe intercultural competency in your own words? If not, let me explain it.
3. What were the initial sources of your IC understanding?

IC Integration in TEFL Programs

4. Is intercultural competence important to teaching English?
5. In your view, to what extent is IC integrated in your TEFL program?
6. Has the TEFL program had an impact on your IC development? If yes, can you please share some experiences?

Challenges of IC Development and Application

7. What challenges, if any, do you face in IC development integration in teaching? And, can you please share your experience with it?
8. What methods do you use to solve the challenges in the integration of IC in teaching?

Suggestions for Improvement

9. What changes would you suggest for the development of IC into TEFL master's programs?
10. What improvements would you suggest for IC development in Kazakhstani TEFL?

Appendix B

Informed Consent Form



SDU University Research Ethics Committee Informed Consent Form

Dear participant,

You are invited to participate in a research study entitled “An Investigation into the Development of Intercultural Competence in TEFL: A Study of Master’s Students’ Perspectives”. The purpose of the study is to explore master’s degree students’ perception of IC development in TEFL programs and to explore challenges faced by master’s students’ IC teaching. The semi-structured interview will take around 40-60 minutes and will be conducted in a blended form, online or offline, at your preference, and the process will be audio-recorded to be transcribed with your consent.

Possible risks and discomfort related to participation in this research

There are minimal risks in the research process. The participation in the research may affect time commitment, and sharing personal experience may be slightly uncomfortable for the participant. However, participation may enhance your understanding of intercultural communication and its role in TEFL. Also, insights may help improve IC-related teaching methods and curricula in Kazakhstan.

Confidentiality & Privacy. Within reason, any personal information obtained as a result of participation will be kept confidential, and names of participants will not be used in any published material. All collected data will be stored securely and accessible only to the researcher.

Voluntary Nature of the Study. It is strictly voluntary as to whether to participate in this study or not. You have the right to withdraw your agreement to participate at any phase of the study.

Contact information: If you have any questions regarding the study, please contact researcher Ibrayeva Altynay, SDU MA student in TEFL, by email 231323002@sdu.edu.kz or number 87083482726.

Statement of Consent.

By signing below, you confirm that:

1. You are aware of the research purpose and objectives, and clearly understand what is expected from you.
2. You agree to participate in semi-structured interview voluntarily. your participation rights, anonymity and freedom to withdraw with no consequences.
3. You understand that any personal information obtained in this study will be kept confidential, and you have the right to withdraw at any time with no consequences.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Researcher:

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Appendix C

Research Ethics Committee Permission

R **Research Ethics Committee** <rethics@sdu.edu.kz>
to me ▾

Dear Altynai Ibrayeva, the decision of Research Ethics committee is provided below:

DISCUSSION:

7. The research conducted by Altynai Ibrayeva, a master's student in the Two Foreign Languages program at the Faculty of Education and Humanities, was reviewed. The following points were noted for clarification and improvement:

- Clarify the research design. Sample size of **20** is not sufficient for quantitative research;
- Recommended structure would be the following: Quantitative research using questionnaires, with a recommended sample size above **30**;
Qualitative research with a smaller, focused sample size of around 5 participants;

DECISION:

7. The research work of Altynai Ibrayeva, «An Investigation into the Development of Intercultural Competence in TEFL: A Study of Master's Students' Perspectives» should be reviewed and re-submitted to the Research Ethics Committee.

If you want to expedite approval, please send the revised application form by Wednesday, ensuring all changes are highlighted in yellow!

Kind regards,
REC committee

R **Research Ethics Committee**
to me ▾

Good day!

Your research was conditionally approved by REC. However the following comments should be considered:

- the research supervisor of the project needs to review the research methodology. Sample size of 10 for semi-structured interviews is ok for the postgraduate small research project. Is it really necessary to include questionnaires? These questions can be covered during the interview process. As such there is only qualitative research design.

Kind regards,
REC

⋮