

Intercultural Communicative Competence in Foreign Language Classroom: Benefits and Challenges

Kemampuan Komunikasi Antarbudaya di Kelas Bahasa Asing: Manfaat dan Tantangan

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ABSTRACT

Enhancing intercultural communicative competence (ICC) is essential in foreign language education, since it profoundly influences learning in a multicultural environment. Instructing a foreign language involves imparting knowledge of a language alongside its unique culture, which encompasses aspects such as religion, gender, and belief systems. Consequently, ICC has emerged as the primary objective of foreign language education and educators. Despite the intrinsic interconnection between language and culture, where one cannot exist without the other, language is nevertheless instructed as a distinct entity from culture. This study, ICC model, seeks to examine the advantages and obstacles of intercultural communicative competence in foreign language education by conducting semi-structured interviews with nine international students from five distinct countries enrolled in Pashto, Urdu, and English courses. The findings indicate that (i) students gain awareness of diverse cultures, languages, cultural values, customs, and traditions; (ii) intercultural communication competence (ICC) presents challenges such as language barriers, cultural alienation, and difficulties in comprehending others' cultures and social norms; (iii) nevertheless, students cultivate a favorable disposition towards learning about other cultures and enhance their literacy skills in foreign language classrooms through ICC.

ABSTRAK

Mengembangkan kompetensi komunikasi antarbudaya (ICC) sangat penting dalam pengajaran bahasa asing karena berdampak signifikan pada pembelajaran di kelas multikultural. Mengajar bahasa asing memerlukan pengajaran bahasa dengan budayanya yang khas yang menggabungkan agama, jenis kelamin, dan seperangkat kepercayaan seseorang. Oleh karena itu, ICC telah menjadi tujuan utama pengajaran/instruktur bahasa asing. Meskipun bahasa dan budaya begitu terkait sehingga yang satu tidak dapat hidup tanpa yang lain, bahasa masih diajarkan sebagai fenomena yang terpisah dari budaya). Mengikuti model ICC7 penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi manfaat dan tantangan kompetensi komunikasi antarbudaya di kelas bahasa asing melalui wawancara semi-terstruktur dari 9 mahasiswa internasional (dari lima negara berbeda) yang terdaftar dalam kursus Pashto, Urdu, dan Inggris. Hasilnya menunjukkan bahwa (i) mahasiswa menjadi tahu tentang berbagai budaya, bahasa, nilai-nilai budaya, adat istiadat, dan tradisi; (ii) ICC menimbulkan hambatan pembelajaran bahasa, keterasingan budaya, dan kesulitan dalam mempelajari dan memahami budaya dan norma sosial orang lain; (iii) namun, siswa mengembangkan sikap positif terhadap pembelajaran dan pengetahuan tentang budaya orang lain dan mengembangkan keterampilan literasi di kelas bahasa asing melalui ICC.

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INTRODUCTION

Language and culture in foreign language teaching (FLT) have been ubiquitous, especially in intercultural classrooms. Some scholars and authors have explained intercultural communicative competence, for instance, as the ability to communicate and engage across cultures (López-Rocha, 2016). Although the ICC is effectively used in teaching, with the emergence of teaching methods and the widespread use of language and culture, several scholars believe that the purpose of foreign or second language teaching is to cultivate students' ability to develop intercultural competence along with effective language use (Byram, 2021; López-Rocha, 2016; Nguyen, 2017). Intercultural

communicative competence in language classrooms in the form of teaching through culture is a tough job for teachers and students since they have to interact and communicate with individuals with different cultural backgrounds and beliefs. ICC has been the major concern of scholars who have worked on the beliefs and perceptions of teachers regarding ICC and students' ability to develop ICC in the foreign language classroom.

The language information that is taught lacks cultural information; thus, it hurdles and limits learners' intercultural vision. Their linguistic repertoire is inadequate to apply their language knowledge in different communicative situations. In this regard, Hoff (2020) stated in his work that the desire and willingness of the class participant to explore and study the deep-rooted relationship between culture and identity, language and culture in a comprehensive manner, one has to understand the complexities in intercultural communication. The key idea is that ICC assists learners in the language classroom to understand their own culture as well as others. It develops language competency in multicultural situations.

Communicative competence is a term coined by Hymes (1972) against the term linguistic competence by Chomsky (1965). He defines linguistic competence as an underlying system of knowledge the speakers have. On the other hand, Hymes (1972) defines communicative competence as the ability to communicate and use language appropriately. Communicative competence focuses on linguistic competence, vocabulary, grammar, and the appropriate use of language in different situations; strategic competence focuses on the organization and delivery of messages effectively and the intended meaning to convey the message, and lastly, communicative competence, which fills the gap which between speaker and hearer (Yule, 2019).

Intercultural communicative competence is researched under different terms such as cross-cultural or multicultural communication, intercultural understanding, intercultural beliefs, and cross-cultural awareness. According to Byram (2009, 2021), ICC is an ability to discover knowledge, skills, interaction skills, and cultural awareness based on the skills and knowledge related to the acquisition of intercultural competence. The ICC model is explained in the theoretical framework section and quoted as Byram (2009, 2021) theoretical model of ICC, which incorporates and describes the qualities as a set of knowledge, skills, attitudes, and disposition. "Language learners who thus become 'intercultural speakers' will be successful not only in communicating information but also in developing a human relationship with people of other languages and cultures" (Byram et al., 2002).

M. J. Bennett (1993, 1998), as referenced by Wu (2014), elucidated that intercultural communication competence (ICC) comes into play when individuals encounter others speaking different languages and possessing diverse cultural, behavioral norms, and beliefs. These disparities can result in cultural differences and challenges in interpersonal interactions. The breakdown in communication within a multicultural society may lead to unfair and negative behaviors. M. J. Bennett (1998) suggested that addressing these issues requires the cultivation of intercultural communicative competence—a capacity to effectively navigate the challenges faced by individuals from diverse cultures. Byram (2009) defines ICC as an interactive approach, describing it as the ability of foreign language speakers to understand and interpret the beliefs, values, and behaviors of themselves and others. This involves establishing boundaries that encompass various cultures within a shared cultural space. In simpler terms, intercultural communication involves interactions among individuals with distinct cultural backgrounds and beliefs, constituting a form of societal communication (Chandler & Munday, 2011).

Intercultural communication plays a vital role for foreign language learners in education to deal with linguistic, social, and cultural complexities. They find it challenging to take an active part in multicultural activities and their event, including educational activities, such as instructions, assessment and, classroom interaction, etc. (Deardorff, 2009; Jæger, 2001; Tran & Seepho, 2016). Tran & Seepho (2016) explored the attitudes of EFL learners toward intercultural communicative language teaching and the development of their ICC in their local context. The methods used in this paper include questionnaires, language tests, IC tests, and semi-structured group interviews to garner data with a sample size of forty-seven EFL learners who were pursuing ICC courses. According to the findings of the study, the attitude of the EFL learners towards intercultural communicative language learning improved and was positive. In addition to improving intercultural ability, they focused on promoting empathy and understanding of various cultures, along with objectivity and respect for other cultures. It is a matter of fact that language and culture are inextricably linked, such that a person cannot exist without the other in society. Language has still been taught as a separate entity from culture, and classroom activities are devoid of any lessons in foreign languages. In his study, Cranmer (2017) passionately argued for heightened attention to the complexities and challenges of developing ICC skills when interacting with individuals who possess a lower level of knowledge and awareness. Students should be exposed to localized situations that allow them to explore the intercultural context in which they are learning. However, dealing with intercultural issues of this nature proves to be complex and challenging across various settings.

López-Rocha (2016) asserted that language teachers are supposed to have cultural knowledge and accumulated information about other cultures, which can help students develop their intercultural competence as their linguistic competence increases. Additionally, teachers can have multiple ways to promote diversified cultures, which can also develop the ICC effectively. ICC training should involve awareness of different values, attitudes, and behaviors of 'others' as well as skills to deal with them in a non-judgmental way (Barany, 2016). It can be the most effective means to enhance the capacity of teachers and instructors. It can also be helpful to engage and develop critical thinking in the intercultural context to develop their own awareness and sensitivity.

In reality, teaching a foreign language undoubtedly carries more effort when the culture that encompasses one's religion, gender, and beliefs is radically ignored in the classroom (Habrat, 2018). The researcher found that FL teachers should be aware of foreign cultures, which helps them teach students according to their needs and required learning environment. The researcher used multiple techniques to develop learners' cultural awareness. Kramsch (1993) stated that culture is not an optional fifth ability in language learning that is taught for speaking and writing. However, language learners get these skills (culture) from day one; their communicative competence is tested, and their ability to make sense is challenged.

Tran & Duong (2018) are of the view in their study focused on the effectiveness of an intercultural communicative teaching model for EFL learners and improving their intercultural communication skills through the use of intercultural communicative language teaching (ICLT). The researchers selected the population of students learning General English courses to get good results. They used different instruments to develop the effectiveness of communicative competence, such as language tests, intercultural communicative competence tests, and semi-structured group interviews to collect data. The researchers suggested that EFL speakers will be fluent enough if they are equipped with ICLT models in their global contexts. The researchers also believed that the study could be applied in various EFL contexts to boost the level of intercultural competence of learners, and the learners were motivated and enthusiastic in the ICC context.

Toscu & Erten (2020) state in their research that developing ICC by means of technology has a positive effect on students' learning. This study also aims to explore how integrated learning affects and enhances the intercultural communicative competence of EFL learners through online learning where they have native and non-native speakers. They found that telecollaborative learning had a favorable impact on students' ICC and revealed that telecollaborative learning improves their ICC because they have people all around the world to learn, such as native and non-native speakers. Additionally, it is revealed that a better understanding of how telecollaborative benefits EFL students by positively influencing their attitudes, knowledge, skills, and critical cultural awareness.

Although ICC has recently been introduced in ELT or EFL teaching, several studies based on ICC principles build up the efficacy of communicative competence for strengthening teachers' intercultural awareness and integration of intercultural communication in learning (Czura, 2016; Mede & Gunes, 2019). Many researchers (Brunsmeier, 2017; Corder et al., 2018; Dirba, 2007; Garrido & Álvarez, 2006; Larzén-Östermark, 2008) have explored inadequacies in providing important information to teachers, as well as specific ICC conceptualizations and teaching principles for ICC growth in the language classroom. Hasanah & Abdulrahman (2021) have explored the benefits and challenges of EFL teachers' ICC and their perception of it through technology integration. The study aimed to see how an online course develops teachers' intercultural communicative competence and aid in teaching intercultural communication. The findings revealed that the teachers learned many things, including cultural change and cultural values, and enhanced their intercultural competence. Nhem (2020) focused on culture, intercultural awareness, intercultural competence, and textbook adaptation. The researchers stated that culture is taught along with the books published in multicultural societies to enhance linguistics knowledge and intercultural abilities in that language. In the same way, the researcher's work reported a qualitative study in which he, with his wise analysis, recognized the role of culture in second language teaching in an IC context and the views about the practices of textbook adaptations to develop intercultural competence. The data for the study was collected from three Canadian EFL teachers, and the methods for this study included classroom observations and teaching materials to achieve the desired objectives of the study.

However, this study is about the challenges and benefits of learners in an intercultural setting. These objectives are rarely touched by the eminent scholars of the times. It is an era of language learning and teaching where students are diverse and multilingual in their cultural backgrounds. Therefore, this study aims to explore the benefits of ICC in the language classroom and investigate students' challenges. This study aims to achieve the objectives mentioned above and explore answers to the following questions:

RQ1. How does ICC benefit students in the language classroom?

RQ2. What are the challenges of intercultural communication for foreign language learners in the multicultural classroom context?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This section describes the procedures for data collection and the theoretical framework guiding the study. This study aims to explore the benefits and challenges faced by students in mixed-cultural language classes. Conducted in Pakistan, the research focused on a public university that offers short-term language courses in English, Pashto, and Urdu to students from various countries. Data were collected from nine participants representing four countries: Canada, the United States, Korea, and Turkey. These participants provided insights into their experiences in a multicultural language learning environment.

The present study employs qualitative technique to evaluate the data; qualitative research is utilized to examine the value and quality of interactions and materials often categorized as descriptive research. Semi-structured interviews were done with purposely selected participants to investigate the benefits and problems encountered in the multicultural language classroom in Pakistan. Data were gathered and documented from 10 individuals from Canada, the United States, Korea, and Turkey. The participants willingly provided their comments and answered the questions proficiently. The data were gathered over a span of 20 days, during which the researchers encountered several challenges in executing the study. A protracted process was necessary to get authorization for interviewing foreigners. The researchers encountered more difficulties in gathering data from foreigners, who face more constraints in meeting with them compared to local individuals, particularly during interviews that are time-consuming and need the recording of potentially sensitive information.

The researchers have employed Byram (2021) intercultural communicative competence model to investigate the advantages and obstacles of ICC. Prior studies, like Hasanah & Abdulrahman (2021), have examined the advantages and attitudes of EFL educators. Byram (2021) asserts that an interculturally competent learner has a range of affective, behavioral, and cognitive abilities. Consequently, he endeavored to develop a novel conceptual model that would include the attributes of an adept intercultural communicator. He identified these traits as a collection of information, skills, attitudes, and a readiness to act:

Savoir être: attitudes; relativizing self, valuing others.

Savoir: knowledge of self and other; of interaction; individual and societal.

Savoir comprendre: skills of interpreting and relating

Savoir apprendre/faire: skills of discovering and/or interacting.

Savoir s'engager: political education, critical cultural awareness (adapted from Byram (2021))

Attitude is a component of the Byram (2021) model, which enables learners to exhibit curiosity, openness, and a readiness to suspend disbelief regarding other cultures while preserving confidence in their own culture. This requires a readiness to eschew a self-righteous disposition, meaning not supposing that one's own opinions and actions are the sole true ones, together with the capacity to perceive matters from an alternative viewpoint; Byram (2021) and Kramsch (1993) have characterized this as being detached from one's own culture. Byram (2009, 2021) describes the understanding of diverse communities and their practices, alongside the cultural products utilized within their respective cultures, states, or countries, including that of one's interlocutor, as well as the implications for personal and social development and the transformations that arise from cultural knowledge. Byram (2009, 2021) posits that the talents of interpreting and relating involve the capacity to analyze a document or event from a different culture, elucidate it, and connect it to documents from one's own culture. This skill involves interpreting several cultures within an intercultural context. The capacity to assimilate new cultural information and practices, along with the ability to use knowledge, attitudes, and skills during real-time communication and engagement, renders an individual a proficient intercultural communicator. Critical cultural awareness in political education is the ability to critically evaluate attitudes, behaviors, and products

of one's own culture and other cultures, based on defined criteria, hence enhancing learners' interaction with diverse cultures (Byram, 2009, 2021).

We have concentrated solely on the attitudes, knowledge, and abilities related to cultural interaction, analyzing the benefits and obstacles in the language classroom based on participant interviews. Upon data collection, we manually transcribed the interviews by listening to each tape. The findings were qualitatively analyzed by elucidating students' challenges and advantages in an international classroom via emergent themes.

ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

This table presents the data of the participants from different countries who were enrolled in Urdu and Pashto certificate courses in an intercultural setting in Pakistan. In order to achieve the objectives of the current research, this study attempted to find out the attitudes, knowledge, and skills of intercepting and relating the cultural interaction aspects in the language classroom in the Pakistani context. In addition, the participants showed their attitude towards learning the desired course in which they were greatly interested. Every course learner considered the desire to learn in an intercultural context. The study explores the advantages or benefits students get in an intercultural classroom and the challenges and hurdles in intercultural classrooms. Table 1 shows the details of the research participants.

Table 1. Profile of the Participants

S. No	Age	Gender	Country	Language Course	Speaker Code
1.	23	Male	Turkey	English Certificate	P1(E)
2.	23	Male	Turkey	English Certificate	P2(E)
3.	25	Male	Turkey	English Certificate	P3(E)
4.	22	Female	Turkey	English Certificate	P4(E)
5.	29	Male	Turkey	Urdu Certificate	P1(U)
6.	20	Male	Korea	Urdu Certificate	P2(U)
7.	25	Male	Canada	Pashto Certificate	P1(P)
8.	24	Male	USA	Pashto Certificate	P2(P)
9.	32	Male	South Korea	Pashto Certificate	P3(P)

Benefits of Intercultural Language Classroom

Considering the first question, this research investigates the benefits of intercultural communicative competence in language classrooms. All participants responded that they learned about the language and literacy skills of the targeted language they have come for. Foregrounding Byram's model, this study traces the benefits of attending an academic setting with mixed-cultural learners.

Students said they had ample opportunities to learn about different cultures in their surroundings, especially in the class were multicultural students' study together. One of the participants is of the view that:

"We learn a lot in the classroom as we have students from Canada, Philippines, Kazakhstan, and China with whom we interact and we learn from one another in the class "(P2 (E)

In the speaker's class, there are students from multiple countries who can help him to know about these cultures. He stated that Pakistan gives freedom and accepts all sorts of cultural diversity. There are cultures like Kashmiri, Balochi, Skardu, Punjabi, etc. This helps people know and be aware of the cultures of the country(ies). The second participant in the same course said:

"The best thing about Pakistan is that there are a lot of cultures in it, whereas there is no such thing in our country. There is a narrow perspective in our country (P3 (P))".

The respondent believed that for this reason, a narrow perspective prevails about welcoming any new culture in their country as people are monolinguals. People stick to their own cultures, which makes them uncomfortable when they want to do business, and they do not understand any other language, etc. Respondents believed that it is better to merge into different cultures so that one may not face such difficulties. One can make relations and business with such knowledge of cultures as one learns about their norms, customs, and language (Byram, 2021). This interaction can also develop communicative competence in the targeted course they intend to pursue. It is, therefore, important for the learner to have communicative competence that helps the learners to be able to communicate with people (Nguyen, 2017).

Attitudes Toward Other Cultures

Students believe that it is advantageous for the learner to groom his/her skills in a class where students from different backgrounds and cultures come together and make a bond that grooms their skills and competence to interact and communicate fluently. Byram (2021) believes there is openness and curiosity to show a positive or negative attitude towards the culture you interact with. Likewise, the participant showed positive behavior towards the course and cultures of the class. One of the students asserted:

"In the intercultural classroom, I came to know how someone from different cultures thinks, behaves, and gives value to others. (P2 (E))".

The participant was in a Pashto course where students from various countries were also enrolled. He found that it is advisable to understand how people think in different cultures and how they show respect and help others. Moreover, most students believe that each culture has different values and beliefs evaluated in multicultural classes. Sometimes they adopt new things in an environment where people from different cultures, languages, and values come together. In this regard, intercultural communicative competence improves, and the learners achieve their targets when there is cooperation and understanding of students' cultures.

"I feel good because different countries and cultures help me think differently. People coming from various cultures and thinking make a connection to improve my intercultural competence (P1 (E))".

The participant asserted that a multicultural environment develops thinking and learning. Intercultural communicative competence is improved by interacting with cultural differences, including language, norms, and ethnicity. Additionally, the participant showed his utmost joy and a critical approach which he has got with the help of this multicultural language classroom. This shows the positive attitude of the participant towards other cultures, especially the understanding of his classmates and teacher. The students have a positive attitude towards learning a new language and enjoy multicultural classrooms whereupon the speakers of different languages help them enhance their vocabulary and listening skills.

Celebration and Offering Things

It is also one of the norms of any culture which affects and leaves its influence on others. One of the speakers enrolled in the Pashto course showed his pleasure that people in Pakistan celebrate every event together. He asserted:

"Here we find that people are community-oriented in celebrating birthdays and other functions. However, there is a drastic difference here between Pakistan and our country (P2 (P))."

This participant was learning Pashto and found the differences in their cultural celebration. They learned that, in Pakistan, people celebrate happy moments with their friends and relatives. In contrast, it is completely different in their country where we celebrate, such as birthdays, with the members of home only. I think these people are community-oriented and want to share their happy moments with their near and dear ones. In the same way, the other speaker observed the different and beneficial things which show commodities, such as offering things.

"In my culture, if somebody says, "would you like to drink tea? And it is polite in my culture to say yes or no right away because nobody will offer again. However, people keep asking once, twice, and thrice that it seems as if the person is very sincere (P1 (P))."

This speaker observes that in their culture, it is polite to say no to an offer, and nobody asks for that after one refuse. In contrast, people in Pakistan keep offering twice, thrice, and even more. People believe in unity and community-oriented activities they eat, celebrate, and enjoy together with the bonding of love and prosperity. Learners interpret and relate their cultures to others where they find such differences and learn new linguistic and cultural traditions.

In the development and attitudes of ICC in the language classroom, Tran & Seepho (2016) have only focused on the perspective of EFL learners towards intercultural communicative competence and found positive results. However, the present study presents the benefits of intercultural communicative competence in the language classroom in three different language courses, such as English, Urdu, and Pashto, in the Pakistani context. This study is also different in terms of emerging themes. As a matter of fact, students' knowledge gets ameliorated when they become aware of the various cultures in their classrooms. Students were of the opinion that there is a positive effect of intercultural communicative competence, and it enabled them to recognize multiple cultures, their thinking, values, and language.

Challenges in Intercultural Language Classroom

Intercultural communicative competence is beneficial for those who understand and develop their competence to communicate in the desired language they are learning or face difficulties in probing into these conditions radically. Much attention has been drawn to the attitude of students and the perception of EFL teachers towards intercultural communicative competence, for instance, the effect of the ICC on EFL learners and its development in inculcating their skills to communicate effectively (Tran & Duong, 2018). However, the paper is mainly student-focused compared to others, focusing on the development, attitudes of students towards ICC, and the teachers' perception about ICC, whereas the challenges were sheerly ignored. The participants had different challenges they encountered in the classroom. Though they found it learnable, they tried to overcome them.

Challenges in Intercultural Language Classroom

The students could read and write because they had improved their literacy skills. However, they failed to develop their knowledge skills (speaking and listening), which were challenging. They could not develop their interpersonal competence, especially those whose first language was English and Turkish. One of these speakers said:

"I can read and write English, but I cannot speak before others. I don't know why, but words don't come to my tongue when I am in a situation to speak in the class (P1 (E))."

The participant said that he had improved his literacy skills, which helped him convey his message to others; however, he also expressed a positive attitude towards learning in the multicultural classroom because it would teach him about different cultures and their languages. The participant also added that he improved his interpersonal competence significantly over time. Moreover, it is linked to the knowledge factor, where students are unable to come up with solutions or they are unable to communicate in the targeted language (Byram, 2021).

Foreign Language as a Medium of Instruction in Intercultural Classrooms

In this regard, one of the respondents is of the opinion:

"It is sometimes very challenging to understand the language of instruction and to participate in group discussion in the class as compared to English which is my native language (P1 (P))."

The participant believed that instructions given in the target language are arduous, and sometimes, they cannot understand the discussion that takes place in the class because their competence is low and is not strong enough to catch what is uttered by the speaker. He was in a state where he could understand the vocabulary but could not understand the message every time. In the same way, as the other participants asserted:

"It is not beneficial to have an intercultural class when students feel bad to be unable to speak that language. Those who know the target language keep speaking in Urdu, etc., which sometimes makes embarrassment for those who speak less (P1 (U))".

It can be summarized that intercultural class is not only beneficial, but they also have a negative effect on the learners. It is sometimes very difficult for learners to make a good connection with their classmates if they are not in a position to take a good stance in communication. Additionally, your interest in developing intercultural communicative competence decreases if the aforementioned situations occur in your classroom environment. In this challenge, it can be observed that the students were unable to receive enough knowledge about the target culture, which blocked their understanding as Byram's (2021) model's factor of knowledge is concerned, whereupon the knowledge is a very crucial factor which helps learner increase their competence towards the target language and culture.

Exam System

This has been the main issue for all those who change their place for academic purposes because it not only affects their language barriers if found but also exerts its influence on learning and dealing with the exam system. In this regard, two of the other participants from the English course said:

"Exam system is challenging for us where our results are shown to everyone which is challenging and a matter of shame for us if we get low marks. (P2 (P))".

These participants found shame and degradation in showing the results on the board or showing one's result to everyone in the class. They found it very unusual to accept because this system was completely new for them in Pakistan, and it was not practiced in their country; the only student could see his/her result in their country. This challenge drastically changed their competency level and negatively impacted their minds. In an intercultural country like Pakistan, we follow a result system that is shown and displayed on the notice board. No such concept of privacy may create a positive image for those new to this culture. Byram (2021), in the same way, provides the factor of ICC in which learners interpret, describe and evaluate the culture by comparing it with their own cultures. The most common issue and challenges students face in the intercultural classroom is academic competence which was toilsome for them to cope with language and comprehension of instructions as well as class activities. In short, the students have fewer benefits and more challenges in intercultural communication, which are caused by the students' incompetence and lack of academic competence.

The results demonstrated that learners in foreign classrooms had the desire to understand and learn about other cultures. The present study is based on students' benefits and challenges in intercultural language classrooms. Even though the participants had interaction with people from different cultures, cultural gatherings, and celebrations such as offers and positive attitudes towards other cultures and the challenges interpersonal skills of language and exams system, etc. were observed. Additionally, the participants also highlighted the distinctions between their own cultures with those of other cultures, which is the same as Yilmaz (2006), who stressed in his work that it is essential to learn about the target language and compare it to the speaker's own culture which can provide a clear picture in understanding the cultures.

Hasanah & Abdulrahman (2021) conducted a similar study focused on the benefits of ICC for EFL teachers. Teacher-centered research was carried out in which they found how the teachers developed their cultural knowledge and language. In the same way, Tran & Duong (2018) tend to focus on the improvement of intercultural competence through effective teaching. However, the present study is student-centered, which can be the most important for the researchers and management to know about the students' benefits in Pakistan public universities. Attitude, knowledge, and comparison of cultures benefit learners in understanding and increasing their knowledge. Byram's (2021) model provides a clear image of behavior, awareness, and evaluation of one's own culture with other cultures.

In the second question, we reported the challenges students were facing in an intercultural class, as mentioned before. As mentioned above, the study conducted by Hasanah & Abdulrahman (2021) focused on the challenges of teachers' intercultural cultural communicative competence and their perception through integrating technology to interact with students and others. In contrast, we have not only focused on intercultural communicative competence, but the focal point of this study was to look into the challenges that students are facing in language classrooms according to the model we have selected, such as the attitude of the students and knowledge which can be said that the heart of the study. According to Byram (2021), your knowledge, your way of looking at other cultures, and interpreting their norms by comparing them with your own culture is very beneficial to increase your ICC skills. However, at the same time, these factors are challenging as well. The students were unable to understand others when speaking in the target language, and their attitude turned out to be discouraging because of their inadequate knowledge of the language they were learning.

CONCLUSION

The results revealed various themes as this study aimed to explore the benefits and challenges of intercultural communicative competence students face in the language classroom. The findings of this study revealed that students in an intercultural language classroom learn about different cultures, which helps them understand other cultures and develop their intercultural communicative competence by knowing and interacting with all these cultures. The students had some benefits, such as literacy skills (reading and writing) of their desired course, whether Pashto, Urdu, or English learners have improved intercultural competence during the course. Moreover, despite the participants interacting with people from many countries, there are cultural gatherings and celebrations such as offerings and favorable attitudes toward other cultures and obstacles in interpersonal language and test systems were seen. The students also faced difficulties and challenges in an intercultural language classroom. For instance, students were unable to understand the local language being spoken in the classroom and had inefficient vocabulary and an exam system that was sometimes degrading. This study also documented that the learners had more challenges in intercultural communication in language rather than benefits. This study contributes to the benefits and challenges of students from various countries, as mentioned earlier in the methodology chapter, in an intercultural context, especially in Pakistan, where a number of cultures are practiced. The researchers have limited this research to benefits and challenges in the intercultural language classroom. However, the researchers also faced pedagogical issues and challenges faced by these students, which future researchers in the same study

can further explore. Due to the shortage of time and resources, we could not focus on the pedagogical issues, gender discrimination, and population in the domains of research which are left to explore and get better results.

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