

"We Talk, Therefore We Understand": A Case Study of Speaking as a Medium for Enhancing Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) Among Indonesian Pre-Service English Teachers

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Abstract

The paradigm of English language teaching has shifted from communicative competence toward intercultural communicative competence (ICC), yet Indonesian pre-service English teachers face limited access to authentic intercultural experiences. This qualitative case study investigates how structured speaking activities, integrated with role-play and simulation, facilitate ICC development among 17 second-semester English Language Education students at a private Islamic university in Lampung, Indonesia. Over nine sessions on culture-themed topics, data were collected through classroom observations and documentation in the form of recordings of teaching and learning. The findings reveal that speaking instruction systematically enhances four dimensions of ICC: linguistic competence through contextualized grammar practice; discourse competence through production of extended spoken genres including personal narratives, procedural explanations, and reported speech sequences; sociolinguistic competence through sensitivity to power relations, social distance, and degree of imposition in situated roleplays; and intercultural competence through development of all five of Byram's (2021) *savoirs*. The sequenced progression from self and daily life to abstract cultural systems mirrors the developmental trajectory of intercultural sensitivity from ethnocentric to ethnorelative stages. Roleplay and simulation function as pedagogical mediators between cultural knowledge and intercultural action, providing a psychologically safe space that lowers the affective filter and reduces foreign language classroom anxiety. This study concludes that an ICC-oriented speaking course integrating culture-themed topics with experiential activities offers a theoretically grounded and practically effective model for preparing pre-service English teachers to become intercultural speakers and mediators in increasingly globalized classrooms.

Keywords – Speaking, Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC), pre-service English teachers, case study, Indonesian EFL context

Introduction

The paradigm of English language teaching has shifted from merely achieving communicative competence to developing intercultural communicative competence (ICC), the ability to negotiate meaning, mediate between cultures, and establish relationships with speakers from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds (Byram, 2021). This shift is particularly relevant in the Indonesian context, where English is taught as a foreign language (EFL), and learners rarely have naturalistic exposure to the target culture. McKay (2003), Fang & Baker (2018) further proposed that

English be reconceptualized as an international/global language that no longer belongs only to Anglophone nations and should be de-nationalized or re-nationalized, enabling users to express their own cultures and purposes. However, EFL pedagogy in Indonesia continues to face tensions between native-speaker ideologies and local realities, as teaching materials and curricula remain heavily centered on inner-circle cultures such as American and British English (Agustina & Kencana, 2023; Hapsari & Fauzi, 2025; Purba, 2023). In contrast, local Indonesian cultural contexts are often marginalized.

Amid these challenges, Indonesian pre-service English teachers occupy a uniquely strategic position because their own ICC levels and their readiness to integrate intercultural perspectives into teaching will directly influence future generations of students. Unfortunately, many pre-service teachers in Indonesia have limited access to authentic intercultural experiences due to having never joined exchanges or internships abroad (Arfiandhani & Suraya, 2021), fragmented understandings of culture and intercultural competence, suggesting limited deep intercultural learning in many programs (Atmojo & Putra, 2022; Setyaningsih et al., 2023; Widiati & Hayati, 2018), culture courses focus on English-speaking countries' cultures for language learning, not on preparing pre-service English teachers to teach interculturally in diverse context (Gunara & Sutanto, 2021), implementation in teaching is constrained by time, materials, curriculum, and short practicum duration (Drajati et al., 2024; Fitriyah et al., 2024; Nazhafah & Muslim, 2021; Nindya et al., 2022). Consequently, there is an urgent need for alternative pathways to ICC development that can be implemented within local Indonesian contexts without relying on international mobility.

One promising alternative is to utilize speaking activities as the primary medium for achieving intercultural understanding. The title of this study, "We Talk, Therefore We Understand," deliberately invokes a communicative epistemology that positions dialogue as the main mechanism for co-constructing intercultural understanding. Unlike reading or writing, which allow for extended reflection, speaking in intercultural encounters demands real-time negotiation of meaning, management of uncertainty, and spontaneous responses to unexpected cultural cues. From a Vygotskian sociocultural perspective, higher mental functions, including

intercultural understanding, develop through social interaction mediated by language. Through structured speaking activities such as intercultural dialogues, role-plays of intercultural scenarios, and reflective discussions, learners can develop what Byram (2021) terms the "skills of discovery and interaction," the ability to elicit cultural meanings, negotiate understanding, and build relationships in real-time communication.

Despite the growing body of literature on ICC in Indonesian English language teaching (ELT), several significant research gaps remain. First, while numerous studies have analyzed cultural content in textbooks or assessed ICC levels among teachers and students, limited research has examined specific pedagogical strategies for developing ICC through speaking activities in the Indonesian pre-service English teachers context. Second, existing studies have predominantly focused on either ICC conceptualization or instructional material development, with fewer investigations examining the actual processes by which spoken interaction mediates intercultural understanding. Third, although scholars have called for more culturally responsive EFL pedagogy in Indonesia, few studies have documented how pre-service English teachers can be prepared to implement such pedagogy through their own experiential learning. To address this gap, this case study specifically investigates how structured speaking activities can serve as a medium to enhance intercultural communicative competence (ICC) among prospective English teachers in Indonesia and how ICC is enhanced among these prospective teachers. By focusing on conversation as both a means and an outcome of intercultural learning, this study aims to generate insights that can inform the design of an ICC-oriented speaking curriculum for English as a foreign

language (EFL) teacher education in Indonesia.

Methodology

This study used a qualitative case study design to explore in depth the process of speaking instruction in a natural context, in a class of 17 second-semester English Language Education students at a private Islamic university in Lampung, Indonesia. The research subjects were selected through purposive sampling because this class is considered representative of beginning-level learners developing intercultural communicative competence. Data collection techniques were carried out in two ways: direct observation of the classroom learning process during nine meetings and documentation. The instruments used in this study include observation sheets with checklists and field notes, as well as documents recording the teaching and learning process in the speaking class. Data analysis was conducted using descriptive techniques (Miles & Huberman, 1994) in three stages: data reduction, involving sorting relevant information from observations and documents; data presentation in narrative and tabular form; and conclusions.

The research procedure was carried out in four main stages. The first stage was preparation, which included establishing the research class, developing and validating instruments (observation sheets), and obtaining research permits from the lecturers and the institution. The second stage was data collection, which involved observing learning activities and interactions, as well as documenting them. The third stage was data analysis, which included processing observation notes and documents into narratives. The fourth stage was conclusion drawing and reporting, in which findings from the two data sources were systematically compiled, discussed with reference to relevant theories, and reported in a

descriptive narrative, complete concrete examples from the data. With this methodology, this study provides a holistic and contextual picture of how speaking can improve second-semester students' intercultural speaking abilities and how these improvements can be achieved in real-life learning situations.

Finding and Discussion

This section presents the finding and discussion of this study, which specifically examines the process by which a speaking class facilitates the development of ICC among Indonesian pre-service English teachers

Finding

1. Speaking facilitates development of ICC

The process of how speaking facilitates development of ICC which includes linguistics, sociolinguistics, discourse, and intercultural competence, is explained in more detail as follows:

1.1 Enhancement of linguistic competence

The speaking activities in these nine topics explicitly target grammatical structures and vocabulary, which are the basis for intercultural interactions.

Session	Linguistic Focus	Contribution to linguistic competence
Good memories	Past tense, <i>used to</i> for habitual actions	Accurate production of past narratives about childhood across cultures
Have you ever tried it?	Simple past vs. present perfect; sequence adverbs (first, then, next, after that, finally)	Distinguishing past experiences from general life experiences
Hit the road	Be going to and will; modals for necessity/suggestion (must, need to, should, ought to)	Expressing future plans and giving advice appropriately
Sure I'll do it	Two-part verbs; will for responding to requests; modals with <i>would you mind...?</i>	Using polite request forms and appropriate response strategies
Time to Celebrate	Relative clauses of time; adverbial clauses (when, after,	Describing festivals and customs with complex sentence

	before)	structures
I like working with people	Gerunds; short responses; clauses with because	Talking about abilities and job preferences fluently
It's really worth seeing it	Passive with by (simple past); passive without by (simple present)	Describing landmarks and historical facts accurately
Now I get it	Modals of possibility (might, may, could, must); adverbs (maybe, perhaps, probably, definitely)	Expressing degrees of certainty when interpreting gestures
Making excuses	Reported speech (requests and statements)	Reporting what people said across cultural contexts

Roleplay and simulation provide contextualized grammar practice, enabling students to move from decontextualized drills to meaningful use of linguistic forms in intercultural scenarios.

1.2 Enhancement of Discourse competence

Each session requires students to produce entire spoken texts (not just isolated sentences) through roleplay and simulation. Different genres are practiced explicitly.

Session	Spoken Genre Practiced	Discourse Features
Good Memories	Personal narrative	Opening (introducing self), chronological sequence, closing
Have you ever tried it?	Procedural explanation	Step-by-step instructions using sequence adverbs
Hit the Road	Travel advice monologue + dialogue	Giving reasons, ordering suggestions, concluding
Sure I'll do it	Request-response sequence	Initiation, response (accept/refuse), follow-up (apology/excuse)
Time to Celebrate	Descriptive explanation	Topic introduction, supporting details using time clauses
I like working with people	Job interview discourse	Q&A adjacency pairs, self-promotion strategies
It's really worth seeing it	Factual report	General statement, specific facts

		using passive voice
Now I get it	Explanatory discourse	Interpreting signs/gestures, giving evidence using modals
Making excuses	Reported speech narrative	Reporting requests and statements with appropriate back shifting

Roleplay and simulation require students to produce coherent and cohesive extended discourse (e.g., a full interview, a complaint dialogue, a travel advice monologue). Students learn to manage turn-taking, topic maintenance, and discourse markers. Example from simulation (Sure I'll do it): Students must perform a complete request-refusal-apology sequence, not just a single sentence. This develops their ability to structure interactions logically.

1.3 Enhancement of Sociolinguistic competence

This competence, using language appropriately according to social context, is the most directly developed through the situated roleplays in this class.

Session	Social Variables Practiced	Sociolinguistic Features
Good Memories	Informal (friends) vs. formal (strangers)	Choice of past tense forms, use of used to vs. simple past for nostalgia
Have you ever tried it?	Expressing likes/dislikes politely	Degree of directness (I love it vs. It's okay vs. I'm not a fan)
Hit the Road	Giving advice to peers vs. elders	Modals: should/ought to (softer) vs. must/have to (stronger)
Sure I'll do it	Request strategies across power relations	Would you mind...? (Polite) vs. Can you...? (neutral) vs. Do this (impolite)
Time to Celebrate	Describing customs to outsiders	Adjusting complexity based on listener's cultural familiarity
I like working with people	Formal interview register	Using gerunds for professional identity (I enjoy working... vs. I like to work...)
It's really worth seeing it	Presenting facts neutrally	Passive voice to depersonalize and sound objective
Now I get it	Explaining prohibited behavior	Modals of obligation/prohibition: must not, can't, not allowed to
Making	Politeness in	Reported speech for

excuses	refusals	indirectness (She said she was busy) vs. direct refusal
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Roleplay and simulation provide authentic social contexts in which students must choose appropriate linguistic forms based on power, distance, and the degree of imposition. This cannot be achieved through decontextualized grammar exercises. Example from simulation (Now I get it): Students roleplay explaining prohibited behaviors in a foreign temple. They learn that direct prohibitions (Don't sit there!) may be rude; softer forms (You might not want to sit there or It's better not to) are more appropriate across many cultures.

1.4 Enhancement of Intercultural Competence

This is the highest-order competence in the ICC framework, and the most effectively developed through the integration of culture-specific topics, roleplay, and simulation.

Intercultural Sub-competence (Byram, 2021)	How It Is Developed in This Class
Savoirs (Knowledge)	9 topics explicitly teach cultural facts: holidays (Time to Celebrate), landmarks (It's really worth seeing it), food (Have you ever tried it?), body language (Now I get it)
Savoir être (Attitudes)	Post-roleplay reflection reduces ethnocentrism and increases curiosity
Savoir comprendre (Skills of interpreting)	Now I get it: Students interpret unfamiliar gestures and link them to cultural values
Savoir faire (Skills of discovery & interaction)	Roleplay across all sessions: requesting, refusing, complaining, reporting across cultures
Savoir s'engager (Critical cultural awareness)	Time to Celebrate and Now I get it trigger discussions on cultural appropriation vs. appreciation

1.4.1. Specific evidence from each session

Specific evidence of each session and its specific intercultural outcomes are presented in the table below:

Session	Specific Intercultural Outcome
Good Memories	Students compare childhood across cultures (e.g., sleeping arrangements, discipline, play)
Have you ever tried it?	Students learn that some cultures eat insects/crocodile/horses and discuss food taboos
Hit the Road	Students compare vacation norms (e.g., paid leave differences, family vs. solo travel)
Sure I'll do it	Students learn that refusal strategies vary: indirect (Japan, Indonesia) vs. direct (Germany, US)
Time to Celebrate	Students explain their own festivals to classmates and learn about foreign ones
I like working with people	Students compare work values (e.g., individualism vs. collectivism in interviews)
It's really worth seeing it	Students discuss why some landmarks are globally famous and others are not (power/knowledge)
Now I get it	Students identify gestures and body language that are neutral in one culture but offensive in another
Making excuses	Students learn that "saving face" affects excuse-giving across cultures

The sequenced topics move from self (Good Memories), daily life (food, travel), social interactions (requests, celebrations), work (job preferences), and abstract values (landmarks, body language, norms). This progression mirrors the developmental trajectory of intercultural sensitivity (from ethnocentric to ethno relative).

Discussion

This study aims to describe how speaking instruction can enhance intercultural communicative competence (ICC) among pre-service English teachers. The findings of this study indicate that speaking classes integrating role-playing and simulations on nine culturally themed topics significantly improved students' ICC across all four dimensions: linguistic, discourse, sociolinguistic, and intercultural competence. These results align with and extend established theoretical frameworks in second language acquisition and intercultural education, particularly the work of

Hymes (1972), Canale and Swain (1980), and Byram (2021).

First, the development of linguistic and discourse competences observed in this study is consistent with Canale and Swain's (1980) foundational model of communicative competence, which argues that grammatical knowledge must be operationalized through meaningful use rather than decontextualized drills. In the present study, each session explicitly targeted specific grammatical structures, such as past tense for childhood memories, present perfect for food experiences, modals for travel advice, passive voice for landmark descriptions, and reported speech for making excuses, within culturally situated role-play contexts. Learners did not simply memorize conjugation patterns but actively selected and produced appropriate forms to achieve communicative goals in realistic scenarios. This finding is supported by García-Carbonell et al. (2001), who demonstrated that simulation and gaming approaches promote communicative competence by immersing learners in problem-solving scenarios that demand integrated language use. Furthermore, the development of discourse competence was evident in how learners managed extended spoken genres, including personal narratives in "Good Memories", procedural explanations using sequence adverbs in "Have you ever tried it?", and complete request, excuse, and apology sequences in "Making excuses". These activities required mastery of cohesion devices and genre-appropriate structuring, which Canale (1983) identifies as essential components of discourse competence.

Second, the enhancement of sociolinguistic competence through role-play activities directly reflects Hymes' (1972) original insight that communicative competence requires

knowledge of socially appropriate language use, not just whether a sentence is grammatically correct, but whether it is appropriate in a given context. In "Sure I'll do it", learners practiced varied request strategies ranging from direct commands to conventionally indirect forms (Would you mind...?), learning to calibrate politeness based on power relations and degree of imposition. In Now I get it, learners adjusted their explanations of prohibited behaviors depending on whether they were addressing a peer or an authority figure, whereas in "Hit the Road", the choice between modals (should, ought to, must, have to) depended on the social distance between interlocutors. These findings demonstrate that roleplay provides the contextual variability necessary for developing sociolinguistic competence. However, as Qu and Chen (2026) note, peer roleplay in EFL contexts faces the limitation that learners may lack authentic cultural models, potentially creating a "blind leading the blind" dynamic. The present study addressed this limitation by using structured scenarios that incorporated explicit cultural content and instructor modeling of pragmatically appropriate language. However, recent research suggests that AI-simulated interlocutors may offer additional scalable solutions for providing culturally nuanced feedback (Qu & Chen, 2026).

Third, and most significantly, the findings demonstrate systematic development of all five dimensions of Byram's (2021) intercultural competence framework. The nine sequenced topics explicitly built cultural knowledge (*savoirs*), including childhood practices, food taboos, travel norms, holidays and festivals, landmarks and national identity, and nonverbal communication systems. This aligns with Kramsch's (2013) assertion that culture teaching must move beyond superficial "tourist information" toward a deeper understanding of cultural practices and

their underlying values. The post-roleplay reflection discussions were crucial for developing *savoir-être* (attitudes), with students reporting reduced ethnocentrism and increased curiosity about cultural differences, findings consistent with Iswandari and Ardi (2022), who found that experiential learning approaches help learners move beyond essentialist conceptions of culture as fixed, homogeneous traits. The *Now I get it* session on body language explicitly trains *savoir comprendre* (skills of interpreting and relating), enabling learners to identify ethnocentric perspectives and decenter from their own cultural assumptions (Byram, 2021). Every roleplay and simulation task required the application of cultural knowledge in real-time interaction, requesting, refusing, complaining, apologizing, and reporting across cultural contexts, thereby developing *savoir faire* (skills of discovery and interaction). As Liddicoat and Scarino (2013) emphasize, ICC development depends on sustained, authentic interaction with interlocutors from diverse cultural backgrounds. Finally, the “Time to Celebrate” and “Now I get it” sessions triggered discussions about cultural appropriation versus appreciation, addressing *savoir s'engager* (critical cultural awareness), the highest level of competence, which has been identified as particularly challenging to develop in traditional language classrooms (Byram, 2021).

The sequence of topics in this course is from oneself (Good Memories) to everyday life (food, travel) to social interactions (requests, celebrations) to work and values (job preferences). And then to abstract systems (landmarks, body language, social norms), which reflect what Heggernes (2021) describes as the developmental trajectory of intercultural sensitivity from ethnocentric to ethno relative. Learners begin with familiar subjects and gradually expand to more

abstract and potentially challenging cultural comparisons, a progression that reduces cognitive load and affective resistance while gradually building confidence.

Finally, the pedagogical role of roleplay and simulation as mediators between knowledge and action deserves explicit discussion. Traditional language teaching often fails to move learners beyond accumulating decontextualized cultural facts (Byram, 2021). In this study, roleplay transformed static cultural knowledge into dynamic interactional competence. For example, learners did not simply study that different cultures have different refusal strategies; they enacted refusals in simulated scenarios and received feedback on their pragmatic linguistic choices. This finding aligns with broader research on experiential learning in intercultural education (Kolb, 1984), which positions ICC not as a static repository of cultural facts but as a dynamic constellation of knowledge, skills, and attitudes that enable learners to mediate between cultures in situated interaction. Moreover, roleplay provides what Qu and Chen (2026) call a “psychologically safe space” for intercultural practice, lowering the affective filter and reducing foreign language classroom anxiety, particularly the fear of negative peer evaluation.

Conclusion

This study examines how speaking classes facilitate the development of Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) among Indonesian English teacher candidates. Findings indicate that speaking class structured around nine culturally themed topics integrated with role-playing and simulation activities effectively enhance all four dimensions of ICC: linguistic, discourse, sociolinguistic, and intercultural competence. Each session explicitly targets specific grammatical structures and spoken genres

while placing learners in culturally meaningful contexts, enabling students to go beyond context-detached exercises to produce coherent, lengthy discourse that is socially appropriate across a variety of cultural scenarios. The development of linguistic and discourse competence is achieved when learners produce complete spoken texts ranging from personal narratives and procedural explanations to job interviews and indirect speech sequences. In contrast, sociolinguistic competence is enhanced through contextual role-plays that require sensitivity to power relations, social distance, and levels of coercion. This finding is consistent with Canale and Swain's (1980) model of communicative competence and Hymes's (1972) emphasis on socially appropriate language use.

Most significantly, the speaking class systematically develops all five dimensions of Byram's (2021) intercultural competence framework. The nine sequenced topics explicitly build cultural knowledge (*savoirs*) regarding holidays, food, landmarks, body language, and social norms; post-roleplay reflection fosters attitudes of openness and curiosity (*savoir être*); interpreting unfamiliar gestures and cultural practices develops skills of interpreting and relating (*savoir comprendre*); real-time interaction across scenarios builds skills of discovery and interaction (*savoir faire*); and discussions of cultural appropriation versus appreciation cultivate critical cultural awareness (*savoir s'engager*). The progression of topics from self and daily life to social interactions, work values, and abstract cultural systems mirrors the developmental trajectory of intercultural sensitivity from ethnocentric to ethno relative stages (Heggernes, 2021), reducing cognitive load and affective resistance while gradually building learners' confidence in navigating increasingly complex intercultural

encounters. Specific evidence from each session confirms that students compare childhood across cultures, discuss food taboos, analyze refusal strategies, compare work values, and identify gestures that are neutral in one culture but offensive in another.

In conclusion, roleplay and simulation function as critical pedagogical mediators between cultural knowledge and intercultural action, providing a psychologically safe space for experimentation that lowers the affective filter and reduces foreign language classroom anxiety (Qu & Chen, 2026). The nine-session speaking class integrated with culture-themed topics, roleplay, and simulation offers a theoretically grounded and pedagogically effective model for developing ICC among Indonesian pre-service English teachers, equipping future educators not only with linguistic accuracy and discourse fluency but also with the sociolinguistic awareness and intercultural criticality necessary to mediate between cultures in an increasingly globalized world. For teacher education programs, integrating a sequenced, experiential approach into speaking curricula is strongly recommended to prepare pre-service teachers to function effectively as intercultural speakers and mediators. Future research should employ pretest-posttest designs with standardized ICC instruments to quantify observed gains and conduct longitudinal studies to examine the sustainability of ICC development.

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