

ELE STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS AND EXPERIENCES ON THE ROLE OF INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION COURSE FOR TEACHING PRACTICE

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Abstrak

Komunikasi antar budaya memainkan peran penting dalam lingkungan pendidikan yang beragam saat ini, di mana guru bertugas membina lingkungan belajar yang inklusif dan efektif. Studi ini mengeksplorasi persepsi dan pengalaman mahasiswa *English Language Education* (ELE) mengenai peran *Intercultural Communication Course* (ICC) dalam praktik pengajaran mereka. Pendekatan penelitian kualitatif dengan menggunakan kuesioner dilakukan dengan sampel 27 mahasiswa Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris angkatan 2019 dan juga dilakukan wawancara semi terstruktur dengan 1 enam mahasiswa Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris angkatan 2019 di Surabaya yang telah menyelesaikan ICC pada semester kelima dan juga melakukan praktek mengajar program pendidikan guru mereka. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa ICC berdampak signifikan terhadap persepsi dan pengalaman siswa tentang praktik mengajar mereka. Mereka melaporkan peningkatan kesadaran akan bias budaya mereka sendiri dan peningkatan refleksi diri, yang mengarah ke praktik pengajaran yang lebih inklusif. Peserta menyatakan peningkatan dalam kemampuan mereka untuk memfasilitasi komunikasi dan menyelesaikan konflik yang timbul dari perbedaan budaya. Selain itu, kursus ini dipandang penting dalam mengembangkan rasa percaya diri siswa, menggabungkan materi dan aktivitas yang relevan secara budaya ke dalam pelajaran mereka. Namun, beberapa tantangan teridentifikasi, termasuk terbatasnya kesempatan untuk penerapan praktis selama kursus dan kebutuhan akan dukungan dan pelatihan lanjutan di luar ICC awal. Peserta menekankan pentingnya pengembangan profesional yang berkelanjutan dalam keterampilan komunikasi antar budaya dan menyarankan untuk mengintegrasikan lebih banyak kesempatan belajar berdasarkan pengalaman dalam kurikulum pendidikan guru. Penelitian lebih lanjut diperlukan untuk mengetahui bagaimana dosen mempersepsikan *Intercultural Communication Course* (ICC). Peneliti masa depan juga diharapkan menemukan bagaimana mengembangkan materi ICC yang tepat untuk siswa ELE untuk mendukung karir mengajar mereka sebagai calon guru EFL.

Kata kunci: Mata Kuliah Komunikasi Antarbudaya, mahasiswa Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris, praktik mengajar, persepsi, pengalaman

Abstract

Intercultural communication plays a crucial role in today's diverse educational settings, where teachers are tasked with fostering inclusive and effective learning environments. This study explores the perceptions and experiences of English Language Education (ELE) students regarding the role of an *Intercultural Communication Course* (ICC) in their teaching practice. A qualitative research approach employing questionnaires was conducted with a sample of 27 ELE students of the 2019 cohort and also conducted semi-structured interviews with a sample of six ELE students of the 2019 cohort of one state university in Surabaya who had completed ICC in their fifth semester and also done their teaching practice of their teacher education program. The findings indicate that the ICC significantly impacted students' perceptions and experiences of their teaching practice. They reported enhanced awareness of their own cultural biases and increased self-reflection, leading to more inclusive instructional practices. Participants expressed improvements in their ability to facilitate communication and resolve conflicts arising from cultural differences. Moreover, the course was seen as instrumental in developing students' confidence, incorporating culturally relevant materials and activities into their lessons. However, some challenges were identified, including limited opportunities for practical application during the course and the need for continued support and training beyond the initial ICC. Participants emphasized the importance of ongoing professional development in intercultural communication skills and suggested integrating more experiential learning opportunities within the teacher education curriculum. Further research is needed to know how the lecturer perceives the *Intercultural Communication Course* (ICC). The future researcher is also expected to discover how to develop the right material for ICC for ELE students to support their teaching career as EFL pre-service teachers.

Keywords: Intercultural Communication Course, ELE students, teaching practice, perceptions, experiences.

INTRODUCTION

English Language Education students (ELE Students) should have a well-rounded education before entering the workforce because they will one day become language instructors. ELE students need to be assisted in improving their professional skills as future teachers and also to raise the overall standard of education and to be better prepare teachers for their jobs. So, more in-depth professional development training should be provided (Wijaya, 2021). ELE students must improve their professional skills as future teachers; one method to achieve this is by offering a wide selection of required and optional courses.

One of the objectives of a teacher education institute is to produce graduates who are capable of applying the acquired knowledge and theories and teaching as professional future teachers. Therefore, evaluating the knowledge and theories students acquire in teacher preparation programs is prudent (Nugroho, 2017). By offering courses relevant to students' needs, universities show their commitment to their student's success.

An example of a course offered by the university is the intercultural communication course (ICC). Intercultural Communication Course (ICC) is required for ELE students at one State University in Surabaya. It is one of the courses offered in the fifth semester. Based on BCO (Basic Course Outline) from one state university in Samarinda, which also offered the ICC for their ELE student, it stated that Intercultural Communication Course is addressed to prepare ELE students to enter the teaching profession with a level of intercultural communication competency appropriate for their roles.

During Intercultural Communication Course (ICC), ELE students learned about different cultures from around the world and how they are different. Students also use some kinds of literature to talk about these differences. Moreover, students must increase their acquaintance with the cultural context of the language they are studying, their cultural awareness, and their ability to work effectively across cultural boundaries (Idris & Widyantoro, 2019). Intercultural communication describes the changes in one's communication style when two or more cultures come together and also for this reason, it is possible to think of intercultural communication as dialogue in metaphorical intercultural arenas (Arasaratnam & Doerfel, 2005).

The previous research explained pre-service teacher conceptions of intercultural communication. Research done by Atmojo & Putra in 2022 shows that the pre-service EFL teacher defined Intercultural Communication as cultural knowledge that facilitates communication in intercultural settings. In the other research on Intercultural Communication by Iswandari & Ardi in 2022,

Intercultural Communication is defined by EFL pre-service teachers as factual knowledge of foreign cultures and one's own culture, which allows one to discern similarities and distinctions between those cultures.

On the other hand, the research by Fernando & Rodríguez in 2013 emphasizes the EFL pre-teachers' experiences of Intercultural Communication in three different universities in Colombia. The findings show that pre-service teachers are taught just surface-level cultural aspects and lack a comprehensive understanding of intercultural communication. Also, they saw culture as a separate part of their future teaching careers. From the previous research, we conclude some universities have not considered their students' needs, especially for their ELE students, by giving general culture courses unrelated to their teaching careers.

In this regard, this present study intends to fill the gap by focusing on investigating and getting the answer related to ELE students' perceptions and experiences on the role of the Intercultural Communication Course in their teaching practice. This study can provide insights into the effectiveness of the teaching methods, curriculum design, and overall learning environment. By examining students' engagement, participation, and reflections, researchers can identify the strengths and weaknesses of the course and potential areas for improvement and make the Intercultural Communication Course more suitable for ELE students in their teaching practice (PLP).

This study focuses on:

1. How do the ELE Students perceive the importance of the ICC course?
2. What are the roles of the Intercultural Communication Course in ELE Students' teaching practice?

This research also explains the following:

1. ELE students perceive the Intercultural Communication Course (ICC).
2. The roles of Intercultural Communication Course on ELE students' teaching practice.

METHODS

This research uses qualitative research with a descriptive qualitative type. Qualitative research is an interactive process in which the scientific community can achieve a greater understanding by making new meaningful distinctions that arise from getting closer to the subject being examined (Aspers & Corte, 2019). In this research, the data concerning ELE students' perceptions and experiences on the roles of the Intercultural Communication Course (ICC) in their teaching practices and the data were collected at one of the State universities in Surabaya which has a specific study program in English Language Education. The English study program was

chosen because the study program offers ELE students the ICC course in the fifth semester. So, the researcher wants to know ELE students' perceptions and experiences of the roles of the ICC in their teaching practice (PLP).

The subjects of this study were the English Language Education (ELE) students 2019 cohort of a state university in Surabaya. The subjects were chosen as the research target and supported the implementation of this research bases on these several criteria:

1. They have already done their teaching practice program (PLP).
2. They had already taken Intercultural Communication Course in their fifth semester before they did the teaching practice program (PLP).

This present research distributed a questionnaire to the 2019 cohort students with 86 ELE students. The researcher successfully gained 27 responses and feedback from the questionnaires. For the interview session, the researcher decided to choose six students to be interviewed based on the questionnaire result. So, the researcher classified the questionnaire into two, between the ELE students who agreed that ICC has some beneficial influences in their teaching practice and the students who stated that ICC did not play any significant role in their teaching practice (PLP).

In this qualitative research, the author uses two different instruments. The first one is questionnaires to find out the students' perceptions of the role of ICC. The second is a semi-structured interview to cross-check and get in-depth information about their responses about the role of ICC in their teaching practice.

1. Questionnaires

The student's perceptions and experiences of ICC have been collected through questionnaires distributed through Google Forms (G-form) that the students can fill out. The WhatsApp group of ELE students 2019 cohort shared the Google Form link.

2. Semi-structured Interview

For the Interview, the researcher invited six students who are qualified with the criteria and already filled out the questionnaire before and conducted approximately a week. The interview was divided into offline and online sessions because some interviewees are out of town. During the interview, the interviewer can take notes or record the conversation (with the participant's consent). Note-taking helps capture key points and notable quotes. Recording the interview allows for a more accurate analysis of participants' responses and reduces the risk of missing important details.

A data analysis technique was implemented by analyzing the questionnaire responses and interview transcripts. The data analysis was then collected through three stages by Ary et al., (2010): Familiarizing and

Organizing, Reducing, and Interpreting and Representing. In the first stage, the data were classified based on the desired outcome, and an attempt was made to partition the data into distinct clusters based on recurring patterns. Researchers immerse themselves in the data by reading and re-reading the transcripts or other qualitative data sources. Then, the data went through a process of summarization, wherein significant points were extracted, and irrelevant data was eliminated. In the third stage, the researcher interprets questionnaires and interview responses. Then, illustrate data using diagrams. Finally, the researcher reaches a conclusion based on the collected data.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

a. ELE Students' Perceptions of The Intercultural Communication Course

1. Promoting Cultural Awareness and Cultural Sensitivity

4. ICC grows my cross-cultural awareness surrounding me
 27 responses

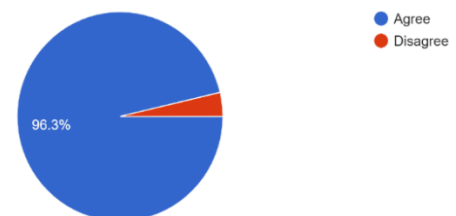


Figure 1. ICC Grows Cultural Awareness

As diagram 1 shows, 96.3 % or 26 from 27 ELE students perceive the course provides a deeper understanding of different cultures and fostering cultural sensitivity.

It is also supported by the result of the interview;

P1: *"By knowing and studying the culture around us, whether from a foreign or local country, I can discover the cultural differences from the behavior and habits of an area and learn to accept the existing cultural differences."*

1. The Intercultural Communication Course (ICC) helps me understand the meaning of intercultural communication
 27 responses

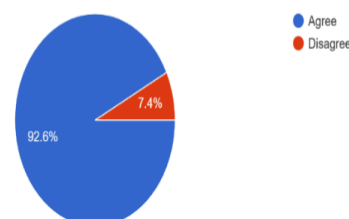


Figure 2. ICC Grows Cultural Sensitivity

However, only one participant disagreed that ICC provides a deeper understanding of different cultures and

fosters cultural sensitivity. It can be seen from the resulting interview with P2 who stated:

P2: “Intercultural communication courses do not necessarily lead to knowing other cultures or cultural awareness. While this course provides theoretical knowledge and highlights cultural diversity's importance, they often fail to facilitate genuine intercultural understanding and sensitivity among students.”

2. Expanding ELE Students' Cultural Perspectives

3. ICC teaches cultural issues that are not taught in other studies
27 responses

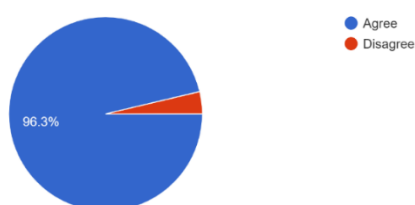


Figure 3. ICC Teaches Cultural Issues

As the diagram above shows, the previous data shows, 26 (96,3%) of 27 ELE students perceive the course as broadening their perspectives. This data is also supported by the following interview result:

P3: “Intercultural communication has its unique value compared to other subjects. ICC teaches cultural diversity, broadening students' perspectives on culture.”

Instead of agreeing that ICC could expand their knowledge and perspectives related to other cultures, one of the respondents have a different perception of the Intercultural Communication Course (ICC). In an Interview with P5, they stated:

P5: “ICC does not broaden ELE students' cultural perspectives. Intercultural communication courses aim to expose students to diverse cultures, but they may not teach students about specific cultures. These courses may cover cultural diversity superficially due to time and resource constraints. Students may not understand different cultures' intricacies, complexities, and historical contexts, limiting their cultural perspectives.”

3. Promoting Cultural Empathy and Understanding

Diagram 3 shows that 25 (92.6%) of 27 ELE students agree that ICC can help them understand intercultural communication better. This is also supported by the interview result below.

P6: “Learn the differences of many cultures, and finally also know the characteristics of each ethnic, race, and region. The existing differences eventually awaken a sense of tolerance and diversity.”

On the other hand, two participants disagree that Intercultural Communication Course (ICC) that they took in the fifth semester have a role in promoting their empathy and cultural understanding. This finding is supported by the resulting interview with P4 affirmed that:

P4: “Cultural understanding, empathy, and cultural tolerance grow from personal experiences, perspectives, and dispositions. ICC also has a limited duration and the classroom-based nature of instruction that is implemented may hinder the development of genuine empathy and cultural tolerance. So, I might say that ICC does not play any crucial role in my cultural understanding of intercultural communication and empathy with other cultures.”

4. Increasing ELE Students' Confidence

21. ICC makes me realize that cultural differences are not a barrier to teaching EFL
27 responses

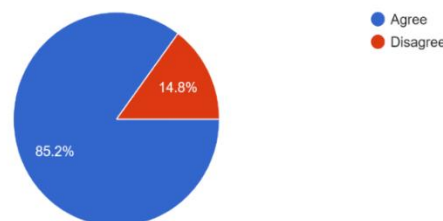


Figure 4. Increasing Students' Confidence

The diagram above shows that 23 (85.2%) of 27 ELE students agree that ICC makes them realize that language or cultural differences are not a barrier when teaching a foreign language. When the researcher asked about students' perceptions of the intercultural communication course, students felt that this course was able to increase self-confidence when communicating with people from different cultures.

P6: “Learning culture is enjoyable and unique. The intercultural communication course made me realize that cultural differences are not obstacles to establishing communication.”

But, two of twenty-five students do not have the same opinion. They have different perceptions of the intercultural course. This can be braced by the interview result with P5:

P5: “For my personal, I would say that ICC that I took in the fifth semester, could not increase my confidence when I face the language barrier in teaching practice because the material I get from actual practice in the course is very different. In the material, I only study how they speak and their characteristics, without learning how to

communicate or how to deal with communication barriers.”

5. ELE Students’ Perceptions Toward the Development of Intercultural Communication Course for ELE Students

23. English language teachers must be intercultural sensitive to empower students with cultural knowledge and understanding of various cultures to communicate effectively in the target language.
 26 responses

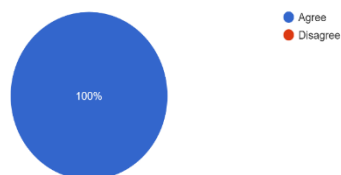


Figure 5. English Language Must Culturally Empower

According to the diagram, all of the respondents (27 ELE students) agree that language teachers must be intercultural sensitive to empower students with cultural knowledge and understanding of various cultures to communicate effectively in the target language, which in this case is English. This means that teaching ELE students related to intercultural communication is crucial.

Based on what can be gleaned from the course descriptions contained within the currently available BCO (Basic Course Outline) related to Intercultural Cultural Communication. This course takes a comparative look at the societies of English-speaking countries and Indonesia, examining how their respective perspectives, cultures, beliefs, and habits compare and contrast. It is crucial to foster cultural awareness and ideals in society for people to interact effectively in various cultural contexts.

When they were asked if ICC that they took was suitable for ELE students, here are some responses:

P2: “ICC is important to be educated to ELE students, but the material taught at ICC is very limited and tends to be basic. Learning cultural differences and case studies about it is very important to be taught to ELE students who will teach foreign languages in the future.”

P5: “ICC will be more useful for ELE students if there is direct practice on overcoming communication barriers in the lesson and implementing learning for students with different cultural backgrounds. Because in my opinion, the ICC class already has support in the form of students from various regions. I think it can be used during learning.”

b. The Role of Intercultural Communication in Teaching Practice

1. Intercultural Pedagogy

13. I can use ICC learning material as the source of my teaching materials for teaching practice
 27 responses

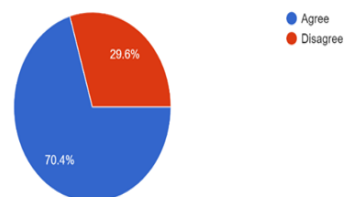


Figure 6. ICC as EFL Teaching Material

As seen in Diagram 6, 70.4 % or 19 of 27 respondents experience using ICC material as the source of their teaching material while doing teaching practice. They explore various instructional strategies, pedagogical resources, and activities to foster intercultural knowledge and competency among their student.

P1: “I teach my students some “slang” words in English and teach some words that have similarities in the mention of an object in other foreign languages, such as “discount,” “handphone,” in English, “gratis,” “handdoek” in Dutch and also gives an understanding of why there are similarities even though most of them have different spelling.”

P6: “When teaching recount texts, I ask them to tell their past experiences during religious holidays or other cultural differences such as village rituals, etc., to introduce cultural differences and diversity that exist among students.”

But, on the other hand, some students do not feel that ICC have a role in their teaching practice. They mention in the interview that:

P2: “I cannot see any significant role of ICC in my teaching practice. Especially ICC as the intercultural pedagogy. The learning materials that I got from ICC are very limited. The course only tends to basic theory and cultural examples, and ICC has no more related cultural case studies. So, I could not use the learning materials I got at ICC when I was doing teaching practice (PLP).”

2. Growing Empathy and Understanding

11. ICC helps me understand the different cultural backgrounds of the students I teach
27 responses

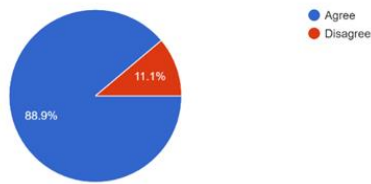


Figure 7. ICC Helps Understand the Students' Cultural Background

As shown in the diagram, 24 (88.9%) of 27 respondents agree that the intercultural course helps ELE students understand the different backgrounds of the students they teach while doing teaching practice.

This is also reinforced by the interview result as the following:

P3: *"ICC teaches existing cultures, so our attitude of tolerance will be formed so that when I meet students with different cultures, ethnic, and religions, I can respect that."*

Instead, some ELE students still disagree that ICC could make the ELE students understand their students' different cultural backgrounds and they feel that they still have a lack of empathy and cultural understanding. This result was reinforced by the researcher when interviewing P5, who stated:

P5: *"The ICC material I got rarely explained the cultural differences in one school. So, I don't think ICC be able to make me understand the cultural differences that surround the students I teach during my teaching practice in the seventh semester. My understanding of cultural differences increased only after I went straight into the school field not when I got ICC."*

As the result shows, ELE students perceive the intercultural communication course as a cultural course that grows their cultural awareness and sensitivity and expands their cultural perspectives, empathy, understanding, and confidence. It is in line with Arizona State University (2022) which stated that the Intercultural Communication Course allows students to expand their knowledge of intercultural communication in various communicative contexts from a global perspective. Cultural awareness itself can be meant as the ability to step back from oneself and gain an understanding of one's cultural values, beliefs, and perceptions is an essential component of cultural awareness, which serves as the bedrock upon which communication is built (Cantatore & Quappe, 2005). Cultural awareness refers to having

knowledge, understanding, and sensitivity toward different cultures, including their beliefs, values, customs, traditions, and social norms. It involves recognizing and appreciating the diversity and differences that exist among various cultural groups. As mentioned in previous research, EFL pre-service teachers as factual knowledge of foreign cultures and their own culture, which allows them to discern similarities and distinctions between those cultures (Iswandari & Ardi, 2022)

The ELE students showed their understanding related to intercultural communication as cultural knowledge that makes it easier to communicate across cultural boundaries. According to some additional findings, the majority of ELE students considered intercultural communication to be the process of learning factual knowledge about certain cultures as well as an attitude of respect toward other cultures (Atmojo & Putra, 2022). Following students must increase their acquaintance with the cultural context of the language they are studying, their cultural awareness, and their ability to work effectively across cultural boundaries. Their cultural knowledge develops after getting an intercultural communication course. English language students should learn intercultural communication and use it realistically. To bridge cultural gaps and develop more productive and friendly relationships (Samovar et al., 2015).

The ELE students also argue that the ICC's material is unsuitable for their needs as ELE students and supports their future careers as teachers. This finding aligns with the previous study by Fernando & Rodríguez in 2013. The results reveal that pre-service teachers learn only basic cultural concepts and lack intercultural communication knowledge. They also considered culture as different from their prospective teaching positions. The ICC materials they got from the previous semester were only through the media of works of art in films, videos, and books. They feel they are not given enough space for exploration and examples of case studies regarding intercultural communication, especially intercultural issues in teaching, if look at ICC, it is quite helpful for English students to grow their cultural ability.

Yet, the material covered in the class is relatively limited and simply acts as a cultural introduction to explaining existing the culture. ELE students expect to receive instruction on various topics related to cultural differences, given the prevalence of such disparities in the instruction of foreign languages. While intercultural communication may not be directly tied to foreign language teaching, its course may play a crucial role in preparing ELE students for a globalized world. It may enhance their interpersonal skills, cultural sensitivity, and ability to communicate effectively across cultural boundaries. Ultimately, these skills contribute to their

personal development, future career success, and ability to engage as responsible global citizens. So, they have good intercultural communication competencies to support their professionalism while teaching.

From the result of the data collecting, the researcher also could find the matches between what ELE students perceive about ICC and what they have experienced related to ICC in their teaching practice. For example, they perceive that ICC makes them more aware of culture, they have more cultural understanding, and by their experience, they can use their IC competencies they have to be more aware of cultural understanding and growing empathy for their student. So, Intercultural communication courses are valuable courses for teaching practice. The ELE students' knowledge about other cultures can be an intercultural pedagogy and grow their students' empathy and understanding while doing teaching practice. For ELE students, having IC competencies are an integral part of communication and essential in language teaching and should include Intercultural communication skills and make people more aware of other cultures (Aleksandrowicz-Pdich et al., 2003). The IC course should encourage the ELE students to understand and increase the IC level of ELE students as preservice teachers. So, they can use their IC competence in their future teaching (Idris & Widyantoro, 2019).

Intercultural communication courses could provide ELE students with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary for successful communication in diverse cultural settings. By embracing cultural diversity, students develop a global mindset, enhance their language proficiency, and become more effective communicators, setting them on a path toward academic, personal, and professional success. The components of IC competencies are the ability to perceive and relate to others, discover and connect with others, and communication skills. Other features include cultural awareness and knowledge. Learners are also assisted in elevating the worth of different cultures and looking up to them. In addition, English language students should be taught a grasp of intercultural communication and the ability to use this knowledge realistically.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, through the intercultural communication course, ELE students gain a deeper understanding of cultural dimensions, intercultural communication theories, and the impact of culture on language use. They learn to recognize and challenge their own cultural biases and assumptions. ELE students perceive the intercultural communication course as a course that grows their cultural awareness and cultural sensitivity, expands ELE students'

perspectives, grows empathy and understanding, and also a course that increases their confidence.

However, it turns out that some ELE students perceive that the ICC they get is only intercultural learning in general and lacks material the fact that ICC offers very small examples of case studies that ELE students can use related to teaching foreign languages (EFL) and their future careers as EFL teachers. An intercultural course should ideally develop beyond surface-level observations and explore the deeper elements of culture, such as values, beliefs, communication styles, and societal norms. By only scratching the surface, students are deprived of the opportunity to develop a more nuanced understanding of different cultures, hindering their ability to engage in meaningful cross-cultural interactions. Also, to foster genuine empathy and cultural tolerance, it is essential to complement classroom learning with real-world experiences, ongoing self-reflection, and exposure to diverse individuals and communities.

Suggestions

Designing intercultural communication courses to be more suitable for English Language Education (ELE) students aspiring to become great teachers in the future requires a thoughtful approach that addresses their specific needs and goals. The course also has to provide practical strategies for effective cross-cultural communication in educational settings. Focus on active listening, empathy, non-verbal communication, and conflict resolution skills in intercultural contexts, exploring the intricate relationship between language and culture.

The course might help students understand how language reflects cultural values, beliefs, and social norms. Discuss the challenges and opportunities that arise when teaching English language learners from diverse cultural backgrounds. ICC must provide opportunities for students to engage in meaningful intercultural experiences, such as community service projects, cultural events, or interactions with English language learners from diverse backgrounds.

By incorporating these suggestions into an intercultural communication course, English education students will be better equipped to navigate diverse classrooms, promote inclusive learning environments, and effectively communicate with students from various cultural backgrounds. Since this study is limited, further research is needed to know how the lecturer perceives the Intercultural Communication Course (ICC). It is also expected that future researchers also discover how to develop the right material for ICC for ELE students to support their teaching career as EFL pre-service teachers.

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