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Cognitive Strategies for Developing Intercultural Competence in English Language Reading: Challenges and Interventions

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Abstract: This study addresses cognitive challenges in developing intercultural competence through English language reading and proposes systematic intervention strategies. The research identifies five primary cognitive barriers: cultural schema deficiency hindering text comprehension, linguistic-cultural disconnection prioritizing language skills over cultural content, limited teacher metacognitive awareness in intercultural pedagogy, insufficient access to culturally rich texts, and risks of stereotype reinforcement. Drawing on cognitive processing theory, the study presents a comprehensive framework integrating four strategic interventions: pre-activation of cultural knowledge to enhance learners' cultural schema, integrated processing strategies balancing linguistic and cultural objectives, structured professional development programs improving teacher facilitation capabilities, and critical reflection strategies promoting nuanced cultural understanding. The framework's practical application is demonstrated through a pedagogical case study using "Lin Yue's Letter," illustrating effective implementation of

cognitive strategies. This research contributes to intercultural language education by providing theoretically grounded, systematic approaches for addressing cognitive barriers in intercultural competence development, offering valuable insights for educators seeking to enhance culturally responsive reading instruction.

Keywords: intercultural competence; cognitive strategies; English language reading; cultural schema

1. Introduction

Intercultural competence (IC) is a crucial skill for helping students understand and navigate various cultural contexts in today's increasingly interconnected world. Intercultural competence is of particular importance in English language classrooms because language learning materials frequently expose students to a variety of cultural perspectives (Sun, 2023). In addition to reflecting on one's own cultural identity, intercultural competence is defined as the capacity to interact with people from different cultures in a manner that acknowledges and respects their viewpoints, according to Gu and Zhao (2021). This includes developing an understanding of the cultural norms, values, and sights embedded in the language they are learning in addition to obtaining language skills.

Even though it is widely recognized, teachers face numerous difficulties when attempting to develop intercultural competence through reading (Sun, 2023). Drawing on correct writing and my training knowledge, this section may thoroughly examine these problems. It will also provide suggestions for how to address these issues, with an emphasis on ensuring the proper harmony between linguistic and cultural goals, strengthening teacher training, and motivating the necessary picture. These methods are intended to increase the effectiveness and importance of checking to encourage ethnic ability.

2. Challenges in developing Intercultural Competence

Lack of familiarity with the social circumstances that are embedded in texts is one of the major problems teachers' experiences. According to Erten and Razi (2009), cultural familiarity plays a significant role in comprehension. Children's ability to comprehend and keep texts that contain traditional sources may be significantly weakened when given works that they are unfamiliar with. For example, effectively known historical emotions, customs, and events do not appeal to learners from different cultural backgrounds because of them. This separation does produce confusion and annoyance, which in turn may cause text-to-text comprehension to rise.



In such instances, employees may focus solely on reading the language and miss out on the deeper social meaning contained in the articles.

Reading comprehension is hampered by this lack of cultural structure, which likewise limits the development of essential social abilities (Zhao et al., 2023). Intercultural competence is built on a foundation of cultural understanding, awareness, and attitudes. If students are unable to critically consider the cultural references in a text, they may struggle to engage in critical reflection about the cultural differences that are presented (Sun, 2023).

Another concern is that studying activities often place verbal ability, such as language, vocabulary, and sentence structure, until historical information. According to Heggernes (2021), many texts chosen for their linguistic value are primarily chosen for their capacity to foster intercultural competence (Gu & Zhao, 2021). This does prevent employees from having missed opportunities to learn about the document's cultural factors.

Gu and Zhao (2021) make it clear that cultural education is a necessary component of language learning. Teachers may not be encouraged to reflect on the traditional norms, suppositions, and behaviors portrayed in the reading materials when the emphasis is primarily on language form. As a result, language teachers do know them without any respect for the social setting in which they are employed. This disconnection between language and culture, according to Yu and Yu (2024), can prevent learners from developing intercultural competence because they are unable to critically examine the text's cultural components.

The headmaster's level of preparation and information even affect how successful social ability is developed through studying. Nemouchi and Byram (2019) stress the importance of teachers having a background in both the target culture and how to facilitate cross-cultural exchanges in the classroom. However, many teachers (Gu & Zhao, 2021) may not have received adequate instruction on how to incorporate intercultural competence into their reading instruction (Gu & Zhao, 2021). Because of this lack of preparation, educators depend on brief discussions of social variations without going into more detail about the complexity of social interactions. Also, there may be a cap on the number of writings that are historically important and appropriate for the conversation phase of the person. Many language textbooks prioritize texts that are linguistically accessible but culturally simplistic, according to Vettorel (2014). Teachers who want to highlight their kids to more of a variety of historical ideas

perhaps find this difficult. Professors may struggle to create leads for important cultural knowledge without having access to a wide range of texts that are generally essential.

Making sure that the development of social skills does not unwittingly strengthen social stereotypes is a more difficult challenge. Tevdovska (2015) warns against developing simplistic and stereotyped views of culture in texts that only show one aspect of the culture. For example, if students are constantly exposed to American culture through the regular media, they may start to believe that everyone in the region has the same values, beliefs, and behaviors, thus ignoring the variety of the country's culture. These five interconnected challenges form a comprehensive cognitive framework as illustrated in **Figure 1** below.

Figure 1

Cognitive Framework of Challenges in Intercultural Competence Development

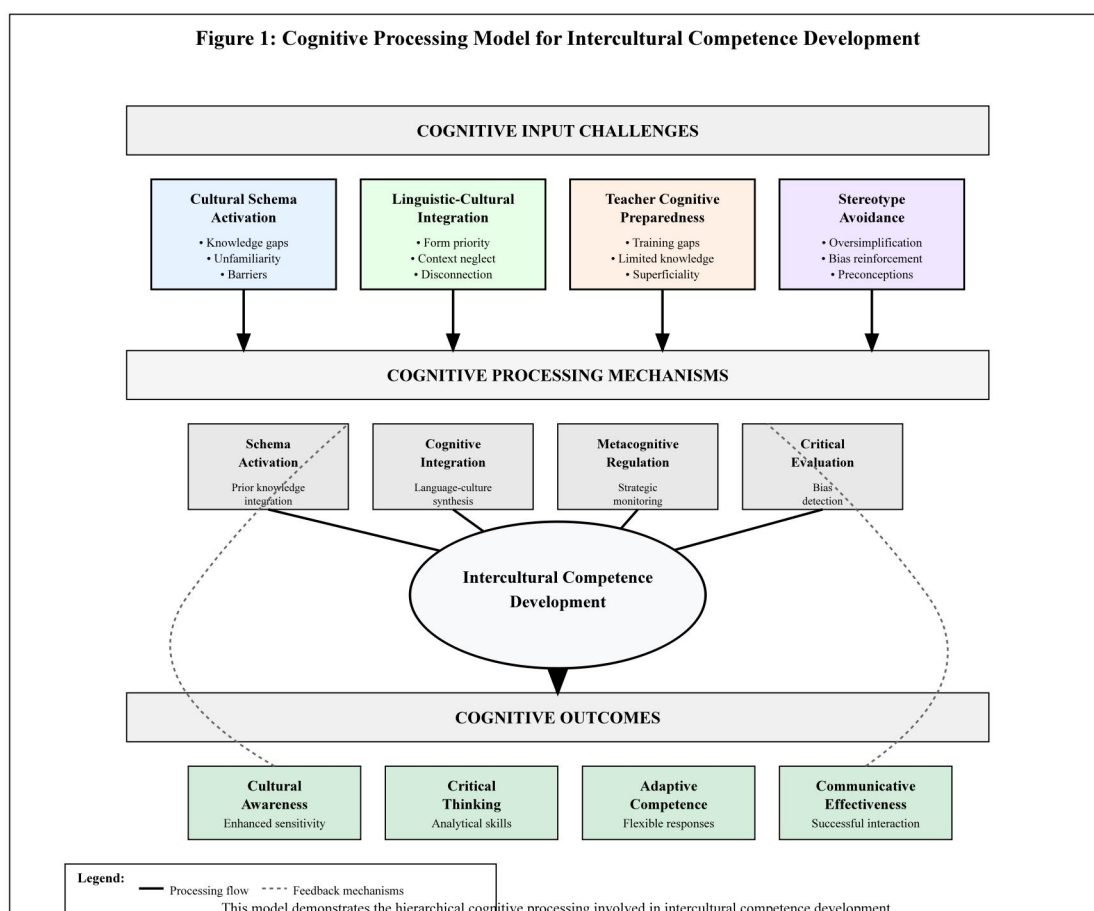


Figure 1 presents a comprehensive cognitive framework that synthesizes these interconnected challenges, demonstrating how cognitive processes influence

intercultural competence development and highlighting the need for systematic intervention strategies.

This bias threat is made even worse by the fact that students often approach work with preconceived conceptions of the particular lifestyle. According to Byram and Grundy (2002), the development of intercultural competence requires critical reflection on the breadth of cultural identities. However, if teachers don't actively challenge these presumptions, students may leave with an oversimplified and narrow understanding of the target culture, which undermines the effort to foster intercultural competence (Gu & Zhao, 2021).

3. Strategies for overcoming challenges

Teachers can provide learners with post-reading activities that cover important cultural concepts and background information to solve the issue of cultural unfamiliarity. Even brief introductions to the cultural context of a text can significantly improve learners' comprehension and engagement, as Erten and Razi (2009) suggest. Students can learn about the importance of certain routines or connections in the language through physical help, videos, and simple explanations.

According to Zhao et al. (2023), to help students make connections between the unfamiliarities of the target culture and their own experiences, he also recommends using real-world examples and comparisons. Understanding more about the social norms and values embedded in the language by creating these links can help foster the development of social skills.

Professors may select reading pieces that strike a balance between social richness and speech difficulties. According to Heggernes (2021), texts should be chosen for their potential to foster intercultural competence as well as their linguistic value. This entails choosing writings that concern individuals' language skills while also offering a historical perspective. Texts that depict real cultural experiences can encourage inquiry into cultural nuances and critical reflection on cultural differences, according to Paola (2016).

Teachers can produce projects that ask kids to assess both the document's discourse and the messages it conveys historically. For instance, Yu and Yu (2024)

recommend including activities that require students to consider how language is used to communicate cultural values and beliefs. Instructors can make a more comprehensive learning experience that promotes both talk acquisition and the development of social ability by integrating linguistic and cultural goals.

Educators should be taught how to incorporate social ability into their rooms, which is a necessity. Nemouchi and Byram (2019) stress the value of professional development programs that equip teachers with the knowledge and abilities necessary to facilitate discussions about cultural differences and similarities. Additionally, these programs should train teachers how to choose culturally acceptable writings and create actions that promote important pictures.

Furthermore, teachers should have access to a range of works that are suitable for their pupils' levels of speech skills. According to Young and Sachdev (2011), intercultural competence requires exposure to a range of cultural perspectives. Educational institutions may encourage the participation of social ability in reading behavior by providing teachers with the needed tools.

Teachers can help individuals completely focus on the social pictures in scriptures to stop discrimination and encourage a more refined understanding of culture. Tevdovska (2015) advises using open-ended questions that encourage students to compare the cultural values presented in the world to their own experiences. This prevents overgeneralization and enables trainees to explore the depth of cultural names. **Table 1** below summarizes the cognitive strategies for addressing each of these intercultural competence challenges.

Table 1

Cognitive Strategies for Addressing Intercultural Competence Challenges

Cognitive Challenge	Cognitive Strategy	Implementation Method	Expected Outcome
Cultural Schema Deficiency	Pre-activation of Cultural Knowledge	Background information provision	Enhanced comprehension
Linguistic-Cultural Disconnection	Integrated Processing Strategy	Balanced text selection	Holistic competence development
Limited Teacher Metacognition	Professional Cognitive Training	Structured development programs	Improved facilitation
Stereotype Reinforcement	Critical Reflection Strategy	Open-ended questioning	Nuanced cultural understanding

Table 1 synthesizes the relationship between cognitive challenges and corresponding intervention strategies, providing a systematic approach for educators to address specific cognitive barriers in intercultural competence development.

Additionally, Gu and Zhao (2021) suggest that educators can facilitate discussions that ask students to consider how cultural norms may differ from one another and how they change over time. This important mirror method aids in the development of cultural diversity, which is necessary for the development of social ability.

4. Conclusion

Studying for cultural variety, an emphasis on language ability, teacher planning, and the risk of stereotyping all contribute to the development of social skills. However, teachers can make learning more enhancing and culturally aware by providing the historical environment, balancing linguistic and cultural objectives, improving teacher training, and motivating necessary representation. In doing so, students are prepared for the richness of a globalized world by using the school as a resource for both speech acquisition and important cultural weddings.

5. Teaching

Lin Yue's Letter is a phrase from the People Education Press English Textbook for the ninth grade, Unit 10 (see Appendix). Lin Yue is studying as a Chinese student in France is described in this speech as she explores cultural similarities, particularly in terms of Western table manners. Because it demonstrates the subtle but significant traditional differences between China and France, the language is very effective for increasing cultural competence in individuals. In particular, it demonstrates how stand habits, which might be prevalent in one world, can be quite surprising and yet remarkable in another.

Students can learn more about social effects on daily activities, such as eating habits, and become more aware of cultural richness by reading this text. This will help them be more agile and cognizant of cultural standards by preparing them for equal social situations in their existence.

Students should be able to understand that traditional requirements, such as table patterns, vary widely between different nations, and that these similarities have an impact on how people act in various social settings. Kids will study the idea that processes they take for granted in one culture may sound odd or even unethical in another using Lin Yue's Letter as a case review. They will obtain knowledge of European table habits as well as a greater knowledge of social versions as a result.

By allowing students to show their historical conclusions, one of the key goals is to encourage cultural competence in children. Students can better understand the value of liberty, admiration, and available-mindedness when interacting with various cultures by understanding how Lin Yue navigates the difficulties of adjusting to French stand habits.

It is assumed that the Taiwanese students, who are eighth- students, are now well-versed in Chinese table manners. These social standards, such as posting sheets at dinners, using sticks, and the habit of putting foods directly onto panels, are deeply rooted in people's everyday lives. They may only be aware of the specific laws governing board courtesy in Western cultures, particularly in France. For example, they might not be comfortable with ideas like putting food directly on the table without a meal or preventing relaxing the child's elbows on the table.

Also, some people may have been exposed to American deception through advertising or foreign actions, but their knowledge may still be constrained or influenced by biases. According to logic, the text is appropriate for ninth-grade students, but some phrasing (such as "cutlery", "courses", and "etiquette") may need clarification.

I'll offer a small image that introduces European manners to students to expose any new social information. Students will be able to explain and understand the differences between Western and Chinese stand manners by using this physical aid, which will give them obvious examples of the customs they may encounter in the world.

In contrast, I'll sponsor a post-reading conversation in which students may discuss their dining traditions in China and how they compare them to United customs they have encountered, both in person or through the press. This exercise will help them learn more about the social distinctions that are discussed in the language.

Later, I'll prior- teach important words like "cutlery", "programs", and "etiquette", offering definitions and examples in view of new vocabulary. In a class



conversation, students will be encouraged to use these words in sentences. In the coaching, I'll include load-in-the-plain exercises to improve comprehension. After reading the text, I'll ask individuals to sum up Lin Yue's experience and ponder how they might respond differentially if confronted with similar situations.

I'll first create a short video clip on Western stand habits for the group, focusing on the important distinctions between Chinese and French stand manners. I'll request students to create a Venn chart that compares French and Chinese stand habits after the film. In this exercise, students will develop critical thinking about the influence of social norms on behavior by visually locating the links and differences between the two countries.

The kids will then know Lin Yue's Notice and listen to a set of knowledge questions designed to inspire their study of the new French customs. Children will reflect on Lin Yue's first vexation with European standards and how she suddenly adjusts as a result of the problems. This method will identify the issues of cultural versions and the value of having an open mind when researching new cultural practices.

Kids will discuss which parts of Western table manners have surprised them the most and whether they have recently encountered cultural differences. In this conversation, individuals will be encouraged to consider their personal social preconceived beliefs and how they might change if confronted with new traditions in a foreign environment. Students will gain a better understanding of the value of enjoying ethnic diversity by posting their opinions.

The activities in the classroom aim to improve language proficiency while yet enabling students to completely reveal their social conclusions and how they can be more efficient and available-minded in cultural settings. Students will know that cultural standards influence actions in a manner that may not always be promptly noticeable by the time the period is over.

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