



ENGLISH AS A LINGUA FRANCA AND THE TEACHING OF CULTURE IN PAKISTANI UNIVERSITY ELT CLASSROOMS: EXPLORING TEACHERS' BELIEFS AND CLASSROOM PRACTICES

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Abstract

The increasing use of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) has challenged traditional assumptions about English language teaching (ELT), particularly regarding the role of culture in language classrooms. Rather than viewing culture as a fixed body of knowledge associated with native English-speaking countries, ELF research emphasizes culture as dynamic, negotiated, and shaped through intercultural interaction. Despite this shift, little is known about how university English language teachers in Pakistan conceptualize culture and incorporate it into their classroom practices. This qualitative case study explored the beliefs and practices of twelve English language teachers from four public and private universities in Karachi. Data were generated through semi-structured interviews, non-participant classroom observations, and document analysis of teaching materials. The data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis. The analysis produced four major themes: (1) teachers viewed culture as both national and dynamic; (2) classroom practices remained largely textbook-driven despite teachers' awareness of intercultural communication; (3) institutional assessment and curriculum constraints limited opportunities for ELF-oriented teaching; and (4) teachers employed localized pedagogical strategies to make cultural content more meaningful for students. Classroom observations demonstrated that while instructors frequently encouraged students to compare Pakistani and international cultural practices, lessons continued to rely heavily on British and American cultural examples presented in prescribed textbooks. Document analysis further revealed that teaching materials privileged factual cultural knowledge over intercultural dialogue and critical reflection. The findings illustrate a significant gap between teachers' beliefs and their classroom practices. Although participants recognized the global nature of English and valued intercultural competence, institutional expectations often encouraged simplified and essentialist representations of culture.

The study argues that Pakistani university ELT would benefit from an ELF-informed approach that promotes flexible understandings of culture, diverse English users, and critical intercultural communication. The paper concludes by offering implications for curriculum development, teacher education, and future research on culture in multilingual English language classrooms.

Keywords: *Culture, Intercultural Communicative Competence, English as a Lingua Franca, English Language Teaching, Qualitative Research, Pakistan, Teacher Beliefs.*

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1. Introduction

The role of English in the twenty-first century has undergone a profound transformation. Once regarded primarily as the language of countries such as the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada, and Australia, English has increasingly become a global means of communication among people who do not share the same first language. This phenomenon has given rise to the concept of **English as a Lingua Franca (ELF)**, which refers to the use of English as a contact language among speakers from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds (Jenkins, 2015; Seidlhofer, 2011). Unlike traditional English language teaching (ELT), which has historically emphasized native-speaker norms of language and culture, ELF recognizes that most interactions in English now occur between multilingual speakers whose communicative success depends on negotiation, accommodation, and intercultural understanding rather than conformity to British or American linguistic standards.

The emergence of ELF has significantly influenced the field of English language education by challenging long-established assumptions about what language learners should learn and how English should be taught. One of the most important changes concerns the teaching of culture. Traditionally, culture in ELT has been presented as factual knowledge about English-speaking countries, including their history, literature, customs, holidays, and social conventions (Byram, 1997). Such an approach assumes that language and culture are inseparable and that mastering English requires familiarity with the cultural practices of native English-speaking communities. While this perspective has played an important role in language education for decades, it has increasingly been criticized for promoting static, homogeneous, and essentialist understandings of culture

that do not reflect the realities of contemporary global communication (Kramsch, 1998; Baker, 2015). Recent scholarship argues that culture should no longer be viewed as a fixed collection of national characteristics but rather as a dynamic, fluid, and context-dependent process that emerges through social interaction (Dervin, 2016). Individuals simultaneously participate in multiple cultural communities shaped by factors such as profession, education, religion, ethnicity, gender, digital communication, and personal experience. Consequently, intercultural communication involves continuous negotiation of meaning rather than the exchange of predetermined cultural knowledge. From this perspective, effective English language users require the ability to interpret differences, manage ambiguity, and communicate across diverse cultural settings instead of merely acquiring information about particular nations.

These theoretical developments have led to increasing attention toward **Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC)** as a central objective of language education. According to Byram (1997), intercultural competence encompasses not only linguistic proficiency but also attitudes of openness, curiosity, critical cultural awareness, and the ability to understand and mediate between different cultural perspectives. Similarly, Baker (2015) argues that ELF communication requires speakers to develop intercultural awareness that enables them to adapt flexibly to unpredictable communicative situations. Rather than preparing learners to imitate native speakers, contemporary ELT should equip students with the skills necessary to communicate successfully with people from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Despite these theoretical advances, research suggests that classroom practice has changed more slowly than academic theory. Numerous studies have reported that English language textbooks continue to privilege British and American cultural content while providing relatively limited opportunities for students to engage critically with intercultural diversity (Gray, 2010; Baker, 2015). Classroom activities frequently emphasize learning cultural facts, traditions, festivals, etiquette, and stereotypes rather than developing learners' ability to negotiate meaning across cultures. As a result, many students continue to encounter culture as a stable body of knowledge instead of a complex and evolving social practice. The tension between theoretical developments in ELF and traditional classroom practices is particularly evident in multilingual countries where English functions simultaneously as an international language, an academic language, and a language associated with social mobility. Pakistan represents one such context. Since independence, English has occupied a unique position within the country's educational system, governmental institutions, higher education, and professional sectors. Although Urdu serves as the national language, English remains the principal language of higher education, academic research, civil administration, and international communication. University graduates increasingly use English not only to communicate with native speakers but also to interact with multilingual users across Asia,

the Middle East, Europe, and other regions. Consequently, Pakistani university students require intercultural communication skills that extend beyond traditional native-speaker models. However, the cultural dimension of English language teaching within Pakistan remains complex. English education operates within a multilingual society characterized by diverse ethnic, linguistic, religious, and regional identities. Teachers frequently negotiate competing expectations arising from institutional curricula, prescribed textbooks, examination systems, national educational policies, and local cultural values. While many educators recognize the importance of preparing students for global communication, they must also ensure that classroom content remains compatible with local social norms and institutional requirements. This dual responsibility creates significant pedagogical challenges regarding how culture should be represented within university English classrooms. Previous research conducted in Pakistan has explored various aspects of English language education, including textbook evaluation, intercultural competence, language policy, teacher beliefs, and classroom practices. Studies have shown that English textbooks often promote particular national, religious, or patriotic narratives while simultaneously presenting selected aspects of British or American culture (Mahboob, 2009; Rahman, 2010). Other researchers have reported that teachers generally acknowledge the importance of intercultural communication but face practical constraints related to curriculum design, limited instructional time, examination-oriented teaching, and insufficient professional development opportunities. Although these studies have contributed valuable insights into English education in Pakistan, relatively few have examined culture from an English as a Lingua Franca perspective. More importantly, existing research has largely focused on either textbook content or teachers' stated beliefs, while comparatively little attention has been paid to the relationship between what teachers believe about culture and what actually occurs during classroom instruction. Teachers may express sophisticated understandings of culture during interviews yet adopt more traditional practices when responding to institutional expectations or textbook requirements. Similarly, classroom activities may appear intercultural on the surface while continuing to reinforce essentialist assumptions about national cultures. Understanding this relationship between teachers' beliefs and classroom practices is particularly important because teachers function as mediators between educational policy, teaching materials, and students' learning experiences. The present study addresses this gap by investigating how university English language teachers in Karachi conceptualize culture within the context of English as a Lingua Franca and how these conceptualizations influence their classroom practices. Karachi provides an appropriate setting for this investigation because it is Pakistan's largest metropolitan city and one of the country's most linguistically and culturally diverse educational environments. Universities in Karachi enroll students from numerous ethnic, linguistic, and socioeconomic backgrounds who are likely to use English

in both national and international contexts throughout their academic and professional lives. Consequently, English classrooms in Karachi offer a valuable context for examining how teachers negotiate global perspectives on language and culture alongside local educational realities.

The study adopts an interpretivist qualitative case study approach to gain an in-depth understanding of teachers' beliefs, classroom practices, and institutional contexts. Through semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis, the research seeks to explore not only how teachers define culture but also how these understandings are translated into pedagogical decisions. By triangulating multiple sources of qualitative data, the study aims to provide a comprehensive account of culture teaching in Pakistani university ELT classrooms from an ELF perspective.

This study makes several important contributions to the field of applied linguistics. First, it extends the growing body of English as a Lingua Franca research by examining its implications within the underexplored context of Pakistani higher education. Second, it contributes to debates on intercultural communicative competence by investigating how teachers negotiate competing understandings of culture in multilingual classrooms. Third, it offers practical insights for curriculum developers, teacher educators, textbook writers, and educational policymakers seeking to design English language programs that better reflect the realities of global English use. Finally, by integrating English as a Lingua Franca, intercultural communication, and teacher cognition within a single qualitative investigation, the study provides a holistic understanding of the opportunities and challenges associated with culture teaching in contemporary Pakistani university English classrooms.

Guided by these objectives, the study addresses the following research questions:

1. How do university English language teachers in Karachi conceptualize culture within the framework of English as a Lingua Franca?
2. How are teachers' beliefs about culture reflected in their classroom practices?
3. What forms of cultural representation emerge from classroom observations and teaching materials?
4. What institutional and pedagogical factors influence teachers' approaches to teaching culture in university English language classrooms?

2. Literature Review

2.1. English as a Lingua Franca (ELF)

The unprecedented global spread of English has transformed its role from the language of a few native-speaking countries to a shared means of communication among multilingual speakers worldwide. This phenomenon, commonly referred to as **English as a Lingua Franca (ELF)**, recognizes that English is primarily used among individuals who do not share the same first language (Seidlhofer, 2011; Jenkins, 2015). Consequently,

successful communication relies less on adherence to native-speaker norms and more on flexibility, negotiation of meaning, and intercultural awareness.

Recent research has expanded ELF beyond linguistic features to include broader perspectives on **Global Englishes**, emphasizing multilingualism, intercultural communication, and social justice in language education. Baker, Fang, and Gimenez (2026) argue that ELF should no longer be viewed merely as a linguistic phenomenon but as a pedagogical framework that prepares learners for communication in diverse global contexts. They emphasize that English language teaching should move beyond native-speaker models and reflect the multilingual realities experienced by contemporary English users.

These developments have challenged traditional English language teaching (ELT), particularly the assumption that learners should imitate British or American linguistic and cultural norms. Instead, ELF-oriented pedagogy encourages learners to develop communicative strategies that enable effective interaction with speakers from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

2.2. Culture in English Language Teaching

Culture has long been regarded as an integral component of language learning. Traditional approaches, however, often conceptualized culture as factual knowledge about English-speaking countries, including customs, traditions, literature, and social etiquette (Byram, 1997). Such representations frequently portrayed culture as homogeneous and nationally bounded.

Contemporary scholarship challenges this essentialist perspective by viewing culture as dynamic, fluid, and continually negotiated through social interaction (Kramsch, 1998; Dervin, 2016). Rather than belonging exclusively to a nation, culture is increasingly understood as emerging from multiple identities, experiences, and communicative contexts.

Recent reviews further reinforce this shift. A comprehensive review by researchers in 2024 concludes that culturally responsive English language teaching should foster learners' ability to interpret, negotiate, and critically engage with cultural diversity rather than simply memorize cultural facts. The review also highlights that integrating diverse cultural perspectives enhances learners' communicative competence and prepares them for authentic international communication.

2.3. Intercultural Communicative Competence

The concept of **Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC)** has become central to modern language education. Byram (1997) defines ICC as the ability to communicate effectively while demonstrating curiosity, openness, empathy, and critical cultural awareness. Unlike traditional cultural knowledge, ICC emphasizes interaction, reflection, and the capacity to negotiate meaning across cultural boundaries.

Within ELF contexts, intercultural competence has gained even greater importance because English users frequently communicate with multilingual speakers rather than native speakers. Baker (2015) argues that intercultural awareness enables learners to manage ambiguity, appreciate multiple perspectives, and adapt their communication according to context. Consequently, English classrooms should provide opportunities for learners to compare cultures, reflect critically on cultural assumptions, and engage in authentic intercultural dialogue rather than merely learning information about particular countries.

2.4. Teachers' Beliefs and Classroom Practices

Teachers play a crucial role in translating educational theory into classroom practice. Their beliefs about language, culture, and learning significantly influence instructional decisions, material selection, and classroom interaction. Nevertheless, previous studies consistently report that teachers' beliefs do not always align with their actual classroom practices due to institutional constraints such as prescribed curricula, standardized examinations, limited instructional time, and textbook requirements.

A recent systematic review of teachers' beliefs about English as an International Language similarly found that although many teachers support multilingual and intercultural approaches in principle, classroom implementation often remains influenced by traditional native-speaker models and examination-oriented practices. These findings suggest that educational policies and institutional contexts substantially shape how culture is taught in English language classrooms.

2.5. The Pakistani ELT Context

English occupies a unique position within Pakistan's educational system, functioning as the principal language of higher education, government, and international communication. Consequently, university graduates increasingly require English not only for national purposes but also for intercultural interaction in academic and professional settings.

Despite this reality, studies examining Pakistani ELT indicate that classroom materials frequently emphasize national identity alongside British and American cultural content, offering relatively limited opportunities for intercultural dialogue or critical reflection. Teachers often acknowledge the importance of preparing students for global communication; however, examination-oriented curricula, prescribed textbooks, and institutional expectations encourage simplified representations of culture. This creates a tension between the multilingual realities of English use and the cultural content typically presented in university classrooms.

2.6. Research Gap

Although research on English as a Lingua Franca, intercultural communication, and teacher cognition has expanded considerably over the past decade, relatively few

studies have examined how Pakistani university teachers conceptualize and teach culture within an ELF framework. Existing research has generally focused on textbook analysis, language policy, or teachers' perceptions independently, while limited attention has been paid to the relationship between teachers' beliefs and their actual classroom practices.

Furthermore, recent Global Englishes scholarship advocates moving beyond native-speaker models toward intercultural, multilingual, and context-sensitive pedagogies. However, little empirical evidence exists regarding how these pedagogical principles are interpreted and implemented in Pakistani higher education. Addressing this gap, the present study investigates university English language teachers' beliefs about culture, examines how these beliefs are reflected in classroom practice, and explores the institutional factors that facilitate or constrain ELF-informed approaches to culture teaching. By integrating interviews, classroom observations, and teaching-material analysis, the study contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of culture teaching within contemporary Pakistani university ELT classrooms.

3. Conceptual Framework

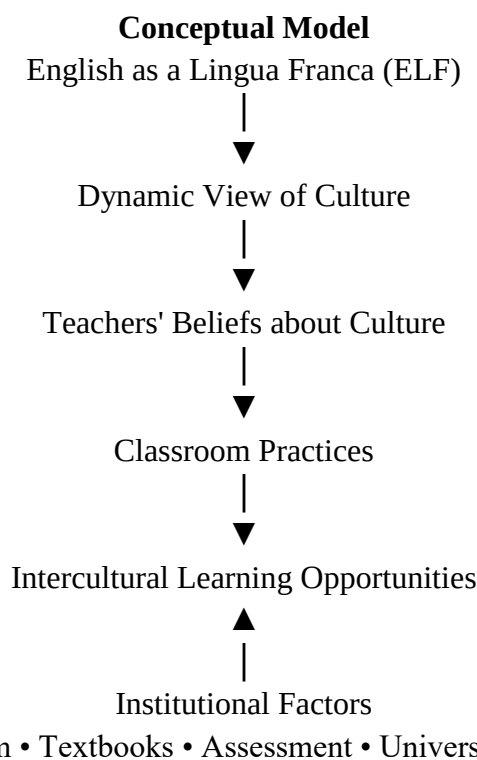
This study is guided by an integrated conceptual framework that combines **English as a Lingua Franca (ELF)**, **Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC)**, and **Teacher Cognition**. Together, these perspectives explain how teachers' beliefs about culture influence their classroom practices within the Pakistani university context.

English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) provides the primary theoretical foundation for the study. Unlike traditional English language teaching, which prioritizes native-speaker norms and cultures, ELF views English as a shared means of communication among multilingual speakers from diverse cultural backgrounds (Jenkins, 2015; Seidlhofer, 2011). Consequently, culture is understood as dynamic, negotiated, and context-dependent rather than fixed and nationally bound.

The second component of the framework is Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC). According to Byram (1997), effective communication requires more than linguistic proficiency; learners also need curiosity, openness, critical cultural awareness, and the ability to negotiate meaning across cultures. Within an ELF perspective, intercultural competence enables learners to interact successfully with speakers from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds instead of relying solely on knowledge of British or American culture.

The third component is Teacher Cognition, which emphasizes that teachers' classroom decisions are shaped by their beliefs, experiences, professional knowledge, and institutional contexts. Although teachers may value intercultural communication and dynamic views of culture, their instructional practices are often influenced by curriculum requirements, prescribed textbooks, assessment systems, and institutional expectations. As a result, classroom practice may not always reflect teachers' personal beliefs.

Drawing upon these three perspectives, the study assumes that teachers' conceptualizations of culture directly influence how cultural content is selected, presented, and discussed in English language classrooms. However, this relationship is mediated by contextual factors such as curriculum policies, examination systems, and teaching materials. Therefore, the study investigates not only teachers' beliefs but also how these beliefs are enacted, negotiated, or constrained within classroom practice.



The framework suggests that while ELF promotes dynamic and intercultural understandings of culture, the extent to which these perspectives appear in classroom teaching depends largely on teachers' beliefs and the institutional environment in which they work. This framework guided the development of the interview questions, classroom observation checklist, document analysis, and thematic interpretation of the findings.

4. Methodology

4.1. Research Design

This study adopted an **interpretivist qualitative** design to explore how university English language teachers conceptualize and teach culture within an English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) framework. A qualitative approach was considered appropriate because the study sought to understand participants' beliefs, experiences, and classroom practices rather than measure predetermined variables. The case study design enabled an in-depth investigation of culture teaching within its real educational context, allowing multiple sources of evidence to be examined simultaneously.

4.2. Research Setting

The study was conducted in four universities located in Karachi, Pakistan. Two public and two private universities were selected to provide variation in institutional culture, curriculum, and teaching practices. These universities offer undergraduate English language courses such as Functional English, Academic Writing, Communication Skills, and English for Academic Purposes (EAP), where cultural issues are frequently discussed.

4.3. Participants

A purposive sampling strategy was employed to recruit participants who possessed substantial experience in university English language teaching. Twelve English language teachers participated in the study, comprising seven females and five males. Their teaching experience ranged from four to twenty-two years. All participants held at least a Master's degree in English, Applied Linguistics, TESOL, or a related field, while four participants possessed doctoral qualifications.

To ensure confidentiality, participants were assigned pseudonyms (e.g., T1, T2, T3). Participation was voluntary, and all teachers provided informed consent before data collection commenced.

Table 1: Participant Profile

Participant	Gender	Qualification	Teaching Experience	Institution
T1	Female	MPhil English	6 Years	Public
T2	Male	PhD Applied Linguistics	18 Years	Public
T3	Female	MPhil TESOL	8 Years	Private
T4	Female	MA English	5 Years	Private
T5	Male	MPhil English	10 Years	Public
T6	Female	PhD Linguistics	22 Years	Public
T7	Male	MA TESOL	7 Years	Private
T8	Female	MPhil Applied Linguistics	12 Years	Public
T9	Male	MA English	4 Years	Private
T10	Female	MPhil TESOL	15 Years	Private
T11	Male	PhD English Education	20 Years	Public
T12	Female	MPhil English	9 Years	Private

4.4. Data Collection

Data were collected over a three-month period using three complementary qualitative methods to enhance the credibility of the findings.

4.4.1. Semi-Structured Interviews

Each participant took part in an individual semi-structured interview lasting approximately 45–60 minutes. The interviews explored teachers' understanding of culture, their perceptions of English as a Lingua Franca, instructional approaches, classroom experiences, and challenges encountered while teaching cultural content. Interviews were audio-recorded with participants' permission and later transcribed verbatim.

4.4.2. Classroom Observations

Twelve classroom observations (one for each participant) were conducted to examine how culture was represented during English language instruction. Each observation lasted between 60 and 90 minutes. Field notes focused on teachers' instructional strategies, classroom interaction, cultural examples, student participation, and the integration of local and international cultural content.

4.5. Document Analysis

Teaching materials used by participants were also examined. These included prescribed textbooks, PowerPoint presentations, lesson plans, worksheets, classroom activities, and assessment tasks. Document analysis provided additional evidence regarding the cultural representations presented to students.

5. Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using **Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis**. The analysis involved repeated reading of interview transcripts and observation notes, generation of initial codes, identification of recurring themes, review and refinement of themes, definition and naming of themes, and finally the preparation of the research report.

The coding process was conducted manually to maintain close engagement with the data. Interview data, classroom observations, and teaching materials were analyzed separately before being compared to identify converging and diverging patterns across data sources.

6. Trustworthiness

To enhance the quality and credibility of the study, several strategies recommended for qualitative research were employed. **Methodological triangulation** was achieved through the combination of interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis. **Member checking** was conducted by sharing interview summaries with participants for confirmation of accuracy. Additionally, detailed field notes and an audit trail were maintained throughout the research process to ensure transparency and consistency during analysis.

7. Ethical Considerations

Ethical principles were carefully observed throughout the study. Participants were informed about the objectives of the research and their right to withdraw at any stage without penalty. Written informed consent was obtained before data collection. To protect

participants' identities, pseudonyms were used in all transcripts and reports, and all collected data were stored securely for research purposes only.

8. Summary

The qualitative case study design enabled a comprehensive exploration of university English language teachers' beliefs and classroom practices regarding culture within an ELF framework. By combining interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis, the study generated rich, contextualized data that informed the thematic findings presented in the following section.

9. Findings

Thematic analysis of the interview transcripts, classroom observations, and teaching materials generated **four major themes**: (1) Teachers' evolving understandings of culture; (2) The mismatch between beliefs and classroom practices; (3) Institutional constraints on ELF-oriented pedagogy; and (4) Emerging localized approaches to intercultural teaching. The themes illustrate how teachers negotiated between contemporary understandings of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) and the practical realities of university English language teaching in Pakistan.

Table 2: Summary of Major Themes

Theme	Description	Sources of Evidence
Theme 1	Teachers viewed culture as both dynamic and national.	Interviews, Observations
Theme 2	Classroom practices remained largely textbook-driven despite intercultural beliefs.	Interviews, Observations, Documents
Theme 3	Institutional factors limited innovative cultural teaching.	Interviews, Documents
Theme 4	Teachers adopted localized strategies to promote intercultural awareness.	Interviews, Observations

Theme 1: Teachers Viewed Culture as Both Dynamic and National

Most participants described culture as a dynamic concept shaped by communication, experience, and social interaction. Rather than limiting culture to customs or traditions, teachers emphasized that individuals belong to multiple cultural communities and continuously negotiate their identities. This understanding closely reflected contemporary perspectives on intercultural communication and English as a Lingua Franca.

For example, T3 explained:

"Culture is not only about festivals or food. My students come from different cities, languages, and backgrounds. Even inside one classroom, everyone brings a different culture."

Similarly, T8 stated:

"English today connects people from everywhere. Students need to understand different ways of thinking instead of memorizing information about Britain or America."

Despite these views, several participants simultaneously described culture using national categories such as Pakistani, British, American, or Chinese culture. While acknowledging diversity, they frequently returned to traditional cultural classifications during classroom explanations.

Classroom observations supported these findings. Teachers regularly encouraged students to compare Pakistani traditions with those of English-speaking countries; however, discussions rarely extended beyond national comparisons. For example, one observed lesson compared wedding ceremonies in Pakistan and the United Kingdom but did not explore how cultural identities vary within these societies or across multilingual communities.

These findings suggest that teachers possessed both dynamic and essentialist understandings of culture, often moving between the two perspectives depending on classroom context.

Theme 2: Classroom Practices Remained Textbook-Driven

Although participants generally supported intercultural learning, classroom observations revealed that teaching practices continued to rely heavily on prescribed textbooks and examination-oriented materials.

T5 commented:

"Personally, I want students to discuss global issues and different perspectives, but examinations are based on the textbook. If I spend too much time on discussion, students become worried about their grades."

Similarly, T10 noted:

"Sometimes I know the examples in the textbook are outdated, but I still teach them because those are the examples students will be assessed on."

Document analysis reinforced these observations. Most teaching materials presented culture through factual descriptions of festivals, historical landmarks, customs, and famous personalities from Britain and the United States. Opportunities for students to engage in intercultural reflection, critical discussion, or multilingual communication were relatively limited.

During classroom observations, teachers frequently explained vocabulary and cultural references but seldom encouraged students to question stereotypes or examine multiple cultural perspectives. Student participation generally focused on recalling information rather than negotiating meaning or reflecting on intercultural experiences.

Overall, the findings indicate a noticeable gap between teachers' intercultural beliefs and their everyday classroom practices.

Theme 3: Institutional Constraints Limited ELF-Oriented Teaching

Nearly all participants identified institutional factors as major barriers to implementing intercultural and ELF-informed pedagogy.

The most frequently mentioned constraints included:

- Examination-oriented assessment
- Prescribed curricula
- Limited classroom time
- Fixed textbooks
- Large class sizes

T2 explained:

"Our curriculum is already overloaded. Teachers have very little freedom to introduce additional intercultural activities."

Likewise, T11 observed:

"Universities expect us to complete the syllabus first. Innovation comes second."

Classroom observations confirmed these concerns. Teachers often shortened discussions because they needed to complete textbook exercises within the allocated class period.

Document analysis also demonstrated that assessment tasks primarily evaluated grammar, vocabulary, reading comprehension, and writing accuracy, with almost no assessment of intercultural communication or critical cultural awareness.

These findings suggest that institutional structures strongly influenced classroom practices, regardless of teachers' personal beliefs about culture.

Theme 4: Localized Strategies Promoted Intercultural Awareness

Despite institutional limitations, many teachers demonstrated creativity by adapting textbook content to make cultural learning more meaningful for Pakistani students.

Rather than presenting British or American culture in isolation, participants frequently invited students to compare international examples with their own experiences.

For instance, T7 remarked:

"Whenever the textbook talks about Western festivals, I ask students to compare them with Eid or local celebrations. This helps them understand similarities instead of thinking one culture is better than another."

Similarly, T1 stated:

"Students become more engaged when discussions begin with their own experiences before moving to global examples."

Several observed lessons included pair discussions, short presentations, and group activities in which students reflected on cultural differences encountered through travel, social media, or interactions with international students.

Although these activities remained relatively limited, they represented important attempts to move beyond traditional cultural instruction toward more interactive and reflective learning.

9.1. Cross-Theme Analysis

Triangulation across interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis revealed a consistent pattern. Teachers generally embraced contemporary understandings of culture associated with English as a Lingua Franca and recognized the importance of intercultural competence. However, their classroom practices remained constrained by institutional expectations, examination systems, and prescribed teaching materials.

The analysis therefore identified a clear tension between **teachers' beliefs** and **their enacted classroom practices**. While participants demonstrated awareness of global developments in English language teaching, the educational context often encouraged simplified and nationally oriented representations of culture.

Overall, the findings indicate that the successful integration of ELF-informed intercultural pedagogy requires not only changes in teachers' beliefs but also broader reforms in curriculum design, assessment practices, and instructional materials.

10. Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore how university English language teachers in Karachi conceptualize culture within an English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) framework and how these beliefs were reflected in their classroom practices. The findings indicate that teachers generally recognized culture as dynamic, negotiated, and intercultural. However, their classroom practices continued to be shaped by institutional constraints, prescribed teaching materials, and examination-oriented curricula. These findings contribute to the growing literature on ELF pedagogy by demonstrating that although theoretical understandings of culture are evolving, their implementation within university English language classrooms remains uneven.

The first major finding revealed that teachers viewed culture as both dynamic and nationally defined. This reflects the transition currently occurring in English language teaching, where traditional cultural models continue to coexist with more recent intercultural perspectives. Participants frequently described culture as flexible, multilingual, and context-dependent during interviews, supporting contemporary views proposed by Baker (2015) and Dervin (2016). Nevertheless, classroom observations showed that teachers often organized lessons around national cultures such as Pakistani, British, and American culture. This suggests that teachers negotiated between competing understandings of culture rather than adopting a single perspective. Similar findings have been reported in recent studies of Global Englishes, which argue that educators often balance traditional curriculum expectations with emerging intercultural approaches instead of completely replacing one with the other (Baker et al., 2026).

The second major finding demonstrated a noticeable gap between teachers' beliefs and their classroom practices. While most participants expressed support for intercultural learning and English as a Lingua Franca, observations and document analysis indicated that classroom instruction remained largely textbook-driven. Cultural content was commonly presented through factual descriptions of customs, traditions, festivals, and national identities, with relatively few opportunities for students to engage in intercultural dialogue or critical reflection. This finding supports previous research suggesting that teachers' pedagogical decisions are influenced not only by personal beliefs but also by institutional and curricular demands. Consequently, understanding teacher cognition requires consideration of the broader educational context in which teaching occurs.

Institutional constraints emerged as one of the most influential factors shaping classroom practice. Participants consistently identified prescribed syllabi, examination systems, limited instructional time, and textbook requirements as barriers to implementing more interactive and intercultural teaching approaches. These findings reinforce earlier research indicating that curriculum and assessment strongly influence classroom pedagogy. Even teachers who demonstrated awareness of ELF principles often prioritized examination preparation because student achievement remained closely linked to institutional assessment practices. Therefore, the challenge of implementing ELF-informed pedagogy extends beyond individual teachers and requires systemic educational reform.

An important contribution of this study is the identification of localized intercultural teaching strategies employed by participants despite institutional limitations. Rather than rejecting prescribed materials, several teachers adapted textbook content by encouraging students to compare local experiences with international perspectives. Discussions relating Pakistani traditions to cultural practices in other countries created opportunities for learners to recognize both cultural similarities and differences. Such practices align with current Global Englishes scholarship, which emphasizes that intercultural learning does not require abandoning local culture but instead encourages learners to critically engage with multiple cultural perspectives through dialogue and reflection.

The findings also have important implications for understanding culture within Pakistani higher education. English language teaching in Pakistan occurs within a multilingual and multicultural society where English functions simultaneously as an academic language, a professional language, and an international means of communication. Consequently, preparing students solely for interaction with native speakers no longer reflects the realities of global English use. Instead, university graduates are increasingly likely to communicate with multilingual English users from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. The findings therefore support calls for university

curricula that emphasize intercultural competence, critical cultural awareness, and communicative flexibility rather than static knowledge of national cultures.

From a theoretical perspective, the study demonstrates the complementary relationship between English as a Lingua Franca, Intercultural Communicative Competence, and Teacher Cognition. ELF provides a framework for understanding English as a global communicative resource rather than the property of native speakers. Intercultural Communicative Competence explains the knowledge, attitudes, and skills required for effective communication across cultural boundaries. Teacher Cognition helps explain why classroom practices are shaped not only by teachers' beliefs but also by contextual and institutional factors. Integrating these perspectives offers a more comprehensive explanation of culture teaching than relying on any single theoretical framework alone.

The study also contributes to the emerging body of ELF research within South Asia. While much previous research has focused on Europe or East Asia, relatively little empirical work has examined how Pakistani university teachers interpret and implement ELF-informed approaches to culture teaching. By triangulating interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis, the present study provides a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between teachers' beliefs, classroom practices, and institutional realities within Pakistani higher education.

Overall, the findings suggest that improving intercultural English language teaching requires change at multiple levels. Professional development programs should familiarize teachers with contemporary perspectives on English as a Lingua Franca and intercultural pedagogy. At the same time, curriculum developers, textbook writers, and educational policymakers should redesign learning materials and assessment systems to encourage critical cultural reflection rather than factual memorization. Without corresponding institutional reform, teachers may continue to experience tension between their pedagogical beliefs and classroom realities. Consequently, meaningful implementation of ELF-informed pedagogy depends not only on teachers' willingness to innovate but also on broader structural changes within higher education.

11. Implications

The findings of this study have important implications for English language teaching, teacher education, curriculum development, and educational policy in Pakistan. As English continues to function as a global lingua franca, university English programs need to move beyond traditional native-speaker models and prepare students for communication in linguistically and culturally diverse environments. The results suggest that achieving this objective requires changes not only in teachers' classroom practices but also in the broader educational system.

11.1. Pedagogical Implications

The study highlights the need for English language teachers to adopt more intercultural and learner-centered approaches to culture teaching. Rather than presenting culture as factual knowledge about particular countries, teachers should encourage students to explore multiple perspectives, compare cultural experiences, and critically reflect on cultural similarities and differences. Classroom activities such as case studies, intercultural discussions, role plays, collaborative projects, and reflective journals can provide students with authentic opportunities to develop intercultural communicative competence.

Teachers should also recognize students' own cultural experiences as valuable learning resources. Integrating local examples with global perspectives enables learners to understand that culture is dynamic, diverse, and continuously negotiated through interaction. Such an approach is more consistent with the principles of English as a Lingua Franca, where successful communication depends on adaptability and mutual understanding rather than conformity to native-speaker norms.

11.2. Implications for Teacher Education

The findings indicate that although many teachers possess positive attitudes toward intercultural teaching, they often lack sufficient institutional support to implement these approaches consistently. Consequently, teacher education programs should include greater emphasis on English as a Lingua Franca, Global Englishes, intercultural communicative competence, and culturally responsive pedagogy.

Professional development workshops should provide practical strategies for integrating intercultural learning into existing curricula without compromising prescribed learning outcomes. Opportunities for collaborative lesson planning, classroom observation, and professional reflection may also help teachers translate theoretical knowledge into effective classroom practice.

11.3. Curriculum and Textbook Development

The study demonstrates that prescribed textbooks continue to shape classroom practice significantly. Therefore, curriculum developers and textbook writers should reconsider how culture is represented in English language teaching materials. Instead of emphasizing only British or American culture, future textbooks should incorporate diverse cultural perspectives from both local and international contexts.

Teaching materials should include authentic intercultural communication scenarios, multilingual speakers of English, global case studies, and activities that promote critical thinking rather than factual memorization. Such materials would better prepare students for the realities of international communication in academic and professional settings.

11.4. Policy Implications

The findings also suggest that educational policies and assessment systems play a crucial role in determining classroom practice. Examination systems that prioritize grammatical accuracy and textbook recall may discourage teachers from implementing discussion-based and intercultural activities. Policymakers should therefore consider revising curriculum standards and assessment frameworks to recognize intercultural communicative competence as an important learning outcome alongside linguistic proficiency.

Universities should also encourage innovation in English language teaching by providing teachers with greater flexibility in selecting instructional materials and designing classroom activities. Institutional support for continuous professional development, curriculum revision, and research-informed teaching practices will facilitate the implementation of more contemporary approaches to English language education.

11.5. Research Implications

This study contributes to the growing literature on English as a Lingua Franca by highlighting the importance of examining teachers' beliefs together with their classroom practices. Future research should continue investigating how intercultural pedagogy is implemented across different educational settings and how institutional contexts influence teachers' instructional decisions. Comparative studies involving different provinces, educational levels, or international contexts may further enhance understanding of culture teaching within multilingual English language classrooms.

Overall, the study suggests that improving intercultural English language teaching requires collaboration among teachers, curriculum developers, textbook writers, teacher educators, university administrators, and policymakers. Sustainable educational change will occur only when classroom innovation is supported by corresponding reforms in curriculum, assessment, and professional development.

12. Limitations and Future Research

Like all qualitative research, this study has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting its findings. First, the research was conducted in only four universities located in Karachi. Although the selected institutions included both public and private universities, the findings reflect the experiences of a specific educational context and therefore cannot be generalized to all higher education institutions in Pakistan. Nevertheless, the purpose of qualitative case study research is to provide an in-depth understanding of a particular context rather than statistical generalization.

Second, the study focused exclusively on university English language teachers. Students' perspectives were not included, despite the fact that learners play a central role in intercultural communication and classroom interaction. Incorporating students' experiences could provide a more comprehensive understanding of how cultural content is interpreted, negotiated, and applied in English language classrooms.

Third, classroom observations were conducted over a limited period. Although the observations provided valuable insights into teachers' instructional practices, longer-term classroom observations or longitudinal research could capture changes in teaching practices over time and provide a richer understanding of classroom dynamics.

Another limitation concerns the use of qualitative methods. While interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis generated rich and detailed data, the study did not examine the relationship between teachers' beliefs and students' intercultural competence using quantitative measures. Future studies adopting mixed-methods designs could combine qualitative findings with surveys, classroom assessments, or intercultural competence scales to provide a broader understanding of the impact of ELF-oriented pedagogy.

Future research should also explore culture teaching across different regions of Pakistan, including rural and urban universities, public and private institutions, and different educational levels. Comparative studies involving colleges, secondary schools, and language institutes would provide valuable insights into how institutional contexts influence the implementation of intercultural English language teaching.

In addition, future researchers may investigate students' perceptions of English as a Lingua Franca, the effectiveness of teacher training programs related to intercultural communicative competence, and the representation of culture in newly developed English language textbooks. Longitudinal studies examining how teachers' beliefs evolve following professional development initiatives would also contribute to the growing body of Global Englishes research.

Finally, comparative international studies involving universities in South Asia, the Middle East, or Southeast Asia could provide a broader understanding of how multilingual societies respond to the pedagogical challenges associated with English as a Lingua Franca. Such research would help identify both context-specific practices and common trends in intercultural English language teaching across diverse educational settings.

13. Conclusion

The increasing global use of English has fundamentally transformed the goals of English language teaching. As English is now predominantly used as a lingua franca among multilingual speakers, language education must move beyond traditional native-speaker models toward approaches that prepare learners for authentic intercultural communication. Within this changing landscape, the present study explored how university English language teachers in Karachi conceptualize culture within an English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) framework and how these beliefs were reflected in their classroom practices.

The findings revealed that teachers generally recognized culture as dynamic, diverse, and continually negotiated through communication. Most participants

acknowledged that English is no longer associated exclusively with native-speaking countries and emphasized the importance of preparing students to communicate with people from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. These findings indicate that Pakistani university teachers are increasingly aware of contemporary developments in English language teaching and recognize the importance of intercultural communicative competence in higher education.

Despite these positive attitudes, the study also identified a noticeable gap between teachers' beliefs and their classroom practices. Although participants expressed support for intercultural and ELF-informed approaches, classroom observations and document analysis demonstrated that instruction continued to rely largely on prescribed textbooks, examination requirements, and nationally oriented representations of culture. Consequently, opportunities for critical intercultural dialogue, multilingual communication, and reflective cultural learning remained relatively limited.

The findings further demonstrate that this inconsistency should not be interpreted simply as a limitation of individual teachers. Rather, it reflects the influence of broader institutional structures, including curriculum design, textbook content, assessment practices, and university policies. Teachers often worked within highly structured educational environments that restricted their ability to implement innovative pedagogical approaches, even when they personally valued intercultural learning. This suggests that meaningful educational change requires systemic support in addition to individual teacher development.

An important contribution of this study is its demonstration that localized pedagogical practices can serve as effective bridges between global theories and local educational realities. Many participants adapted prescribed teaching materials by encouraging students to compare Pakistani cultural experiences with those of other communities, thereby creating opportunities for intercultural reflection without disregarding local identities. Such practices illustrate that integrating local culture into English language teaching does not conflict with the principles of English as a Lingua Franca. Instead, local experiences can function as valuable resources for developing learners' intercultural awareness and communicative flexibility.

From a theoretical perspective, the study contributes to the growing literature on English as a Lingua Franca by integrating three complementary perspectives: ELF, Intercultural Communicative Competence, and Teacher Cognition. Examining these perspectives together provides a more comprehensive understanding of how teachers' beliefs, institutional contexts, and classroom practices interact to shape culture teaching in university English language classrooms. This integrated perspective extends existing research by demonstrating that effective intercultural pedagogy depends not only on

teachers' knowledge and attitudes but also on the educational structures within which teaching occurs.

The study also offers several practical contributions. The findings suggest that universities should strengthen teacher education programs related to intercultural communication, revise English language curricula to reflect multilingual realities, and encourage the development of teaching materials that present culture as diverse, dynamic, and context-sensitive. Assessment systems should likewise recognize intercultural communicative competence as an essential learning outcome alongside linguistic proficiency. Such reforms would better prepare university graduates for participation in increasingly interconnected academic, professional, and social environments. The findings indicate that the future of English language teaching in Pakistan lies not in replacing local cultural identities with global ones, nor in preserving traditional native-speaker models of language and culture. Rather, effective English language education should create learning environments in which students develop the knowledge, skills, and critical awareness necessary to communicate confidently and respectfully across cultural boundaries. As English continues to evolve as a global lingua franca, embracing intercultural, multilingual, and context-sensitive pedagogies will enable Pakistani universities to prepare learners more effectively for the linguistic and cultural realities of the twenty-first century.

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