

# EFL Teachers' Beliefs about the Development of Intercultural competence

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**Anja Birović**

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EFL Teachers' Beliefs about the Development of Intercultural competence

Diplomski rad

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## 1. Introduction

Language and culture are inextricably linked, and neither can live without the other (Jiang, 2000). Indeed, it is difficult to thoroughly understand a language without first understanding its culture (Gül, 2021). Culture affects language at several linguistic levels, including semantics, pragmatics, and discourse (Atay, 2022). Language is a medium for the expression of one's beliefs, passage from one generation to the next, and learning about the world (Hartley, 1982). Furthermore, the extent to which learners are affected by the acculturation process varies depending on context and learning aims. The Second Language acquisition (L2) process involves several essential components that contribute to the success and fluency of language learners. According to Brown and Lee (2015), these components include an understanding of the nature of language acquisition, effective teaching practices, learner autonomy, communicative competence, and the need to transcend a native speaker's model. The educational process fosters intercultural competence and understanding by encouraging the acquisition of knowledge, skills, and attitudes toward other cultures. Interculturality entails communication and comprehension between English speakers from various cultural backgrounds (Croatian National Curriculum, 2019). The student develops intercultural competence that enables him to recognize differences and similarities between cultures and encourages empathy, adaptability, and openness to understanding other cultures and languages. In addition, it enables him to communicate effectively with English speakers, promote understanding, broaden his worldview, and participate in the community (Croatian National Curriculum, 2019).

Teachers and researchers are now particularly concerned with the intercultural dimensions of foreign-language teaching. Studies in social psychology and intercultural communication have shed light on the linguistic and social skills, knowledge, and attitudes required for effective and appropriate communication in intercultural contact situations (Wiseman & Koester, 1997). Intercultural education primarily focuses on fostering dialogue, understanding, and tolerance among people and groups with diverse cultural backgrounds. It seeks to prepare students to live in diverse societies by enhancing their understanding of inequalities, cultivating mutual respect, fostering intercultural communication skills, and resolving conflicts (Gube, 2023). Teachers play a crucial role in transferring intercultural competencies to young people. By developing their own intercultural competencies, teachers can model and guide students to understand and appreciate different cultures (Kramsch, 2013).

Cushner and Mahon (2009) reported that intercultural competence is not a recent addition to the field of linguistics, and its origins can be traced back to the 1600s. Byram proposed the model of ICC which emphasizes the development of intercultural competence through the integration of knowledge, skills, and attitudes. (1997) His framework is extremely important for language acquisition. It acknowledges that language proficiency alone is insufficient for effective intercultural communication and that learners must cultivate intercultural competency in order to effectively cope with cultural differences (Byram, 1997).

The primary aim of this paper is to investigate English foreign language (EFL) teachers' perceptions of the cultural aspects of foreign language teaching and the teaching of intercultural competence. In addition, the strategies that teachers use to develop learners' intercultural skills are addressed, as well as the challenges that teachers face. First, the theoretical background is presented. The methodology section follows this, including the aim and method, sample, instruments, procedure, and data analysis used in the study. The results are presented and discussed in relation to those of previous studies. Finally, the research findings are summarized and the study's limitations are discussed in the conclusion.

## 2. Theoretical Background

### 2.1. Second language acquisition (SLA)

Second Language learning (SLA) differs from learning a native language in that it is more complex. Second Language learning (SLA) involves tasks other than native language learning, such as language structure, pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary development. Acquiring the skills necessary for effective communication in a second language is challenging. According to Saville-Troike and Barto (2017), "Second Language Acquisition (SLA) refers both to the study of individuals and groups who are learning a language subsequent to learning their first one as young children, and to the process of learning that language" (p. 14). A new language is called a second language (L2), although it may be the third, fourth, or tenth acquired language. SLA includes informal L2 learning in a realistic context, formal L2 learning that happens in the classroom, and L2 learning which is a mixture of these two settings (Saville-Troike & Barto, 2017). In the field of second language acquisition, the three basic questions that Saville-Troike and Barto (2017, p. 15) in the field of SLA try to answer are: "What exactly does the L2 learner come to know? How does the learner acquire this knowledge? Why are some learners more (or less) successful than others?"



L1 and L2 learning refer to acquiring a person's first language (L1) and a second language (L2). The preliminary or initial state of L1 and L2 learning is thought to include the underlying knowledge of the basic elements and principles of language in learners' heads at the start of L1 or L2 acquisition. The initial stage of L1 acquisition consists merely of inherent language acquisition abilities (Saville-Troike & Barto, 2017). However, L2 learners already possess real-world skills in their initial state of language acquisition, which young children need to acquire when they start learning their L1. The intermediate states encompass all phases of critical language development, including the maturational changes in "child grammar" in L1. Both first language (L1) and second language (L2) learners experience systematic and predictable phases of development in their linguistic systems according to the intermediate state. Learners' language development is characterized by creativity, as opposed to mere repetition of the taught material. There is also a correlation between the order of language acquisition across languages (Saville-Troike & Barto, 2017). Native proficiency is the final state of L1 learning, whereas the final state of L2 learning is multilingual competence (Saville-Troike & Barto, 2017).

## 2.2. L2 teaching

### 2.2.1. Teaching language skills

Language is divided into four distinct categories based on how it is used: receptive or productive, and written or oral. Receptive language refers to the ability to understand language, whereas productive language involves the use of language for expression. Written and oral communication are two different ways to communicate. Receptive activities such as reading and listening are crucial for academic competence, while oral activities such as listening and speaking are essential for interpersonal competence (Saville-Troike & Barto, 2017). The order of development depends on social circumstances, and learners can develop proficiency in receptive activities and production, without well-developed proficiency in oral activities. When one language is acquired in a formal environment, schooling and literacy skills make it possible for a person to master competency in another (Saville-Troike & Barto, 2017).

Teaching reading is necessary to develop proficient L2 learners. Reading is essential for developing the ability to skim significant amounts of written material without relying on dictionaries (Huang, 2012). When teaching reading, teachers must create a fun and supportive learning atmosphere. Some activities included guided reading and group discussions.

Therefore, scaffolding was necessary. Reading teaching should focus on decoding, vocabulary, and comprehension. Final assessments and feedback are essential for reading education (Brown & Lee, 2015).

Teaching speaking is an important language skill for several reasons. First, speaking is the primary mode of communication in daily life and in professional settings. Developing speaking skills enables individuals to effectively express their thoughts, ideas, and emotions, fostering meaningful interactions and connections with others (Ying et al., 2021). Speaking skills are closely linked to listening skills. By engaging in speaking activities, learners can improve their listening comprehension as they actively process and respond to the spoken language (Canepa, 2013). Wilson (2008) provided practical advice on the teaching of listening, covering topics such as authenticity, assessment, and the utilization of technology. Richards (2005) investigated two perspectives of listening, listening as comprehension and listening as acquisition, which have an impact on educational methodology and the development of instructional materials. Listening tasks range from reciprocal to nonreciprocal. Direct interaction is reciprocal; however, radio and TV news require the listener to take in information without asking questions. Broad listening focuses on the big picture, whereas selective hearing emphasizes details. Educational listening requires vocabulary, sophisticated language patterns, and new distinctions (Saville-Troike & Barto, 2017).

Teaching writing involves helping students develop their skills and abilities to compose written texts. Prior to writing, students must understand strategies such as prewriting, drafting, revising, and editing that teach students logical writing. Additionally, teachers should promote critical thinking and unique writing skills (Brown & Lee, 2015). Carroll and Wilson (1993) offered their integrated perspective of teaching writing effectively, where students must be focused and engage with the text to make sense of words and experiences.

### 2.2.2. Teaching by principles

In an effort to connect the theoretical aspects of SLA research and L2 teaching, Brown and Lee (2015) suggested eight fundamental principles that they argued serve as a foundation for effective teaching practices. The eight principles defined by Brown and Lee (2015) are automaticity, transfer, reward, self-regulation, identity and investment, interaction, languaculture and agency. These principles encompass various aspects of language acquisition and provide educators with valuable insights. (Brown & Lee, 2015)

Brown and Lee (2015) claimed that the first principle is automaticity. Children naturally learn additional languages without analyzing language forms, exposure, or interactive experimentation (Brown & Lee, 2015). However, adults may be hindered from developing automaticity by overanalyzing language forms and focusing too much on grammar, phonology, and vocabulary (Brown & Lee, 2015). The Principle of Automaticity promotes efficient language learning and fluency. Fluency development primarily focuses on meaning and interaction, with emphasis on language form. It is critical to balance norms and guided practices when educating adults. While the intentional processing of rules and organized guidance may be valuable, it is critical to emphasize language forms, because this could interfere with the development of automaticity in language usage. Instead, to successfully engage adult learners, teachers should prioritize actual language usage and relevant themes. The goal of concentrating on form should be to assist students in actively observing, changing, and smoothly integrating language forms into their daily speech, thus guaranteeing a practical and productive adult language learning experience (Brown & Lee, 2015).

The second principle, stated by Brown and Lee (2015), is the Principle of Transfer. This principle concerns how one naturally wants to use what one already knows when learning new things. It is about connecting the dots between your existing skills, emotions, knowledge and the new discoveries you are taking over (Brown & Lee, 2015). Interlanguage development relies on the cross-linguistic impact or the transmission of linguistic information from one's native language (L1) to a second language (L2). Saville-Troike and Barto (2017) define two primary transfer methods:

1. Positive transfer occurs when an L1 structure or rule is used in an L2 context and matches L2 language norms, making it inappropriate or suitable. Positive transfer enables students to use their knowledge without acquiring new L2 language structures, thus simplifying the learning process. (Saville-Troike & Barto, 2017, p. 39)
2. Negative transfer (interference): Negative transfer occurs when an L1 structure or rule is misused in an L2. The use of L2, which differs from native speech or combines non-monolingual parts, shows this transfer form. The influence of cross-linguistics affects vocabulary, phonetics, grammar, linguistic structure, and use. L1's positive or negative effect on interlanguage development complicates and deepens L2 learning. (Saville-Troike & Barto, 2017, p. 39)

The reward principle was the third principle proposed by Brown and Lee (2015). According to Skinner et al., rewards significantly affect people's actions. Psychologists and language specialists have long been discussing this issue. Both believe that rewards are significant, as is intrinsic motivation. Things function better in the classroom when students find assignments enjoyable, engaging, helpful, or complex for their reasons. The important thing is that they are doing so because they sincerely want to, not because they want the instructor to pat on the back. (Brown & Lee, 2015) It has been claimed by Brown & Lee (2015) that „human beings are universally driven to act, or „behave,” in anticipation of a reward. The most powerful rewards are those that are intrinsically motivated: The behavior stems from needs, wants, or desires within oneself and is self-rewarding.” (Brown & Lee, 2015, p. 73)

Brown and Lee (2015) found out that the fourth principle is the Principle of Self-Regulation. Creating an environment in which students become independent and accountable for their learning is a fundamental principle of modern language instruction. Today's classrooms involve students establishing their objectives, employing various strategies, speaking up in class, solving problems with their peers, and practising with their classmates (Brown & Lee, 2015). Language acquisition is no longer restricted to classrooms but involves the application of knowledge to the actual world. Teachers encourage students to assume responsibility for their education, determine their paths towards success, and use language outside the classroom. This indicates that students are not just passive learners of language, but also active participants in their own educational experiences (Brown & Lee, 2015).

The fifth principle, mentioned by Brown and Lee (2015), is related to the concepts of identity and investment. In both our native and second languages, language plays a significant role in how we express ourselves and interact with others. With the increasing focus on emotions and sentiments in SLA research and teaching during the 1970s was the concept of language ego (Brown & Lee, 2015). Today, the concept of language ego has evolved into a more refined concept known as "identity" (Brown & Lee, 2015, p. 77). It is not just about the students as individuals but also about how they perceive themselves within a larger social context. The concept of identity entails that students know themselves, their strengths and limitations, and how to learn effectively. Learning a second language is not only about vocabulary and syntax; it also involves a sense of self as a social group member. It is about knowing oneself, putting in effort, having the ability to make decisions, and determining one's position in the community (Brown & Lee, 2015).

The sixth Principle of Interaction was identified by Brown and Lee (2015). The concept of "willingness to communicate" (WTC) in L2 learning has been controversial (Brown & Lee, 2015, p. 79). It is not enough to know a language; one must also be motivated and be able to communicate. Sometimes, students hesitate because of factors such as anxiety and nervousness (Brown and Lee, 2015). Therefore, teachers should emphasize classroom activities that encourage students to open up and begin speaking. The concept of WTC is universal, and does not adhere to any particular culture. Research indicates that a more open learner-centered environment is beneficial for retaining motivation and knowledge (Brown & Lee, 2015). It is not enough to know terms and grammar; one must also know how to use language in everyday life. Interaction is necessary for developing language skills, forming one's identity, and learning through collaboration and negotiation (Brown & Lee, 2015).

The seventh principle, labelled by Brown and Lee (2015), is the Principle of Languaculture. Language teaching involves a very intricate system of cultural conventions, principles, ways of thinking, feelings, and sentiments. Students learning a second language might benefit by identifying cultural differences, affirming their challenges, the value for one's culture, and high self-esteem in situations where they feel vulnerable (Brown & Lee, 2015). Further details on this topic are discussed in the next section.

The Principle of Agency, which Brown and Lee (2015) identified as the principle that highlights the importance of learners ability to make choices, take charge and regulate their language learning process. It acknowledges that individuals desire autonomy and freedom to express themselves in a social setting. This concept is believed to be essential for language learning and comprehension (Brown & Lee, 2015). Agency is essential for motivation, self-efficacy, self-regulation, and autonomy in language acquisition. This perspective emphasizes teachers' responsibility to empower students on their path to autonomy, self-identity development, and personal growth within their sociocultural context by providing emotional and educational support (Brown & Lee, 2015).

### 2.2.3. The Principle of Languaculture

This section focuses on the significance of intercultural competency in second language acquisition, and the intricate relationship language and culture. It highlights the importance of educating learners on identifying and navigating the complex interaction between various

cultural factors. It also provides techniques for guiding students through their language and cultural explorations. (Brown & Lee, 2015)

Brown and Lee (2015) state that cultural competence is an essential component of language acquisition. It begins with developing knowledge and admiration for a culture's conventions, values, ways of thinking, feelings, and actions. Language and culture are inextricably linked, and learners must manage both to communicate properly in a second language (Brown and Lee, 2015). Brown and Lee (2015) suggest that teachers may assist learners in acquiring the skills needed to adapt and integrate into a new culture by recognising and dealing with cultural differences. This involves understanding and valuing the importance of traits, like being polite using humor, slang and accent. It also includes staying updated with current literature, popular culture, music, movies, sports teams, famous personalities, scandals and the latest technological gadgets (Brown and Lee 2015). Culturally competent individuals can deal with and engage in various cultural situations with sensitivity, respect, and understanding (Brown and Lee, 2015).

The principle of *Linguaculture* emphasizes the inseparability of language and culture. It recognizes that language concerns words, sentences, and discourse (Brown & Lee, 2015). Similarly, culture is not limited to dictionary and grammar, but includes meanings beyond these. As mentioned by Brown and Lee (2015) the concept of *linguaculture* recognizes the inseparable connection between language and culture. Additionally, it suggests that when learning a language it is essential to comprehend and absorb the elements incorporated into it. *Linguaculture* emphasizes the significance of teaching both language itself and the elaborated system of practices, values, thought processes, emotions and behaviors associated with it. The principle of *Linguaculture* recognizes that language and culture cannot be separated and must be taught and learned together (Brown and Lee, 2015).

### 2.3. Defining intercultural competence

Byram defines intercultural competence as "knowledge of others; knowledge of self; skills to interpret and relate; skills to discover and/or to interact; valuing others' values, beliefs, and behaviours; and relativizing one's self. Linguistic competence plays a key role (...)." (Byram, 1997, p. 248). Intercultural competence is the ability to navigate and communicate effectively across different cultural environments. The concept includes the comprehension and admiration of universal information that applies to several communities and specialized

knowledge of distinct groups or societies' practices, customs, and traditions. Triandis (1972) argues that the acquisition of broad cultural knowledge encompasses the comprehension of values and norms that have significance across diverse communities. On the other hand, specific cultural knowledge refers to understanding practices, customs, and traditions unique to a specific group or community. Witkin et al. (1962) defined psychological difference as the cognitive capacity to receive and understand information diversely and intricately. Individuals who exhibit differentiation can identify and appreciate various ideas and behaviours within a particular cultural framework. The notion of categorization depth was first established by Detweiler (1978). This refers to the capacity to broaden one's comprehension of how information is perceived. This process involves maintaining an open and adaptable mindset while evaluating communication and rules, resulting in a complete understanding of many cultures. As implemented by McCrae et al. (1998), openness refers to an individual's inclination to explore various experiences and exhibit an open mindset towards other cultures. The concept entails maintaining a positive attitude towards ideas, opinions, and other ways of living. Multiple factors are involved in the development of intercultural competency.

The concept of transcultural ethnic reliability, as explained by Tyler (2001), underscores the need to recognize and honour the identities and lived experiences of persons from many cultural backgrounds. The concept includes recognizing and appreciating individuals' cultural backgrounds and contributions from diverse cultural origins. According to Brislin (1993), four primary factors contribute to successful intercultural interactions. These characteristics include feeling good about international connections, receiving matching emotions from others inside the culture, engaging in collaborative task completion, and minimizing stress. These aspects underscore the need to cultivate mutually advantageous interactions across cultures. According to Kealey (1996), three key factors should be considered to attain success: possession of adaptation skills, acquisition of cross-cultural competencies, and development of partnership abilities. The acquisition of adaptation skills includes the ability to retain a positive mindset and demonstrate flexibility in navigating diverse cultural environments. Cross-cultural competencies included demonstrating reality, cultural awareness, and political astuteness. Partnership skills cover a range of attributes including openness, persistence, and problem-solving ability, which are essential for practical cooperation across many cultural contexts. Within education, competency comprises many elements including perception, viewpoint, and connection development. Teachers' perceptions are significant in comprehending student behavior and classroom dynamics (McCarthy & Benally, 2003; Sheets, 1996). Developing

relationships among learners from diverse cultural backgrounds is crucial to provide an inclusive and supportive educational environment.

### 2.3.1. Byram's extensive framework for intercultural competence

The model proposed by Michael Byram offers a comprehensive framework for the comprehension and categorization of competence. Byram argued that intercultural competence encompasses various related components, including knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values. According to Byram's paradigm, intercultural communicative competence encompass two areas: communicative competence and intercultural competence. These subcategories are intimately connected (Byram, 2009).

Communicative competence consists of three subcategories, that are linguistic competence, sociolinguistic competence, and discourse competence. However, intercultural competence entails three different elements: knowledge, skills, and attitudes are three elements of intercultural competence. These are complemented by five core values, which are as follows: "(1) intercultural attitudes, (2) intercultural knowledge, (3) intercultural skills of interpreting and relating, (4) intercultural skills of discovery and engagement, and (5) critical cultural awareness" (Byram et al, 2002, pp. 11-13). The five primary intercultural competencies are tightly related to one another. According to Byram's argument, "the basis of intercultural competence is in the attitudes of the person interacting with people of another culture." With this fundamental skill, it will be possible for the other four to grow to their full potential (Byram et al. 2002, pp. 11-13).

The ICC model, which focuses on intercultural communication competence, consists of three elements. First, it introduces the concept of a standard known as the intercultural speaker, challenging the notion that only native speakers can serve as role models for foreign language learners. Second, this framework is an approach to developing intercultural communicative competence (ICC) by incorporating learning objectives. Finally, given its nature, this document provides information regarding where knowledge is acquired and defines the respective responsibilities of educators and students throughout their educational journey (Byram, 1997). Individuals who possess intercultural competence can proficiently communicate with individuals from other nations and cultures in their respective languages. This competence depends upon individuals' proficiency in effectively communicating their thoughts, their open-mindedness towards other viewpoints, and their aptitude to comprehend, establish connections,



and reconcile differences between cultures. People often develop these abilities through the process of learning a language even if they don't have opportunities to use it within a practical context. For example, an individual may be able to comprehend a translated document originating from a different cultural context, even without a complete understanding of the language in question. Instead, individuals depend on their ability to analyse and comprehend various cultural contexts. They were demonstrating genuine curiosity and active involvement (Byram, 1997). This approach follows the perspective that language education should include engagement with many cultures and prioritise the development of intercultural competence. Conversely, people who exhibit a high level of intercultural communicative competence can successfully interact with others from different nations and cultures by using a foreign language. These individuals possess the ability to effectively traverse several channels of communication ensuring that they provide the requirements and interests of all parties involved. They serve as facilitators, using their diverse experiences to facilitate effective dialogue among individuals. The level of one's cultural comprehension is intricately linked to one's language competency, including knowledge, ability to engage in conversation, and awareness of the distinct complexities, values, and meanings associated with that unique language (Byram, 1997).

The distinction between intercultural competence and intercultural communicative competence resides in their respective capacities to navigate varying degrees of complexity within intercultural contexts. intercultural communicative competence enables people to effectively navigate many encounter circumstances that need adaptation, in contrast to the narrow focus of intercultural competence alone. The determination of the components to include while instructing these skills is reliant upon the particular facts and requirements of students. However, both competencies involve goals that prioritise language acquisition taking place inside educational environments. The approach places emphasis on the significance of seeing communication as a dynamic interaction and promotes critical engagement with otherness and self-reflection, rather than only concentrating on information flow across cultural boundaries (Byram, 1997). The educational dimension of the intercultural communicative competence (ICC) model has consequences for the contexts in which intercultural communicative competence (ICC) is cultivated, which may be classified into three domains: the classroom, research, and independent learning. Every location exhibits associations with the aims defined in the model. Moreover, in these educational environments, both educators and students adopt certain responsibilities (Byram, 1997).

Another noteworthy feature is the rejection of the idea that the ultimate objective in language learning should be to become a proficient speaker. Instead, the idea advises prioritising the development of speakers who have exceptional skills in managing cultural exchanges, rather than focusing on attempting to replicate the abilities of native speakers. This objective may not always be achievable or preferable in some contexts (Byram, 1997).

#### 2.4. Second Language Teaching and Intercultural competence

Teaching a second language and intercultural competence are closely related. Teaching a second language requires not only the acquisition of linguistic skills, but also the development of intercultural competence, which involves being able to comprehend and adapt to different perspectives on culture and communicate effectively across cultures (Cranmer, 1995). Integrating intercultural competence into language education enhances students' comprehension of the target language and its cultural setting (Mu & Yu, 2022). By introducing multicultural components into language education, teachers may assist learners in developing the knowledge, attitudes, and competencies required to negotiate and fully understand differences in cultural norms and values (Sercu, 2002). As mentioned by Brown (2000) language and culture are closely connected to each other. Brown and Lee (2015) agree that when you teach a language, you are also teaching "a complex system of cultural customs, values, and ways of thinking, feeling, and acting" (Brown & Lee, 2015, p. 64). In addition, the level to which the acculturation process influences your students may vary based on the setting and the learning goals you have set for them (Brown & Lee, 2015). Brown & Lee (2015) highlight significant factors in various second language (L2) acquisition situations: acculturation, social distance, and psychological adjustment. These aspects are connected to the ego and self-esteem of language learners, both essential components in acquiring a second language.

Language teachers play a crucial role in integrating intercultural elements into language instruction, including promoting cultural sensitivity and developing learners' intercultural communicative competence. Teachers can help learners become more globally competent by incorporating cultural content and by providing opportunities for authentic intercultural communication. The significance of intercultural competency as an essential component of acquiring a second language (L2) has been acknowledged in recent revisions of the Croatian national curriculum (Croatian et al.; CNC, 2019). According learners need to become interculturally competent to fulfill their educational goals. The CNC suggests that this

competence entails several factors. For example, by achieving educational goals in this area, students can become interculturally competent, which means they can recognise and analyse cultural similarities and differences. Moreover, learners are empathetic, adaptable, and open to understanding, accepting, and appreciating the cultures of English speakers, and are also prepared to read literature written in the English language and have a basic understanding of its most significant forms. Additionally, they will communicate effectively and demonstrate a genuine appreciation for other cultures (Croatian et al.; CNC, 2019). In the end, the growth of intercultural competence assists the student in rejecting prejudices, empowers them in avoiding discrimination and nonviolent resolution of conflicts, and enhances comprehension, deepening and broadening the student's perspective of the world, enabling students to successfully participate in both a small and large community, in the physical and digital environment, and increases opportunities for mobility and employability (Croatian et al.; CNC, 2019).

## 2.5. Research on teaching culture in the L2 context

The development of students' intercultural competency in L2 and EFL teaching has drawn more attention recently. It is not just about acquiring language skills, but also about developing a knowledge of the ability to communicate with people from different cultural backgrounds. The research data in this thesis is drawn from various research studies undertaken by Atay et al. (2009), Bal Savas (2022), Bouslama and Benaisi (2018), Karabinar and Guler, 2013, Roiha and Sommier (2021), Salih and Omar (2022), and lastly, Sobkowiak (2021). These studies give insight on EFL instructors' attitudes and practises when it comes to developing intercultural competency.

Firstly, Atay et al. (2009) set out to investigate Turkish EFL instructors' perspectives and attitudes towards teaching intercultural competence, as well as how these views emerge in their classrooms. The study revealed that even though language teachers recognize the significance of culture, in teaching languages they often fail to incorporate cultural elements in their lessons to facilitate the development of intercultural competence among students. In other words, they see the need yet often fall short of meeting it. Bal and Savas' (2022) research investigated views and practises of EFL instructors in Turkish public schools with regard to developing learners' intercultural competence. According to the data, some EFL instructors have difficulties due to students' biases against learning English language and lack of enthusiasm for intercultural learning, beliefs, and a lack of openness. They did discover, however, that technology, such as social media, online games, movies, and television, may be

a useful tool in developing intercultural competency. To enhance connection and learning among young people from varied backgrounds, teachers used tactics such as pen pal activities and exchanging cultural ideas.

Bousslama and Benaisi's (2018) study investigated EFL instructors' perspectives of intercultural competency instruction in Algeria. According to the findings, instructors may lack a full grasp of intercultural competency and culture, as well as the theoretical knowledge necessary to properly teach it (Bousslama & Benaisi, 2018). Karabinar and Guler (2013) study focuses on the incorporation of culture into third-year foreign language instruction in Turkey. According to interviews with teachers, teaching culture is gaining popularity in foreign language education, especially in English language instruction. It is, nevertheless, constrained by strict curriculum requirements. The research emphasised the need of include more cultural content in the curriculum. Similar to Bousslama and Benaisi's (2018) study, Karabinar and Guler (2013) found that awareness of the benefit of comparing two cultures, the results emphasised the need of educating both local and target cultures, meaning that everyone agreed on how important it is to understand another culture when talking to people from that culture. Participants said that understanding a different culture is very important for encouraging conversation based on culture, following cultural rules, and recognising the similarities and differences between cultures. Roiha and Sommier (2021) focused on teachers' comprehension and implementation of intercultural education in an International Baccalaureate school in the Netherlands. According to the data, many instructors described intercultural education using cultural-differentialist methods that emphasise differences over connections and hold essentialist ideas. They stated that intercultural education is vital for children's futures, but are unsure how to execute it successfully. This study emphasises the necessity of teacher education programmes that go beyond essentialist conceptions of culture and emphasises the relevance of intersectionality in intercultural education (Roiha & Sommier, 2021).

Salih and Omar's (2022) study emphasised the significance of adding intercultural competency into language teaching and learning. This study focused on multicultural perspectives and practises in English language education in Oman. Participants in this survey viewed intercultural education as very important for the development of learners. The study also emphasised the rich cultural diversity of the EFL setting, especially in the countries of the Gulf and the Middle East, where teachers come from a variety of cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Sobkowiak's (2021) study looked at EFL teacher perceptions of intercultural

teaching, their knowledge of the link between language, culture, and learning, and their willingness to extend their teaching beyond language training. This research emphasised the need for teachers to incorporate cultural variety and encourage critical examination of both their own and other cultures. It emphasised the significance of teacher professional development in intercultural teaching practises(Sobkowiak, 2021). The combination of these research' findings illustrates the complex character of EFL teacher beliefs and practises regarding intercultural competency. The results highlight the relevance of bridging the gap between recognising the value of culture and successfully incorporating it into the teaching of second languages.

### 3. Aim and method

#### 3.1. Aim

Language and culture are closely linked and this factor needs to be taken into consideration when learning a new language. Developing EFL learners' intercultural competence has become a major aim of the new Croatian curriculum. Consequently, it's important for EFL teachers to be equipped to deal with this area of EFL teaching. The major aim of this research was to explore EFL teachers' opinions about teaching intercultural competence among L2 learners in the Croatian context. In addition, the study explored how teachers teach intercultural competence, as well as the challenges they face. The study attempted to answer the following research questions:

1. What are Croatian teachers' beliefs toward teaching intercultural competence in the EFL classroom?
2. What strategies and activities do teachers use to teach intercultural competence?
3. What are the challenges of teaching intercultural competence?

#### 3.2. Method

##### 3.2.1. Sample

The sample included 10 participants. All participants were Croatian EFL teachers from 5 different schools from the areas of Donji Miholjac, Viljevo, Đakovo and Kutina. It involved three teachers from Donji Miholjac High school (*Srednja škola Donji Miholjac*), three teachers from Ante Starčević Elementary School (*Osnovna škola Ante Starčevića Viljevo*), two teachers from August Harambašić Elementary School (*Osnovna škola Augusta Harambašića, Donji Miholjac*), one teacher from Antun Gustav Matoš High School (*Srednja škola Antuna Gustava Matoša, Đakovo*) and one teacher from Tin Ujević High School (*Srednja škola Tina Ujevića, Kutina*). With regard to gender, 9 out of 10 participants were female, and 1 of participants was male. The age range was between twenty-seven and fifty-two years of age with a mean average of 38.8 years of age. With regard to the school they worked in, 5 of the participants were primary school teachers, and 5 were secondary school teachers. Concerning years of experience, 5 of the participants had less than ten years of experience, 2 had between eleven to twenty years of experience, and 3 had between twenty-one to thirty years of experience. The mean average of teaching experience was 13.8 years. The details of the sample are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Frequencies: Gender, years of experience, level of teaching and school

		<b>Frequency (number)</b>	<b>Percent (%)</b>
<b>Gender</b>	Male	1	10
	Female	9	90
<b>Years of experience</b>	0-10	5	50
	11-20	2	20
	21-30	3	30
<b>Level of teaching</b>	Primary school	5	50
	Secondary school	5	50
<b>Name of School</b>	Ante Starčević elementary School	3	30
	Donji Miholjac High school	3	30
	August Harambašić Elementary School	2	20
	Antun Gustav Matoš High School	1	10
	Tin Ujević High School	1	10

### 3.2.2. Instruments

In order to investigate the research questions, semi-structured interviews were conducted to gather information on teachers' attitudes toward intercultural competence in EFL learning. The interviews consisted of questions based on several studies, (Bousslama & Benaissi, 2018; Sobkowiak, 2021), the researchers' readings on intercultural teaching, including Byram (1997), Kramsch (1993, 1998, 2013) and was then adapted for the Croatian context. The first part of the interview gathered information on respondents' biographical data.

This was followed by eight questions that were based on investigating the research questions. Several factors were explored, including teacher attitudes toward intercultural teaching in general, the presentation of culture in textbooks, and differences between teaching intercultural competence and other elements of L2 teaching. In addition, two interview questions attempted to reveal the strategies and activities that teachers used to teach intercultural competence. Finally, two interview questions asked teachers what they thought were the challenges of teaching intercultural competence.

### 3.2.3. Procedures

Teachers and school administrators were notified prior to the interviews and given thorough information on the background and objectives of the research. Furthermore, the teachers were notified in order to arrange the scheduling and location of the meeting. At the beginning of the interview, the participants were once again provided with details on the study and its objectives, and were assured that their participation would be anonymous. All the participants gave their informed consent. The interviews were conducted using three different methods: telephone conversations in speaker mode, online meetings, and in-person interactions with teachers. These conversations were recorded using a smartphone for recording purposes. The interviews ranged from 10 to 25 minutes. Furthermore, due to the anonymous nature of the interviews, participants were referred to using codes such as Teacher 1, Teacher 2, Teacher 3, etc., in the study.

### 3.2.4. Data analysis

Several procedures were used in order to analyse the data from the qualitative interviews. Initially, the interviews' audio recordings had been transcribed. Upon completing the transcriptions, a thorough examination of the data was conducted, accompanied by the meticulous documentation of observations. This process aimed to discern prevalent patterns or repeating themes within the data set. During the following stage, the transcriptions went through a thorough review to identify and document a wide range of patterns, facilitating the creation of pertinent categories. A code (label) was applied to each section of the gathered story to signify a specific topic related to the participants' experiences. The collected data was then analyzed using several methods, according to the principles of constant comparative analysis. The analysis included systematically examining each coded segment of the narrative, then comparing and contrasting the data to identify any emergent patterns, ideas, and themes.



Consequently, upon aligning the categories with the whole interview transcripts, the analysis was concluded, formulating thematic patterns. The analysis and description of the obtained data are presented in the results section.

## 4. Results

### 4.1. Teachers' perspectives on teaching intercultural competence

In order to answer the first research question, EFL teachers were asked about their attitudes towards teaching intercultural competence among L2 learners. This section provides the results of the analysis of L2 teachers' opinions and attitudes toward teaching intercultural competence. The following sub-sections are divided according to topics covered by the interview questions. These include teachers' opinions about teaching intercultural competence in general, their views on how they believe culture is presented in textbooks, and how teaching intercultural competence differs from teaching other aspects of L2 teaching, such as grammar and vocabulary.

#### 4.1.1. Teaching intercultural competence in general

The first research question relates to how Croatian EFL teachers define culture within the context of English L2 teaching. The findings revealed that Croatian EFL teachers had optimistic outlooks toward intercultural education, recognizing its relevance and importance in language teaching. The EFL teachers were well aware of intercultural education and they acknowledged its relevance. The majority of teachers, 9 out of 10 of participants stated that intercultural education was something extremely important, and that it provided students with the necessary tools to navigate and communicate effectively in diverse cultural contexts.

Although the participants in the study conducted among Croatian EFL teachers had a comprehensive understanding of culture, it was observed that 5 of them described culture as consisting of various aspects such as language, customs, habits and traditions. One interviewee argued that culture is mixture of customs, social behaviours, or particular people or society and language is also main part of every culture. A third of the participants, 3 out of 10, described culture as a reflection of one's way of life, indicating that "they (students) can learn a lot about, not only language but also about the way of life." Similarly, two participants acknowledged the concept of culture as encompassing how individuals live their lives because one participant stated "how other people live, what they believe in, and how are they raised."

The second interview question asked EFL teachers about their opinions and attitudes toward teaching intercultural education. In intercultural education, it is essential to cultivate empathy to promote mutual respect and comprehension among cultures. The present study confirmed the findings about the importance of fostering empathy, in which six out of ten participants confirmed it. As one interviewee put it: „Intercultural education, in my opinion, is important to create tolerance towards other people.” One participant also mentions that "language is also culturally dependent, " meaning that language cannot be fully understood without understanding the culture behind it. Furthermore, talking about this issue an interviewee agreed that: „It is very important to promote compassion...”

In brief, four out of ten participants expressed their desire to focus on fostering socially appropriate communication skills in language teaching, emphasizing their significance in the overall language learning process. They mention socially appropriate communication skills, such as greetings, non-verbal cues, and understanding cultural norms and customs. One participant stated that intercultural education helps develop students' ability to communicate effectively because students must be able to use the language properly in a given situation.

Moreover, three out of ten participants claimed that exploring and understanding different cultures is another essential component of intercultural education. There are many reasons for this. One teacher stated that it is important to understand others' needs and differences, while the other highlighted the importance of students understanding other cultures, and that other cultures are as valuable as their own. Additionally, some participants (three out of ten teachers) mentioned that exploring different cultures could broaden students' horizons and enhance their knowledge of the world. Overall, EFL teachers believe that teaching intercultural education is important for promoting empathy, tolerance, compassion, socially appropriate communication skills, and even understanding students' own characteristics, as stated by one participant.

In sum, the analysis of the data suggested that Croatian EFL teachers have a solid understanding of the importance of culture in language teaching. They recognize that culture is not limited to language, but also includes customs, habits, traditions, and the way of life. Furthermore, they acknowledge the significance of fostering socially appropriate communication skills and promoting intercultural education in language teaching. According to the results, Croatian teachers of English as a foreign language had optimistic views towards intercultural education. These teachers acknowledged the value and relevance of intercultural

education in language instruction. The main themes that evolved from the teachers responses regarding the teaching of intercultural communicative competence (ICC) are given in Table 2.

Table 2. Frequencies: Teachers' perception of Intercultural education

	<b>Frequency (number)</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
1. Empathy/tolerance	6	60
2. Socially appropriate communication	4	40
3. Exploring and understanding different cultures	3	30
4. Broadening students horizons	3	30
5. Shape students character	1	10

#### 4.1.2. The presentation of culture in textbooks

Teachers were asked their opinions about how culture was presented in EFL textbooks. The participants expressed mixed opinions about how intercultural competence was presented in EFL textbooks. According to the majority of teachers surveyed, six out of ten participants conveyed a positive viewpoint, asserting that textbooks have enough cultural content. One of the teachers gives examples from the textbooks they use in elementary school which include topics such as geography, politics, history, holidays and important people from the world of science, sports, politics, film, and literature. This helps the students to relate to the material and better understand the concepts being taught. For example, one interviewee said:

„First, we introduce English speaking countries in the term of geography, politics and so on. For instance, we learn about different parts of the UK, we talk about the flags about national anthems, its origins and so on. We say something about the geographical position of the countries, we usually bring a map to the class. The next, after that, we usually start with a little bit of history. We talk about or usually mention some of the most important rulers when you face consider the start with a William the Conqueror, Elizabeth the Second, Queen Victoria, when talking about USA, we usually start with

the pilgrim fathers and the Mayflower. We mention all the important American wars like the American war for independence, American Civil War and so on. When we talk about Australia, we start with James Cook, and something like that. The next obligatory cultural topic that is usually covered in the textbook is usually connected to holidays, and holiday costumes. And this one is very popular among students, especially when we teach costumes connected to those holidays which are not that common in Croatia. Like how Thanksgiving and Halloween of course. Some of the other cultural elements that appear in the textbooks today are about important people from the world of science, sports, politics, film, literature, and so on. We have a whole lesson in the sixth grade, which deals with the Beatles. ”

Two out of ten teachers conveyed a negative viewpoint, asserting that textbooks lack cultural content. One participant expressed that textbooks do not contain enough cultural elements, and that children are not surprised to see any cultural elements because they lack them. Moreover, another participant noted that the current focus in schools continues to prioritize grammar and vocabulary instruction.

Two out of ten expressed the sentiment that, while their textbooks included certain cultural aspects, these elements were not deemed sufficient for effective teaching. One participant said that "they (textbooks) do give some cultural elements, but I would say not enough," and another claimed that textbooks do not represent culture effectively and accurately. She also added that for a textbook to effectively and accurately represent a certain culture "it should be a textbook on its own."

Overall, the findings from this study demonstrate that more than half of the teachers (6 out of 10) think that the textbooks they use in the classroom represent culture effectively. They pointed to topics such as geography, politics, history, holidays, and important figures from various fields as evidence of cultural representation. While some teachers acknowledge the presence of cultural elements in their textbooks, they emphasize that these elements are often insufficient for effective teaching. One teacher particularly argued that comprehensive intercultural education requires a dedicated textbook solely focused on culture. Moreover, two out of ten participants were reluctant to discuss this topic and did not express their opinions clearly. On the other hand, a smaller percentage of teachers (2 out of 10) expressed a more negative perception, believing that there were not enough cultural elements in the textbooks.

#### 4.1.3. Teaching intercultural competence vs. Teaching grammar and vocabulary

Another element that was considered with regard to teacher attitudes toward teaching intercultural competence included their attitudes toward teaching intercultural competence as opposed to teaching grammar or vocabulary. According to teachers responses, the majority of teachers (6 out of 10) suggested that intercultural competence is extremely different from teaching grammar and vocabulary. Two participants characterized it as "extremely different," and the third one described it as "complex" because in her opinion there are many topics that the curriculum requires to be covered and they do not include cultural aspects but focus must be on other elements such as grammar and vocabulary.

Teachers can help students understand the different cultural settings in which English is spoken by providing authentic materials in real life. Three out of ten participants in the study highlighted the importance of using authentic materials in intercultural teaching. It is worth noting that the participants who used authentic materials distinguished intercultural teaching from traditional approaches to language instruction, as they placed a particular focus on developing effective communication skills and intercultural competence. For example, one teacher considers authentic materials such as films, video clips, newspaper articles, and recipes to be "a must," and the other one asserts that "this is all on us (teachers). So we have the freedom to, let's say, invent some tasks or games for this kind." As stated above, three out of ten teachers described the inclusion of cultural aspects in their lectures as part of the lectures that are much more relaxed and where students are more interested and active in class.

Teachers may do a lot to assist their pupils learn about different cultures by modelling these attitudes themselves. Further analysis showed that two out of ten participants stated that teachers need to stay up to date. Furthermore, participants in the study acknowledged that teaching intercultural competence goes beyond simply imparting knowledge of the target language's culture. One participant, for instance, mentioned that she is also teaching Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), "So I think it's connected and everything is connected in the English language, not only IC, intercultural topics but also I'm teaching Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL). So many other topics are coming into my English classroom..." She explores a wide range of topics in her classroom, including sustainable development goals and the diverse cultures around the world beyond just focusing on European cultures.

Apart from the freedom offered by the inclusion of intercultural competence in their lesson plan, one of the participants singled out that common lessons with cultural elements are more engaging for them and their students. One of the participants called teaching intercultural elements more interesting and dynamic compared to teaching grammar and vocabulary. Another participant expressed her opinion calling intercultural teaching "more interesting and laid back." She provides examples of her efforts to enhance her students' intercultural competence, such as bringing them tickets from a theatre in London. This experience elicited excitement and enthusiasm among the students.

Alternatively, two out of ten participants claimed that teaching intercultural competence is not different from teaching grammar and vocabulary. For instance, one participant highlighted the flexibility and lack of strict rules or tasks that teachers employ in their lessons. Hence, one teacher argued that "it's not different at all, because grammar and vocabulary are just part of intercultural teaching, you cannot divide these things."

Moreover, another difference between teaching grammar and vocabulary and intercultural competence mentioned by teachers includes the problem of assessment. For a small number of participants, two out of ten participants emphasized that these cultural aspects are not integrated into the curriculum. One teacher asserted that while traditional language skills, such as reading comprehension, listening comprehension, writing skills, and speaking skills undergo summative assessments, the incorporation of cultural knowledge in student instruction receives little attention. This observation underscores a significant deficiency in evaluating and acknowledging cultural awareness and intercultural proficiency within an educational setting.

Lastly, the new curriculum encourages intercultural curiosity, and now, within the domain of intercultural communication competence, learners can be graded by their teachers. One participant stated that during the interview when she was talking about the difference between the old and the new way of assessment, she said "I think this new way of grading is maybe better because we can incorporate culture in all elements."

#### 4.2. Strategies and Activities that EFL Teachers Use

In an effort to investigate the second research question, teachers were asked the manner in which they develop L2 learners' intercultural competence. The sixth and seventh interview questions focused on investigating the activities, materials, and strategies that teachers use in

the classroom. The responses indicate that teachers utilise a variety of strategies in order to foster intercultural competence. All the participants (10 out of 10) reported using online materials to teach intercultural competence. These online materials included Youtube videos, articles, magazines, and other multimedia resources that provided authentic cultural content. One teacher noted that she actively encouraged her students to explore and utilize diverse learning materials in the classroom, “..and some additional materials that I usually find online, including videos, quizzes, students also made their own presentations and their own quizzes.”

In brief, seven out of ten participants stated that they gave students homework or gave them to research about a topic on their own. One teacher stated that she gave learners homework where "lots of research in the sense of the pupils do research on their own.“ In addition to using online sources and students research, six out of ten participants find presentations or posters extremely important and useful to promote intercultural communicative competence (ICC). Participants agreed that students also make Powerpoint presentations and other projects where they are encouraged to investigate and learn about different cultures. To make students' learning interesting, one participant gave an example she incorporated in her classroom: "the activities that they have can vary from having a presentation or telling their story as if they belong to that cultures, which they did a research prior.“ Students actively participate in hands-on projects that allow them to create tangible works of art for classroom decoration. One teacher recalled that "we usually make some posters that we put on a pin board or decorate the classroom. And for example, one time we created this huge England flag that we have in our classroom, and input cards called A to Z England cards..“

Additionally, half of the teachers (five out of ten) emphasized the importance of involving students into lessons that are focused on intercultural communicative competence (ICC) through group work and discussions. Commenting on these activities that enable students to actively engage with different cultures and perspectives, one of the interviewees said: „I promote intercultural competence through fun stuff like group discussions on global topics, exploring diverse literature and movies, sharing personal cultural experiences, and even talking about international dishes during certain units.“ Teachers also mentioned the use of role-plays and simulations in the classroom to promote intercultural understanding. For instance, one teacher declared that "Students roleplay the situations with cultural context for example, how to apologize, how to dress a person, things like that.“

A minority of teachers (four out of ten participants) used another strategy for developing intercultural competence, such as playing games. Another teacher highlighted the use of board games that incorporate cultural questions as a fun and interactive way for students to learn about different cultures, "playing some board games with questions about culture that we are learning currently, and so on."

Furthermore, the use of textbooks was also mentioned by a few teachers (three out of ten) as a way to develop intercultural competence. One participant explained that she used it a primary source, "the main source are student books, of course, because they are using them." Another teacher stated that she uses textbooks as a starting point later expands the topic, adds her assignments and shapes her lecture according to the interests of the students, "Well I use textbooks, but I don't like them actually, because these textbooks are just the frame that I use."

Two instructors mentioned inviting visitors from various cultures into the classroom as a strategy for fostering intercultural competence among language learners. They explained that inviting guest speakers from diverse cultural backgrounds allows students to have firsthand interactions and learn from individuals with different perspectives and experiences. One teacher invited two guests from Australia to school and the other teacher mentioned it as a strategy she also uses, "it's one of the strategies to bring a native speaker to the class, to have a guest."

An additional strategy used by two of the participants is combining cultural topics with grammar and vocabulary activities. One teacher talked about integrating cultural topics into grammar lessons by using examples and exercises that incorporate cultural elements. She mentions that "in each topic I cover, I try to include some cultural context." Another teacher emphasized that she "likes to slip intercultural topics in grammar and vocabulary lessons, just to make them a bit more interesting and easier to remember."

Furthermore, two of teachers mentioned that they use of literature and cultural texts as a way to expose students to different cultures and promote intercultural understanding. One teacher mentioned that "it's good to expose them (students) to newspapers, magazine articles, which are brought from English speaking countries" to provide authentic cultural materials for students to engage with. One participant agreed with that statement and added that he often explore diverse literature with his students.

In addition, two out of ten participants talked about the doing video calls with students from other countries. One teacher mentioned that she is involved in many of international



projects and participates in video conferences with learners. For example, her students connected with their Spanish peers and then exchanged ideas about education in Spain and Croatia and other topics, she stated „So they can connect with, let's say, their Spanish peers, and then exchange the ideas about education in Spain and Croatia, about free time, whatever they actually want to learn. So this is also I believe, the best way to do it.” The other teachers uses this strategy in her class and mentioned that "sometimes video calls with students from other countries too.“

In sum, EFL teachers employ various strategies to develop intercultural competence in their classrooms. Taken together, these results suggest that online materials, doing research on their own, presentations, discussions, group works, playing games, introducing guests, using textbooks and newspapers or English literature, and videocalls help expose students to diverse cultures and promotes intercultural understanding. The results of this analysis, including frequencies and percentages, are presented in Table 6.

Table 3. Strategies and activities teachers use when teaching intercultural competence (Number and percent)

	<b>Frequency (number)</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
1. Online materials	10	100
2. Doing research on their own/homework	7	70
3. Presentations (posters)	6	60
4. Discussions	5	50
5. Group work	5	50
6. Playing games	4	40
7. Guests	3	30
8. Textbooks	3	30
9. Combining cultural topics with grammar and vocabulary	2	20
10. Newspapers, magazines	2	20
11. Video calls	2	20

#### 4.3. Challenges in teaching intercultural competence

The third research question focused on teachers' opinions regarding the challenges they face when teaching intercultural competence. The findings suggest that teachers face several challenges when dealing with teaching intercultural competence. One of the main challenges stated by eight out of ten teachers was the lack of time which hindered their ability to fully incorporate intercultural teaching into their classrooms. Some participants reported that they sometimes skipped some cultural elements because they do not have enough time. Other responses to this question included: „Lack of time is the most important problem for teachers”, „(...) due to lack of time.”

In addition, seven out of ten teachers state the need for additional training and seminars. As one interviewee put it: „There's never enough training in relation to IC teaching, because there is always something to learn.” Another participant stated that training is very important part for teachers and the other one agreed that „there is a lot of room for improvement.” A further concern noted by a comparable number of participants (seven out of ten) who expressed their apprehension regarding colleagues who prioritized the instruction of grammar and vocabulary over cultural aspects. For example, one teacher stated „we tend to focus more on grammar and vocabulary because this is essential for language teachers.” On the other hand regarding additional training and seminars, three out of ten teachers mentioned that teachers have sufficient knowledge on the topic of intercultural competence. One participant disagreed with the fact that teachers need training concerning intercultural competence teaching and suggested that their university education provided them with enough background. She stated that it "Depends on the university where, where they're going to. I went to the university in Osijek and we have, we had British and American culture and civilization, and our teachers were American or English Erasmus teachers who came for a semester or for a year and emphasis on American and English culture was very, very important."

Moreover, a number of participants (three out of ten) emphasized the value of traveling and spending time abroad as an effective means to enhance intercultural competence. One participant highlighted that "the best way to get extra education in this intercultural teaching is to spend some time abroad." However, this is a challenge in the current context where traveling and opportunities for international experiences may be limited or inaccessible for many individuals. Some of the participants, two of them mentioned that technology can play a crucial role in bridging the gap and providing intercultural experiences virtually by which they can exchange ideas with other teachers. For example, one participant stated that "teachers can exchange ideas or experiences which may help them in their own teaching," while the other added that "teachers need temporarily participate in other school educational systems around the world.“

Lastly, two out of ten participants stated that intercultural communicative competence are not summatively assessed in EFL classrooms, which may contribute to the lack of emphasis on intercultural competence in teaching. One participant stated that very often when she notices that she doesn't have enough time until the end of the lecture, she skips the part with cultural elements because she never includes them in her exams. In addition to all of this, one teacher

stated also the problem of planning and preparation of intercultural elements in the lesson plan. Creating a lesson plan and preparing for class generally takes a lot of time for teachers as one teacher indicated „because it takes a lot of planning and preparation (...) it's a lot of work.”

Altogether, these findings highlight several challenges that EFL teachers encounter in their attempt to develop L2 learners' intercultural competence in their classrooms. Lack of time is the main challenge many teachers face while trying to cover everything in the curriculum and prioritize other aspects of language learning, such as grammar and vocabulary. Furthermore, limited knowledge and training in teaching intercultural competence also contribute to hesitation and scepticism among EFL teachers. To increase their intercultural proficiency, the teachers expressed a desire for additional training opportunities, increased travel experiences, and more collaborative exchanges with other educators. The frequency and percentages of the participants' responses are summarised in Table 4.

Table 4. Challenges teachers face when dealing with teaching intercultural competence

	<b>Frequency (number)</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
1. Lack of time to teach intercultural competence	8	80
2. The need for additional training and seminars	7	70
3. Traveling (spending time abroad)	3	30
4. Exchanging ideas with other teachers	2	20
5. Intercultural communicative competence skills are not summatively assessed	2	20
6. Creating a lesson plan taking a lot of preparation	1	10

## 5. Discussion

The first research question focused on Croatian teachers' beliefs about teaching intercultural competence in EFL classrooms. The findings reveal that most EFL teachers in Croatia believe that intercultural education is significant, and that it prepares students with the skills necessary to navigate and express themselves effectively in diverse cultural contexts. In addition, the teachers expressed their belief that intercultural education could promote empathy and understanding among students, cultivate multicultural awareness, and prepare them for global citizenship. These results reflect those of Roiha and Sommier (2021), who also found that most EFL teachers in the Netherlands agreed that teaching culture is an important concept that appears before human interaction, and can and should be taught to minimize misunderstandings between individuals. Furthermore, half of the participants in the current study characterized culture as involving numerous elements including language, customs, routines, and traditions. Teachers argued that culture combines conventions, social behaviors, or a particular group of people or society, and that language is a fundamental aspect of all cultures. Bouslama and Benaissi's study (2018) supported this finding, as they also found that all teachers viewed culture in a national context, thus validating the need for culture-specific intercultural competence instruction when cultures across national borders interact. Another finding of this study is that the emphasis teachers placed on socially acceptable communication skills in language learning developed when learning about the target culture, such as greetings, nonverbal clues, and cultural awareness. This result is similar to Atay et al.'s study (2009), which showed that a majority of teachers emphasized the significance of assisting students, in the growth of their communication skills.

The second research question focused on the strategies and activities that EFL teachers use to teach intercultural competence. All participants reported using online materials such as YouTube videos, a wide range of online written materials, and multimedia resources as essential tools for promoting intercultural competence. Teachers also incorporate PowerPoint presentations and other projects in which students are encouraged to investigate and learn about different cultures. Compared to the study by Sobkowiak (2021), a small sample of teachers reported watching films with their students to expose them to different cultures and foster intercultural understanding. This differs from the findings presented here, where more than half of the participants allow students to conduct their research for assignments and find presentations or posters extremely essential and beneficial for developing their intercultural

understanding. In addition to using online resources, students actively partake in hands-on projects that enable them to create tangible artwork for classroom decoration and where students learn more about different cultures. In Karabinar and Guler's (2012) study, instructors from various nationalities were interviewed to obtain deeper insights into language teachers' views on the concept of culture. The study also found that a small number of participants used authentic and hands-on materials to promote their intercultural competence in their classrooms. Another important finding is that half of the teachers in the present study emphasized the importance of integrating students into lessons through group work and discussion, enabling them to actively engage with different cultures and perspectives. There are also similarities between the attitudes expressed by Turkish EFL teachers in this study and those described by Croatian EFL teachers in the present study, where both groups of teachers found that the use of discussion in the classroom was one way that most participants encouraged intercultural competence. A few Croatian EFL teachers in the present study also mentioned textbooks as a means of cultivating intercultural competence. However, slightly different results were found in Salih and Omar's (2022) study, where it was discovered that teachers primarily relied on textbooks and course materials to teach intercultural competence. For example, participants reported that they would promote debate about the cultural elements emphasized in the textbook and syllabus (Salih & Omar, 2022). A small number of EFL teachers in this study mentioned inviting guests from different states to the classroom to foster intercultural competence. In Atay et al.'s (2009) study, a very small number of teachers invited guests from different cultural contexts into the classroom, and a small minority of Croatian EFL teachers noted the use of literature and cultural texts to expose students to diverse cultures and foster intercultural understanding. Similar results were found in Karabinar & Guler's (2012) study, where a small number of participants also mentioned using written materials to develop intercultural understanding. These findings indicate that EFL teachers in Croatia employ various strategies and resources to develop their students' intercultural competence.

The third research question focused on the challenges EFL teachers face when teaching intercultural competence. The results of this study showed that lack of time, resources, and support from the curriculum were the main challenges faced by Croatian EFL teachers. Similar results were found in Karabinar and Guler's (2012) study, where half of the respondents cited a lack of time as a reason for insufficient cultural information in the classroom. Additionally, Sobkowiak's (2021) research also suggested that participants cited time constraints and

inappropriate curriculum or instructional materials as the greatest barriers to intercultural education.

Croatian EFL teachers also expressed a lack of dedication to intercultural learning, possibly due to a lack of exposure during their university education and failure to attend relevant seminars or training courses. This leads them to feel uncertain about their knowledge in this area, and may have led to their lack of interest in incorporating such topics into their lectures. However, this was a small number because Croatian teachers are comfortable teaching intercultural competence and use various strategies to achieve their aims. Similarly, Bal and Savas's (2022) study conducted in Turkey noted several challenges for teachers, including physical factors such as a lack of facilities, the perspectives and attitudes of learners, students' disinterest in engaging with immigrants, society's expectations, and teachers' limited knowledge.

## 6. Conclusion

Understanding individuals from other cultures and having the capacity to communicate with them is becoming an increasingly valuable skill in today's globally related society. This ability, also known as intercultural competence, overcomes obstacles, such as language and cultural differences. It functions as a bridge that brings together people from various backgrounds, thereby fostering understanding, empathy, and efficient communication. The results of this study highlight the importance of competence in EFL teaching. However, the relevance of this topic extends well beyond the confines of classrooms. In a culture characterized by diversity, intercultural collaboration, and frequent cross-cultural interactions, individuals who demonstrate competence are better suited to handle the complexity of our environment. They can interact with individuals of other cultures politely, welcome different points of view, and efficiently clear any cultural misconceptions that may arise.

This study aimed to investigate EFL teachers' perceptions about the cultural aspect of foreign language teaching and teaching of intercultural competence. This study's first aim was to identify Croatian teachers' beliefs about teaching intercultural competence in the EFL classroom. The results revealed that Croatian EFL teachers' beliefs about teaching intercultural competence are positive, and teachers consider this an integral part of English language teaching today. This study found that the majority of EFL instructors in Croatia recognize the relevance and significance of intercultural teaching. They have a strong understanding of the

significance of culture in language instruction and are aware that culture encompasses not only language but also customs, routines, traditions, and way of life. In addition, the findings of this study revealed that more than half of the teachers believed that the textbooks they used effectively represented culture. The second aim of this thesis was to investigate the strategies and activities that teachers use to teach intercultural competence. The results showed that Croatian EFL teachers employ various instructional strategies to foster intercultural competence among their students, ranging from the use of online materials, discussions, and video calls to combining cultural topics with grammar and vocabulary. In addition, some teachers mentioned textbooks as a means of fostering intercultural competence. The third aim of this study was to identify some of the challenges in teaching intercultural competence. The results showed that Croatian EFL teachers face several challenges in teaching intercultural competence, including a lack of time, limited resources, and a lack of training and professional development opportunities. The research findings also revealed that, while many EFL teachers recognized the importance of teaching intercultural competence, their focus was primarily on linguistic and communicative competencies. This implies that curriculum creators, textbook authors, and teacher training organisations should place a strong emphasis on helping students become interculturally competent.

To conclude, the limitations of this study include its small number of participants. Although this study showed Croatian teachers' beliefs toward teaching intercultural competence, the most frequent strategies and activities teachers use to teach intercultural competence, and the challenges teachers face when teaching intercultural competence, it would be fascinating examining Croatian students' perspectives on intercultural competency as well as the efficacy of their teaching methods and activities. In conclusion, this study has shown that intercultural competence is crucial for language teaching because it prepares students for effective communication in culturally diverse settings.



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## Appendix A: Interview questions

1. How do you define culture within the context of English L2 teaching?
2. What is your opinion and attitude towards intercultural education?
3. Do you think that the textbooks you use contain enough cultural elements and that they present culture effectively? / (Why? Can you explain?)
4. Do you think teachers need training in relation to Intercultural Competence teaching? Or do you think that teachers have sufficient knowledge on this topic? Why?
5. How is Intercultural Competence teaching different from teaching other elements of English L2 teaching, e.g. grammar, vocabulary, etc?
6. How do you promote intercultural competence in your classroom? / What are the most common activities you use?
7. What materials and strategies do you use in your classroom to promote intercultural competence?
8. In your opinion, do you think there is a particular reason why English L2 teachers neglect intercultural competence in their classrooms? / What prevents teachers from fully engaging in intercultural teaching?

## Appendix B: Sample of transcripts

Teacher 1 (August Harambašić Elementary school, Donji Miholjac)

Researcher: Okay, so before we begin, I would like to point out that I will be recording this interview. Your identity will remain anonymous meaning your first and last name will not be written down anywhere. And I want you to know that the interview is also voluntary. So the topic of my thesis is the study of EFL teachers beliefs about developing intercultural competence. And I would like to ask you some questions about this topic. So, before we start with the questions, I'm just interested in basic information about you as a teacher. So how old are you? How long have you been teaching? So how many years of experience do you have? And what grades are which levels do you teach?

Teacher 1: I'm 41, at the moment. I teach English language for about seventeen years. Now. Mostly I teach young learners from grades one to four.

Researcher: Okay. So my first question would be how do you define culture within the context of English L2 as a second language teaching?

Teacher 1: In my opinion, it is learning about differences between what we know and live like, and how other people live, what they believe in and how they are raised.

Researcher: Okay, so continuing on that question, what is your opinion and attitudes towards intercultural education?

Teacher 1: Intercultural education, in my opinion, is important to create a tolerance towards other people, understanding their needs and differences.

Researcher: And do you think that the textbooks you use contain enough cultural elements and that they present culture effectively? And why?

Teacher 1: No, I think they don't. We do have Afro-American girl showing up here and there, and children aren't surprised to see her. But that girl isn't enough to show all the differences the world is full of.

Researcher: Do you think teachers need training in relation to IC teaching? Or do you think that teachers have sufficient knowledge on this topic and why?

Teacher 1: Teachers need to travel for free, or temporarily, temporarily participate in other school educational systems around the world. That's my opinion.

Researcher: And how do you promote intercultural competence in your classroom? So what are the most common activities you use?

Teacher 1: So it's question number five?

Researcher: Yes.

Teacher 1: I have written questions in summary, okay. So teachers, like me, travel mostly throughout our own country, because of the salaries we earn, we should have guest teachers to provide original language structures, accent, and cultural aspects that cannot be seen and learned from books or videos.

Researcher: And a follow up question, what materials and strategies do you use in your classroom to promote intercultural competence?

Teacher 1: My most used material types while teaching IC is YouTube. We watch and listen to native speakers, and we can expand our knowledge and spend different amounts of time on things that amuse pupils the most.

Researcher: Okay, and we are almost done. The last question is, in your opinion, do you think there's a particular reason why English L2 teachers neglect the intercultural competence in their classrooms? And what prevents them from fully engaging in intercultural teaching?

Teacher 1: I had one more question. Sorry. More about strategies? Can I tell you?

Researcher: Yes, yes, yes, sure. Sure.

Teacher 1: Okay, so, about strategies, or learning while teaching English. Once I found out that the native Australian citizens are visiting our town as guests. So I invited them in our

school because we learned about Australia at the time. Usually, I bring some objects, if I can get them and talk to my pupils to see whether they have anything from the country we are learning. Learning about at the moment, at home, if they had, if they had something at home, I use YouTube mostly and I go with the flow to follow the interests of the class. So I refer again to the YouTube because other aspects of materials aren't always available.

Researcher: And the last question, in your opinion, do you think there is a particular reason why English sheltered teachers neglect intercultural competence in their classrooms and what prevents them from fully engaging in intercultural teaching.

Teacher 1: I will answer it in my, in my view of the answer. Sometimes I don't have enough time to finish the lesson. I never put IC context into my exams. So when I'm in a hurry, I sometimes skipped at some parts, the lack of time, that is the main reason.

Researcher: Okay, okay, so that's it. Now at the very end before I stop recording, I would like to thank you for your answers and also for taking time to participate in my interview.

Teacher 1: Thank you and good luck!

Teacher 2 (Antun Gustav Matoš High School, Đakovo)

Researcher: Okay, so before we begin, I would like to point out that I will be recording this interview, your identity will remain anonymous, meaning your first and last name will not be written down anywhere. And I want you to know that the interview is also voluntary. So the topic of my thesis is the study of English as a foreign language teachers beliefs about developing intercultural competence. And I would like to ask you some question, questions about this topic.

Teacher 2: Okay, sure!

Researcher: So, before we start with the questions, I'm just interested in the basic information about you as a teacher, so, how old are you? How long have you been teaching? So how many years of experience do you have? And what grade are which levels do you teach?

Teacher 2: I will be 29 next week. I have been a teacher for seven years now. And I have taught all levels of English, everything from beginners level to upper intermediate.

Researcher: Okay, okay, great. So my first question would be, how do you define culture within the context of English L2 teaching?

Teacher 2: Well, honestly, I'm not a person of definition. So I tend not to define anything. I think each culture brings up some curiosity whenever given the opportunity to do so, in order

to make students enjoy English classes and thus allowing them to bring something new to everyone.

Researcher: Okay, continuing on that question, what is your opinion and attitude towards intercultural education?

Teacher 2: Well, I believe that it should have been placed in our textbook. It is important for understanding most of English vocabulary, and sometimes even grammar, but I'm also quite old fashioned. So I believe that vocabulary and some grammar parts are more important than culture.

Researcher: Okay, do you think that the textbooks you use contain enough cultural elements and that they present culture effectively? Why?

Teacher 2: I believe they do contain enough information for elementary and high school students, but I also think they don't represent culture accurately. In order for a textbook to represent a certain culture effectively and accurately, it should be a textbook on its own. And that would be too much for obligatory education.

Researcher: Okay, do you think teachers need training in relation to IC teaching? Or do you think that teachers have sufficient knowledge on this topic and why?

Teacher 2: I believe that teachers have sufficient knowledge on this topic. And if they don't have it, they can Google it anytime. And I think that's enough for IC teaching in schools. Also, IC teaching is interesting and fun. And such class really depends on the teachers personality. For example, if the teacher is an extrovert, has traveled a lot and met a lot of different people, cultures, nations, tried a lot of local food, then that class is something beyond just the class regardless.

Researcher: Okay, how is IC teaching different from teaching other elements of English to teaching for example, grammar vocabulary, etc.?

Teacher 2: Oh, it's extremely different. It strongly reflects the teachers passions, fears, desires. While teaching grammar and vocabulary is mostly by the book and required only free learned knowledge and in most cases doesn't need to be significantly updated through the years.

Researcher: Okay, how do you promote intercultural competence in your classroom? So what are the most common activities you use?

Teacher 2: I always open discussions, encourage everyone to speak since there is literally no wrong answer during such topics. And by doing so, I raise confidence of all of my students in every field, I like to slip intercultural topics in grammar and vocabulary lessons, just to make them a bit more interesting and easier to remember.

Researcher: Okay, so I have a follow up question. What materials and strategies do you use in your classroom to promote intercultural competence?

Teacher 2: I always use something fun, discussions as I already mentioned, PowerPoint presentation, groupwork projects, etc.

Researcher: Okay, and we are almost done. The last question is, in your opinion, do you think there is a particular reason why English L2 teachers neglect intercultural competence in their classrooms and what prevents them from fully engaging in intercultural teaching?

Teacher 2: Honestly, I'm not aware that any of my colleagues neglect ICLs in their classrooms. It's a perfect opportunity to meet and connect with your students get out of everyday routine, learn something new for both teachers and students, and just enjoy the class. If there is data that confirms that teachers avoid teaching culture I would say that those teachers are introverted and seek grammar and vocabulary perfection from their students.

Researcher: Okay, so that's it now at the very end before I stop recording, I would like to thank you for your answers and also for taking the time to participate in my interview.

Teacher 2: Sure, anytime!

Teacher 3 (Ante Starčević Elementary school, Viljevo)

Researcher: Okay, okay. So, before we begin, I would like to point out that I will be recording this interview, your identity will be, will remain anonymous and, so meaning your first and last name would be will not be written down anywhere and I want you to know that this interview is also voluntary. So the topic of my thesis is actually EFL, or English as foreign language teachers beliefs and developing intercultural competence. So, I would like to ask you some questions about this topic.

Teacher 3: Okay.

Researcher: Would it be okay?

Teacher 3: Yes, of course.

Researcher: Okay. So before we start with the questions, I'm just interested in the basic information about you as a teacher, so how old are you and how long have you been teaching?

Teacher 3: Okay, my age is 30. Okay. And I've been teaching for two years, so I'm pretty new.

Researcher: You're a young teacher. Great! And what grade or which levels do you teach?

Teacher 3: I teach in first grade, second, third and fourth, and this is combination. So combination of grades.



Researcher: Okay.

Teacher 3: And I teach in seventh grade and in sixth and fifth grade.

Researcher: Okay, so you have combination...

Teacher 3: Yes, beginners and some kind of...

Researcher: ...Upper intermediate?

Teacher 3: Upper intermediate, yes.

Researcher: Okay. Okay. So, back to the questions. My first question would be, how do you define culture within the context of English L2 (as a second language teaching)?

Teacher 3: So, I think the culture is some kind of customs, social behaviors, or particular people or society and their language is also a part of their culture. And within the context of English L2 teaching, I think the culture is appropriate ways to address, let's say, people, express some gratitudes, make requests agree or disagree with someone. And I think people should learn that behaviors and intonation patterns that are appropriate, appropriate in their own speech or language may not be perceived differently or may be perceived differently by members of the target language.

Researcher: So you think that linguistic competence alone... Do you think that linguistic competence alone is enough for learners of the language to be competent in that language? For example, do you think that someone who learns grammar and vocabulary is competent enough to speak English? Or they need that kind of a culture?

Teacher 3: Okay, I think they could manage in some kind of different environment or different culture, but I think it is important to incorporate this cultural aspect also.

Researcher: Okay. So to be completely competent, you think culture is also important?

Teacher 3: Yes, yes. In order to have a successful communication, I think we should associate this language teaching also with some cultural.

Researcher: Okay, great, thank you. Continuing on that question, what is your opinion and attitude towards intercultural education?

Teacher 3: Okay, I think that this is really important part of the language, and the language teaching, because as I already said, language is a big part of someone's culture. And the way we speak and the phrases that we use determine how good we perceive someone and someone's culture, and how well can we communicate and use different phrases and language expressions.

Researcher: Mhm, and do you think that the textbooks you use, for example, contain enough cultural elements and that they present culture effectively? Or not?

Teacher 3: Okay, some of the textbooks use insufficient cultural context, and some of them have quite good context.

Researcher: For example?

Teacher 3: For example, in my case with fifth graders, we learn only about British culture and their customs. And for example, in the seventh grade, we learn about people, customs, culture, from all over the world. For example, India, Scotland, Ireland, USA, for example, especially Louisiana and that some southern parts so their food, I don't know customs, culture, and so on.

Researcher: Okay. And so the beginners usually learn just about Great Britain?

Teacher 3: Yes, Great Britain and that part of the language speaking community or countries, yes.

Researcher: Okay. Next question, do you think teachers need training in relation to IC teaching? Or do you think that teachers have sufficient knowledge on this topic? This is interesting, because you are talking from a point of view as a young teacher.

Teacher 3: Okay, so, about that. I think that teachers get some part of the knowledge during their college education, just like I did. But I also think they should continue expanding this knowledge and continue to read about different cultures, different countries, expressions and customs and so on.

Researcher: Okay, so you think that teachers don't have sufficient knowledge?

Teacher 3: Yes, I could say that.

Researcher: Or they have to expand it during their work?

Teacher 3: More to expand during their work to expand their knowledge with some kind of additional training, seminars, etc.

Researcher: Yes.

Researcher: How is, to get back to the classroom... How is IC teaching different from teaching other elements of English L2 teaching, for example, grammar, vocabulary?

Teacher 3: In my opinion, I think there are not so strict in sense of rules, task, tasks that we use in, in lessons, but they can be done more freely, and we can incorporate them in all elements. For example, in e-dnevnik, we have some different elements than before. Because we have a new curriculum, and for example, we have speaking, then we have writing, listening comprehension, and reading comprehension. So we can incorporate cultural contexts in this kind of element.

Researcher: In all of them?

Teacher 3: Yes, in all of them. And this is all on us. So we have the freedom to, let's say, invent some tasks or games for this kind.

Researcher: Okay, and before it was different?

Teacher 3: Yes, before it was different. It was language competence, then we have intercultural competence and independence in language mastering so we have three different elements. And this intercultural competence was a big part of grading pupils.

Researcher: And what do you think was better?

Teacher 3: Well, I think this new way of grading is maybe better because we can incorporate culture in all elements. And before we had to focus just on this element alone.

Researcher: And how do you promote intercultural competence in your classroom? So, what are the most common activities you use? If you use them?

Teacher 3: Okay, we are doing a lot of talking, a lot of debates, lots of research in sense of the pupils do research on their own, then some kind of group works, playing some board games with questions about culture that we are learning, currently and so on.

Researcher: Aha, great. So do you sometimes make some culture features explicit in relation to the linguistic forms to study for example, in Croatian, we have seven cases and in English, there is none. So do you point that out to the students, do you make that kind of difference or not?

Teacher 3: Yes, okay. When we come to some kind of language part that isn't normal for Croatian language, we tend to compare this and talk about some kind of differences and why do we use this and they don't, and so on.

Researcher: Okay, great. And a follow up question, what materials and strategies do you use in your classroom to promote intercultural competence?

Teacher 3: Okay, the main source is student books, of course, because they are using them, and we use some kind of audio files, videos, especially, interesting material that I can find online and incorporate that in group work or in debates talking about some subjects.

Researcher: Okay, so you give them, how would I say, extra tasks to explore some of the linguistic and cultural aspects?

Teacher 3: Yes. And I tend to provide them then additional material, if they don't have it in textbook, I would go online and research and print out the additional material and then additional task for this kind of material.

Researcher: Okay, great. And we're almost done. The last question is, in your opinion, do you think there is a particular reason why English L2 teachers neglect intercultural

competence in their classrooms. So what prevents teachers from fully engaging in intercultural teaching?

Teacher 3: This one is very good question. So I think the main reason would be lack of time. So, new curriculum gives us more freedom. And this is very good, to do more intercultural teaching, but we still don't have enough lessons to incorporate that and to cover all the content that we have. So we tend to focus more on grammar and vocabulary and language because this is essential for language teachers. And if we don't have this kind of intercultural content in our books, we don't have enough time to do this kind of research. And if you don't have a will, you don't have time.

Researcher: Yes.

Teacher 3: And where there is will, there is time, so it depends on teacher.

Researcher: Okay. You think it depends?

Teacher 3: Yes, yes.

Researcher: And you as a young teacher?

Teacher 3: I'm still eager to materials and I do tend to find time.

Researcher: Okay, that's great. That's right. That's it. Now at the very end before I start recording, I would like to thank you for your time and for the participation and for your help.

Teacher 3: You're welcome.

Teacher 4 (High school Donji Miholjac):

Researcher: Okay, so before we begin, I would like to point out that I will be recording this interview. Your identity will remain anonymous, meaning your first and last name will not be written anywhere. And I want you to know that the interview is also voluntary. So the topic of my thesis is the study of EFL, English as a foreign language, teachers' beliefs about developing intercultural competence and I would like to ask you some questions about it.

Okay, so, before we start with the questions, I'm just interested in the basic information about you as a teacher, so how old are you? How long have you been teaching? So how many years of experience do you have?

Teacher 4: Okay, I'm 49 years old, and I have been teaching in the same school for about 24 years actually, I teach English and German as foreign languages, primarily in general education. And then I have some English lessons in vocational education as well.

Researcher: Okay. So, my first question would be how do you define culture within the context of English L2 teaching?

Teacher 4: Well, I think that culture is a very important part of English language teaching. Because students, while we are actually culture, they can learn a lot about not only language, but also about the way of life. So they can probably identify with the culture and in that way, they can learn a language even better, because one day, see the purpose of learning foreign language, they will learn it - otherwise they won't.

Researcher: So they do think that linguistic competence alone is enough for learners, in order to be competent in some language?

Teacher 4: No, actually, linguistic is very important part as well. But to to the certain point, actually, and then you have to learn about the culture, the language that you learn, and also the most important part, is this, finding the purpose, why do you want to learn language?

Otherwise, you won't learn it.

Researcher: Okay. Okay. Thank you. So continuing with that question, what is your opinion and attitude towards intercultural education?

Teacher 4: I think it's very important. Last few years, I'm not sure is it five or four years, I'm actually doing Erasmus Plus projects. And this is the best way, if you want your students to learn about different cultures, about the purpose of language, especially when a language such as English is actually not. Well, it's very important that it's lingua franca, actually, that is what I wanted to say. And it helps students to when they are in on their exchange activities, work, when they are traveling around or later on, doing certain things in their lives, but I find intercultural education, very, very, very important part of teaching and learning as well.

Researcher: Okay, so do you think that the textbooks you use in school contain enough cultural elements and that they present culture effectively? Why?

Teacher 4: Yes, but if we think only about English language textbooks, then we can find only about the American culture, a little bit about Australian culture, nothing about Canadian culture, or many things about British culture. But this is not enough. They have to learn about other cultures, specially European cultures, this is my opinion, because this is the environment they live in. And as I said previously, that English is lingua franca. So probably they won't have the opportunity to talk to the Americans or the British people. Rather, they will exchange their ideas, talk to the Dutch people or German using English language.

Researcher: Okay, and do you think teachers need training in relation to IC teaching to or do you think that teachers have sufficient knowledge on this topic?

Teacher 4: Well if you ask me, training is very important part for teachers. I'm also a teacher trainer. So I usually work with teachers who are willing to be trained actually to do something new, and I think it should be a part of training, because back to 90s, when I was a student, we got a certain IC teaching, actually, but it's not enough. It wasn't enough for us. And if you're not curious enough to dig in deeper in that topic, you will not do anything, you need someone to help you, to find information that you need, to give you ideas to motivate your action, especially when you are teaching more than 20 years, then you need someone to motivate you to do it.

Researcher: And how is IC teaching different from teaching other elements of English L2 teaching, for example, grammar, vocabulary, that is in the textbooks?

Teacher 4: It's not different at all, because grammar and vocabulary are just part of IC teaching, you cannot divide these things. Teaching pure grammar or pure vocabulary? Why? What for actually? And what is the purpose of language to understand certain ideas, to understand people you're talking to. So I think it's connected and everything is connected in English language, not only IC, intercultural topics, but also I'm teaching CLIL. So, many other topics are coming into my English classroom, such as sustainable development goals, and different cultures, not only European cultures, but I think it's, it's connected.

Researcher: And how do you promote intercultural competence in your classroom? So what are the most common activities you use?

Teacher 4: The most common activities are actually project based learning. Because this is the thing that I well the method, I believe, works the best thing in my classroom, because students then have enough time to dig in deeper if they want to learn what they want, and when they want. And I do a lot of it with international projects. So students are teaching students about their culture. So this is the most important actually. So video conferences, a lot of them. So they can connect with, let's say, their Spanish peers, and then exchange the ideas about education in Spain and Croatia, about free time, whatever they actually want to learn. So this is also I believe, the best way to do it. And sometimes I even ask as experts to enter my classroom, via videoconference. So these are people from let's say, Cyprus or Poland or everywhere, where we want actually to be that at that time. So if my students want to meet someone from Cyprus, then I find someone there are to talk to the person.

Researcher: Great!

Teacher 4: So this is the thing that I believe is very, very important for students and gives the purpose of learning languages and teaching as well.

Researcher: And I have a follow up question, what material and strategies do you use in your classroom to promote intercultural competence?

Teacher 4: Well, I use textbooks, but I don't like them actually, because these textbooks are just the frame that I use. But then when I see the students like the topic, and that they want to learn more about that topic, then I find certain info in internet or as I said, I do a lot of e-twinning projects. So therefore, I share the ideas with my colleagues around Europe. I even, when it comes to, to learning about European cultures, then I actually have a huge project. That is not only mine, I'm just a part of it. This is a project that is very important for European Union. It's called European ambassador, the European Parliament Ambassador school program. So we are learning actually about civic topics, but also about cultural, intercultural ideas and topics using actually our MAPS, a member of Parliament's in European Parliament actually using their networking. Their ideas. Their, I don't know, willingness to help us to learn about let's say, how do people in Belgium live or something like that?

Researcher: Okay, do you for example, give them tasks to explore that cultural diversity at home to search on their own or just in the classroom?

Teacher 4: It depends actually, I use Flipped Classroom very often, very often, especially when it comes to intercultural education, because I believe that that way I give them I don't know, five, six or seven different videos to watch and different texts to explore. But then I just give them this voice and choice to choose one they are going to do it and which text or video they are going to watch. Later on. I organized Socratic seminars to discuss certain things, especially if we're talking about, it's not just exploring, let's say, the middle and or is it exploring the way of life so that they can exchange ideas. So yes, they can do it at home, but then they can do it in the classroom, as well.

Researcher: Okay. And we're almost done. The last question is, in your opinion, do you think there is a particular reason why English L2 teachers neglect intercultural competence in their classrooms? And what prevents them from fully engaging in intercultural teaching?

Teacher 4: Hard question, actually, I don't know about the other teachers, but I think they, they rely too much on the textbooks. And it depends definitely on what kind of person privately you are, if you're interested enough in other topics, or not, if you're curious enough or not. But also, if you have enough time to do that.

Researcher: Lack of time?

Teacher 4: Lack of time is the most important problem for teachers.

Researcher: Okay. Okay, so that's it. Now at the very end, before I stop recording, I want to thank you for your answers and also to take time to participate in my interview. And that's it. Thank you!

Teacher 5 (August Harambašić Elementary school, Donji Miholjac):

Researcher: Okay, so before we begin, I would like to point out that I will be recording this interview your identity will remain anonymous meaning your first and last name will not be written anywhere. And I want you to know that the interview is also voluntary. The topic of my thesis is the study of EFL teachers beliefs about developing intercultural competence. And I would like I would like to ask you some questions about this topic. So, before we start with the questions, I'm just interested in basic information about you as a teacher. So, how old are you? How long have you been teaching? How many years of experience do you have? And which grades do teach?

Teacher 5: I'm 47 years old, I have been teaching for 23 years. At the moment, I'm teaching first graders, fifth graders and the sixth and seventh graders.

Researcher: Okay. And my first question would be, how do you define culture within the context of English L2 teaching.

Teacher 5: When teaching English as a second language, it is necessary to include cultural elements, because language reflects culture, and it cannot be taught without it. It cannot be taught without this cultural context, which includes not only teaching different traditions, customs, habits, routines, of the English speaking people, but also, I think it's very important to teach socially appropriate communication, because children are exposed to those informal greetings and everything and they consider that appropriate in any social context. So it's important to teach them how to address different people, the difference between formal and informal speech, greetings, then to teach them about stereotypes, even superstitious, which are different in our culture and other cultures, different expectations and so on.

Researcher: Okay, continuing on that question, what is your opinion and attitudes towards intercultural education?

Teacher 5: I personally think that this kind of education should be included more in the current curriculum, not only because these elements are important for language learning, but because they are interesting. Especially for the children who are generally curious, interested in media,



interested in history, geography, and so on. One of the most difficult things nowadays teachers are faced with is how to motivate the students. I think the teachers of English are luckier in this context than the others. Because English as a school subject, has been considered as more attractive and popular than the other school subjects. And I think that, that situation has been like this for many years now, including those cultural moments into teaching, especially those elements, which are students special attracted to, like popular music, films, media in general, is one of the reasons for the popularity of the subject.

Researcher: Okay. Do you think that the textbooks you use in school contain enough cultural elements and they present culture effectively or no?

Teacher 5: Okay, in my experience, most textbooks cover the usual elements of cultural teaching. First, we introduce English speaking countries in the term of geography, politics and so on. For instance, we learn about different parts of the UK, we talk about the flags about national anthems, its origins and so on. We say something about the geographical position of the countries, we usually bring a map to the class. The next, after that, we usually start with a little bit of history. We talk about or usually mention some of the most important rulers when you face consider the start with a William the Conqueror, Elizabeth the Second, Queen Victoria, when talking about USA, we usually start with the pilgrim fathers and the Mayflower. We mention all the important American wars like the American war for independence, American Civil War and so on. When we talk about Australia, we start with James Cook, and something like that. The next obligatory cultural topic that is usually covered in the textbook is usually connected to holidays, and holiday costumes. And this one is very popular among students, especially when we teach costumes connected to those holidays which are not that common in Croatia. Like how Thanksgiving and Halloween of course. Some of the other cultural elements that appear in the textbooks today are about important people from the world of science, sports, politics, film, literature, and so on. We have a whole lesson in the sixth grade, which deals with the Beatles.

Researcher: Mhm, great!

Teacher 5: And then we also introduce a few songs as well. Then we talk about Martin Luther King, Marilyn Monroe and so on. There is also inevitable Harry Potter then we talk about environment. The Chief Seattle speech is always there. And... But those cultural elements are often integrated when teaching grammar or vocabulary. It doesn't have to be a separate lesson. And it usually isn't. For instance, when I teach countable and uncountable nouns, I always refer to a recipe with a list of ingredients. And it is usually a traditional English or American

dish, like brownies, or I don't know, I think there was a recipe about a recipe of some Scottish biscuits, I forgot the name, mac and cheese, something like that. In this way, we learn both grammar and culture.

Researcher: Okay, and do you think teachers need training in relation to IC teaching to or do you think that teachers have sufficient knowledge on this topic?

Teacher 5: I wouldn't be very vain to say that teachers don't need any training to do that. Of course, we do have some basic knowledge about the countries whose language we teach, but there is a lot of room for improvement. Since the subject of intercultural teaching is very wide, we all have our preferred preferences. I, for instance, personally, I like history, I enjoy historical fiction, and I know a lot about, a great deal about American Civil War. I'm very interested in the history of slavery. And I think that I can introduce this topic to my students very well. But that's only one tiny element. The best way to get extra education in this intercultural teaching is to spend some time abroad.

Researcher: Okay, how is IC teaching different from teaching other elements of English L2 teaching for example, grammar, vocabulary, etc.?

Teacher 5: I think for the most part, it's more interesting and laid back. Not only for the teacher, but for the students as well. Secondly, when you use authentic materials, which is a must - films, video clips, newspaper articles, recipes, I saw once I brought some tickets, which I, when I was watching a musical in London, it was something they, they were very happy about. Students like when we bring something something to class, there is also a personal experience students like to share if they have been to any of the English speaking countries, if they have heard or seen any of the things we talk about in the class, if a person they are close to has been there, they like that.

Researcher: Okay, and how do you promote intercultural competence in your classroom? So, what are the most common activities you use?

Teacher 5: I think that language learning is probably the best way to promote, language learning in general, to promote intercultural competence in the classroom because it allows you to all the other steps, you can then go and study abroad, you can travel you can explore, you can promote your own language and your country abroad, you can understand better other cultures and you can be more tolerant to different people.

Researcher: And what materials and strategies do you use in your classroom to promote intercultural intercultural competence? So, for example, do you give your students homework to research, something about some topic that is mentioned in the book or something else?

Teacher 5: We don't usually do homework at all when we teach our culture. But I think it's important to expose students to some authentic materials because all the texts in in our textbooks are simplified. And sometimes it's good to expose them to newspapers, magazine articles, which are brought from English speaking countries, then listening to YouTube videos, sometimes feel so I used to watch with them, extracts from different sitcoms, Friends and so on. I think it's important to compare our language to the target language our customs to the customs of the target language. It's one of the strategies to bring a native speaker to the class, to have a guest.

Researcher: Yes.

Teacher 5: Once we had a person from Australia, and it was a native speaker of English, he didn't have this person wasn't Croatian. It was, it was actually an old lady. She was a guest here. And she came to the class and it was, it was really great. And as she was surprised by how it was the fourth grade, and she was very surprised how much English they could understand. Then, this is not my personal experience, this is something I'm planning to do. I heard of this in a workshop to bring a tool which isn't used in Croatia and to bring it to the class. So they could talk about, they could talk about it, how it is used in England it was some kind of an agricultural tool. So yes, you can expand it when we talk about the seasons, about agricultural work and so on.

Researcher: Okay, and we are almost done, the last question is, in your opinion, do you think there is a particular reason why English L2 teachers neglect intercultural competence in their classrooms and what prevents them from fully engaging in intercultural teaching?

Teacher 5: I wouldn't say that they neglect intercultural competence teaching in their cultural competence in classroom. But teaching grammar, vocabulary speaking, writing, that's graded and is considered more important because of that. Cultural elements are included in almost every aspect of teaching a foreign language and cannot be separated from it. So I don't think it's neglected. But those four elements which are graded which resulted grades are considered to be more important.

Researcher: Okay. Okay. Thank you. Now, at the very end before I stopped recording, I would like to thank you for answers and also for taking time to participate in my interview.

Teacher 6 (High school Donji Miholjac):

Researcher: Okay, before we begin, I would like to point out that I will be recording this interview, your identity will remain anonymous, meaning your first and last name award

won't be written anywhere. And I want you to know that the interview is also voluntary. So the topic of my thesis is the study of EFL teachers beliefs about developing intercultural competence. And I would like to ask you some questions about it. So, before we start with the questions, I'm just interested in the basic information about you. So how old are you? Which grades do you teach and, or which levels? And how many years of experience do you have?

Teacher 6: Okay, I'm 52 years old, and I am, but I have 28 years of experience in this very school, and I teach all grades in secondary school. So from the first to the fourth levels, I would say A2 to B2.

Researcher: Okay. Okay. And my first question would be how do you define culture within the context of English L2, as a second language teaching?

Teacher 6: When we teach culture within English as L2, we basically try to convey information about beliefs, about customs, about manners, ways of communication with the wife, or the people over in speaking countries.

Researcher: Okay. And continuing on that question, what is your opinion and attitude towards intercultural education?

Teacher 6: I think it's very important because it provides context for language learning for structures, vocabulary, everything else we teach within the language. You have to know the culture to be able to use the language properly in a given situation.

Researcher: Okay. Do you think that the textbooks you use in school contain enough cultural elements and that they present culture effectively? Why?

Teacher 6: They do give some cultural elements, but I would say not enough. As for the effectiveness, I might say that the current books offer much more realistic picture of cultural elements. All the textbooks had more elements, which were closer to stereotyping, than presenting really a culture.

Researcher: And do you think teachers need training in relation to IC teaching? Or do you think that teachers have sufficient knowledge on this topic?

Teacher 6: There's never enough training in relation to any aspect of teaching language, let alone IC teaching. It has always been something that we did when we found time for it. And it wouldn't hurt to get information about some new interesting ways of teaching culture.

Researcher: Okay. And how is IC teaching different from teaching other elements of English language? So, for example, grammar, vocabulary, etc.?

Teacher 6: It's more complex, much more complex. There are a lot of elements that you have to connect, and it's ideal when you manage to connect teaching a structure or some vocabulary with some, some cultural elements.

Researcher: Okay, how do you promote intercultural competence in your classroom and what are the most common activities you use?

Teacher 6: In each topic I cover, I try to include some cultural context, we add the research information about the situation connected to that cultural context, we compare that cultural element with something similar in our culture. Students roleplay the situations with the cultural context for example, how to apologize, how to dress a person, things like that. They read a part of well known novel or story, watch a video clip taken from a film played by native speaker, and so forth.

Researcher: Okay, and a follow up question, what materials and strategies do you use in your classroom to promote intercultural competence? So do you give your students for example, something for homework to research something about culture?

Teacher 6: Sometimes I do, for example, currently, we are working on traditional holidays, and each student was given a specific tradition to research on but it's not just, this time I didn't just cover English speaking countries, but I cover the whole world. So from America, Europe, Asia, Africa, so they were all given one traditional holiday to cover and to research, waited to give information to the rest of the class.

Researcher: Okay, so, like a presentation?

Teacher 6: A presentation, like a presentation.

Researcher: Okay, and we're almost done. The last question is, in your opinion, do you think there is a particular reason why English L2 teachers neglect intercultural competence in their classrooms, and what prevents them from fully engaging in intercultural education?

Teacher 6: I wouldn't say that it's totally neglected. I think that we teach culture much more than before. But some teachers still don't realize the importance of giving cultural context to everything we teach. And some teachers may be avoiding it, because it takes a lot of planning and preparation. So you will know you have to plan how to incorporate it you have to find the materials if you want to use the authentic materials, you have to prepare the tasks that the children we do that we'll do. There are a lot of already prepared materials but again you have to research where to find it and you have to incorporate it in a lesson plan somehow. So it's a lot of work.

Researcher: Okay, great. Okay, that's it. And now at the very, very end, I would like to thank you for your answers and for taking time to participate in my interview.

Teacher 7 (Tin Ujević High School, Kutina):

Researcher: So, before we begin, I would like to point out that I will be recording this interview. Your identity will remain anonymous, meaning your first and last name will not be written down anywhere. And I want you to know that the interview is also voluntary. So the topic of my thesis is the study of EFL, English as a foreign language teachers beliefs about developing intercultural competence. And I would like to ask you some questions about this topic. So, before we start with the questions, I'm just interested in basic information about you as a teacher, so, how old are you? How long have you been teaching? So, how many years of experience do you have and what grade or which levels do you teach?

Teacher 7: Okay, so I'm 27 and I've been teaching for two years. I teach from A2 level to B2 level. So this is vocational high schools.

Researcher: Okay, so, my first question would be how do you define culture within the context of English L2 as a second language teaching?

Teacher 7: Okay. Well, the importance of culture in English L2 teaching, in raising awareness about the way of life beliefs, and speaking countries, teaching culture is all it is also teaching about the way of thinking which means that if a person wants to convey a message, they have to know how to express something in a target language, so that the message is understood correctly.

Researcher: And continuing with that question, what is your opinion and attitude towards intercultural education?

Teacher 7: I think that intercultural education is very important, because language is also culturally dependent. Languages are full of metaphorical expressions, which vary from language to language, depending on the culture. Also, it is very important to promote compassion and understanding of the students that they understand other cultures, and they need to learn that other cultures are as well as valuable as their own.

Researcher: Do you think that the textbooks you use contain enough cultural elements and that they present culture effectively?

Teacher 7: Well, I don't think that textbooks contain enough cultural elements because the focus is still mostly on grammar, or specific vocabulary. Because there isn't enough cultural

content, culture is not represented effectively. Even when there are some cultural contexts, this is not the kind of content that students can relate to, because they're mostly not interested in that kind of content.

Researcher: And do you think teachers need training in relation to IC teaching? Or do you think that teachers have sufficient knowledge on this topic and why? Also, from your point of view as a young teacher?

Teacher 7: I do think that teachers need training in relation to IC teaching, because there is always something to learn. Teachers can exchange exchange ideas or experiences which may help them in their own teaching. And this is precisely talking me as a young teacher because I don't think that we've covered this part enough in our college courses. So I think that it would be very useful for us.

Researcher: And how is IC teaching different from teaching other elements of English L2 teaching for example, grammar vocabulary, etc.?

Teacher 7: Okay, oh, well, I think teaching is different from other elements because grammar has specific rules, which students can learn vocabulary has definitions, while teaching about culture gives more freedom. In other words, there isn't one possible answer or one definition that fits all.

Researcher: And how do you promote intercultural competence in your classroom? So what are the most common activities you use?

Teacher 7: In my classroom, I promote intercultural competence by letting students do some research on other cultures. They mostly do research on English speaking countries, and cultures that could be found there. But they also did some research on other cultures for the European day of languages. And the activities that they have can vary from having a presentation or telling their story as if they belong to that cultures, which they did a research prior.

Researcher: And a follow up question, what materials and strategies do you use in your classroom to promote intercultural competence?

Teacher 7: Okay, as I said earlier, I don't think that there is enough, there are enough materials in textbooks. So, I mostly use the ones that I find on the internet to make it more interesting for the students or I make my own materials using the information that I find on the internet.

Researcher: And we are almost done. The last question is In your opinion, do you think there is a particular reason why English L2 teachers neglect intercultural competence in their classrooms and what prevents teachers from fully engaging in intercultural teaching?

Teacher 7: I think neglecting intercultural teaching happens due to lack of time or materials, which would be interesting to students. For example, in high schools, I think that everybody is more focused on Matura exams or English for specific purposes than they are on cultural teaching. So, maybe it is because they find these more important for students at that point. Maybe culture is not as important as these two are.

Researcher: Okay, so that's it now at the very end before I stop recording, I would like to thank you for your answers and also for taking the time to participate in my interview.

Teacher 7: Of course, no problem.

Teacher 8 (Ante Starčević Elementary school, Viljevo):

Researcher: Okay, so before we begin, I would like to point out that I will be recording this interview, your identity will remain anonymous, which means that your first and last name won't be written anywhere. And I want you to know also that this interview is voluntary. So the topic of my thesis is the study of EFL teachers beliefs about developing intercultural competence. And I would like to ask you some questions about this topic. Would it be okay?

Teacher 8: Yes, it's okay.

Researcher: Okay. So before we start with the questions, I'm just interested in basic information about you as a teacher. So how old are you? How long have you been teaching? So how many years of experience do you have? And what grade or which levels do you teach?

Teacher 8: Okay, so I'm 44, almost. And I have nearly 20 years of working experience at school. And usually, I teach grades fifth to eighth, fifth, sixth, seventh and eighth graders, but this year, I also had one 4th grade.

Researcher: Okay, so intermediate, upper intermediate?

Teacher 8: That's B1, I think. I think it's B1.

Researcher: Okay. So my first question would be, how do you define culture within the context of English L2, as a second language teaching?

Teacher 8: Okay. So it's learning about history and civilization, geography, social aspects culture, I would say pop culture, literature, art, famous people, holidays. Also meeting with students from under speaking countries, live face to face or online.

Researcher: Okay. So you think culture is important aspect of language?

Teacher 8: Yes, very important.



Researcher: Okay. And do you perhaps think that English culture is taught implicitly in school? So that it is not expressed directly? Or not?

Teacher 8: Well, I was trying to get to that part. Okay. Well, I don't know, I have a feeling that it's a kind of put aside so that, it's not, it is part of the educational process, but it's not used to achieve certain goals, like grammar learning or extending vocabulary. It's kind of some additional content, I would say.

Researcher: Okay, okay. Okay. So, continuing on that question, what is your opinion and attitude towards intercultural education?

Teacher 8: I think it's very important because it results in developing intercultural competency as well as better understanding tolerance towards different and other cultures.

Researcher: Okay. So, do you also think that linguistic competence alone is enough for learners of a language to be completely competent in that language?

Teacher 8: No, no, no. I think this cultural part of learning about culture should be constantly developed and permanently taught.

Researcher: Okay. Okay. Great. So, do you think that the textbooks you use contain enough cultural elements and that they present cultural effectively?

Teacher 8: Okay. So, I think that culture, as I said is very important. In the educational process but it should also be a means to achieve certain goals, like learning grammar, vocabulary, develop language competencies. Most of the textbooks that we have in Croatia contain texts about culture, but they are usually put aside usually at the end of the book or unit and, and they are not used to achieve these goals as I mentioned, they are usually taught independently, separately, as some kind of extra, fun time, I would say.

Researcher: So for some extra activities?

Teacher 8: Well, they are part of our curriculum. But as I said, we are not used to learn grammar or vocabulary in the text where we I don't know, where the goal is to learn Present Continuous for example, but these things are not on the topic of culture.

Researcher: Okay, I understand.

Teacher 8: And they could be. I think that they would be maybe more, more used and that students will learn more about culture. If these texts about culture were put in the main part of the book I would say. For learning these days obligatory contents.

Researcher: Yes, yes. Okay. So do you think teachers need training in relation to IC teaching?

Teacher 8: Yes, I think that teachers need permanent professional training in all skills as well as the IC teaching. But we rarely do. For example, most of our seminars and trainings are,

especially during and after the COVID based on learning. I don't know, the use of digital tools, which are very important during the online lessons and educations. And this aspect of IC teaching became kind of neglected, I will say, yes.

Researcher: So you don't think they have sufficient knowledge?

Teacher 8: Well, I don't say we don't have, teachers don't have sufficient knowledge, suppose we do have at least a sufficient level. But we are not permanently, I don't know, upgrading those parts as we do, as learning new digital tools and new methods of teaching grammar, for example. And this part of IC teaching is neglected in my opinion from those professional training and seminars and so on.

Researcher: Okay, so back to the classroom. How is IC teaching different from teaching other elements of English L2 teaching, for example, grammar vocabulary, etc.?

Teacher 8: Yes, well, as I already said, they are not integrated in this process of learning grammar and vocabulary. And that's why these cultural topics have never been summative assessed, and students don't get such an assessment of those parts like, I don't know we summative assess reading comprehension, listening comprehension, writing skills, speaking skills, but this cultural information that they hear and learn, they are never summative assessed.

Researcher: Okay. Okay, do you and how do you promote intercultural competence in your classroom? And what are the most common activities you use, for example?

Teacher 8: Well, we usually celebrate holidays, special days, like Christmas, Easter, St. Patrick's Day, Valentine's Day, Halloween, Remembrance Day, bonfire nights, and so on. First, we learn something about it certain day, using textbooks and some additional materials that I usually find online, including videos, quizzes, students also made their own presentations and their own quizzes. And we always make comparisons with traditions in Croatia, we usually make some posters that we put on a pin board or decorate the classroom. And, for example, one time we created this huge England flag that we have in our classroom, and input cards called A to Z England cards. So these cards had basic information for every letter of the alphabet containing some important things for England, for example, Q for Queen Elizabeth, B for Beatles and so is it okay that I show it later to you? There's an example.

Researcher: Okay, I would love to. Okay, so I have a follow up question. What materials and strategies do you use in your classroom? So you give your students tasks to explore linguistic and also cultural aspects.

Teacher 8: Yes, yes, yes. They often do some research. Like in grade six, we, they were researching Ireland homelands and landmarks, for example. Then they presented their work, they use digital tools to present what they found. For example, they made posters using Canva and then they correctly put them on a pin board or we make a poster or something like that.

Researcher: Okay. Okay. And we are almost done. The last question is, in your opinion, do you think there is a particular reason why English L2 teachers neglect intercultural competence in their classrooms? So what prevents teachers from fully engaging in intercultural teaching?

Teacher 8: Well, I would say its lack of time, this is the main problem. So it would be much better if cultural texts were used as a need to teach grammar and vocabulary and not to be put separately as some kind of an additional, extra things, which then also require an extra time.

Researcher: So lack of time?

Teacher 8: Lack of time, yes.

Researcher: Okay.

Teacher 8: It would be perfect if, when these texts containing some cultural information would be used as a mean to teach grammar, to teach vocabulary, then they will do them immediately as we do this grammar and vocabulary and other units, and they won't require an extra time then.

Researcher: Okay. And I would like to ask something. You said that, before the interview, you said that you taught in high school. So these textbooks, do they contain enough cultural elements?

Teacher 8: Well, it was really a long time ago and that was my first job as a substitute teacher. And I was teaching in a vocational schools. And, I don't remember hearing much of this cultural, I didn't don't have some, some textbooks. I don't remember some really, really...

Researcher: I thought maybe for advanced learners...

Teacher 10: That were made missional schools. I didn't teach in a grammar schools. Only vocational schools like I don't know, for I don't remember in that culture element wasn't much there.

Researcher: Okay. Okay, so that's it. Now at the very end before I stop recording, I would like to thank you for your answers and also for taking time to participate in it.

Teacher 9 (Ante Starčević Elementary school, Viljevo):

Researcher: Okay, so before we begin, I would like to point out that I will be recording this interview, your identity will remain anonymous meaning your first and last name will not be written down anywhere. And I want you to know that the interview is also voluntary. So the topic of my thesis is the study of EFL teachers beliefs about developing intercultural competence. And I would like to ask you some questions about this topic. So, before we start with the questions, I'm just interested in the basic information about you as a teacher. So, how old are you? And how many years of experience do you have?

Teacher 9: I'm 31 years old and I am teaching English five years.

Researcher: Okay, and what grade or which levels do you teach?

Teacher 9: Mostly from the first to the fifth grade? Okay. But this year, I have the second grade, oh, not the second, sixth grade.

Researcher: Okay. And my first question would be how do you define culture within the context of English L2 as a second language teaching?

Teacher 9: The cultural context is a foundation for understanding and developing competence in a foreign language. With it, we can understand idioms, expressions that we normally couldn't, it also gives us an important input of social understanding. With it, the students could easily understand why are they learning some expressions or idioms and their context of it.

Researcher: Okay, and continuing on that question, what is your opinion and attitude towards intercultural education?

Teacher 9: My opinion is that it should be more included in schools, and it's very important to learn the kids about it, because when they travel to some country, or when they apply for a job, or when they maybe work in a foreign country, that they know how to behave, and they didn't know what some expressions mean, that they could fit in, in the other culture, and it would be better for them.

Researcher: Do you think that the textbooks you use contain enough cultural elements and that they present culture effectively?

Teacher 9: The textbooks contain enough material according to the curricular, curricular plan and program, but in my opinion, it could be more. In some topics, it is presented effectively, while in others isn't, for example, in geography or food, it's more effectively than for example, when we learn about the royal family or so on.

Researcher: Okay, and do you think teachers need training in relation to IC teaching? Or do you think that teachers have sufficient knowledge on this topic?

Teacher 9: Depends on the university where, where they're going to I went to the university in Osijek and we have, we had British and American culture and civilization, and our teachers were American or English Erasmus teachers who came for a semester or for a year and emphasis on American and English culture was very, very important because they were interested that we have some background and that we know why some expressions or idioms and some stuff means to us.

Researcher: Okay, and how is IC teaching different from teaching other elements of English L2 teaching for example, grammar, vocabulary?

Teacher 9: It's different because the how the people change, the culture is also changing. So the cultural habits change and we need to know the background of the culture so that we can teach, so that we can teach IC. Grammar, vocabulary, okay vocabulary changes with grammar, it remains the same.

Researcher: Okay, how do you promote intercultural competence in your classroom and what are the most common activities you use? For example, do you sometimes make some cultural features explicit in relation to the linguistics form?

Teacher 9: Yes, for example, when the Queen died, I made a presentation and I made, some, I searched some videos of her life and about her reign. Oh, I use it in form of presentation, videos, in group work or pairs.

Researcher: Okay, and there is a follow up question also what materials and strategies do you use in your classroom?

Teacher 9: Media, music, videos...

Researcher: Do you give them tasks? For example, for homework, to explore something? Maybe to search more about some topic?

Teacher 9: Yes.

Researcher: Okay. And we are almost done. The last question is, in your opinion, do you think there is a particular reason why English L2 teachers neglect intercultural competence in their classrooms? And what prevents teachers from fully engaging in intercultural teaching?

Teacher 9: And think there is no reason, but we have a lot of, we have a lot of to care, we have a lot of stuff that we need to that we need to cover, cover. Yes, we have a lot to cover according to the curriculum, so it's hard for us to only be emphasizing on intercultural on IC

teaching, but I don't think that teachers are not engaging in IC teaching but there's just not enough time.

Researcher: Okay. Okay, so that's it. Now at the very end before I stop recording, I want to thank you for your answers and also for taking time to participate in my interview.

Teacher 9: No problem. Thank you.

Teacher 10 (High school Donji Miholjac):

Researcher: So, before we begin, I would like to point out that I will be recording this interview. Your identity will remain anonymous, meaning your first and last name will not be written down anywhere. And I want you to know that the interview is also voluntary. So the topic of my thesis is the study of EFL, English as a foreign language teachers beliefs about developing intercultural competence. And I would like to ask you some questions about this topic. So, before we start with the questions, I'm just interested in basic information about you as a teacher, so, how old are you? How long have you been teaching? So, how many years of experience do you have and what grade or which levels do you teach?

Teacher 10: Okay, so I'm 38 and I've been teaching for ten years. I teach first, second and third graders in high school.

Researcher: Okay, so, my first question would be how do you define culture within the context of English L2 as a second language teaching?

Teacher 10: Culture, in the context of our English class, includes the set of values, traditions, practices, and expressions that define a community. It is an important part of language learning, because language reflects the history and ideology of a society.

Researcher: And continuing with that question, what is your opinion and attitude towards intercultural education?

Teacher 10: I have an interest, I'm interested, in intercultural education. I believe that students should have the opportunity to explore cultures and perspectives through language learning. It also helps shape them into well rounded global citizens.

Researcher: Do you think that the textbooks you use contain enough cultural elements and that they present culture effectively?

Teacher 10: In evaluating the textbooks I use in my high school English classes, I believe that although they do offer valuable cultural elements, there's often room for improvement in terms of depth and effectiveness in presenting culture. Textbooks provide a foundational

understanding of cultural aspects within the English-speaking world, but they might not always capture the full spectrum of diversity present in various cultures.

Researcher: And do you think teachers need training in relation to IC teaching? Or do you think that teachers have sufficient knowledge on this topic and why?

Teacher 10: In my opinion, it is crucial for teachers to undergo continuous training and professional development in the field of intercultural teaching. While some teachers may have a basic understanding of intercultural concepts, you need training for everything. Intercultural teaching involves navigating delicate subjects, confronting biases, and facilitating conversations on cultural differences.

Researcher: And how is IC teaching different from teaching other elements of English L2 teaching for example, grammar vocabulary, etc.?

Teacher 10: It is extremely different because when teaching grammar and vocabulary, you, you build the foundation of language proficiency, and IC teaching enriches language learning by providing the cultural context necessary for effective communication. It helps students to become not only proficient language users but also culturally aware and competent individuals.

Researcher: And how do you promote intercultural competence in your classroom? So what are the most common activities you use if you don't mind sharing?

Teacher 10: Absolutely, happy to share! In my classroom, I promote intercultural competence through fun stuff like group discussions on global topics, exploring diverse literature and movies, sharing personal cultural experiences, and even talking about international dishes during certain units. I try to spark curiosity, empathy, and open chats among my students.

Researcher: And a follow up question, what materials and strategies do you use in your classroom to promote intercultural competence?

Teacher 10: I mix things up every day, and every week. I use materials on the internet, different articles, short stories, and other things I find on YouTube. Yes, I use Youtube a lot in my classroom. Also, role plays, sometimes video calls with students from other countries too.

Researcher: Okay, great. And we are almost done. The last question is in your opinion, do you think there is a particular reason why English L2 teachers neglect intercultural competence in their classrooms and what prevents teachers from fully engaging in intercultural teaching?

Teacher 10: I understand, valid. One reason might be the pressure teachers feel to cover everything that is in the curriculum...

Researcher: So lack of time?

Teacher 10: Yes, exactly, too many things and we don't have enough time for everything. And also, the availability of suitable materials and training could also be a big problem.

Researcher: Okay, thank you. So that's it now at the very end before I stop recording, I would like to thank you again for your answers and also for taking the time to participate in my interview.

Teacher 10: You're welcome.

## **Abstract**

### **EFL Teachers' Beliefs about the Development of Intercultural competence**

Intercultural competence is an essential factor in learning a second language, as it facilitates more efficient language acquisition and fosters a deeper understanding of the world. The main goal of this research was to investigate the perceptions and attitudes of English foreign language (EFL) teachers regarding the cultural aspect of teaching a foreign language and how language learners' intercultural competence is developed in Croatian schools. In addition, the strategies and activities that teachers use when teaching intercultural competence were explored, as well as the challenges that English language teachers face when teaching intercultural competence. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with a sample of ten elementary and high school EFL teachers. The results showed that Croatian EFL teachers have positive attitudes toward teaching intercultural competence and consider it an integral part of English language teaching. In addition, it was found that teachers used different teaching strategies and activities to encourage intercultural competence among learners. For example, they use additional Internet materials, presentations, discussions, group work, games, and video calls. Several challenges that teachers encounter in their attempt to develop learners' intercultural competence include a lack of time, the need for additional training and seminars, and traveling or spending some time abroad. In conclusion, this study highlights the limitations of the research given that a few respondents participated in the research. However, the study also shows that there is a need to address some of the challenges of developing learners' intercultural competence, especially considering its place in the curriculum and importance in today's world.

**Key words:** Second language acquisition, English Foreign Language (EFL) teaching, Intercultural competence, primary and secondary EFL teachers



## Sažetak

### **Uvjerenja nastavnika engleskog kao stranog jezika o razvoju interkulturalne kompetencije**

Interkulturalna kompetencija jedan je od bitnih čimbenika u učenju drugog jezika, budući da olakšava učinkovitije usvajanje jezika i potiče dublje razumijevanje svijeta oko nas. Glavni cilj ovog istraživanja bio je istražiti percepcije i stavove nastavnika engleskog stranog jezika o kulturološkom aspektu poučavanja stranog jezika i poučavanja interkulturalne kompetencije u hrvatskim školama. Putem polu-strukturiranih intervjua s deset osnovnoškolskih i srednjoškolskih učitelja engleskog jezika istražile su se strategije i aktivnosti koje učitelji koriste prilikom poučavanja interkulturalne kompetencije te izazove s kojima se nastavnici engleskog jezika suočavaju prilikom poučavanja interkulturalne kompetencije. Rezultati su pokazali da hrvatski nastavnici koji podučavaju engleski jezik imaju pozitivne stavove o poučavanju interkulturalne kompetencije i smatraju je sastavnim dijelom nastave engleskog jezika. Također, hrvatski učitelji engleskog jezika koriste različite nastavne strategije i aktivnosti za poticanje interkulturalne kompetencije među svojim učenicima. Neki od primjera su internetski materijali, prezentacije, rasprave, grupni rad, igranje igara, video pozivi, itd. Najveći problem s kojim se hrvatski učitelji engleskog jezika suočavaju prilikom uključivanja sve većeg broja kulturnih aspekata u svoja predavanja, najčešće su nedostatak vremena, potrebu za dodatnom obukom i seminarima na ovom polju te putovanje ili provođenje određenog vremena u inozemstvu. Zaključno, ovaj rad ističe ograničenja istraživanja s obzirom da je u istraživanju sudjelovao malen broj ispitanika. Međutim, preporučuju se daljnja istraživanja za rješavanjem nekih od izazova razvoja interkulturalnih kompetencija učenika, posebno s obzirom na njezino mjesto u kurikulumu i njegovu važnost u današnjem svijetu.

**Ključne riječi:** usvajanje drugog jezika, interkulturalna kompetencija, nastava engleskog kao stranog jezika, nastavnici engleskog jezika u osnovnim i srednjim školama