INTERCULTURAL CITIZENSHIP IN THE EFL CLASSROOM: A SURVEY ON KAZAKHSTANI TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS

Elmira Gerfanova
PhD, Assistant Professor, Department of General Education Disciplines, Astana IT University, Astana, Kazakhstan
elmira.gerfanova@astanait.edu.kz

Zarina Rudik
PhD student, Senior Lecturer, Department of the English Language and TM, Ualikhanov Kokshetau University, Kokshetau, Kazakhstan
zrydik@shokan.edu.kz

Abstract

This study aimed to investigate how English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers perceive the concept of intercultural citizenship. The participants for this study were 23 EFL teachers from two universities in Kazakhstan. The primary method of data collection was a structured questionnaire containing open-ended items that asked the participants to express their thoughts and opinions on the qualities, responsibilities, and duties they believe are essential for an intercultural citizen. The obtained data revealed teachers' perceptions of IC: teachers highlighted the importance of cultural awareness, empathy and intercultural communication skills. Moreover, the findings indicate that EFL teachers have a limited understanding of the concept of intercultural citizenship. The results of this study may provide insights for educators

and curriculum developers into EFL teachers' perceptions of intercultural citizenship, which may help to develop effective strategies and approaches for integrating the IC component into EFL classrooms.

Keywords:

Intercultural Citizenship, Global Citizenship, Intercultural Competence, Perceptions.

1. Introduction

A focus on the development of intercultural citizenship has become increasingly important in foreign language (FL) education. Society is constantly changing due to globalization, societal challenges and new technologies. This means that FL education should be adapted and adjusted to keep up with these changes. EFL classrooms can become an appropriate environment for investigating communication across cultures in the process of language learning and teaching.

Considering the strong connection between intercultural competence and intercultural citizenship, analysing teachers' perceptions of IC is crucial. Teachers play a pivotal role in shaping students' attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours toward cultural diversity and intercultural interactions. Their perceptions regarding IC not only reflect their understanding of intercultural competence but also influence their instructional practices and approaches to fostering intercultural understanding among students.

This study addresses how teachers perceive intercultural citizenship in EFL classrooms. The exploration and analysis of teachers' perspectives can help gain insights into how intercultural competence and intercultural citizenship are taught.

The study focuses on the following research questions:

RQ 1: How confident are EFL teachers about the concept of 'intercultural citizenship'?

RQ 2: What skills, responsibilities and personal qualities do EFL teachers perceive as important for intercultural citizens?

RQ 3: What teaching strategies are most frequently employed in EFL classrooms to develop students' intercultural citizenship?

2. Literature Review

In today's globalized world, countries are striving to establish strong economic, political, social, educational, and cultural interconnections. One of the ways to achieve this goal is to raise and educate a community of communication and action beyond the boundaries

of the state/country. Such communities introduce new interpretations and approaches for rethinking the essence of citizenship. The notion of intercultural citizenship has thus been reconsidered in relation to a political education component integrated into foreign language teaching. Openness and curiosity, willingness, and readiness to engage in dialogues, the ability to recognize and accept multiple perspectives and the ability to overcome misunderstanding and conflicting situations are essential competences for an intercultural citizen. Baker and Fang (Baker&Fang, 2019) state that "Intercultural citizenship is typically conceived as the extension of citizenship beyond national borders and recognition of the global scale of social relations, the need to respect and value diversity, and participation in and responsibility to communities at multiple levels from the local to the global. Intercultural citizenship education aims to facilitate intercultural learning experiences and engagement with others, leading to change both in the individual's behaviour and self-perceptions, as well as in their behaviour and perceptions towards others" (p.7). From this perspective, it becomes evident that both foreign language educators and civic education practitioners have a common goal: to cultivate citizens who are prepared and ready for intercultural communication, able to demonstrate empathy, and able to recognize, analyse, and accept cultural distinctions.

Kazakhstani researchers emphasize the importance of developing students' intercultural citizenship. Kenzhebayeva (Kenzhebayeva et. al., 2022) underscores that in the era of globalization, the primary focus of Kazakhstani education system is on raising civic consciousness and intercultural relations grounded in respect for one's own native language and culture, as well as embracing and understanding other cultures. Arinova (Arinova, 2015) observes that the study of foreign languages contributes to the harmonious raising of individuals with multiple talents, skills, and expertise by instilling moral ideals, commitment to peace, responsibility, and conscientiousness. Abazov (Abazov, 2021) focused on the integration of the intercultural citizenship component into the educational programs of Kazakhstani universities, emphasizing the need to consider the peculiarities of the national education system, the opinions of the pedagogical community, and institutional regulations in promoting cultural diversity in the context of teaching and learning.

EFL teachers are responsible for integrating intercultural communication and citizenship into their classes to develop students' critical awareness, to cultivate their respectful attitudes toward people from different cultures and to foster their skills of cooperation and mediation. To achieve this, teachers need to have a deep understanding of what intercultural communication and citizenship are and how to promote these in their classrooms.

Several research studies have investigated the perceptions of teachers regarding intercultural competence and intercultural citizenship and their implementation in EFL classes. A study by Budharugsa (Budharugsa, 2011) revealed that while a significant proportion of teachers acknowledged the importance of both linguistic and intercultural competence, there was a disparity in practice. Despite recognizing the value of intercultural competence, a majority of teachers devoted more time to linguistic competence. Furthermore, the integration of cultural dimensions has focused primarily on surface-level aspects of foreign culture. The teaching approach observed was predominantly teacher-centred, with activities such as sharing anecdotes about other cultures being common.

Young and Sachdev (Young & Sachdev, 2011) explored the beliefs and practices of teachers regarding the integration of the intercultural component into English language programs. The findings of this study indicated a positive perception of the intercultural approach among participants. However, there was a gap between understanding and implementation, with intercultural competence receiving less emphasis in the curriculum. The lack of adequate materials and testing support posed additional obstacles to the effective incorporation of the intercultural component into teaching methodologies.

The results of a study by Jata (Jata, 2015) showed that teachers consider linguistic competence to be the primary teaching objective, with intercultural skills receiving minimal attention. Time constraints, curriculum priorities, students' low language proficiency, and inadequate materials were identified as barriers to developing students' intercultural competence. An observable culture, such as geography and history, tended to be favoured over other aspects of culture when taught.

In a study by Israelsson (Israelsson, 2016), interviews with EFL teachers revealed a gap in teachers' theoretical understanding of intercultural competence and its practical application. While teachers understand some basic concepts, they lack in-depth knowledge of theoretical frameworks, thereby hindering the inclusion of the intercultural component in foreign language teaching.

Similarly, the findings of a study by Cheewasukthaworn and Suwanarak (Cheewasukthaworn & Suwanarak, 2017) on EFL teachers' perceptions of intercultural competence indicated a general understanding of the concept and recognition of its significance. However, teachers lacked deep and detailed knowledge of the essence of intercultural competence and how to integrate and assess it.

Hvalby (Hvalby, 2022) investigated EFL teachers' perspectives on intercultural citizenship in FL classrooms. The study revealed a strong connection between teachers'

perceptions of democracy, citizenship, and intercultural competence. Teachers emphasized the importance of understanding different cultures and developing communication skills through English language learning. The findings showed that teachers believe that democratic competence, intercultural competence, and intercultural citizenship are interconnected and recognize the importance of a comprehensive educational approach that can integrate all these elements.

Research conducted by Basarir (Basarir, 2017) revealed that most participants did not actively incorporate specific teaching methodologies to instill intercultural citizenship in their students, as they perceived EFL classes and citizenship education to be unrelated.

Roux (Roux, 2019) investigated the perspectives of EFL teachers regarding the integration of the intercultural citizenship component into language curricula. The participants of the study distinguished three main categories of intercultural citizens: informed travelers, adaptable individuals, and critical thinkers. However, none of the participants believed that implementing intercultural citizenship was possible within their curricula.

Hosak (Hosak, 2023) described how EFL teachers can integrate the intercultural citizenship component into EFL classrooms. The researcher observes that instructional materials should focus on contemporary global and social issues. Analysis and evaluation of these topics develop students' understanding of their roles and responsibilities as intercultural citizens and of the importance of demonstrating an active stance in local and global communities. Furthermore, the content on social and global issues contributes to cultivating students' empathy, tolerance, and respect for representatives of other cultures.

An analysis of the literature revealed a lack of studies identifying Kazakhstani EFL teachers' perceptions of the concept of "intercultural citizenship." The present study aimed to address this gap.

3. Research Methods

The survey was conducted in an online format using Google Forms. The questionnaire in English was structured into three sections: 1) a survey introduction, 2) a section on background information, and 3) a section with questions on intercultural citizenship. The first section provided relevant information about the research, its aims and objectives, instructions for completing the questionnaire, and the required time and guaranteed the participants' confidentiality and anonymity. The second section captured the demographics of the participants: their age, years of teaching experience, and academic qualifications. The third section included two Likert scale questions and five open-ended questions asking participants

to provide items related to qualities, responsibilities, and skills perceived as important for an intercultural citizen and to mention and describe teaching strategies they employ in the EFL classroom to integrate the intercultural citizenship component.

The responses were analyzed both quantitatively and qualitatively, with thematic analysis being the main method that helped to identify common themes and patterns in the obtained data.

3.1 Participants

The participants of this study were 23 EFL teachers at two Kazakhstani universities. The participants' profiles are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1: Profiles of Participating Teachers.

Background Information	Number of Teachers
Academic Qualification	
- Bachelor's Degree	10
- Master's Degree	8
- Doctoral Degree	5
Teaching Experience	
- Less than 5 years	6
- 5 to 10 years	8
- More than 10 years	9
Age Range	
- 25-35 years	7
- 36-45 years	9
- 46-55 years	5
- 56+ years	2

(Source: Authors' Own Illustration)

4. Results and discussion

RQ1: How confident are EFL teachers about the concept of 'intercultural citizenship'?

Table 2 shows the EFL teachers' responses to two Likert scale questions that assessed their confidence in the term "intercultural citizenship" and in teaching IC in their classrooms.

Table 2: Participants' Responses to the Questions on Confidence with the Term and Teaching IC

	N	Mean	SD	Min	Max

How confident are you about the term "intercultural citizenship"?	23	2,39	1,03	1	4
How confident are you in teaching intercultural citizenship?	23	2,22	0, 42	1	3

(Source: Authors' Own Illustration)

The mean value of 2.39 for the question how confident are you about the term 'intercultural citizenship'? Suggests that teachers have a moderate level of confidence regarding the term. However, there is considerable variation in respondents' confidence levels, with some teachers reporting high levels of confidence and the majority demonstrating lower levels of confidence.

The participants' confidence in teaching intercultural citizenship was slightly lower than their confidence in the term itself, with a mean value of 2.22. Notably, none of the participants chose the highest option (i.e., 'very confident'). The teachers' lack of confidence in integrating the IC component into EFL classrooms may be explained by the relatively new concept of intercultural citizenship. Furthermore, this could signal that current professional development courses might not address incorporating the IC component into foreign language teaching.

RQ2: What skills, responsibilities, and personal qualities do EFL teachers perceive as important for intercultural citizens?

The participants were asked to provide at least three items for the core skills, responsibilities, and personal traits of an intercultural citizen. The responses were thematically analyzed and distributed into distinct categories (see Tables 3, 4, and 5).

Table 3. Intercultural Citizenship: Skills

Skills	Frequency	Percentage
Communication skills	18	78,3
Foreign language proficiency	15	65,2
Cultural awareness	12	52,2
Adaptability	10	43,5
Conflict resolution	7	30,4
Leadership	5	21,7

Source: Authors' Own Illustration

Table 3 illustrates various skills identified by EFL teachers as important for intercultural citizenship, with communication skills being the most frequently mentioned (43.9%). Foreign language proficiency closely followed, constituting 36.6% of the total, emphasizing its significance for effective and meaningful communication at the intercultural level. Cultural awareness is also highlighted as an essential skill, with 29.3% of respondents recognizing the importance of developing students' awareness of cultural nuances in intercultural communication. The participants (24.4%) also distinguished adaptability skills as important for an intercultural citizen. The ability to adapt to new cultural environments and manage one's communicative behavior is crucial for preventing misunderstandings in various intercultural communication scenarios. The categories of conflict resolution skills (17, 1%) and leadership skills (12, 2%) had the lowest frequency. There might be a perception among EFL teachers that other skills are more critical of intercultural citizenship, leading to less emphasis on conflict resolution and leadership. Teaching students effective conflict management strategies in intercultural communication is essential for promoting peaceful interactions and mutual understanding. Developing leadership skills equips students with the ability to actively engage in intercultural dialogues, promote diversity and inclusion, and bring about positive changes in their communities.

Table 4. Intercultural Citizenship: Responsibilities

Responsibilities	Frequency	Percentage
Respecting cultural differences	20	87
Fostering mutual understanding	15	65,2
Challenging stereotypes	10	43,5
Promoting social justice	8	34,8
Engaging in intercultural dialogues	6	26,1
Promoting cultural diversity and inclusion	5	21,7

Source: Authors' Own Illustration

Table 4 shows the varying degrees of emphasis placed by English teachers on different responsibilities associated with intercultural citizenship. The category of 'respecting cultural differences' emerged as the most emphasized responsibility, with 48.8% of respondents. This

indicates that teachers recognize the importance of cultivating students' tolerant and respectful attitudes toward the values and traditions of other cultures and developing their ability to cooperate harmoniously with people from different cultural backgrounds. The category 'fostering mutual understanding' was identified by 36.6% of respondents as a key responsibility. This reflects the imperative to foster empathy and cultural sensitivity towards representatives of other cultures. Furthermore, the participants also distinguished the categories of 'challenging stereotypes' (24.4%) and 'promoting social justice' (19.5%). This highlights the significance that teachers place on the development of students' behavioral strategies devoid of stereotypical assumptions and based on respect for and acceptance of diverse perspectives to promote a more equitable and inclusive society. Other important responsibilities include 'engaging in intercultural dialogues' (14, 6%) and 'promoting cultural diversity and inclusion' (12, 2%). These findings align with the principles of intercultural education that focus on the ability to communicate and interact with people from various cultures. To help students successfully participate in intercultural dialogues, EFL classrooms should aim to develop many of the attitudes fostered by a harmonious culture, including open-mindedness, cultural sensitivity, willingness, and readiness to accept multiple perspectives, and peacefully resolve conflicts. Intercultural education also aims at instilling universal human values, cultivating respect for the dignity of every individual, and recognizing the uniqueness, self-containment, and self-sustainability of every culture.

Table 5. Intercultural Citizenship: Personal Traits

Personal Qualities	Frequency	%
Open-mindedness	18	78,3
Empathy	15	65,2
Patience	12	52,2
Tolerance	10	43,5
Curiosity	8	34,8

Source: Authors' Own Illustration

Table 5 demonstrates a range of personal traits identified by EFL teachers as crucial for intercultural citizenship. Foremost among these qualities is 'open-mindedness,' mentioned by the highest number of respondents (43.9%), which reflects the importance of being receptive to new ideas, perspectives, and cultural practices. Similarly, 'empathy' emerges as a fundamental personal quality, with 36.6% of respondents recognizing its significance in

understanding and empathizing with individuals from different cultural backgrounds. Empathy fosters genuine connections and promotes mutual respect and understanding across cultural divides. 'Patience', 'Tolerance', and 'Curiosity' are also considered to be important for intercultural citizens, with 29.3%, 24.4%, and 19.5%, respectively. These qualities are essential for establishing positive intercultural interactions based on mutual respect and understanding.

RQ 3: *What teaching strategies are most frequently employed in EFL classrooms to develop students' intercultural citizenship?*

The teaching strategies mentioned by the participants are presented in Table 6.

Table 6. Teaching Strategies

Teaching strategies	Frequency	%
role-playing	17	73.9
projects (target language culture; global issues)	15	65.2
case studies	11	47.8
classroom discussions	10	43.5
analysis of cultural nuances and global issues after watching movies, YouTube videos, reading texts, etc.	8	34.8
brainstorming	7	30.4
essay writing (intercultural topics, global issues)	7	30.4
no specific teaching strategies	5	21.7

Source: Authors' Own Illustration

Role-playing and projects are the most frequently mentioned strategies, with 73.9% and 65.2%, respectively. Role plays are based on authentic communication scenarios, allowing students to perform various socio communicative roles and represent themselves as characters from the target language culture. Interculturally oriented role plays develop students' knowledge about intercultural communication and foster their abilities to analyse various behavioral strategies for interactions with people from different cultures. Culturally oriented projects enhance students' cultural and linguocultural literacy, cultivate positive attitudes toward different cultures, and foster creative thinking and research skills. Projects on global issues help students obtain a better understanding of common global problems that may affect their local communities. By addressing global issues with peers, students are likely to deepen their global awareness as they exchange perspectives and collaborate to find solutions.

Case studies were mentioned by 47.8% of the participants. This strategy fosters a conducive linguistic environment, motivating students to actively use the foreign language

while solving tasks within each individual case. This technology promotes self-reflection and encourages independent information seeking. Furthermore, case study analysis develops students' critical thinking, communication, teamwork, and decision-making skills.

Classroom discussions and analysis of cultural nuances and global issues are the next most frequently mentioned strategies, with 43.5% and 34.8%, respectively. Through discussions and analysis, students are encouraged to generate new ideas, scrutinize suggested topics and reflect on challenging scenarios of intercultural communication and situations related to specific local or global issues.

Participants also mentioned brainstorming and essay writing, each with a frequency of 30.4%. These strategies stimulate creative and critical thinking by encouraging students to explore different perspectives, thus developing a deeper understanding of the interdependencies of the globalized society.

Notably, five teachers reported that they did not employ any specific teaching strategy to integrate the intercultural citizenship component. This might suggest a gap in their intercultural teaching approaches.

Implications and Future Research

The findings of this study underscore the need for ongoing professional development initiatives targeting Kazakhstani English teachers in the area of intercultural citizenship. Despite recognizing the importance of intercultural citizenship, many teachers show varying levels of understanding and confidence in the concept. Furthermore, the survey revealed gaps in teachers' knowledge of the components of intercultural citizenship, as evidenced by incomplete identification of skills, responsibilities, and personal qualities associated with being an intercultural citizen.

Future professional development programs should prioritize enhancing teachers' understanding of intercultural citizenship and its implications for language education. Specifically, teachers need support in identifying and integrating the full spectrum of skills, responsibilities, and personal qualities required for individuals to become effective intercultural citizens. Additionally, training programs should focus on equipping teachers with pedagogical strategies and resources for effectively teaching intercultural citizenship within the foreign language classroom.

Moreover, the results of this survey align with previous research highlighted in the literature review, indicating a consistent need for teacher training and curriculum reform in the

field of intercultural citizenship education. For example, studies conducted by Budharugsa (2011), and Jata (2015) similarly identified challenges in teachers' understanding and implementation of intercultural competence in language education contexts. By confirming these findings, the present study reinforces the urgency of addressing these issues and underscores the significance of intercultural citizenship in contemporary language education.

Future research should explore the effectiveness of specific professional development interventions in enhancing teachers' confidence and competence in promoting intercultural citizenship among learners. Longitudinal studies could track the impact of such interventions on teachers' instructional practices and students' intercultural competence development over time, providing valuable insights into effective approaches for integrating intercultural citizenship education into the language classroom.

5. Conclusion

The present study investigated Kazakhstani EFL teachers' perceptions of intercultural citizenship. Through a survey-based approach, the research examined teachers' understanding of the concept, their confidence levels, and their identification of skills, responsibilities, and personal qualities associated with intercultural citizenship.

The findings revealed a varied level of understanding among Kazakhstani English teachers regarding intercultural citizenship. While many teachers recognized its importance, there was a notable range in confidence levels, with some expressing uncertainty about the concept. Furthermore, the survey highlighted gaps in teachers' knowledge of the components of intercultural citizenship, suggesting a need for targeted professional development initiatives in this area.

Regarding the teaching strategies indicated by EFL teachers in the survey, role-playing and projects emerged as the most frequently mentioned methods, offering immersive experiences that enhance students' understanding of cultural diversity and global issues. These strategies not only develop intercultural communication skills but also foster creativity, critical thinking, and problem-solving abilities. Additionally, case studies and classroom discussions provide valuable opportunities for self-reflection, idea generation, and analysis of intercultural communication challenges. However, some teachers reported not using specific intercultural teaching strategies, indicating a potential gap in their teaching approach.

This study underscores the significance of intercultural citizenship education in contemporary language teaching contexts. As globalization continues to shape societies and increase cultural diversity, the ability to navigate intercultural interactions becomes

increasingly crucial. By equipping learners with the necessary skills, responsibilities, and personal qualities to engage effectively in diverse cultural contexts, language educators play a pivotal role in fostering global citizenship.

6. Funding

REFERENCES

Abazov, R. (2021). Redefining global citizenship education: a case study of Kazakhstan. *Bulletin of Al-Farabi Kazakh National University, 1* (75), 90-99.

Arinova, B. A. (2015). The national language as the cornerstone of national self-awareness. In M. B. Kasymbekov et al. (Eds.), *Mangelik El*. Almaty: Ulagat. https://nabrk.kz/ru/e-catalog?catalog=3&title_first_letter=%D0%94&topic=9&page=3

Baker W., Fang, F. (2019). *From English language learners to intercultural citizens: Chinese student sojourners' development of intercultural citizenship in ELT and EMI programmes.* British Council
https://eprints.soton.ac.uk/437519/1/j155_eltra_paper_from_english_language_learners_to_intercultural_citizens_a4_final_web.pdf

Budharugsa, W. (2011). A perception of Thai EFL teachers towards intercultural competence teaching: A study of secondary schools in Chiang Mai province (Master's thesis). Mahidol University, Thailand.

Basarir, F. (2017). Examining the Perceptions of English Instructors Regarding the Incorporation of Global Citizenship Education into ELT. *International Journal of Languages' Education and Teaching, 5* (4), 409-425.

Cheewasukthaworn, K., & Suwanarak, K. (2017). Exploring Thai EFL teachers' perceptions of how intercultural communicative competence is important for their students. *PASAA, 54,* 177-204.

Hosack, I. (2023). Addressing citizenship teaching objectives through English language classes in Japan's secondary schools: exploring teachers' perceptions. *Ritsumeikan Social Sciences Review, 58* (4), 1-18.
https://www.ritsumei.ac.jp/ss/sansharonshu/assets/file/58-4_3-01.pdf

Hvalby, L. (2022). Teachers' perceptions and practices of working with democracy, citizenship, and intercultural competence in the English subject (Master's thesis). Faculty of Arts and Education, University of Stavanger. https://hdl.handle.net/11250/3007278

Israelsson, A. (2016). Teachers' perception of the concept of intercultural competence in teaching English (Master's thesis). Stockholm University, Sweden. https://www.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:940669/FULLTEXT01.pdf

Jata, E. (2015). Perception of lecturer on intercultural competence and culture teaching time (Case Study). *European Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies, 3*(1), 197-201.

Kenzhebaeva, A.T., Sansyzbaeva, D.B., & Kasymova, G.K. (2022). Psychological and pedagogical conditions for the formation of intercultural competence of students. *Yasaui universitetinin habarshysy, 1*(123), 92–101.

Roux, R. (2019). Perspectives on Global Citizenship Education of Mexican University English Language Teachers. *Global Education in Practice: Teaching, Researching, and Citizenship, 7,*139-145. https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED596939.pdf

Young, T. J., & Sachdev, I. (2011). Intercultural communicative competence: Exploring English language teachers' beliefs and practices. *Language Awareness, 20*(2), 81-98.