

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides a comprehensive overview of the study, including the background of the study, research question, research objective, formulation of hypothesis, significance of the study, scope and limitations, and definition of key terms.

A. Background of the Study

Intercultural communication (IC) has significantly transformed the approach to foreign language teaching (FLT). Traditionally, to communicate in a foreign language was understood as having the capacity to use it correctly. This includes using appropriate vocabulary, grammar, and sentence structures in appropriate contexts.¹ This perspective often necessitated that learners emulate the “native speaker.” However, Byram’s conceptual model of IC challenges this notion, suggesting that learners should retain their cultural identities rather than replace them with those of the L1 speakers.² Instead, exploring both interlocutors’ cultures is encouraged, and effective communication is achieved when two parties negotiate meaning to attain their communicative goals.³

¹ Michael Canale and Merrill Swain, “Theoretical Bases of Communicative Approaches to Second Language Teaching and Testing,” *Applied Linguistics* 1, no. 1 (January 1, 1980): 20.

² Michael Byram, *Teaching and Assessing Intercultural Communicative Competence: Revisited*, 2nd ed. (Bristol: Multilingual Matters & Channel View Publications, 2021), 17-20.

³ *Ibid.*, 85-89.

Despite the importance of IC, the existing literature remains complex, with many conceptual models being overly intricate.⁴ Arguably, this complexity may hinder empirical research, particularly within classroom settings. For example, Sercu et al. argue that experiential learning provides intercultural experiences that traditional classroom settings cannot offer. Such experiences often include school trips and exchange programs, which may be inaccessible for students lacking the financial means. However, it is important to note that experiential learning can also be facilitated within students' home countries⁵ or through technological means, such as virtual reality.⁶ In light of the practical difficulties posed by experiential learning, the literature suggests a rising exploration of alternative pedagogical methods, such as dialogic approaches.⁷ This highlights the need for classroom-based approaches that remain accessible while still promoting meaningful intercultural engagement.

Texts are integral to the dialogues, as language in itself is not inherently neutral. Each utterance, whether spoken or written, is appropriated from how other people use it, with additional meanings shaped

⁴ Brian H. Spitzberg and Gabrielle Changnon, "Conceptualizing Intercultural Competence," in *The SAGE Handbook of Intercultural Competence*, ed. Darla K. Deardorff (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2009), 45.

⁵ Lies Sercu et al., *Foreign Language Teachers and Intercultural Competence: An International Investigation* (Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, 2005), 73, 110-11.

⁶ Muhammad Muddassir Asad et al., "Virtual Reality as Pedagogical Tool to Enhance Experiential Learning: A Systematic Literature Review," *Education Research International* 2021, no. 1 (November 16, 2021): 7061623, 2.

⁷ Einfalt, Alford, and Theobald, "Making Talk Work"; Forsman, "EFL Education"; Penz, "Cultural Awareness."

by the speaker's or author's intentions.⁸ This results in the emergence of "multiple voices" within a language, which exist across various sociocultural realities or imagined ones, as in the case of fictional texts.⁹ In intercultural communication literature, the significance of texts is recognized in facilitating intercultural teaching and learning.¹⁰ This view is supported by Byram, who emphasizes that "documents depicting another culture" are crucial for promoting criticality in teaching intercultural communication.¹¹ In such educational settings, students engage with the voices present in texts, collaborating with peers and instructors to explore, challenge, and construct meanings together.¹² This process exhibits the importance of learning through social interaction.¹³

However, problems arise when attention is given only to visible cultural products while the less visible aspects of culture, often referred to as "deep culture," are overlooked.¹⁴ What deep culture is can be understood as the underlying meanings, values, norms, and implicit assumptions that are shared by members of a cultural group.¹⁵ These shared understandings

⁸ Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, University of Texas Press Slavic Series No. 1 (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 293-94.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 271-72, 357-58.

¹⁰ Sissil Lea Heggernes, "A Critical Review of the Role of Texts in Fostering Intercultural Communicative Competence in the English Language Classroom," *Educational Research Review* 33 (June 2021): 100390, 10.

¹¹ Byram, *Teaching and Assessing*, 65.

¹² Robin Alexander, "Developing Dialogic Teaching: Genesis, Process, Trial," *Research Papers in Education* 33, no. 5 (June 17, 2018): 566.

¹³ Mary Gauvain, "Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory," in *Encyclopedia of Infant and Early Childhood Development*, ed. Janette B. Benson, 2nd ed. (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 2020), 446-47.

¹⁴ Eli Hinkel, "Culture and Pragmatics in Language Teaching and Learning," *Teaching English as a Second or Foreign Language* 4 (2014): 5-6.

¹⁵ Joseph Shaules, *Deep Culture: The Hidden Challenges of Global Living* (Bristol: Multilingual Matters & Channel View Publications, 2007), 11-12.

may not be apparent to those outside the cultural context, potentially leading to stereotypes and fostering antagonism towards other cultures.¹⁶ This limitation indicates that simply exposing learners to cultural information is insufficient. Students also need the ability to question assumptions, interpret multiple perspectives, and reflect on their own beliefs when engaging with cultural differences. In this context, the researcher asserts that critical thinking (CT) is essential, as it encourages individuals to suspend judgment until further inquiry is undertaken.

In this era of unprecedented ease of access to information, the importance of CT has become ever more obvious.¹⁷ In the EFL context, this skill is especially crucial for engaging with L1 speakers in academic environments, where qualities such as “explicit comment, intelligent criticism, and intellectual assertion” are typically valued.¹⁸ Furthermore, CT promotes openness and tolerance toward differing viewpoints, encouraging learners to engage constructively with the ideas of others.¹⁹ However, because CT itself remains an unobservable internal process, educators must rely on measurable student outputs to assess its development. Wilson argues that educational practices tend to emphasize writing as the primary manifestation of CT, while paying comparatively less attention to reading,

¹⁶ Shaules, *Deep Culture*, 65-69.

¹⁷ Diane F. Halpern, *Thought and Knowledge: An Introduction to Critical Thinking* (Psychology Press, 2013), 2.

¹⁸ Bruce W. Davidson, “Comments on Dwight Atkinson’s ‘A Critical Approach to Critical Thinking in TESOL’: A Case for Critical Thinking in the English Language Classroom,” *TESOL Quarterly* 32, no. 1 (1998): 121.

¹⁹ Yue Lin, “Infusion of Critical Thinking into L2 Classes: A Case Study in a Chinese High School” (PhD diss., Newcastle University, 2014).

despite its fundamental role in higher education.²⁰ This highlights the importance of critical reading (CR), which can be viewed as implementing critical thinking into the reading process.

According to Al Roomy, critical readers apply higher-order thinking skills when engaging with texts,²¹ while Kohzadi et al. reinforce this connection by asserting that CT can be effectively cultivated through critical reading of literary texts.²² In this sense, critical reading may be understood as an advanced form of comprehension that requires readers to identify significant information, distinguish facts from opinions, and evaluate the author's purpose, perspective, and underlying attitudes.²³ All things considered, these perspectives bring to attention critical reading as a practical and measurable means of developing critical thinking. By engaging learners in the analysis, evaluation, and interpretation of texts, critical reading helps translate internal cognitive processes into observable academic achievement. Accordingly, critical reading provides a practical context in which the cognitive dimensions of critical thinking can be examined through students' academic achievement. This characteristic

²⁰ Kate Wilson, "Critical Reading, Critical Thinking: Delicate Scaffolding in English for Academic Purposes (EAP)," *Thinking Skills and Creativity* 22 (2016): 257.

²¹ Muhammad A. Al Roomy, "Investigating the Effects of Critical Reading Skills on Students' Reading Comprehension," *Arab World English Journal (AWEJ)* 13 (2022).

²² Hamedreza Kohzadi, Fatemeh Azizmohammadi, and Fatemeh Samadi, "Is There a Relationship between Critical Thinking and Critical Reading of Literary Texts: A Case Study at Arak University (Iran)," *International Letters of Social and Humanistic Sciences* 33, no. 2014 (2014): 63–76.

²³ Richard Pirozzi, Gretchen Starks-Martin, and Julie Dziewisz, *Critical Reading, Critical Thinking: Focusing on Contemporary Issues*, 4th ed. (Harlow: Pearson Education Limited, 2014), 234.

makes it particularly suitable for investigating its potential relationship with intercultural communication.

Although this connection is often implied rather than explicitly discussed, a substantial body of research on IC notes cognitive skills that closely align with those associated with CT. Researchers have frequently identified abilities such as analysis, interpretation, and self-regulation, all of which correspond to Facione's model of CT.²⁴ Despite this conceptual overlap, relatively few studies have examined the relationships between IC and CT or between IC and CR. This imbalance suggests that, although the theoretical relationship between these constructs is widely acknowledged, empirical evidence supporting it remains limited. Consequently, whether students who demonstrate stronger intercultural communication also perform better in critical reading remains an open question.

Of the five studies reviewed, three focus on the IC-CT relationship; two provide primarily theoretical accounts of this connection,²⁵ and the third uses a descriptive quantitative design.²⁶ The first study addressing the IC-CR relationship is a quantitative meta-analysis evaluating the effectiveness

²⁴ Deardorff, "Identification and Assessment," 248-50; Facione, *Critical Thinking*; Matsumoto et al., "Development and Validation," 505; Ting-Toomey and Dorjee, *Communicating Across Cultures*, 388.

²⁵ Braslauskas, "Intercultural Stereotypes and the Role of Critical and Creative Thinking in Overcoming Them"; Namsaeng and Ambele, "Potentials of Intercultural Competence in Promoting Critical Thinking in Thai Tertiary Education."

²⁶ Djono, Hieronymus Purwanta, Musa Pelu, Herimanto, Sutiyah, and Hasan Ashari, "Cultivating Global Citizens: Cultural Awareness, Critical Thinking, and Intercultural Competence in High School Education," *Jurnal Kependidikan: Jurnal Hasil Penelitian dan Kajian Kepustakaan di Bidang Pendidikan, Pengajaran, dan Pembelajaran* 11, no. 3 (2025): 1143-1151.

of incorporating cultural elements into critical reading programs,²⁷ while the last study on IC-CR uses a mixed-method design that claims the effectiveness of gamification in fostering IC by comparing two reading comprehension tests for German FL learners.²⁸

Despite the valuable contributions of these studies, none has applied a correlational framework to assess the connection between the two variables. As a result, the extent to which students' achievement in intercultural communication is associated with their achievement in critical reading remains unclear. Addressing this issue is important since this would help determine whether the theoretical relationship proposed in the literature is reflected in actual student achievement. To fill this gap, this study will be conducted at Universitas Islam Negeri Sayyid Ali Rahmatullah Tulungagung. The study aims to examine the relationship between intercultural communication and critical reading skills among the Indonesian EFL undergraduate students at this university, as reflected in their achievement in two specific courses: Intercultural Communication and Critical Reading Comprehension.

²⁷ Arif Setiawan, Sarwiji Suwandi, and Muhammad Rohmadi, "The Effectiveness of Critical Reading Skills Teaching Programs Integrated with Local Culture: A Meta-Analysis Study," *Theory and Practice in Language Studies* 15, no. 6 (2025): 2047-2058.

²⁸ Nurming Saleh and Muhammad Akhir, "Gamification in Foreign Language Learning: A Pathway to Inter-Cultural Communication Understanding in Reading Comprehension," *Theory and Practice in Language Studies* 15, no. 11 (2025).

B. Research Question

Based on the background of the study and the identified research gap, this study seeks to examine the relationship between students' academic achievement in the Intercultural Communication and Critical Reading Comprehension courses. To achieve this objective, the following research question is proposed: "Is there a significant correlation between English Education students' academic achievement in Intercultural Communication and Critical Reading Comprehension courses at Universitas Islam Negeri Sayyid Ali Rahmatullah Tulungagung?"

C. Research Objective

Based on the research problem, the researcher formulated the following objective: "To determine whether a significant correlation exists between English Education students' academic achievement in Intercultural Communication and Critical Reading Comprehension courses at Universitas Islam Negeri Sayyid Ali Rahmatullah Tulungagung."

D. Formulation of Hypothesis

Before determining the result of the hypothesis, the researcher proposed interpretations based on the following procedures:

1. The Null Hypothesis (H_0)

There is no significant correlation between English Education students' academic achievement in Intercultural Communication

and Critical Reading Comprehension courses at Universitas Islam Negeri Sayyid Ali Rahmatullah Tulungagung.

2. The Alternative Hypothesis (H_a)

There is a significant correlation between English Education students' academic achievement in Intercultural Communication and Critical Reading Comprehension courses at Universitas Islam Negeri Sayyid Ali Rahmatullah Tulungagung.

E. Significance of the Study

With increasing awareness of global citizenship, intercultural communication has become a major element of both general education and foreign language learning. This shift has likewise affected English Language Teaching (ELT), creating a growing demand for educators with strong intercultural competence. By having such educators, higher education institutions can nurture students who are prepared to engage responsibly and effectively as global citizens. Despite its recognized importance, integrating intercultural learning into classroom practice remains challenging. One widely recommended approach is the use of authentic cultural materials. However, simply exposing students to these materials is not sufficient to foster intercultural competence. Students also need opportunities to think critically about the underlying cultural perspectives, values, and assumptions in what they encounter. Without this

critical engagement, there is a risk of reinforcing oversimplified views that could undermine effective communication.

Although the theoretical connection between intercultural communication and critical thinking is increasingly acknowledged, research on their relationship, particularly their classroom application through critical reading, remains limited. Moreover, to the best of the researcher's knowledge, no recent studies have looked into this relationship using a correlational research design. To address this gap, this study aims to investigate the correlation between the two constructs and to determine whether one influences the other. The research findings may offer insights for intercultural communication instruction in teacher education, potentially contributing to the preparation of English teachers with stronger intercultural competencies.

F. Scope and Limitations

The scope of this study includes examining the statistical relationship (correlation) between two courses among English Education students at Universitas Islam Negeri Sayyid Ali Rahmatullah Tulungagung. The study is limited to sixth-semester students from the 2023 cohort across all five classes. Students' academic achievement is measured exclusively using the final course grades in Intercultural Communication (third semester) and Critical Reading Comprehension (fifth semester). No other cohorts, institutions, or achievement measures are included.

The study analyzes the correlation between academic achievement in these two specific courses and does not seek to establish causation. Furthermore, the study is limited to using academic achievement (i.e., final grades) as an indicator of competence; it does not assess real-world performance. Consequently, final grades alone cannot fully capture the nuanced development of these competencies. They may reflect some aspects of intercultural competence or critical thinking, but they do not provide a complete picture, as they can also be influenced by factors such as participation, attendance, and other assignments.

Consequently, the findings are specific to this particular cohort: the five classes of sixth-semester students from the 2023 cohort in the English Education program. While using a census provides a robust representation of this specific group, the results may not be generalizable to students from a different cohort year, at other institutions, or across different educational contexts.

G. Definition of Key Terms

1. Intercultural Communication Achievement

Operationally, intercultural communication achievement is defined as the students' final grades obtained in the Intercultural Communication course. In this study, academic achievement refers to students' attainment in completing educational tasks, which can be represented

through scores or marks obtained in a particular subject or course.²⁹

Therefore, the students' grades in the Intercultural Communication course are used as an indicator of their achievement in the course and as an indicator of their intercultural communication competence.

2. Critical Reading Comprehension Achievement

Operationally, critical reading comprehension achievement is defined as the students' final grades obtained in the Critical Reading Comprehension course. Following the concept of academic achievement, these grades represent students' attainment in completing learning tasks related to critical reading comprehension. Thus, the students' grades in the Critical Reading Comprehension course are used as an indicator of their achievement in the course and as an indicator of their critical reading ability.

3. Critical Thinking

Conceptually, critical thinking is defined as the ability to analyze, evaluate, and make reasoned judgments based on available information. In this study, critical thinking is not directly measured as an independent variable; instead, it serves as the theoretical foundation underlying the interpretation of students' achievement in the Critical Reading Comprehension course as an indicator of critical thinking-related ability.

²⁹ Arunima Borah, "Impact of Teachers' Job Satisfaction in Academic Achievement of the Students in Higher Technical Institutions: A Study in the Kamrup District of Assam," *Clarion: International Multidisciplinary Journal* 8, no. 1 (2019).