International Journal of Literacy and Education

**E-ISSN:** 2789-1615
**P-ISSN:** 2789-1607
www.educationjournal.info
**Impact Factor: RJIF** 5.7
IJLE 2025; 5(2): 286-292
Received: 01-06-2025
Accepted: 05-07-2025

**Sukhen Chandra Sarker**
Department of English, Jagannath University, Dhaka, Bangladesh

**Farzana Noor Misty**
Daffodil International School, Dhaka, Bangladesh

**Dr. Ahmed Sharif Talukder**
Department of English, Pundra University of Science and Technology, Bogura, Bangladesh

**Correspondence Author;**
**Sukhen Chandra Sarker**
Department of English, Jagannath University, Dhaka, Bangladesh

# Cultural sensitivity in ELT for integrating sociolinguistic competence among students

**Sukhen Chandra Sarker, Farzana Noor Misty and Ahmed Sharif Talukder**

**DOI:** https://www.doi.org/10.22271/27891607.2025.v5.i2d.341

**Abstract**
This study examines the role of cultural sensitivity in English Language Teaching (ELT), particularly in enabling students to position themselves within the global context. Focusing on Bangladesh, it explores how cultural elements are integrated into ELT and their impact on learners' sociolinguistic competence, the ability to use language effectively across social and cultural settings. Drawing on survey responses from 200 undergraduates at two Dhaka universities, the study finds that despite cultural content being present, challenges remain: limited teacher training, overcrowded syllabi, and few opportunities for cultural engagement. While many students could handle cross-cultural conversations, idiomatic expressions, and cultural references were often misunderstood. The findings highlight the effectiveness of interactive strategies such as role-play and multimedia over passive learning for fostering cultural awareness. The research suggests that in-service teachers require stronger, holistic training, students need authentic cultural materials, and curricula should allow more space for culture. Ultimately, the study underscores the transformative potential of culture-specific pedagogy, offering practical strategies to equip students for more natural and effective communication in a globalized world.

**Keywords:** Cultural sensitivity, sociolinguistic competence, english language teaching (ELT), intercultural communication, teaching strategies

## Introduction
The scope of English Language Teaching (ELT) extends beyond language learning to connecting students with the world. Teachers use ELT to address pressing issues like violence and inequality, showing students that they have a voice. It fosters comprehension, inspires change, and builds mutual understanding through language (Ortega, 2024) [7]. English language teaching, or ELT, is the process of teaching English to those who do not speak it as their first language. Helping people comprehend various cultures, speak more confidently, and communicate effectively are the objectives. This is accomplished via a variety of techniques, frequently involving the use of technology, to enhance the learning experience and personalise it (Vaishnav, 2024) [12] In addition, the concept of Cultural sensitivity in English Language Teaching (ELT) emphasizes the significant nexus between language and culture. We're not teaching words and grammar; we're also teaching our students to make connections with other cultures. Educators: Classes need to include cultural elements to promote cross-cultural consciousness and improve global communication. But being culturally rich has its difficulties, with the stigma that students encounter and the ongoing chains of stereotypes that inhibit them from grasping these links to extreme extents. Teachers can address this by providing an array of resources and fostering a classroom environment that supports all cultural perspectives. That way, learners can get a better and broader education experience (Hossain, 2024) [4]. Moreover, cultural sensitivity in English teaching extends beyond language to how individuals use language appropriately and its social-cultural function. It's more about discipline, where students learn to adapt their language to the context and maintain a formal tone in meetings and social gatherings with friends. When educators focus on this, students will not only become fluent, but also be able to communicate effectively in several different real-world contexts, making them more confident and adaptable globally (Dorgham, 2024) [3]. Cultural sensitivity is significantly influenced by incorporating sociolinguistic competency into English Language Teaching (ELT).

This is because learning a second language involves more than just learning grammar or vocabulary; it also comes down to the social and cultural contexts that influence how language takes form. To do so, learners need to learn how to compensate for the use of language with social norms. It is more than just knowledge from a book, but understanding the customs, values, and practices of the culture that speaks the language. In the end, practicing competency in this way enables learners to connect better and have more impactful discussions. (Jiang *et al*., 2022) [5]. It is vital to have cultural sensitivity in English Language Teaching (ELT) because the concept will help students with a less extreme frame of reference better connect with their surroundings in Bangladesh. In accepting varied cultural points of view, we allow students to experience a more comprehensive approach toward global communication. Textbooks have unwittingly been sources of misleading and stereotypical ideas, particularly depicting women and non-Western cultures without cultural sensitivity. This provides students with a skill set that may hinder their ability to engage in meaningful cross-cultural dialogue and may at times give them hyper-exotic ideas of the world, which skew towards Western perspectives. When we are mindful of cultural diversity, this will come naturally to students and help them enhance their global approach (Mostafa & Jahan, 2024) [6]. There are several reasons for the importance of ELT in Bangladesh. For starters, it enables students to establish international communication as they can hook up with individuals globally. English is also the most popular language for higher education and research, which makes ELT crucial for holding educational opportunities on offer. Proficiency in English is also essential for career development, as many industries and multinational companies now require good English from their staff. ELT can help in that area by preparing students to take advantage of the openings and succeed in this globalized world. (Rahman *et al*., 2019) [8]. Therefore, this study aims to explore the role of cultural sensitivity in English Language Teaching (ELT) in Bangladesh, focusing on its impact on sociolinguistic competence and global communication. It addresses challenges such as stereotypes and limited cultural resources in the classroom.

## Literature Review

In Bangladesh, several studies on cultural sensitivity in ELT have been conducted to incorporate sociolinguistic competence among the students. On the contrary, Rouf (2022) [9] argued that with innovative practices in new trends in English Language Teaching (ELT), it would be most helpful for Bangladesh to move from conventional practice to flexible practice based on the needs of the context. This method highlights the application of digital technology to deepen and broaden student emancipation. ELT emphasizes that students must be interculturally communicative, globally anchored, and locally relevant, while also learning from the criticisms of pedagogy.

Bipasha and Islam (2025) [1] explored the Influence of Socio-Economic factors, cultural matters, and linguistic aspects on ELL in Bangladesh. It shows that wealthier, urban students do better due to more resources and support at home, but a lack of opportunity hinders rural students. It is also related to parental education, as more children of educated parents speak better English. Among the many hurdles, another includes a lack of exposure to English at home; students use either Bengali or local dialects otherwise. Many students perform well in English through Private tuition. Trisha *et al*. (2025) [11] emphasized the inclusion of local culture and multilingualism with English Language Teaching (ELT) in Bangladesh. This finding suggests that integrating folklore and traditions into instruction stimulates student participation and aids in sustaining cultural heritage. The study proposed that if a multilingual ELT curriculum that has adopted students native language resources can be supported, students' cognitive flexibility and second language abilities will improve. It also promotes the use of digital tools to make learning more interactive and available to every student. A study by Mostafa and Jahan (2024) [6] criticized the English for Today series by focusing on its Western bias and restricted cultural viewpoints.

Focusing on the development of sociolinguistic and multicultural competence in students, it offers a new holistic framework for becoming an appositive agent: Intercultural Communicator Competence (ICC). The Framework follows a four-step approach that involves teachers leading cultural discussions and students completing communicative real-world language tasks: Pre-text, Text, Image, Post-text. It is the first of its kind in the world as far as Bangladesh goes, and even though this model remains untested, it is designed to cultivate empathy, tolerance, and global competence. A study by Sikder (2024) [10] revealed that 80% of Bangladeshi students viewed English positively, considering it a key to future opportunities. Around 15% remained neutral, while only 5% had negative perceptions. Most students rated their English proficiency as moderate, though about 30% considered themselves highly proficient. English was widely regarded as essential for higher education (90%) and career opportunities (85%). Students with high proficiency often expressed aspirations to study abroad and pursue international careers. Overall, the findings pointed to the importance of developing policies that encouraged English language learning while also valuing and preserving local languages and cultural identity.

While past studies have shown the importance of culture in English teaching, they often overlook its practical application in real classrooms. Many focus on big-picture issues like access or theory, but don't explore how students learn to use English in different social and cultural situations. Teachers' struggles with limited resources and stereotypes are also rarely discussed. This study examines the everyday classroom experience, exploring how incorporating cultural awareness into lessons enables students to communicate more naturally and confidently. It aims to find practical ways for teachers to make ELT more inclusive, relatable, and effective in helping students connect with the world around them.

## Research Questions

Based on the background, the research questions are stated below:

- To what extent is cultural sensitivity currently incorporated into English Language Teaching (ELT) practices to enhance students' sociolinguistic competence?
- How can ELT strategies be designed or adapted to promote cultural awareness and sociolinguistic competence among language learners effectively?

**Objectives**

This study focuses on the following specific goals:

1. To assess the degree to which cultural components are currently included in ELT teaching methods and resources.
2. To determine the difficulties that language instructors encounter when attempting to integrate cultural awareness into their instruction.
3. To assess how culturally sensitive teaching methods affect students' sociolinguistic proficiency.
4. To suggest efficient ELT techniques and exercises that might improve students' capacity to utilize English correctly in a variety of social and cultural situations

**Theoretical Framework**

Michael Byram's (1997) [2] Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) Theory serves as the foundation for this investigation. According to the thesis, learning a language involves more than just expanding one's vocabulary or grammar; it also entails learning how to interact politely and successfully with individuals from various cultural backgrounds.

ICC aims to develop students to become considerate, culturally aware people in addition to competent speakers. It promotes open-mindedness, curiosity about alternative lifestyles, and the ability to comprehend various points of view in kids. Byram asserts that effective communication calls for more than just words; it also calls for social awareness and cultural knowledge.

- The theory highlights five main areas:
- Being open and curious about other cultures.
- Understanding how different groups live and communicate.
- Explaining cultural differences clearly and respectfully.
- Knowing how to interact in a range of social situations.
- Thinking critically about one's own culture and others.

This aligns nicely with the study's goal, which examines how teaching English with cultural sensitivity can help Bangladeshi students become more sociolinguistically competent, that is, use English more effortlessly and appropriately in everyday contexts. This study examines how educators might design more engaging and inclusive classrooms that support students' development as global citizens as well as language users by using ICC as a guide.

**Methodology**

This study follows a quantitative approach to understand how cultural sensitivity in English Language Teaching (ELT) helps students develop sociolinguistic competence, the ability to use English appropriately in real-life social and cultural situations. The main goal is to explore how well cultural elements are being integrated into English classes and how that affects students' confidence and communication skills. To gather data, a structured survey questionnaire was developed. The questions were designed to reflect the core ideas of Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC), such as openness to other cultures, understanding social norms, and using language in context. The survey included statements where students shared how much they agreed or disagreed using a 5-point Likert scale, from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree." A total of 200 students from two universities in Dhaka city participated in the survey. Because university students are typically more proficient in English, they are more likely to have encountered cross-cultural scenarios (online, in class, etc.) They can meaningfully reflect on sociolinguistic use, cultural norms, and contextual communication. They were selected through a random sampling technique to make sure a wide range of perspectives were included. On average, the survey took about 10 to 15 minutes to complete. Once the surveys were collected, the data were analyzed using SPSS version 25. The results were summarized through frequencies and percentages (for background information like age, gender, and education level) and mean, median, and standard deviation (to understand patterns in how students responded to the questions. Before taking part, all students were clearly informed about the purpose of the study, and their participation was entirely voluntary. Their identities were kept confidential, and their answers were anonymous. Informed consent was obtained, and the study followed all standard ethical guidelines for research involving human participants

**Results and Discussions**

This section presents the findings of the study, analyzing both demographic characteristics of the participants and their perspectives on cultural sensitivity in English Language Teaching (ELT). The results are interpreted in line with the research objectives to understand the current situation, challenges, impacts, and possible strategies for improvement.

**Demographic Information**

Before analyzing perceptions and practices, it is essential to understand the demographic profile of the participants. The sample consisted of 200 undergraduate students equally drawn from two universities in Dhaka.

**Table 1:** Demographic Information

| University | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| University A | 100 | 50% |
| University B | 100 | 50% |
| **Gender** | | |
| Male | 102 | 52% |
| Female | 96 | 48% |
| **Age** | | |
| 19-22 | 135 | 67.5% |
| 23-24 | 65 | 32.5% |
| **Education (Undergraduate)** | | |
| (1st year) | 46 | 23% |
| 2nd year | 54 | 27% |
| 3rd year | 41 | 20.5% |
| 4th year | 59 | 29.55 |

Table 1 shows this study involved 200 undergraduate students from two universities in Dhaka, with an equal split of 100 from University A and 100 from University B. The gender balance was nearly even, with 52% male and 48% female participants, ensuring perspectives from both sides were well represented. Most students (67.5%) were between 19 and 22 years old, typically in the early years of their degree, while the rest (32.5%) were 23-24 years old, reflecting the views of more senior students. All were enrolled in undergraduate programs, spread across all four years of study: 23% in 1st year, 27% in 2nd year, 20.5% in 3rd year, and 29.5% in 4th year. This mix of universities, ages, and academic stages provides a well-rounded picture

of how cultural sensitivity in ELT is experienced by students at different points in their learning journey.

**Current extent of cultural elements**

Figure 1 examines the degree to which cultural aspects are integrated into current ELT practices. It provides insight into how well classroom activities, materials, and teacher approaches incorporate cultural sensitivity.

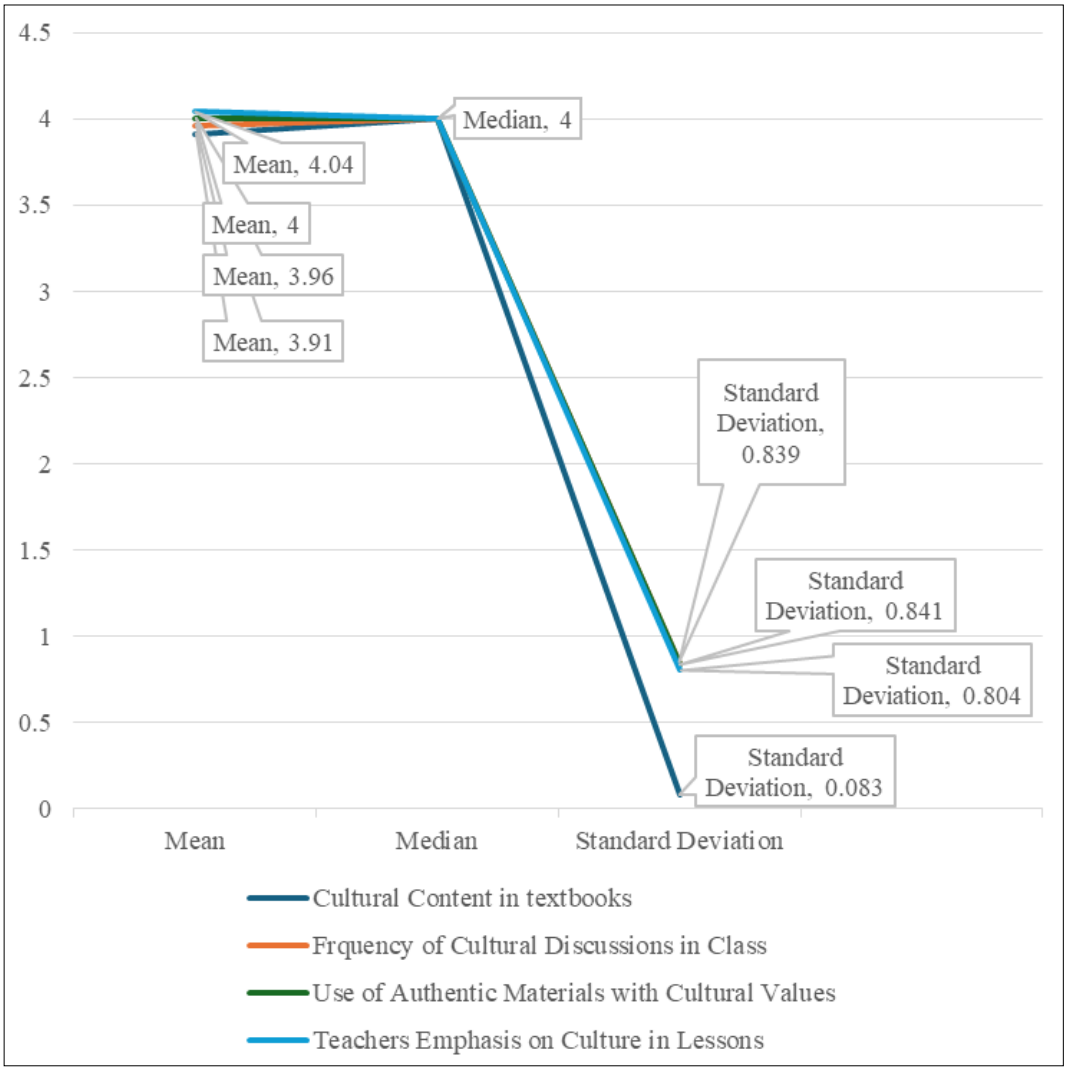


**Fig 1:** Current Extent of Cultural Elements

Figure 1 shows that all four aspects of cultural integration in teaching cultural content in textbooks, frequency of cultural discussions in class, use of authentic materials with cultural values, and teachers' emphasis on culture in lessons are rated quite similarly. The average score across these areas sits at 4.04, with a median of 4, suggesting that respondents generally agree these elements are essential in the classroom. Variation in responses is also relatively small, with standard deviations ranging from 0.803 to 0.839, meaning most participants rated them close to the same level. In simple terms, this means teachers and learners see consistent value in incorporating cultural elements into lessons, whether through textbooks, classroom discussions, authentic materials, or teacher-led emphasis, with no single approach standing out dramatically above the others.

**Challenges Faced by Language Teacher**

Figure 2 identifies the major obstacles educators encounter when incorporating cultural sensitivity into their teaching. Understanding these challenges is essential for developing realistic improvement strategies.

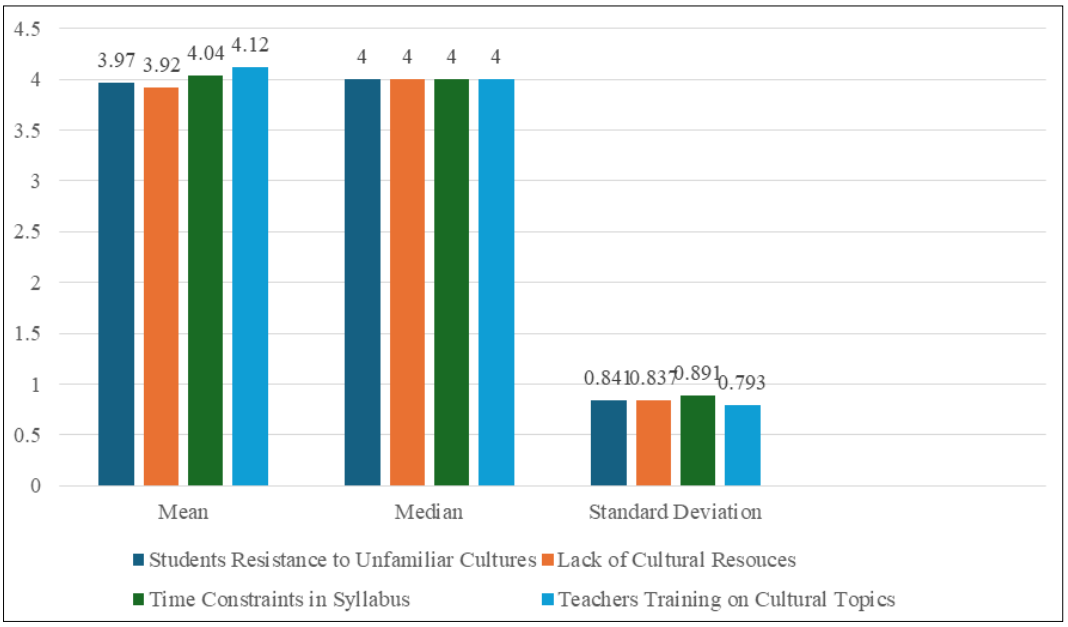


**Fig 2:** Challenges faced by Language Teacher

The findings in Figure 2 show that teachers and students alike recognize several key barriers to bringing more cultural content into education, and they see them all as necessary. At the top of the list is the need for better teacher training on cultural topics, earning the highest average score of 4.12 and showing the strongest agreement among respondents. Close behind is the issue of time constraints in the syllabus (4.04), though opinions here are a bit more varied, hinting that while many see it as a challenge, others may feel it's less of a hurdle. Students' resistance to unfamiliar cultures (3.97) and the lack of cultural resources (3.92) round out the list, both still seen as meaningful obstacles. Interestingly, the median score for every challenge is 4, suggesting that, across the board, people generally agree these are real issues that need attention, even if they differ slightly on which ones are the most urgent.

**Impact of Culturally Sensitive Teaching Approaches**

Figure 3 evaluates how integrating cultural awareness influences students' sociolinguistic competence and overall language learning experience.

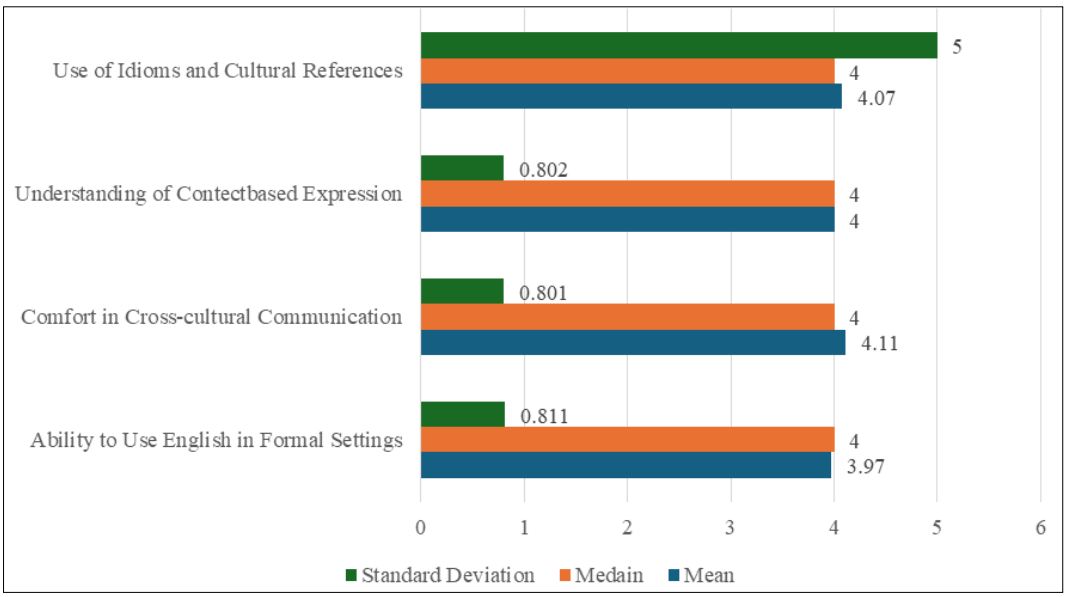


**Fig 3:** Impact of Culturally Sensitive Teaching Approaches

The results from Figure 4 illustrate that people in this group feel confident using English in a variety of situations, but with some interesting differences in the numbers. Comfort in cross-cultural communication scored the highest, with an average of 4.11, a median of 4, and a minimal spread of scores (standard deviation 0.801), showing that most people rated themselves similarly. Understanding expressions based on context followed closely, with both the average and median at 4.00 and a standard deviation of 0.802, again pointing to strong agreement. Using English in formal settings came in slightly lower, with an average of 3.97, a median of 4, and a standard deviation of 0.811, suggesting a similar level of skill but with a touch more variation. The most noticeable gap appeared in the use of idioms and cultural references, which had a solid average score of 4.07 and a median of 4, but an unusually high reported standard

deviation of 5.00, far above what is typical for a 1-5 scale, indicating either very mixed experiences or a possible data error. Overall, the group shows strong and consistent English skills, with idiomatic and cultural language being the one area where confidence varies most.

**Effective ELT Strategies and Activities**

Figure 4 outlines specific strategies and activities that could strengthen cultural sensitivity in ELT, offering a practical framework for educators.

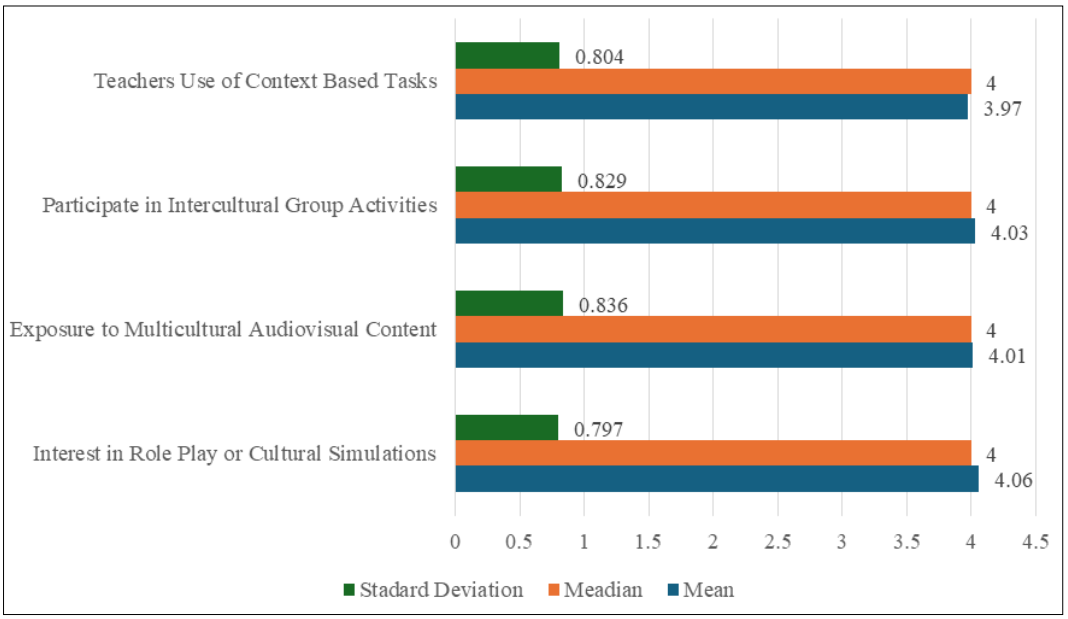


**Fig 4:** ELT Strategies and Activities

Figure 4 specifies how participants perceive four different activities that help build intercultural competence in education, focusing on their average ratings, consistency, and agreement levels. Overall, the results are strongly positive, with all activities receiving a median score of 4 and mean values ranging narrowly between 3.97 and 4.06. This suggests that respondents generally agree that these practices are both present and valuable in their learning environment. "Interest in Role Play or Cultural Simulations" stands out slightly, with the highest mean score (4.06) and the lowest variation (SD = 0.797), meaning most participants not only enjoy these activities but also share similar opinions about them. "Participation in Intercultural Group Activities" (mean = 4.03, SD = 0.829) and "Exposure to Multicultural Audiovisual Content" (mean = 4.01, SD = 0.836) also received very high and consistent ratings, showing their importance in fostering cultural understanding. Even "Teachers' Use of Context-Based Tasks," with the lowest mean (3.97), still reflects strong approval. Together, these findings highlight a shared belief in the value of interactive, rich, culturally rich learning experiences.

**Findings**

This study explored how cultural sensitivity is integrated into English Language Teaching (ELT) in Bangladesh, particularly about students' sociolinguistic competence. The findings reflect student perspectives on current practices, challenges, and practical strategies for fostering intercultural communication in ELT classrooms. The insights offer useful implications for teachers and curriculum developers.

1. The study included 200 undergraduate students from two universities in Dhaka, with a balanced gender distribution (52% male, 48% female) and a majority aged between 19 and 22 years. This diverse sample across academic years provided a well-rounded understanding of students' experiences with cultural sensitivity in English Language Teaching (ELT).
2. Students generally felt that their classes included a good amount of cultural content. Whether through textbooks, class discussions, real-life materials, or teacher explanations, they noticed a consistent effort to connect language learning with cultural understanding, showing that teachers are making space for these critical conversations.
3. However, students also identified some real challenges. Additionally, many perceived teachers as needing additional training in the area of culture, as the heavy curriculum does not allow room to address a more thorough understanding of cultural knowledge. CHALLENGES: Ongoing challenges include a lack of teaching materials and some teachers feeling uncomfortable with other cultures.
4. Most students were confident in using English for real-life purposes à going beyond communication with other cultures and understanding language as an entity that works differently in each environment. However, a few speakers acknowledged that they occasionally have to stop and think more when it comes to idioms and culture, prompting a greater need for support.
5. Students also like more interactive methods of learning. This interactivity made tasks like roleplaying, group activities, and watching multicultural videos bring the lesson plans to life. They developed ways to not only learn English but also to use English more naturally and confidently in various social situations.

**Recommendations**

There are several valuable strategies to improve the effectiveness and cultural sensitivity of English language instruction, according to the study's findings. Here are some recommendations to enhance the educational experience and

communication abilities of pupils.

1. Offer more targeted professional development to guide teachers on how to weave cultural content into lessons in a productive way. That way, a more profound cultural understanding would be achieved in the ELT classrooms.
2. Facilitate more authentic materials and local references in teaching. It will enliven learning and allow students to develop a better cultural appreciation.
3. Revise the syllabus to foster more diverse cultural conversations and engagements. By teaching in this way, students will become more sociolinguistically proficient, enabling them to engage in cultural communication and respond promptly.
4. On role-playing, group activities, and multimedia content in classrooms. These strategies help students become active in learning and use the language in authentic conditions.
5. Develop students' language idiom, cultural references, and native way of expression. It would also enhance their fluency and confidence in different modes of communication.

## Limitations

The study sample was small, and it is worth noting that there are several limitations. Methodology: Two universities in Dhaka, the capital of Bangladesh, are purposely selected to conduct this study, which might not represent all students from other regions of Bangladesh or entirely differ from different educational settings. While fairly extensive, the 200-student sample is also confined to university students who start from a high level of proficiency in the English language. This means the findings may not generalize to students in other educational settings. The survey data is also based on self-reports by students, which can involve bias if participants answer according to socially desirable responses or misunderstand the questions. This study was also conducted using a quantitative framework, and, while valuable for pinpointing trends overall, the complexity of how cultural sensitivity functions in the everyday classroom is reduced. Last but not least, this study provides four suggestions for enhancing cultural sensitivity in ELT. Still, it doesn't test them out and prove the effectiveness of these strategies when they are being put into use in real-life teaching.

## Conclusions

The study stresses the necessity of cultural respect in English Language Teaching (ELT) in Bangladesh, and to enable them to use the language if it comes for real. These results indicate that cultural elements are infused within contemporary teaching contexts, while students generally appreciate teacher-generated cultural talks and materials. Yet several challenges still exist, like the lack of cultural awareness and better training for teachers, hindrance in syllabus delivery, scarcity of cultural resources, etc. Even with these barriers, students are confident in their cross-cultural communication abilities and would like to improve their understanding of historical figures, idiomatic expressions, and cultural references from textbooks. The study also found that students develop cultural sensitivity and apply language with more effectiveness if they are involved in engaging activities such as role-plays, group work, etc. The study therefore recommends more teacher training, authentic materials, syllabus change, and accurate idiomatic use based on these findings. Follow-up research is needed to investigate these strategies in an actual classroom environment.

## References


1. Bipasha SR, Islam MN. Social class, language, and academic achievement: Understanding English performance in the context of Bangladesh's stratification. Journal of English Language Studies. 2025;10(1):39-63.
2. Byram M. Teaching and assessing intercultural communicative competence. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters; 1997.
3. Dorgham R. Implementation of the sociolinguistic competence strategies in teaching and learning English as a foreign language. Journal of Language Teaching and Research. 2024;15(4):1189-1199. https://doi.org/10.17507/jltr.1504.16
4. Hossain KI. Reviewing the role of culture in English language learning: Challenges and opportunities for educators. Social Sciences & Humanities Open. 2024;9:100781. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssaho.2023.100781
5. Jiang B, Liu L, Guo Z, Wang Y. A study of intercultural communicative competence in ELT. Advances in Journalism and Communication. 2022;10(3):297-306. https://doi.org/10.4236/ajc.2022.103018
6. Mostafa M, Jahan R. Cultural disparate English textbooks: An analysis of Bangladesh ELT. 2024. https://doi.org/10.5281/ZENODO.12604371
7. Ortega Y. 'Un futuro mejor para todos': Towards a critical humanizing English language teaching. Language Teaching Research. 2024. https://doi.org/10.1177/13621688241262618
8. Rahman MM, Islam MS, Karim A, Chowdhury TA, Rahman MM, Seraj PMI, Singh MKM. English language teaching in Bangladesh today: Issues, outcomes and implications. Language Testing in Asia. 2019;9(1):9. https://doi.org/10.1186/s40468-019-0085-8
9. Rouf MA. Emerging trends in global ELT: Implications for ELT in Bangladesh. BELTA Journal. 2022;6(1). https://doi.org/10.36832/beltaj.2022.0601.02
10. Sikder MP. Exploring Bangladeshi students' perspectives on English as a global language. ESP International Journal of English Literature and Linguistics Research. 2024;2(1):28-36. https://doi.org/10.56472/25842773/IJELLR-V2I1P105
11. Trisha BJ, Ghosh R, Das S. Integrating local culture and multilingualism in English language teaching in Bangladesh: Bridging global standards and local practices. Studies in Educational Management. 2025;17:44-61. https://doi.org/10.32038/sem.2025.17.03
12. Vaishnav PB. Current trends and future prospects in English language teaching (ELT). Asian Journal of Education and Social Studies. 2024;50(7):1-10. https://doi.org/10.9734/ajess/2024/v50i71438