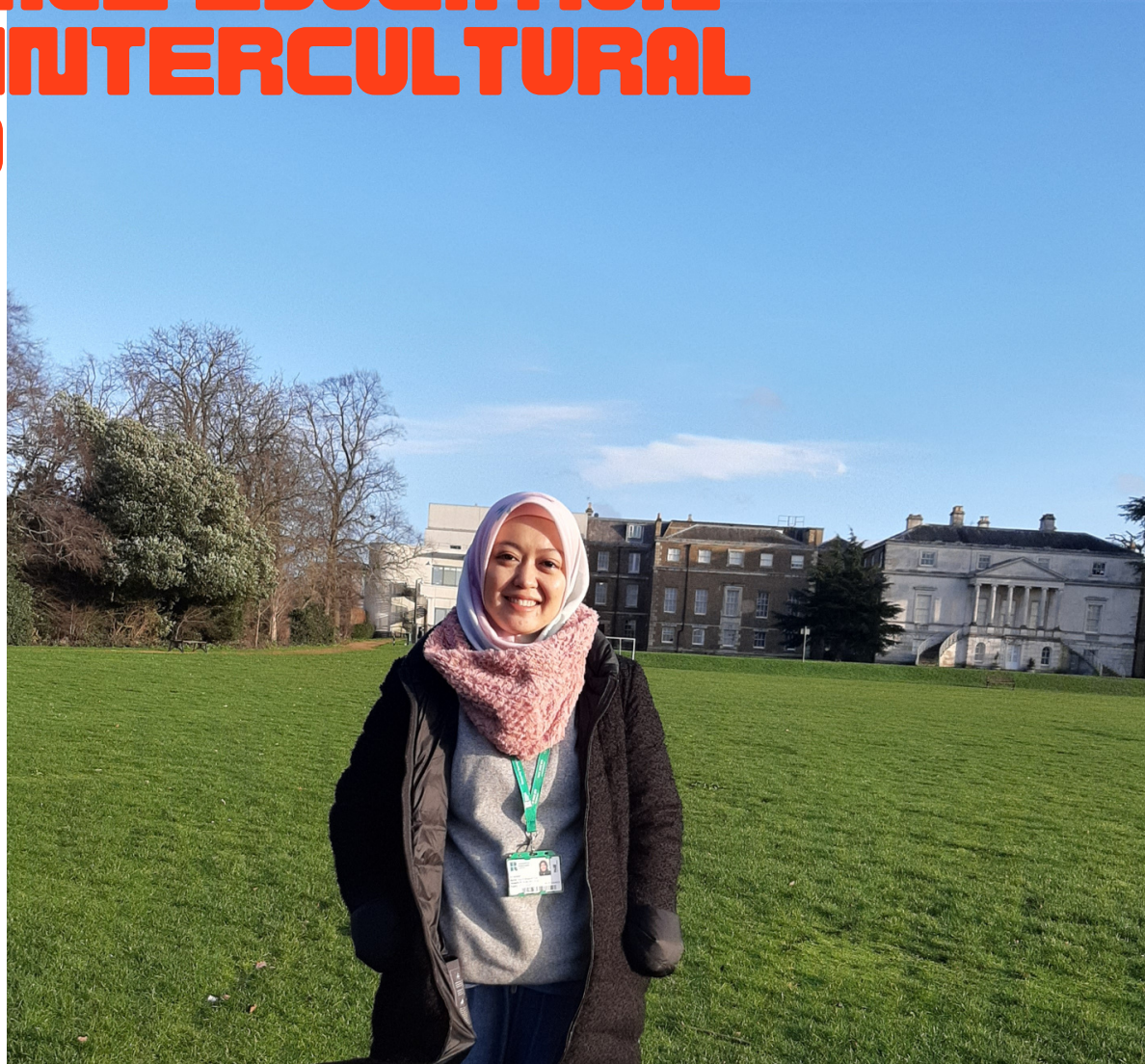


FLUENT, YET FOREIGN: RETHINKING ENGLISH LANGUAGE EDUCATION IN AN INTERCULTURAL WORLD



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RETHINKING ENGLISH LEARNING: BEYOND GRAMMAR ACCURACY

For a long time, English learning has been treated as something that is mainly about being correct. Students are trained to focus on grammar rules, memorize vocabulary, and perfect pronunciation. Success is often measured by how accurate a sentence is, rather than how meaningful a message can be delivered.

This way of learning has produced generations of students who can form correct sentences but still struggle when they must use English in real communication. Especially in real-life situations where meaning is not only about words, but also about context, intention, and cultural understanding.

THE PROBLEM: WHEN ENGLISH CLASS BECOMES TOO TECHNICAL

The problem is that language is not just a system of rules. Language is something alive; it is used between people, in real situations, across different cultures and ways of thinking.

Because of that, knowing English should not stop at being grammatically correct. It should go further into understanding how meaning changes depending on who you are talking to, where you are speaking, and what cultural background is involved.

This is why English education needs a shift. Not away from grammar entirely, but away from making grammar the center of everything.

The Problem: When English Class Becomes Too Technical

In many classrooms, English is still taught in a very technical way. Lessons often revolve around sentence structures, word lists, and pronunciation drills. Culture may appear, but only as small additions, like learning about holidays or food in English-speaking countries.

The issue is that this kind of learning does not fully prepare students for real communication. In real life, misunderstandings are rarely caused by bad grammar. They are more often caused by differences in meaning, tone, expectation, and cultural habits.

So even when students are “good at English” in class, they may still feel lost in real conversations with people from different backgrounds. They know the language, but not how it lives in different cultural contexts. This creates a strange situation: students become fluent in structure, but not fluent in understanding people.

A NEW DIRECTION: INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE

English education needs a clearer direction that goes beyond technical mastery. One important direction is Intercultural Communicative Competence, or ICC. At its core, ICC is not just about speaking English correctly. It is about using English in a way that is sensitive, thoughtful, and appropriate in different cultural situations.

It means being able to:

- understand that people from different cultures may interpret the same message differently
- adjust communication style depending on the situation
- listen and respond with awareness of cultural context
- avoid misunderstanding caused by assumptions

In other words, ICC is about becoming a communicator, not just a language user. With this approach, English is no longer seen as a set of rules to memorize. It becomes a bridge between people.

Technology, Culture, and Real Communication



Today, technology has made it easier than ever to connect with people around the world. Students can talk to someone from another country in seconds. They can also practice English through digital tools and AI-based platforms.

But having access to technology does not automatically create good communication. Without cultural awareness, digital interaction can still lead to misunderstanding or shallow communication.

That is why technology should not be seen as the goal of learning. It should be seen as a tool that helps students practice real communication in a safe and flexible way. What matters is not how advanced the tool is, but how it helps learners understand people better.

Literature, Stories, and Understanding People

One powerful but often overlooked way to learn English is through stories; novels, short stories, and texts that come from different cultures.

Stories allow learners to step into other people's lives. They are not just learning words, but also learning how people think, feel, and see the world differently. This kind of learning helps students understand beyond understanding. It helps them build empathy and imagine perspectives that are different from their own. In this sense, reading is not just about comprehension. It is about expanding how we see the world.

Teachers play a very important role in shaping how English is learned.

THE ROLE OF TEACHERS: MORE THAN GRAMMAR INSTRUCTORS

Teachers play a very important role in shaping how English is learned. If teachers focus only on grammar and accuracy, students will likely do the same. But if teachers see English as a tool for communication between cultures, then the classroom changes completely. It becomes a place where students not only learn how to speak, but also how to understand.

In this approach, teachers are not just language instructors. They become guides who help students navigate meaning, culture, and communication. This requires a shift in mindset. Teaching English is not only about correcting mistakes. It is about helping students understand people.

English in a Global World: No Single “Correct” Way
English today is used by people all over the world, not just native speakers. Because of that, there is no single “perfect” version of English that everyone must follow. Different cultures use English in different ways, and all of them are valid as long as communication works. This means the goal of learning English should not be to sound like a native speaker. The goal should be to communicate clearly, respectfully, and effectively across cultural differences. In a global world, flexibility is more important than imitation.

Closing Reflection

English education needs to move beyond its heavy focus on grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation. These elements are important, but they are not enough on their own. What learners truly need is the ability to communicate across cultures with awareness and sensitivity. Intercultural Communicative Competence offers this direction. It shifts the focus from simply producing correct language to understanding people behind the language. Because in the end, being fluent in English is not enough if we still feel foreign in real communication. What matters most is not just speaking English correctly but using it to connect with others in a meaningful and respectful way.

