

# **INTERACTIVE FOLKLORE-BASED LEARNING TECHNOLOGIES TO FOSTER INTERCULTURAL DIALOGUE IN ENGLISH LESSONS**

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## **Abstract:**

This paper explores how interactive technologies digital storytelling, gamified heritage apps, and COIL-like digital exchanges can leverage English folklore to stimulate intercultural dialogue and develop intercultural communicative competence among preschool teacher trainees. Drawing on theoretical models of ICC and empirical work on folklore in ELT, digital storytelling in early childhood, gamification for heritage learning, and COIL-based intercultural projects, the paper proposes a technology-mediated pedagogical approach and reports qualitative outcomes from pilot implementations reported in the literature. The evidence shows increased cultural interest, reflective capacity, and readiness to include diverse cultural perspectives in early childhood practice when folklore is used via interactive technologies.

**Keywords:** Interactive folklore, intercultural dialogue, preschool teacher education, digital storytelling, gamification, intercultural communicative competence, COIL, English language teaching

## **Introduction**

In today's increasingly interconnected world, language education must move beyond mechanical mastery of vocabulary and grammar to embrace intercultural communicative competence (ICC) - the ability to engage respectfully and effectively with people from different cultural backgrounds. As Michael Byram reminds us, "foreign and second language teaching should prepare learners not only to use a language with fluency and accuracy, but also to speak with people who have different cultural identities, social values and behaviours. [1]. His work frames ICC as a set of knowledges and capacities that teachers must cultivate: linguistic skills, attitudes of openness and curiosity, interpretive and relational skills, and critical cultural awareness. In the context of early childhood and preschool teacher education, this shift is especially timely: teachers not only must model language competence, but also inter-cultural sensitivity and mediation for young learners.

At the same time, folklore narrative forms such as fairy tales, nursery rhymes, legends, proverbs and folk songs present a rich and under-utilised resource in language education.

Folklore encapsulates culture, values, worldview, and social norms in compact, narrative formats, making it ideal for bridging language and culture in meaningful, age-appropriate ways. As studies of young learners show, folktales function as a valuable rich cultural and linguistic resource to teach a foreign language to young learners [5]. When preschool teacher trainees engage with such materials, they not only practice English but also learn to scaffold cultural learning and to mediate intercultural understanding for children. In this sense, folklore becomes not simply content to learn from, but a tool teachers can use in designing culturally responsive language experiences.

Meanwhile, technological innovations have transformed the affordances for teaching and learning. Digital storytelling platforms, gamified heritage apps, and online intercultural exchanges now offer dynamic, interactive spaces in which culture and language intersect. For instance, in their landmark study, William Ian O’Byrne and colleagues documented how early childhood students constructing digital stories developed stronger communicative voice, collaboration, and technology-mediated narrative competence [6]. In the teacher education field, such interactive technologies create fertile opportunities for embedding folklore in English lessons in ways that foster dialogue across cultures rather than passive consumption of cultural artefacts.

The convergence of these three strands ICC pedagogy, folklore as cultural-linguistic resource, and interactive technologies suggests a compelling direction for preschool teacher education. Yet, despite this potential, relatively few studies systematically integrate all three. Many language teaching programmes either focus on folklore as static content, or introduce technology without a clear intercultural mediation framework, or address ICC without embedded cultural storytelling. This leaves a gap: how to design, implement, and assess interactive folklore-based learning technologies in English lessons specifically to foster intercultural dialogue and develop ICC among preschool teacher trainees.

#### Literature Review and Methods

In the past two decades, intercultural communicative competence (ICC) has become a central concern in English language education, as globalization and digitalization have profoundly reshaped how learners interact across cultures. According to Michael Byram in *Teaching and Assessing Intercultural Communicative Competence: Revisited*, language teaching should not merely aim at linguistic proficiency, but at forming “intercultural speakers” who can interpret, relate, and mediate meaning between cultural worlds. ICC through five dimensions of understanding: attitudes, knowledge, skills of interpreting and relating, skills of discovery and interaction, and critical cultural awareness. These capacities make communication meaningful beyond grammar and vocabulary, as learners learn to evaluate cultural practices including their own through the lens of empathy and ethical reflection [1].

Recent studies have expanded Byram’s framework in light of new communicative realities shaped by digital technology and online collaboration. Hild Elisabeth Hoff, in *The Evolution of Intercultural Communicative Competence*, notes that twenty-first-century classrooms require an “updated ICC” that integrates multimodal literacy, virtual exchange, and critical engagement with global diversity. Hoff’s argument underscores that intercultural learning now

occurs through interactive and technological mediation, not only face-to-face dialogue [3]. Therefore, teacher education programs especially in preschool education—must prepare teachers to design and facilitate intercultural dialogue using digital tools and culturally embedded materials.

Within this evolving framework, folklore represents an invaluable yet underused pedagogical medium. Folklore includes folktales, legends, nursery rhymes, proverbs, and songs that transmit a community's worldview, values, and moral codes through narrative. Pham Thi Hong Nhung, in *Folktales as a Valuable Rich Cultural and Linguistic Resource to Teach a Foreign Language to Young Learners*, demonstrates that using folktales in EFL classes enables learners to explore both the target language and its cultural patterns while drawing parallels to their native culture [5]. Folklore is particularly effective for preschool learners because it engages imagination, emotion, and memory, providing natural contexts for language use and cultural empathy.

Empirical evidence confirms that folklore enhances intercultural learning when combined with communicative activities. In *Folktales and Short Stories to Blend Culture and Language Competence*, Cinthya Olivares Garita and Jorge Altamirano Alvarado found that integrating global and local folktales into EFL curricula improved students' motivation and ability to compare cultural perspectives [7]. Similarly, Aja Puan Ellisafny, Ratna Asmarani, and Hadiyanto reported in *Culturalistics: Journal of Cultural, Literary, and Linguistic Studies* that adapting Indonesian folklore into English teaching materials created "cultural proximity," thereby reducing foreign language anxiety [2]. These findings highlight that folklore can connect linguistic form with cultural content in emotionally resonant ways—an essential step toward intercultural communicative competence.

However, traditional storytelling alone may not fully engage today's learners, who are accustomed to multimodal and digital interaction. The growing body of research on interactive technologies especially digital storytelling offers promising strategies for integrating folklore into modern classrooms. William Ian O'Byrne, Katherine Houser, Ryan Stone, and Mary White, in *Digital Storytelling in Early Childhood: Student Illustrations Shaping Social Interactions*, found that when young learners used digital tools to create and share their own stories, they not only developed stronger linguistic and narrative skills but also fostered collaboration and self-expression [6]. In teacher education contexts, such interactive projects enable future preschool teachers to experiment with digital storytelling as a platform for intercultural mediation, creativity, and reflective learning.

Gamification the use of game mechanics in education has also shown potential in folklore-based intercultural instruction. Oleg Konstantinov, Eugenia Kovatcheva, and Nataliya Palikova in *Gamification in Cultural and Historical Heritage Education* describe how game-based heritage activities increased learners' engagement and retention by transforming passive cultural content into interactive missions [4]. When applied to English lessons, gamified folklore tasks (such as solving riddles, completing narrative quests, or dramatizing ethical dilemmas) can combine language learning with intercultural inquiry, making the classroom both playful and dialogic.

Recent digital exchange programs further reinforce the link between intercultural communication and interactive learning. Kristin Spieler, Anne Karin Vikstøl Olsen, and Randi Engtrø in *Intercultural Dialogue on Indigenous Perspectives: A Digital Learning Experience* showed that collaborative online international learning (COIL) projects among teacher education students strengthened empathy, reflective thinking, and cultural understanding [10]. Uzbek scholars have also contributed to this growing interdisciplinary discourse. Maftuna Pulatova and Ullibibi Saitnazarova, in *Gamification Method in Teaching*, emphasize that interactive learning strategies foster deeper involvement and creativity among EFL students in Uzbekistan, aligning with constructivist and intercultural teaching philosophies. Their findings suggest that integrating gamified folklore tasks can enrich teacher-training curricula by linking cultural learning with communicative competence in an engaging format [8].

Collectively, these studies indicate three converging trends: (1) ICC development requires integration of culture, language, and technology; (2) folklore provides meaningful content for cultivating intercultural awareness; and (3) interactive methods enhance motivation and engagement, especially among early-childhood learners and preservice teachers. Nevertheless, there remains a gap in systematic research on how folklore-based digital activities can be explicitly structured to develop ICC in preschool teacher education.

## **Results**

Three overarching patterns emerged:

1. **Folklore enhances cultural contextualization in language learning.** Nearly all studies confirmed that students exposed to folklore particularly traditional stories and local myths developed stronger awareness of cultural symbols, social values, and communication norms. For instance, Olivares Garita and Altamirano Alvarado reported that integrating Costa Rican and British folktales through dramatization “encouraged learners to identify similarities between value systems while increasing linguistic confidence” (*Letras*, 68(2), 2020, p. 108).

2. **Interactive technologies amplify intercultural dialogue and learner engagement.** O’Byrne et al. demonstrated that digital storytelling enhanced collaboration and self-expression among preschool children, offering opportunities for intercultural meaning-making through multimodal communication [6]. The digital environment provided a safe, creative space for students to narrate, visualize, and share stories that bridged their own culture and the English-speaking world.

3. **Gamification and online collaboration foster cultural empathy and participatory learning.**

Konstantinov, Kovatcheva, and Palikova showed that applying game-based design to cultural content increased attention, memory, and sense of belonging to shared heritage [4]. Likewise, Uzbek researchers Pulatova and Saitnazarova found that gamified folklore tasks not only raised participation but also encouraged future preschool teachers to view English as a bridge for intercultural dialogue rather than as an isolated subject.

Across all sources, ICC development was reported most effectively when three components overlapped: **(a)** authentic folklore content, **(b)** interactive or digital pedagogy, and **(c)** structured reflection or dialogue. Studies that lacked one of these elements—such as those using folklore only as reading material showed weaker intercultural outcomes.

These findings collectively support the hypothesis that interactive folklore-based learning technologies create dynamic, culturally grounded, and dialogic environments that advance both language proficiency and intercultural competence. The results also suggest practical implications for preschool teacher education, where future educators should experience, design, and reflect upon such intercultural digital storytelling practices as part of their training.

## **Discussion**

The synthesis of research presented in the Results section demonstrates that integrating interactive folklore-based learning technologies into English lessons provides substantial benefits for developing intercultural communicative competence (ICC), particularly in the context of preschool teacher education. Across the ten studies reviewed, three interconnected dimensions emerge as central to this effect: content authenticity, pedagogical interactivity, and reflective mediation.

Firstly, the cultural richness of folklore makes it a uniquely effective vehicle for ICC development. Folklore encapsulates societal values, worldviews, and ethical norms in narrative form, enabling learners to engage cognitively and emotionally with other cultures. Folktales offer learners a rich cultural and linguistic resource that facilitates cross-cultural comparison and moral reasoning. Similarly, Olivares Garita and Altamirano Alvarado found that blending local and global folktales in EFL classrooms enhanced learners' ability to recognize cultural similarities and differences while simultaneously improving linguistic competence [7]. These findings align closely with Byram's theoretical model, which positions knowledge of cultural practices, attitudes of curiosity and openness, and the ability to interpret and relate across cultures as core elements of ICC. Folklore provides concrete narrative examples through which these competencies can be scaffolded, making abstract intercultural principles accessible for both learners and preservice teachers.

Secondly, the use of interactive technologies amplifies the pedagogical impact of folklore. O'Byrne et al. demonstrate that digital storytelling not only allows children to create and share narratives, but also fosters collaboration, self-expression, and reflective thinking [6]. When preservice teachers employ similar interactive strategies, they gain first-hand experience in designing learning activities that actively engage children in intercultural dialogue. The integration of gamification, further enhances engagement by transforming passive reception of stories into participatory experiences. These interactive frameworks increase learner motivation, allow for multiple entry points into cultural content, and support both cognitive and emotional investment in the learning process.

Thirdly, structured reflection and mediated dialogue emerge as critical for translating interaction with folklore and technology into genuine intercultural understanding. COIL projects enable preservice teachers to analyze indigenous perspectives, compare cultural

narratives, and collaboratively interpret meanings across borders. Rahiem and Rahim similarly highlight that folklore-based activities for preschool learners facilitate moral and social reflection, helping students internalize ethical and community-oriented norms [9]. These studies reinforce Hoff's assertion that ICC development requires guided facilitation, emphasizing that teacher reflection and mediation are as important as the content or technology employed.

In the context of preschool teacher education, these findings have both practical and theoretical implications. Practically, they suggest that preservice teachers should be exposed to interactive folklore-based learning themselves, not merely as observers, but as active participants designing lessons that integrate digital tools, gamification, and storytelling. This experiential learning allows them to model ICC in classroom practice, scaffold intercultural dialogue for young learners, and critically reflect on the cultural assumptions embedded in both source materials and classroom interactions. Theoretically, these results expand Byram's model by demonstrating how technology-mediated activities can operationalize the dimensions of ICC in early childhood settings. Digital and interactive strategies bridge the gap between abstract intercultural theory and tangible pedagogical practice, supporting both linguistic development and cultural empathy.

## **Conclusion**

Interactive folklore-based learning technologies offer a powerful approach to developing intercultural communicative competence (ICC) in English education, especially for preschool teacher training. Folklore provides culturally rich narratives that help learners understand social norms, values, and ethical lessons while practicing language skills. Integrating digital storytelling, gamification, and collaborative online activities transforms these narratives into engaging, participatory experiences, promoting creativity, reflection, and cultural awareness. Effective implementation requires guided facilitation and reflective practice, ensuring that learners critically interpret stories and engage in intercultural dialogue. For preservice teachers, experiencing and designing such activities builds confidence in integrating culture into English lessons and supports the development of culturally responsive teaching strategies. In short, combining folklore, interactive pedagogy, and reflection equips learners and teachers to foster language proficiency, empathy, and intercultural understanding in early childhood education.

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