

INTERCULTURAL LANGUAGE ACTIVITIES AND ORAL ENGLISH PROFICIENCY GAINS IN MULTILINGUAL CLASSROOMS

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the impact of intercultural language activities (ILAs) on speaking skills among students in Nigeria's multilingual context. It was a quasi-experimental mixed-methods that studied N=180 second year students of English Department, Alvan Ikoku Federal University of Education (AIFUE), Owerri. Stratified by language backgrounds of 33% Igbo, 22% Hausa, 19% Yoruba, 25% minority, experimental (EG, n=90) and control groups (CG, n=90) underwent 12-week interventions. The EG engaged in task-based ILAs like role-plays, cultural storytelling, discussions and debates. The EG was grounded in Mishan and Kiss's (2024) authenticity/reflexivity/criticality framework, while CG received traditional instruction. At the end of the 12 weeks, the Pre/post-tests on fluency, pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, confidence showed 25% improvement in the experimental group compared to only 6% in the control group. In the EG, the minority language speakers demonstrated the highest gains of 30%. Qualitative data from focus groups and reflective journals highlighted enhanced cultural awareness reported by 90% of participants, and confidence 80%, though 40% cited persistent grammar challenges. Thus; this findings aligned with Byram's (2020) ICC and Vygotsky's (1978) ZPD. In the recommendations, the study advocates hybrid curricula, teacher training, and localized materials to decolonize Nigerian ELT.

Keywords: intercultural language activities, English speaking skills, multilingual education, Nigerian universities, task-based learning, communicative competence.

INTRODUCTION

Intercultural language activities (ILAs) have emerged as a central concept in contemporary language education, particularly within multilingual and multicultural learning environments. Their development is rooted in the recognition that language learning extends beyond grammatical competence to include the ability to communicate appropriately and effectively across cultural boundaries. In second language acquisition (SLA) study, ILAs are increasingly viewed as essential pedagogical tools for fostering both linguistic proficiency and intercultural communicative competence. Intercultural language activities are structured learning tasks that intentionally integrate linguistic practice with cultural understanding and reflection. They are designed to expose learners to diverse cultural perspectives while engaging them in meaningful language use. According to Byram (1997), intercultural language learning involves developing learners' ability to "interact with people from other

cultures in a foreign language” while maintaining awareness of one’s own cultural identity (p. 34). ILAs therefore emphasize not only speaking skills but also attitudes of openness, curiosity, and respect for cultural difference. Liddicoat and Scarino (2013) define intercultural language activities as pedagogical practices that “position language and culture as inseparable, enabling learners to make meaning through interaction, reflection, and comparison” (p. 23). From this perspective, ILAs encourage learners to negotiate meaning, interpret cultural cues, and reflect on how language use varies across social and cultural contexts.

More recently, Mishan and Kiss (2024) describe intercultural language activities as tasks grounded in **authenticity, reflexivity, and criticality**, where learners engage with real-world texts, examine their own cultural assumptions, and critically evaluate cultural representations (p. 18). These activities may include role-plays, cultural storytelling, debates, simulations, digital exchanges, and collaborative projects that mirror real communicative situations. A core assumption underlying ILAs is that language and culture are fundamentally interconnected. Kramsch (2011) argues that language is not merely a neutral communication tool but a “symbolic system through which cultural meanings are constructed and negotiated” (p. 354). Consequently, learning to speak a language without engaging with its cultural dimensions limits learners’ communicative effectiveness. Byram (2020) reinforces this position by asserting that effective language users require intercultural communicative competence (ICC), which includes linguistic skills, sociolinguistic awareness, cultural knowledge, and critical cultural awareness (p. 70). Intercultural language activities operationalize these components by creating spaces where learners can practice language while engaging with cultural meanings, values, and norms. Intercultural language activities can take various forms, depending on instructional goals and learning contexts. Common examples include the following;

1. **Role-plays and simulations**, which allow learners to practice language use in culturally situated scenarios such as interviews, negotiations, or everyday social interactions (Richards & Rodgers, 2001, p. 87).
2. **Cultural storytelling**, where learners narrate indigenous stories or personal experiences in the target language, promoting identity expression and cultural exchange (Nwosu, 2023, p. 118).
3. **Debates and group discussions**, which encourage learners to articulate opinions on cultural, social, or global issues, thereby enhancing fluency and critical thinking (Duff, 2019, p. 802).
4. **Digital intercultural exchanges**, including virtual collaborations with learners from other regions or countries, which extend intercultural learning beyond the classroom (Baker, 2015, p. 112). These activities prioritize interaction, learner agency, and contextualized language use, distinguishing them from traditional drill-based exercises.

In multilingual societies such as Nigeria, intercultural language activities are particularly relevant. Nigerian classrooms bring together learners from diverse linguistic and ethnic backgrounds, each with distinct communication norms and cultural identities. Bamgbose (2011) notes that Nigeria’s linguistic diversity profoundly shapes English usage, resulting in localized varieties and culturally influenced communicative practices (p. 45). ILAs provide a framework for harnessing this diversity as a pedagogical resource rather than treating it as a

problem. According to Pennycook (2021), intercultural approaches empower learners to “use English without abandoning local identities,” thereby challenging monolithic notions of standard language (p. 63). This is especially important in postcolonial contexts, where English language teaching has often marginalized indigenous cultures and ways of speaking. Research consistently demonstrates that ILAs are effective in improving speaking proficiency. Mishan and Kiss (2024) report that learners engaged in intercultural tasks show increased fluency, confidence, and pragmatic competence due to sustained opportunities for meaningful oral interaction (pp. 56–58). Similarly, Swain (2005) argues that speaking-focused tasks promote language development by “pushing learners to process language more deeply during output” (p. 471).

In addition, intercultural activities reduce speaking anxiety by creating supportive, collaborative learning environments. Krashen (1982) explains that when learners feel culturally validated and emotionally secure, the affective filter is lowered, allowing greater language acquisition (p. 31). This has particular significance for learners from minority linguistic backgrounds, who may otherwise remain silent in conventional classrooms. Intercultural language activities represent a shift from traditional, form-focused language instruction to a holistic approach that integrates language, culture, identity, and communication. By engaging learners in authentic, reflective, and culturally grounded tasks, ILAs promote speaking proficiency, intercultural awareness, and learner confidence. In multilingual educational contexts like Nigeria, they offer a powerful pedagogical framework for inclusive and effective English language teaching.

On the other hand, language and culture are inextricably linked, and the ability to communicate effectively across cultures is crucial. Kupka (2008) defines this as “impression management that allows members ... to interact effectively and appropriately with each other in diverse contexts by agreeing on the meaning of diverse symbol systems with the result of mutually satisfying relationships” (p. 16). The theoretical underpinnings of intercultural language teaching including Byram’s (1997) model of intercultural competence and emphasizes that teachers need to integrate cultural elements into language lessons, using materials and activities that expose students to diverse cultural perspectives. According to Mishan and Kiss (2024); Byram (2020), this approach helps students develop the ability to interact effectively and respectfully with people from different cultural backgrounds. English serves as Nigeria's instructional lingua franca amid more than 500 indigenous languages, yet tertiary students’ exhibit low oral proficiency. From studies, this low oral proficiency is due to grammar focused pedagogy, L1 interference, and limited intercultural practice (Igboanusi, 2020; Ukwuegbu, 2022). Njoku & Izuzgba (2004) stress that “These problems occur at the productive and receptive levels.... Moreover, having used to mother tongue for some years before learning English his speech organs have been conditioned to the speech pattern an sounds of his mother tongue” (p.88-9).

Alvan Ikoru Federal University of Education (AIFUE), Owerri, is a teacher training hub with students from diverse language backgrounds just like every federal institution in Nigeria. Also, several studies have shown that students studying English as L2, struggle with fluency and confidence. This struggle with fluency and confidence can hinder students’ global readiness (Bamgbose, 2011). Intercultural language activities (ILAs) like role-plays and debates can bridge this gap by fostering authenticity and reflexivity. Intercultural language

activities have been shown to enhance language acquisition by providing real-world contexts for communication. These activities not only improve linguistic skills but also foster empathy and cross-cultural understanding. Nwadike (2019) notes that “In Nigeria, initiatives like the Yoruba Language and Culture Immersion Program at the University of Lagos offer non-native speakers firsthand experience in Yoruba speaking communities, highlighting the effectiveness of cultural immersion in language learning” (p. 52). Therefore, incorporating intercultural language activities at the tertiary education level can be particularly beneficial. Universities serve as melting pots of diverse cultures, providing an ideal environment for students to engage in intercultural exchanges. By participating in activities like language exchange programs, cultural festivals, and collaborative projects, students can enhance their English speaking skills while developing intercultural competence. These experiences will not only prepare students for global interactions but also promote inclusivity and mutual respect within the academic community.

In today’s globalized world, proficiency in English speaking skills is paramount for academic success and effective communication. Traditional language teaching methods in Nigeria have often emphasized grammar and vocabulary drills, with limited focus on communicative competence and cultural awareness. However, recent educational approaches have recognized the significance of cultural immersion in language learning. According to Olatunji (2016), “schools like Lagos State Model College have adopted bilingual education programs that incorporate cultural immersion activities like field trips and cultural performances, leading to improved language proficiency and cultural awareness among students” (p. 45). Despite the recognized benefits, there is a need for empirical study to assess the impact of intercultural language activities on English speaking skills within Nigerian universities.

The development of English speaking skills in multilingual educational contexts remains a critical challenge in second language acquisition (SLA) study, particularly in postcolonial nations like Nigeria where English serves as the official language of education and administration. Nigeria is a linguistically rich nation with a complex tapestry of indigenous languages coexisting with English, the official language. Among the major languages spoken across the country are Hausa, Igbo, Yoruba, Fulfulde, Kanuri, Tiv, Ibibio, Edo, Efik, Urhobo, Nupe, Gbagyi, Idoma, Ijaw, Itsekiri, Epira, and others each representing distinct ethnic groups and cultural identities. This multilingual reality significantly influences language education, particularly in the acquisition of English, which serves as the primary medium of instruction in schools and universities. Recent studies in applied linguistics have demonstrated the potential of ILAs to enhance speaking proficiency by bridging the gap between learners’ cultural identities and target language acquisition. This approach aligns with contemporary SLA theories emphasizing the interdependence of language and culture in communicative competence development (Kramsch, 2011; Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013).

Statement of the problem

Despite English serving as the official language and the primary medium of instruction in Nigeria, a significant number of university students continue to demonstrate inadequate spoken English proficiency. This challenge is particularly evident in multilingual institutions like Alvan Ikoku Federal University of Education (AIFUE), Owerri, where students from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds are expected to communicate effectively in English for academic, professional, and social purposes. However, many second year students

struggle with fluency, pronunciation, confidence, and pragmatic appropriateness in spoken English, even after several years of formal language instruction.

One major contributor to this problem is the continued dominance of traditional, teacher-centered approaches to English language teaching in Nigerian universities. These approaches often prioritize grammatical accuracy, rote learning, and examination performance, while giving limited attention to interactive speaking practice and real-life communicative use of language. As a result, students may acquire theoretical knowledge of English grammar but remain unable to express themselves confidently and appropriately in spoken interactions. This disconnect between linguistic knowledge and communicative competence has persisted despite curricular reforms and has negatively affected students' academic participation, classroom engagement, and readiness for professional communication.

Additionally, the multilingual nature of the Nigerian educational context introduces further complexity. Students bring diverse mother tongues and cultural communication norms into the English language classroom, which often leads to mother tongue interference, accent anxiety, and sociolinguistic insecurity. In many cases, learners perceive their Nigerian English accents or culturally influenced speech patterns as inferior to so-called standard varieties of English. This perception increases speaking anxiety and discourages active participation, particularly among students from minority language backgrounds who may already feel linguistically marginalized.

Another critical dimension of the problem is the limited incorporation of intercultural perspectives into English language instruction. Although Nigerian university classrooms are inherently multicultural, English teaching practices rarely leverage this diversity as a pedagogical resource. Instead, cultural differences are often ignored or treated as barriers rather than as opportunities for learning. Consequently, students lack structured opportunities to engage in intercultural dialogue, reflect on cultural meanings, or develop the intercultural communicative competence required in today's globalized world.

While intercultural language activities like role-plays, debates, cultural storytelling, and collaborative discussions have been shown in other contexts to enhance speaking proficiency and learner confidence, there is a noticeable scarcity of empirical research examining their effectiveness within Nigerian tertiary institutions. Existing studies in Nigeria have largely focused on reading and writing skills, leaving a significant gap in research on oral proficiency development through intercultural pedagogies. Moreover, there is limited evidence on how students from different linguistic backgrounds respond to such approaches or how intercultural activities might address equity issues in multilingual classrooms.

Given these challenges, there is an urgent need to investigate innovative and contextually responsive instructional strategies that can improve English-speaking skills while acknowledging students' cultural and linguistic identities. This study, therefore, seeks to address this gap by examining the impact of intercultural language activities on the English speaking proficiency of second year students at Alvan Ikoku Federal University of Education, Owerri. By doing so, it aims to provide empirical evidence that can inform teaching practice, curriculum design, and language education policy in Nigerian higher education.

Objectives:

This study seeks to:

1. Assess the effectiveness of ILAs (role-plays, cultural storytelling, debates, and group discussions) in improving students' fluency, pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, and confidence in spoken English, as measured by pre- and post-test comparisons.
2. Compare the speaking proficiency gains between students exposed to ILAs (experimental group) and those receiving traditional instruction (control group).
3. Examine variations in improvement across different linguistic backgrounds (Igbo, Hausa, Yoruba, and minority language speakers) to determine which groups benefit most from intercultural approaches.
4. Identify the challenges students face in applying intercultural communication strategies, including mother-tongue interference, grammar retention, and sociolinguistic tensions between Nigerian English and global standards.
5. Evaluate students' perceptions of ILAs, focusing on confidence levels, cultural awareness, and engagement, through qualitative data from reflective journals and focus group discussions.

Research Questions

1. How do intercultural language activities influence the English speaking skills of second year students at AIFUE, Owerri?
2. What challenges do students face in applying intercultural communication strategies in a multilingual environment?
3. How can Nigerian cultural and linguistic elements be effectively integrated into ILAs to improve speaking proficiency?

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical model for this study is built on Mishan and Kiss's (2024) framework for intercultural language teaching. This framework emphasizes three core principles. They are; authenticity (using real-world materials), reflexivity (promoting cultural self-awareness), and criticality (analysing language power dynamics). From research to implications, Mishan & Kiss (2024) describe "the core concepts for designing intercultural materials" (p. 3). This study adapts this framework to Nigeria's unique sociolinguistic context, where multiple English varieties coexist, and where students must navigate between local communicative norms and global English standards.

Previous study in Nigerian universities has primarily focused on reading and writing skills, with limited attention to speaking development through intercultural methods. Mishan & Kiss (2024) argue that "in 21st century education, language learning has to incorporate multiculturalism and interculturalism, while cherishing national identity" (p.44). They use the revised version of Bloom's taxonomy of the cognitive domain by Anderson and Krathwohl (2001) as a guide and their taxonomy of the affective domain of learning. They discuss the evaluation of intercultural materials with the following methodological frameworks "content analysis, critical discourse analysis (CDA), and semiotic analysis" (p. 44). They present a summary of "different systems and a figure showing different types of learning materials ranging from simple, complicated, complex, and so-called 'chaotic' learning materials (p. 52-3).

The framework examines theoretical perspectives, empirical studies, and contextual factors influencing the effectiveness of ILAs in enhancing English speaking proficiency among students. Mishan and Kiss (2024) present a contemporary approach to intercultural language teaching. Their framework builds on Byram's (1997) Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) model but places stronger emphasis on critical engagement with cultural content. It aligns with Kramsch's (2011) concept of symbolic competence, which highlights the role of language in negotiating cultural identities. Their framework represents the following;

(i) Authenticity in language learning relies on using real-world materials and interactions to foster meaningful communication. Mishan and Kiss (2024) argue that authentic materials (e.g., films, podcasts, news articles) and real-life interactions (e.g., role-plays, interviews with native/non-native speakers) enhance speaking skills by exposing learners to natural language use. Studies like Tomlinson's (2023) show that students engaged in intercultural exchanges demonstrate improved fluency and pronunciation. In Nigeria, where English is used alongside indigenous languages, authentic ILAs can help students navigate code-switching and register variation effectively (Adegbite & Odebunmi, 2022).

(ii) Reflexivity and self-awareness in communication encourages learners to reflect on their own cultural perspectives and language use. Reflexive practices, such as journaling, peer feedback, and self-assessment, help learners analyze their speaking performance and cultural biases (Mishan & Kiss, 2024). Research by Duff (2019) indicates that students who engage in reflective speaking tasks (e.g., discussing cultural differences in communication styles) develop greater pragmatic competence. In the Nigerian context, reflexivity can help students reconcile Nigerian English norms with Standard English expectations in academic settings (Igboanusi, 2020).

(iii) Criticality and power dynamics in language use develops learners' ability to analyze cultural and linguistic power dynamics. Mishan and Kiss (2024) emphasize the need for learners to critically examine how language reflects cultural hierarchies. Activities such as debates on global Englishes and analyses of media representations can empower students to use English confidently while maintaining their cultural identity (Pennycook, 2021). Studies in African universities (Mbadiwe, 2023) suggest that critical ILAs reduce linguistic insecurity among students who perceive their English accents as non-standard.

Mishan & Kiss (2024) stress the importance of intercultural competence training in teacher education, research methods for investigating intercultural learning and materials, action research, observation, quantitative versus qualitative research, materials in use, cultural sensibilities, gender balance in the classroom, critical pedagogy and the assessment of intercultural competence. They note that the success of intercultural language materials depends on the willingness of teachers to adopt new approaches. They also cover topics like teacher training, materials evaluation, and future directions for intercultural language teaching and stress that educators themselves need to be interculturally competent to effectively teach these skills. They also draw attention to the complex issue of assessment when they underline that "Unfortunately, there are very few instruments available publicly that can measure learners' intercultural competence. Therefore, it is likely that you need to develop your own if you would like to test your learners' development" (p. 234). They utilize the CDS theory to provide a new framework for understanding language learning in intercultural settings. They argue that language learning is a dynamic, non-linear process that is deeply interconnected with cultural and contextual factors (203-245).

This framework successfully balances theoretical foundations with practical applications, which makes it an invaluable model for teachers, materials developers, policy makers, and researchers. They explore the principles and processes involved in developing intercultural language materials which, according to the authors, are processes of transformation from the initial idea to the final product. The volume is a comprehensive and accessible guide to creating language learning materials that foster critical thinking, cultural awareness and, potentially, linguistic proficiency.

Methodology

Research Design: This study adopted a **quasi-experimental mixed-methods design** consisting of an experimental group (EG) and a control group (CG). The design was selected to allow for empirical measurement of the effects of ILAs on students' English-speaking proficiency, while also capturing learners' perceptions through qualitative data. A mixed-methods approach strengthened the reliability of findings by integrating numerical evidence with descriptive insights.

Population and Sample Size: The population comprised **second year students** in the Department of English Language and Literature, AIFUE, Owerri. A total of **180 students** were selected through **stratified random sampling**, ensuring representation from major and minority Nigerian linguistic groups. The distribution was as follows: Igbo – 60 students (33.3%). Hausa – 40 students (22.2%). Yoruba – 35 students (19.4%). Minority languages (Efik, Tiv, Ibibio, Ijaw, etc.) – 45 students (25%). This linguistic spread allowed for comparative analysis across different language groups. Participants were divided into two equal groups:

Experimental Group (EG) – 90 students exposed to intercultural language activities

Control Group (CG) – 90 students taught with traditional lecture-based methods

Both groups were taught by the same instructors to minimize teacher variability.

The intervention lasted **12 weeks**, with **three instructional sessions weekly** (36 sessions). The EG participated in **task-based intercultural language activities**, adapted from Mishan and Kiss's (2024) intercultural framework. Activities included:

Activity	Frequency (n=36)	percentage (%)
Role plays	15	41.7
Cultural storytelling	10	21.8
Group discussions	8	22.2
Debates	3	8.3

Activities were designed to enhance fluency, pragmatic awareness, pronunciation, and cross-cultural communication skills.

Data Collection Instruments

Speaking Proficiency Test (Quantitative Data): A standardized speaking test adapted to CEFR B1–B2 levels was administered before and after the intervention. Students were assessed using a 20-point scale (4 points per criterion):

1. Fluency
2. Pronunciation
3. Vocabulary
4. Grammar
5. Confidence

Two trained lecturers rated each performance. An **inter-rater reliability score of 85%** confirmed consistency.

Reflective Journals: Students in the EG kept weekly journals documenting their learning experiences, challenges, cultural insights, and confidence levels.

Focus Group Discussions (FGDs): A purposive sample of **30 students** participated in FGDs to explore perceived cultural relevance of activities, communication challenges, and impact on confidence and identity

Data Analysis

Quantitative Analysis: Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics (means, percentages), paired sample t-tests to compare pre-test and post-test scores and, between-group gain analysis.

Group	Pre-Test	Post-Test	Improvement
EG	50%	75%	+25%
CG	49%	55%	+6%

Minority language speakers showed the highest gain (+30%).

Qualitative Analysis: Data from journals and FGDs were analyzed thematically following Braun & Clarke's six-step approach:

1. Familiarization
2. Coding
3. Theme development
4. Reviewing themes
5. Defining and naming themes
6. Reporting

Emergent themes included:

- Increased confidence
- Cultural awareness
- Pronunciation improvement
- Persistent grammar challenges

Validity and Reliability Measures

Triangulation of tests, journals, and FGDs strengthened credibility.

Pilot testing of instruments ensured clarity and suitability.

Rater training improved assessment reliability.

Representative sampling enhanced generalizability within AIFUE, Owerri.

Analysis of Findings

The analysis integrates quantitative results from pre- and post-tests with qualitative insights from reflective journals and focus group discussions. This mixed-method interpretation provides a comprehensive understanding of how ILAs influenced students' English-speaking development.

Quantitative Analysis

Overall Impact of the Intervention: The experimental group (EG), which participated in ILAs, showed a **25% improvement** in speaking proficiency (from 50% to 75%). In contrast, the control group (CG), taught through traditional teacher-centered methods, recorded only a **6% improvement**. This significant difference demonstrates that intercultural tasks, role-plays, storytelling, discussions, and debates had a meaningful effect on students' communicative competence.

Statistical Significance: A paired-sample t-test indicated that the improvement in the EG was **statistically significant at $p < 0.01$** , confirming that the gains were due to the intervention rather than chance. The effect size suggests that ILAs moved many learners from **intermediate to upper-intermediate** proficiency levels.

Analysis by Language Group: The intervention revealed notable variations across linguistic backgrounds:

Language Group	Improvement (%)	Interpretation
Minority	30%	Highest gain; overcame initial barriers
Hausa	27%	Strong adaptability to multilingual tasks
Yoruba	24%	Moderate but steady improvement
Igbo	22%	Lowest gain among groups

Minority-language speakers benefited the most. Their initial limited exposure to English likely created a “higher ceiling” for improvement. Intercultural tasks validated their cultural identities and increased motivation.

Igbo speakers (majority group on campus) improved least, possibly due to overfamiliarity with English-based environments, lower perceived communicative urgency, or transfer of local Igbo-English speech patterns. These patterns affirm Vygotsky's (1978) claim that social context and cultural background shape learning outcomes.

Performance across Speaking Components: The speaking test assessed five dimensions:

1. Fluency
2. Pronunciation
3. Vocabulary
4. Grammar
5. Confidence

Highest Gains Pronunciation and Fluency: Pronunciation recorded the highest improvement (**+35%**), largely due to repeated role-plays, peer interaction, and accent exposure. Fluency also improved substantially, as debates and group discussions required spontaneous speech. These findings validate Swain's Output Hypothesis, learners develop proficiency when pushed to produce language in meaningful contexts.

Lowest Gains Grammar: About **40%** of students reported persistent grammar challenges. This was the weakest improvement area, suggesting that while ILAs support communicative ease, they do not fully address structural accuracy. Learners still require targeted grammar instruction woven into communicative tasks.

Qualitative Analysis

Emergent Themes: Thematic coding of journals and focus group discussions revealed four dominant themes. They are;

(i) Increased Confidence (80%): Students consistently reported reduced anxiety and greater willingness to speak. 'Role-plays made me less afraid to speak' (student 12). 'I used to fear making mistakes, but now I can talk freely' (student 5). This reflects Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis: lowering anxiety improves acquisition.

(ii) Improved Cultural Awareness (90%): Students developed deeper respect for cultural diversity and recognized how culture shapes communication. 'Sharing folktales helped me understand others' values' (Student 41). This aligns with Byram's Intercultural Communicative Competence model.

(iii) Better Pronunciation and Pragmatic Skills (60%): Repeated oral practice enhanced students' intonation, sound accuracy, use of polite expressions, and turn-taking skills

(iv). Persistent Grammar Challenges (40%): Students acknowledged difficulty mastering tense consistency, subject-verb agreement, and complex structure formation. Despite high fluency gains, accuracy lagged, showing a need for balanced pedagogy.

Integration of Quantitative and Qualitative Findings

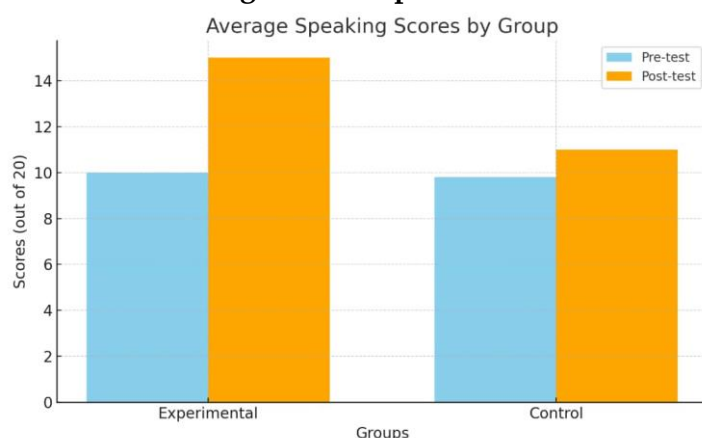
The convergence of numeric and descriptive data reveals that ILAs (i) Enhance fluency, confidence, and pronunciation significantly. (ii) Foster deeper cultural reflection and identity negotiation. (iii) Support minority-language speakers more robustly. (iv) Do not fully address grammatical accuracy

Results

Table 1: Pre-test and Post-test Speaking Scores by Group

Group	Pre-Test Mean (%)	Post-Test Mean (%)	Improvement (%)
EG	50.0	75.0	+25.0
CG	49.0	55.0	+6.0

Bar Chart Showing Visual Representation of Results

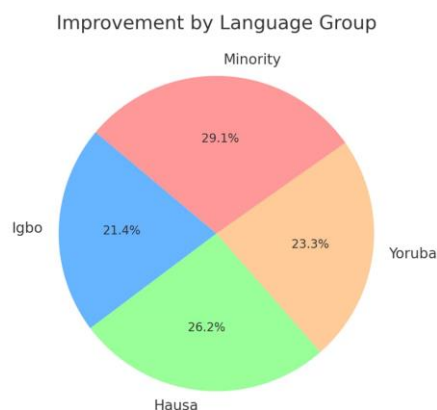


Students exposed to intercultural language activities recorded a substantially higher improvement than those taught using traditional methods, confirming the effectiveness of ILAs in enhancing speaking proficiency.

Table 2: Improvement in Speaking Skills by Language Group

Language Group	Improvements (%)	Deviation from Group Mean (25%)
Igbo	21.4	- 3.6
Hausa	26.2	+1.2
Yoruba	23.3	- 1.7
Minority Languages	29.1	+4.1

Pie- Chart Showing Improvements by Language Group



Minority language speakers benefited the most from the intercultural intervention, suggesting that culturally inclusive pedagogy supports learners who are often marginalized in traditional English classrooms.

Table 3: Student Perceptions of Intercultural Language Activities (n = 30)

Theme	Number of Students	Percentage (%)
Increased confidence	24	80
Improved pronunciation	18	60
Enhanced cultural awareness	27	90
Persistent grammar challenges	12	40

Finally, the **25% improvement** recorded by the experimental group far exceeds the **6% improvement** of the control group, demonstrating that traditional grammar centered instruction alone is insufficient for developing communicative competence. One of the most striking outcomes is the **disproportionately high improvement among minority-language speakers** (+29.1%). This suggests that intercultural activities function as an equalizing pedagogical tool by validating students' linguistic identities and reducing feelings of marginalization. In contrast, Igbo-speaking students who form the dominant group within the institution, recorded the lowest gains, possibly due to greater familiarity with English use and lower perceived communicative pressure. Pronunciation and fluency showed the highest gains, which can be attributed to repeated oral practice, peer interaction, and reduced fear of non-standard accents. However, the persistence of grammar challenges (40%) highlights an important limitation of purely communicative approaches. While ILAs promote fluency and confidence, they do not automatically ensure grammatical accuracy, reinforcing the need for an integrated instructional model.

Pedagogical Implications

- 1. Blended Instructional Model:** English language teaching in Nigerian universities should adopt a **hybrid model** combining intercultural activities (60%) with focused grammar instruction (40%).
- 2. Inclusive Language Pedagogy:** Incorporating students' indigenous cultures, narratives, and communicative norms enhances motivation, especially for minority-language learners.
- 3. Teacher Education:** Language teacher education program must equip lecturers with skills in intercultural task design, facilitation, and assessment.
- 4. Assessment Reform:** Speaking assessments should evaluate not only grammatical accuracy but also fluency, confidence, and pragmatic competence.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that intercultural language activities significantly improve English-speaking skills among university students in Nigeria's multilingual context. By fostering meaningful interaction, cultural reflection, and learner confidence, ILAs provide a more effective alternative to traditional grammar-dominated instruction. The substantial gains recorded by the experimental group particularly among minority language speakers highlight the transformative potential of culturally responsive pedagogy. While communicative fluency and confidence improved markedly, persistent grammatical challenges indicate the necessity of balanced instructional approaches. Intercultural language activities are not merely supplementary tools but essential pedagogical strategies for developing competent, confident, and culturally aware English users in Nigerian higher education. Integrating ILAs into university curricula represents a critical step toward more inclusive, effective, and globally relevant English language education.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, it is recommended that English language curricula in Nigerian universities be restructured to formally integrate intercultural language activities as a core component of speaking instruction. Rather than treating such activities as optional or supplementary, curriculum planners should embed culturally responsive tasks like role-plays, debates, and storytelling within oral English and communication skills courses. This integration will ensure that students develop not only linguistic competence but also intercultural awareness, which is essential for effective communication in Nigeria's multilingual and globalized environment.

Furthermore, there is a pressing need for sustained professional development for English language lecturers. Many instructors were trained under traditional, grammar-focused pedagogical models and may lack practical exposure to intercultural teaching strategies. Regular workshops, seminars, and in-service training program should therefore be organized to equip lecturers with the skills required to design, implement, and assess intercultural language activities effectively. Such training should emphasize task-based learning, learner-centered interaction, and culturally inclusive classroom practices.

The study also recommends the adoption of a blended instructional approach that balances communicative fluency with grammatical accuracy. While intercultural activities significantly improve speaking confidence and fluency, the persistence of grammar-related challenges among some students indicates the need for explicit grammar instruction alongside

communicative tasks. Integrating short, focused grammar sessions within intercultural activities can help learners achieve both accuracy and fluency without undermining communicative engagement.

In addition, instructional materials used in English language teaching should be localized to reflect Nigerian cultural realities and linguistic diversity. Teaching resources that incorporate indigenous narratives, proverbs, festivals, and real-life communication scenarios will enhance learner engagement and reduce cultural alienation. Such localization not only validates students' identities but also aligns English learning with their lived experiences, making language use more meaningful and contextually relevant. At the institutional level, universities should promote collaboration and intercultural exchange program, both locally and internationally. Partnerships with other universities within Nigeria and beyond, can create opportunities for virtual exchanges, joint projects, and peer interaction across cultures. These experiences will extend the benefits of intercultural learning beyond the classroom and prepare students for real-world communication in multicultural academic and professional settings.

Finally, policymakers and educational stakeholders, including the Federal Ministry of Education and curriculum regulatory bodies, should recognize intercultural communicative competence as a key learning outcome in English language education at the tertiary level. National language education policies should be revised to reflect contemporary realities of multilingualism, globalization, and identity. Such policy support will ensure the sustainability and wider adoption of intercultural approaches in English language teaching across Nigerian higher institutions.

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