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A DOCUMENTARY STUDY OF THE INTEGRATION OF INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE IN BHUTAN'S ENGLISH CURRICULUM

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Abstract: This study aimed to analyze the integration of Intercultural Communicative Competence (hereby ICC) in Bhutan's English curriculum for key stage II. ICC is defined in this study as a set of skills that allows one to engage effectively and appropriately with others who are linguistically and culturally different. Bhutan's English curriculum for key stage II refers to students in grades IV, V, and VI in Bhutan. A documentary research design was employed to analyze one hundred eighteen numbers of classroom activities suggested in the curriculum for students. A Thematic Analysis method was used to analyze the data, which involved deriving codes and categories. The findings of the study revealed the amount of classroom activities related to ICC in Bhutan's English curriculum is minimal. According to the findings, there is no clear mention of any classroom activity that involves students in understanding various cultures. Based on the findings, the present study discusses Bhutan's English curriculum for key stage II should include a variety of activities in the curriculum that would let students compare different cultures.

Keywords: *Intercultural communicative competence; Bhutan's English curriculum; documentary research; thematic analysis*

INTRODUCTION

People from different linguistic groups and cultural backgrounds communicate in this multilingual society (Barker, 2016). For cross-cultural communication to be successful, it is essential to cultivate the ability to comprehend others as well as to present oneself through one's cultural identity. One such beneficial skill for people to effectively communicate with people from different cultural backgrounds is intercultural communicative competence (ICC). According to academics (Byram, 1997; Deardorff, 2006; Fantini, 2000), ICC refers to a set of abilities that enable one to interact appropriately and effectively with people from different cultures or languages.

In today's multicultural society, ICC is regarded as a crucial quality of global citizens because it aids in addressing and mediating issues brought about by cultural differences (Clouet, 2013; Jackson, 2014). In a world where tensions and conflicts persist, good intercultural communication is essential to promote diplomacy, peace, and understanding. In many real-world scenarios, effective intercultural communication has been essential to resolving disputes and promoting greater understanding among people worldwide. For instance, Ebola Outbreak Response in West Africa (2014–2016): To effectively combat the Ebola outbreak in West Africa, international teams worked with local governments and communities. Trust was established and successful public health initiatives were implemented with the help of courteous communication and cultural awareness. Also, due to effective intercultural communication, a long-standing border dispute between China and Bhutan reached a peaceful resolution in 2016 averting military confrontation. However, there are certain other difficulties encountered in cross-cultural communication. For example, when Bhutanese graduates were interviewed by a Kolkata-based Call Center to work with them, only a few participants were found to possess the necessary communication skills to operate in call centers (LaPrairie, 2014).

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Similarly, in research conducted by Choden (2017), Bhutanese students studying in the United States encountered difficulties in using English to communicate within unfamiliar cultural surroundings. Also, Choden's research revealed that Bhutanese students struggled to adjust to a new learning environment and cultural norms while building interactions with teachers and classmates. Due to its ability to help students reflect on the cultural values of others with an intellectual objectivity (Santana & Cely, 2021) and to reach consensus on areas where their ideas and those of others differ (Byram, 1997), ICC is considered an indispensable communication tool that helps individuals from different cultural contexts form new friendships, connections, and relationships (Garcia, 2022).

Numerous definitions of ICC have been offered by academics (Byram, 1997; Deardorff, 2006; Fantini, 2000). In his influential book The Silent Language, Hall (1959) coined the phrase "intercultural communication" for the first time. Hall (1959) emphasized the importance of exchanging cultural beliefs, values, and worldviews as part of intercultural communication (Rogers, Hart, & Mike, 2002). According to Byram (2021), ICC is defined as knowledge of oneself, knowledge of others, the ability to interpret and relate, the capacity to discover and/or interact, the appreciation of others' beliefs, values, and behaviors, and the ability to relativize oneself. A person who develops ICC, according to Byram (1997), is able to establish rapport while speaking a foreign language, communicates effectively while taking into account both his own and the other person's viewpoints and needs, mediates interactions between people from different backgrounds, and aspires to keep improving their communicative abilities. In the modern world, intercultural communication can be defined as the flexible and dynamic process by which people and groups with different cultural backgrounds interact meaningfully using a variety of face-to-face, digital, and virtual platforms. This allows them to foster empathy, cooperation, and mutual understanding while navigating the complexities of cultural diversity in a world where people are becoming more interconnected and dependent on one another. In order to foster harmony, coexistence, and group development, it entails not just the sharing of knowledge and concepts but also the acknowledgment and integration of various cultural viewpoints, values, and conventions.

There are many advantages to incorporating ICC into the English language curriculum because it helps students develop their communication skills when interacting with people from other cultures. American universities have made intercultural communication a priority in an effort to increase the retention of foreign students. Institutions have observed higher rates of student retention by offering cultural support and fostering interactions between domestic and international students (Bista & Foster, 2011). According to Byram (1997), the building of ICC will first give students the opportunity to learn about cultural practices, objects, and beliefs in both their own and other cultures. Because of this, students can simultaneously learn about other cultures and gain insights into their own culture, including its values, traditions, customs, and rituals (Alptekin, 2002). Secondly, the success of communication in a multicultural setting is also facilitated by ICC, which teaches students to recognize the parallels and differences between their own culture and that of other cultures (Byram et al., 2002). Thirdly, as soon as students are aware of the differences between cultures, they will become more open-minded and inquisitive, and they will learn to be less judgmental of those who have different cultural backgrounds than themselves (Liu, 2021). Additionally, knowing how cultures are alike and different will help students analyze their own culture from the viewpoint of those from other cultures (Byram, 1997). Lastly, the incorporation of ICC will give students the opportunity to reflect on other people's cultural values with intellectual objectivity

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(Santana & Cely, 2021), enabling them to resolve differences between their ideas and those of others (Byram, 1997).

Despite the fact that intercultural communication (ICC) research has advanced significantly, there are still gaps and restrictions that, if filled, could advance our knowledge of cross-cultural interactions and communication (Dix, 2018; Fong et al., 2018; Osman, 2015; Rabehi, 2021). The results from these studies show a lack of integration of ICC in the curriculum. One of the most crucial elements of the teaching and learning process in schools is the curriculum (Alvior, 2014). The in-class exercises are a great illustration of the types of curricula that can successfully incorporate ICC. According to (Huber & Reynolds, 2014), learning-by-doing, experiential learning, and cooperative learning situations are all effective ways for students to learn ICC and are crucial for intercultural competency. Liddicoat & Scarino (2013) also point out that the class activities must involve observation, description, analysis, and interpretation of phenomena. Interpretation, creation, and exchange of meaning must all be included in the activities. Additionally, "active engagement with the interpretation of self and others in diverse contexts" is necessary (Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013, p. 69). Through various classroom activities, the curriculum must also instill knowledge of one's own and other people's social groups, products, and practices (Byram, 2021; Corbett, 2003).

One distinctive and significant feature of Bhutan's educational system is intercultural communication. Empathy and cross-cultural understanding are highly valued in Bhutan, a country renowned for its unique culture and dedication to Gross National Happiness (GNH). Bhutan's national education policy aims to create an educational system that equips students with the skills necessary to be "nationally rooted and globally competent" (Royal Government of Bhutan (RGOB), 2019, p.1). Bhutan's English curriculum policy aims to support each student in developing the capacity for learning and attaining high levels of knowledge, abilities, attitudes, and behaviors that will enable them to communicate and collaborate skillfully and sensitively in a range of contexts in this multicultural world (Department of Curriculum and Professional Development (DCPD), 2022; Royal Education Council (REC), 2021). The English curriculum policy also promotes students' development of intercultural communication, understanding, and empathy through the use of various cultural contents in the teaching-learning process (Thinley & Maxwell, 2013).

Although Bhutan's English curriculum and education policy seem to have a clear understanding of the value of ICC, it is still uncertain whether ICC is successfully incorporated into the country's English language curriculum. Bhutan is a multilingual country where people speak many dialects and languages. There may be difficulties for students from non-English speaking backgrounds when using English as the medium of instruction. In the classroom, this language barrier may make intercultural communication ineffective. Further, in Bhutan, access to the internet and technology can vary, especially in rural areas. Disparities in technology access can be a barrier, but digital literacy and the ability to access online resources can greatly improve intercultural communication. Although moral and cultural education are incorporated into Bhutan's curriculum, there may be space for improvement to include a wider range of viewpoints and a more thorough examination of the country's rich cultural diversity.

According to some studies (Choden, 2017; LaPrairie, 2014; Singye, 2018), Bhutanese students struggle to communicate effectively in foreign cultural settings, lack communication skills, and have trouble using English for social interaction. These studies suggest that the difficulties that Bhutanese students encounter may be related to the ineffective way that English is taught and learned, failing to adequately prepare students for ICC. Innovative pedagogical approaches and strategies can be

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incorporated into Bhutan's English curriculum to effectively promote intercultural communicative competence. Such as setting up roles that students can play that represent various cultural backgrounds. They can practice intercultural communication in a safe setting and gain an understanding of various viewpoints. Encourage students from different countries to collaborate virtually. Joint projects or conversations about common interests can be examples of this. Students have access to peers from various cultural backgrounds through online platforms.

Since the national framework, which is presented in an instructional guide, serves as the foundation for teaching and learning in Bhutan, it's intriguing to consider how well ICC is incorporated into the classroom activities recommended in the key stage II curriculum. According to the literature, the curriculum's lists of classroom activities must offer students independent learning opportunities where they can actively contribute to the gathering of knowledge about their own and other people's cultural practices and products (Aguilar, 2010). However, there has never been an ICC study done in Bhutan. The purpose of the current study is to evaluate how ICC has been incorporated into Bhutan's key stage II English curriculum's list of classroom activities. In order to effectively adapt education to the particular circumstances of Bhutan, it is imperative that localized research be conducted in order to assess the efficacy of Bhutan's English curriculum in fostering intercultural communicative competence. Accurate measurement of students' progress in acquiring these skills is made possible by locally appropriate assessment tools and methodologies, which support societal empathy and intercultural understanding while also aiding in the preservation of Bhutanese culture. It is feasible to find chances to combine intercultural communication abilities with regional practices and customs by carrying out localized research. This encourages the acquisition and use of these skills more successfully. Bhutan has a distinct culture and societal context. The effectiveness of the English curriculum in promoting intercultural communication must be evaluated in the context of Bhutan's specific cultural norms, values, and practices.

The findings of this study are intended to assist Bhutanese teachers and curriculum designers in understanding the benefits and drawbacks of the English curriculum. Its goal is to help the Bhutanese curriculum develop a culturally appropriate English curriculum that incorporates Bhutanese cultural values, norms, and practices. It is to ensure that the curriculum is appealing to Bhutanese students and that it assists them in connecting their cultural heritage with intercultural communication skills.

The outcome of the study specifically intends to analyze the integration of intercultural communicative competence in the classroom activities of Bhutan's English curriculum for key stage II.

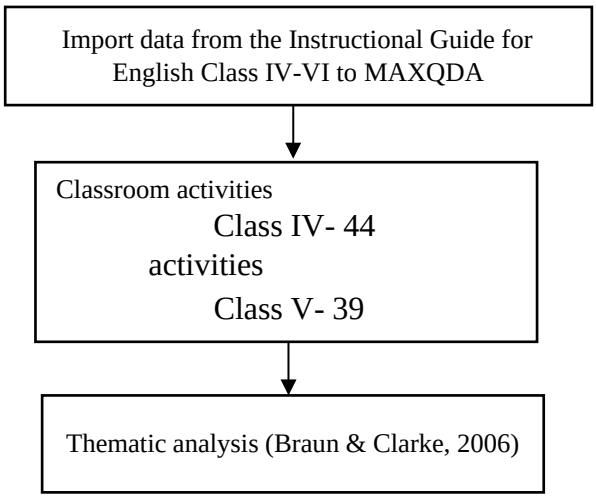
METHOD

The analysis of the integration of ICC was conducted using a documentary research design (Grant, 2019; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). According to Bowen (2009) and Grant (2019), documentary research is a systematic qualitative approach to reviewing or assessing documents. The study's procedures are shown in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1. *The procedures for the integration of ICC in Bhutan's English curriculum for key stage II*

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The instructional guide for English classes IV-VI was part of the document used for the current study, and all suggested classroom activities were taken out and analyzed to address the study's objective. A total of 118 classroom activities were imported into computer software. A computer-assisted software (MAXQDA) was used to organize and handle enormous data (Leavy, 2017).

The data were analyzed using the thematic analysis method (Braun & Clarke, 2006). According to Braun and Clarke (2006), thematic analysis is a qualitative analytic technique for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns within data. In this study, all of the literary texts were analyzed and assigned codes followed by categorizing them into larger themes.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings of the study. The codes and categories obtained from the analysis of the literary texts are reported in Table 1.

Table 1. *The Analysis of the Integration of ICC into the Classroom Activities of Bhutan's English Curriculum for Key Stage II*

	Codes	**Title** (story/essay/poem)	**Examples of excerpts that werecoded**
1. Knowledge of practices	- Music	Class VI (activity no.21)	- *Identify different music genres.*
2. Knowledge of products	- Currency	Class IV (activity no.5)	- *How manysaved? dollars had Ruby*
3. Identifying stereotypes	- Gender roles	Class IV (activity no. 2)	- *Initiate society/community discussion on the roles of males and females.*
4. Suspending disbelief	- Gender roles	Class IV (activity no. 3)	- *A little girl named Kay disguisesherself as a boy to be the King's knight.*
5. Respect for others	- Empathy and values	Class IV (activity no. 1) ClassIV (activity no. 6)	- *Panel discussion on the concept of animal rights and principles of freedom* - *Narrate experiences related to the good things learned from parents.*

According to Table 1, the classroom activities suggested in Bhutan's English curriculum for key stage II contain only a few information related to the understanding of one's or another's cultures. The findings from the curriculum were categorized under five categories.

(1) Knowledge of Practices

The knowledge of practices refers to the knowledge of how people from one's own or other cultures perform a certain thing appears to be integrated into Bhutan's English curriculum through classroom activities. Out of one hundred and eighteen classroom activities given in the curriculum, it was found that one of them focuses on knowledge of cultural practices of both Bhutan and other countries. One code assigned for knowledge of cultural practices includes *music.*

The code *music* was assigned when a classroom activity presented knowledge related to various genres of music found in both Bhutan and another country. For example, one of the classroom activities let students the task of selecting one song, either English or Dzongkha.

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The activity allows students to learn about the genre of music they have chosen, which may include R&B, Rock N' Roll, ballads, or Bhutanese songs such as Zhungdra, Boedra, and Rigsar.

> *Style/Genre: what kind of song is this? Is it Rap, R&B, Blues, Rock n' roll, ballad, Pop, Alternative, Zhungdra, Boedra, and Rigsar (if the learner chooses a Bhutanese song or poem)? Who wrote the song? Find out more information about the author, their history, other songs they have written, their personal life, etc.* (Activity no. 21, class VI).

(2) Knowledge of Products

The knowledge of products refers to the knowledge of specific cultural inventions in one's own or another country that appears to be integrated into Bhutan's English curriculum through classroom activities. Out of one hundred and eighteen classroom activities given in the curriculum, it was found that one of them focuses on knowledge of cultural products of both Bhutan and other countries. One code assigned for knowledge of cultural products includes *currency.* The code *currency* was assigned when a classroom activity presented knowledge related to the names of money in both Bhutan and another country. For example, an activity teaches students about saving and spending money while also introducing them to international and Bhutanese currencies such as the dollar and ngultrum. The activity allows students to watch a video and answer questions related to saving money.

> *How many dollars had Ruby saved and put in her wallet for the shopping trip? ($15. Learners may need to count all the dollars crossed out to getthis total)*
> *Ask children to interview shopkeepers/their father/mother/teachers on theirmonthly expenditure in ngultrum* (Activity no. 5, class IV).

Identifying Stereotypes

Out of one hundred and eighteen classroom activities given in the curriculum, it was found that one of them focuses on identifying stereotypes. One code assigned for identifying stereotypes includes *gender roles.* The code *gender role* was assigned when a classroom activity presented knowledge related to avoiding stereotypical thinking about the roles and responsibilities of men and women. For example, the suggested activity from class IV includes a question-and-answer activity that encourages students to recognize that gender roles are created by societies and that people can change them. The discussion question includes asking students to share their thoughts on the following topics:

1. *Why are there more girls who can cook than boys?*
2. *Where do these ideas come from?*
3. *Is it not important for the boys to cook?*
4. *Can girls dig the garden?*
5. *Is it true that boys should not wash plates and cups?*

The activity will encourage them to see that gender roles are made by societies and people can change them (Activity no. 2, class IV).

The above-mentioned activity is guided through a group discussion to discover the roles of men and women in their families, society, or community. The students are expected to inquire about the roles of men and women in the village.

(3) Suspending Disbelief

Out of one hundred and eighteen classroom activities given in the curriculum, it was found that one of them focuses on suspending disbelief. One code known as *gender roles* was assigned for the category suspending disbelief.

The code *gender role* was assigned when a classroom activity presented an activity related to avoiding stereotypical thinking about the roles and responsibilities of men and women. For example, there is a story in the curriculum about a little girl named Kay who disguises herself as a boy tobe a knight. The king in the story suspects something and sets traps with things likejewelry and clothes, it is the men in the storywho appreciate them, while Kay just pursuesher own goal of being the best knight. The story breaks down gender myths whereby little Kay demonstrates that a girl can be a knight as well.

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Use the text 'Little Kay' to teach empathy and concepts such as self-awareness and critical thinking. The learners can be asked to read the textand the following questions may be used for the discussion.

"What made little Kay to dressed up like a girl?"

Following the responses provided by the learners, group discussion on roles of males and females in their family/ society/ community may be initiated to make learners aware of the fact that the gender stereotyperoles are created by the people and can change for the betterment of society.

Whole class discussion:

Ask learners to demonstrate some ways of promoting gender equality in their relationships at home and school. The expected answer could be girls and boys can share household work. Boys and girls can be provided with equal opportunities to use the playfield (Activity no. 2, class IV).

(4) Respect for Others

Out of one hundred and eighteen classroom activities given in the curriculum, it was found that two of them focus on the category. One code known as *empathy and values* was assigned for the category respect for others, which refers to respecting and demonstrating empathy. For example, the curriculum allows students to read an animal story and participate in a panel discussion about being empathetic to others.

Use the text 'At the Zoo' or any other relevant text to teach 'empathy', concepts such as 'know yourself', 'respect for others', and 'principles of freedom'. Panel discussion on being empathic to others. Conduct thefollowing activity. This activity clearly shows the concept of animal rights and principles of freedom. Whole class discussion:

1. *Did you ever see an injured animal anywhere? What did you do? How did you feel?*
2. *Are you happy with what you did?*
3. *What could you have done?*
4. *What happened next?*
5. *What did you do then?*
6. *How did you feel then?*
7. *If you were that animal, how would you have felt?* (Activity no.1, class IV).

Following the panel discussion, another question is posed to the students, asking them to share their thoughts on how they might show empathy when another person is speaking. In another activity, students are encouraged to recount an event or experience related to any good thing or value they learned from their parents or elders.

Narrate real-life events/stories/or experiences to the class related to good things he/she learned from the parents and elders. Assist learners to narrate…by asking the following questions such as;

What good things do you learn from your parents and elders such as Health Assistants/Doctors/caretakers/instructors/shopkeepers/teachers/physical education? Let the learners reflect on the values that they have learned from their families (Activity no. 6, class IV).

According to the study's findings, the integration of ICC into the classroom activities of Bhutan's English curriculum for key stage II is minimal. Based on the findings, Bhutan's English curriculum for key stage II should include more classroom activities that allow students to participate in learning about one's and others' cultures since there are very few ICC-related classroom activities that would let students compare different cultures. As a result, classroom activities are discovered to reflect ICC very minimally by providing basic cultural values of one's and others. The findings show that few ICC-related classroom activities are not explicitly clear enough to let students learn about their own or others' cultures, which certainly lacks involving students in interactions with

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people from other cultures (Byram, 1997; Sercu, 2005). The findings of this study are in line with previous research conducted by Rodriguez (2015) in which a communicative English textbook was examined for cultural material. Only two activities were found to berelated to ICC that involved listening and responding to the recorded audio. According to the findings of the study, such classroom activity is not adequate to enhance ICC skills such as critical cultural awareness. Similarly, the present study resonates with the findings from the study conducted by Rodriguez (2015). Although Bhutan's English curriculum for key stage II includes numerous amounts of classroom activities, only a few activities could be interpreted towards improving students' ICC. Otherwise, almost all of the classroom activities presented in Bhutan's English curriculum for key stage II are explicitly directed towards enhancing only language skills including reading, writing, listening, speaking, and grammar. The few classroom exercises related to ICC that were found in Bhutan's English curriculum for key stage II do not give more precise instructions on how to use them in an intercultural setting.

Furthermore, the findings of this present study may be comparable to that of Gunantar's earlier study, which was conducted (2017). Gunantar's (2017) study involved textbook analysis investigating cultural material. After analyzing the textbooks, the results from Gunantar's (2017) study showed that most of the cultural topics were of the national/ local culture. As there were limited cultural topics from interlocuter the textbook lacked examples where students could participate in comparing cultures. It is possible to conclude that the classroom activities in Bhutan's English curriculum for key stage II also include a small number of lessons that are primarily focused on Bhutan. Due to a lack of variety in classroom activities involving cultural comparison, those few activities fall short of effectively enhancing crucial ICC skills like critical cultural awareness and the ability to interact and discover new things. There weren't many activities that gave students the chance to engage in cross-cultural interactions. Key Stage II of Bhutan's English curriculum largely lacks ICC in its teaching and learningstrategies.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the findings of the study demonstrate that there are only a few classroom activities from the curriculum that could be associated with ICC since they give students the chance to learn about other people's cultures. For example, the curriculum suggests an activity where students are supposed to go and talk to the shopkeepers in their community about how much money they spend or save in a month. Students are asked to learn about the Ngultrum, which is the currency used in Bhutan, as well as a dollar, which could be a US dollar, an Australian dollar, or a Singaporean dollar. However, students' opportunities to learn more about currency would be limited because the activity does not require students to explore the currency of other countries. The students are involved in a similar activity where they learn more about the various music genres that exist both in their own country and in other nations. This activity expects students to name music genres such as rap, R&B, Blues, Rock N' Roll, Ballad, pop, Zhungdra, Boedra, and Rigsar, which is a mix of Bhutanese and non-Bhutanese music.

According to Byram (1997), teachers should provide students with opportunities to expand and refine their knowledge about themselves and others by allowing them to use their existing knowledge to understand specific documents or behaviors about people from other cultural backgrounds. Similarly, Lussier et al. (2007) state that classroom activities must include the learners' abilities to compare, regroup, deduce, appreciate, synthesize, and judge the information presented in the texts. It is found that teachers do not have to be the sole source of information, the curriculum should let students participate in the process of learning

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about cultural diversity alongside their own national culture (Mihoub & Sifour, 2021).

The findings from the thematic analysis of this study have certain implications for curriculum developers and Bhutanese teachers. The English curriculum for key stage II is made up of appropriate classroom activities because the Bhutanese educational system places a strong emphasis on wholesome education. These activities will encourage students to engage in real-world issues and participate in practical experiences. As a result, it would be easier for the curriculum designers to assess the suggested classroom activities in the curriculum that are being offered to other grade levels in schools and universities across the nation. Similarly, curriculum developers can provide guidelines for writers to create materials that are relevant to their own and other people's cultures in order to make them more meaningful for the improvement of ICC. As a result, the key stage II English curriculum for Bhutan could be evaluated for its strengths and weaknesses in terms of ICC. The English teachers who work with students in grades IV through VI would also be aware of the significance of those suggested classroom exercises in the aspect of ICC. Given the significance of ICC, teachers could come up with ways to include lessons that emphasize ICC in the classroom. This is because in-class activities give students practical experience and the chance to learn about both their own and other cultures.

Limitations of the Study and Recommendations for Further Studies

In light of some study limitations, the following suggestions for additional research are made. Due to the fact that this study is only focused on the key stage II suggested classroom activities, it is recommended that future research focus on other key stage levels. Future research may also include a few classroom observations to look into how ICC is used in the classrooms. Second, since this study is only able to use a documentary research design, future studies could use a mixed-method research design to ask teachers, students, and curriculum developers about how well ICC is integrated into the English curriculum.

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