



Deep Learning Model Integrated with Intercultural Pragmatic Competences in Improving EFL Learners' Speaking Skills

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the integration of a deep learning model with intercultural pragmatic competence to improve EFL learners' speaking skills. The study was motivated by the need to develop speaking instruction that goes beyond grammatical accuracy and fluency by incorporating meaningful communication, learner reflection, pragmatic appropriateness, and intercultural awareness. A qualitative research design was employed to explore teachers' experiences and classroom practices in applying deep learning-oriented speaking activities. The participants were seven EFL teachers who had experience implementing a deep learning model in their English classes. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and classroom observations. The data were analyzed through data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings revealed that the deep learning model contributed to learners' speaking development by encouraging meaningful speaking practice, collaboration, problem-solving communication, learner autonomy, and self-reflection. Activities such as role-plays, group discussions, simulations, dialogue analysis, and problem-based tasks helped learners express ideas, negotiate meaning, and build confidence in using English. The findings also showed that integrating intercultural pragmatic competence enabled learners to speak more appropriately and effectively in intercultural contexts. Learners were guided to understand politeness strategies, speech acts, indirect expressions, turn-taking, social distance, and cultural norms in communication. This integration helped learners become more aware of how language choices should be adjusted according to context, relationship, and communicative purpose. The study concludes that combining deep learning principles with intercultural pragmatic competence provides a meaningful pedagogical framework for developing EFL learners as fluent, reflective, culturally responsive, and pragmatically competent speakers.

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INTRODUCTION

English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning has increasingly moved beyond the traditional emphasis on memorizing grammar rules, vocabulary lists, and fixed sentence patterns. In contemporary language education, learners are expected not only to know English but also to use it meaningfully, critically, and appropriately in diverse communicative situations. This shift is especially important in the context of globalization, where English functions as a medium of international communication among speakers from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. As a result, EFL instruction needs to prepare learners to communicate ideas, negotiate meaning, interpret context, and respond appropriately in real-life interactions (Babault et al., 2022; Exare & Vaissière, 2023). In this regard, deep learning-oriented pedagogy offers a relevant framework because it encourages learners to engage in reflective, analytical, collaborative, and problem-solving activities rather than relying on surface-level memorization. Deep learning in EFL instruction emphasizes meaning-making, critical thinking, learner autonomy, and the application of language knowledge in authentic contexts. Learners are encouraged to analyze dialogues, interpret meanings, compare expressions, evaluate language choices, and use English to complete communicative tasks. This approach is consistent with studies emphasizing reflective engagement, critical analysis, authentic discourse, and higher-order language use in language learning contexts (Grabowska, 2022; Leroux & Manoïlov, 2020; Lin et al., 2022).

The efficacy of a deep learning model in teaching EFL lies in its ability to transform learners from passive recipients of linguistic input into active constructors of meaning. Rather than simply repeating grammatical forms, learners are guided to understand how language works in relation to purpose, audience, situation, and context. Through meaning-rich activities such as role-plays, discussions, problem-based tasks, collaborative projects, reflective journals, peer feedback, and authentic discourse analysis, learners can connect linguistic knowledge with communicative practice. Such activities support vocabulary development, grammatical awareness, comprehension, fluency, and confidence because learners are required to use language for purposeful communication (Ensor et al., 2022; Révauger, 2022). The integration of formal and informal learning also strengthens this process. Formal classroom instruction provides structure and guidance, while informal learning through online platforms, forums, blogs, journals, and self-directed tasks allows learners to extend their learning beyond the classroom. Studies on autonomous learning and metacognition show that learners benefit when they are encouraged to self-assess, monitor progress, reflect on strategies, and take responsibility for their learning development (Babault et al., 2022; Mompean & Eisenbeis, 2022; Révauger, 2022). In addition, technology-supported learning, including translation tools and online resources, can function as scaffolding when used critically. Instead of depending on automated outputs, learners can evaluate translations, compare alternatives, discuss errors, and develop metacognitive awareness of language use (Barysevich & Costaris, 2021; Ensor et al., 2022; Révauger, 2022).

However, effective English communication requires more than linguistic competence. EFL learners may produce grammatically correct sentences but still fail to communicate appropriately if they do not understand the pragmatic and cultural dimensions of language. This is where intercultural pragmatic competence becomes essential. Intercultural pragmatic competence refers to learners' ability to use language appropriately across cultural, social, and situational contexts (Petraki & Bayes, 2022;

Rouki, 2023; Tai & Chen, 2021; Tran & Yeh, 2020). It includes understanding speech acts, politeness strategies, indirect meanings, implicatures, turn-taking, social distance, power relations, and culturally shaped communicative norms. In intercultural communication, meaning is not determined only by words and grammar but also by context, intention, relationship, and cultural expectation (Huang & Lu, 2023; Kentmen et al., 2023). For example, learners need to know how to make requests politely, refuse invitations without causing offense, express disagreement diplomatically, give opinions respectfully, respond to compliments, and apologize appropriately. Research consistently emphasizes that pragmatic and intercultural competence are central components of communicative competence because proficiency alone does not guarantee successful pragmatic performance (Al-Hozali, 2023; Al-Khazaali, 2023; Al-Seghayer, 2024; González-Lloret, 2022).

The importance of intercultural pragmatic competence is also supported by studies showing that EFL textbooks and classroom materials often underrepresent authentic pragmatic use. Many instructional materials present language in decontextualized ways, with limited attention to social variation, politeness, indirectness, and cultural appropriateness (Kentmen et al., 2023; Petraki & Bayes, 2022; Tran & Yeh, 2020). This limitation can prevent learners from developing the ability to adjust their language according to situation and interlocutor. Therefore, explicit pragmatic instruction is needed to help learners notice how language choices change depending on context. Media-based instruction, authentic dialogues, films, television clips, online intercultural exchanges, and technology-mediated tasks can expose learners to varied pragmatic practices and support their ability to recognize and produce appropriate speech acts (González-Lloret, 2022; Omar & Razi, 2022; Schauer, 2022). At the same time, learner variables such as motivation, willingness to communicate, proficiency level, and intercultural awareness influence pragmatic development. Some studies suggest that higher proficiency may support pragmatic comprehension, but others show that language proficiency alone is not sufficient without targeted pragmatic instruction (Al-Hozali, 2023; Huang & Lu, 2023; Tai & Chen, 2021; Tajeddin & Malmir, 2024). This indicates that intercultural pragmatics should be taught deliberately and systematically in EFL speaking instruction.

Speaking is one of the most challenging skills for many EFL learners because it requires real-time processing of vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, fluency, meaning, and social appropriateness. Learners often struggle not only with what to say but also with how to say it in ways that are contextually and culturally acceptable. Integrating a deep learning model with intercultural pragmatic competence can address this challenge because it combines meaningful language use with pragmatic and cultural awareness (Kim, 2020; Taglialatela, 2021). Deep learning principles provide learners with opportunities to engage in authentic speaking activities, while intercultural pragmatic competence ensures that these speaking activities go beyond fluency and accuracy to include appropriateness, respect, and adaptability. For instance, role-plays and simulations can be designed around real-life intercultural situations such as making requests, negotiating disagreement, participating in academic discussions, giving feedback, or resolving misunderstandings. Collaborative projects and problem-based tasks can require learners to use English to analyze intercultural issues, compare communicative norms, and reflect on how language choices affect relationships and meaning. Such instruction enables learners to develop not only speaking fluency but also

pragmatic sensitivity, cultural flexibility, and communicative confidence (Abrams, 2022; Dimova, 2020; Kim, 2020; Tagliatalata, 2021).

The integration of deep learning and intercultural pragmatic competence is particularly significant because English today is not used only for interaction with native speakers but also for communication among diverse users of English as an international or global language. Therefore, speaking instruction should not be limited to imitating native-speaker norms. It should help learners become flexible communicators who can understand different varieties of English, negotiate meaning across cultures, and use language respectfully in diverse contexts. English as an International Language and English as a Lingua Franca perspectives emphasize the need to expose learners to linguistic diversity and intercultural realities rather than treating native-speaker accuracy as the only measure of success (Blair, 2020; Dimova, 2020; Lwanga-Lumu, 2020; Tagliatalata, 2021). This perspective aligns with intercultural pragmatic pedagogy because it values communicative effectiveness, mutual understanding, and cultural responsiveness. It also supports a more inclusive model of EFL speaking development in which learners are trained to become confident, reflective, and socially aware speakers.

Despite growing attention to deep learning pedagogy and intercultural pragmatic competence, previous studies have often examined these areas separately. Research on deep learning in EFL has focused on meaningful tasks, autonomy, metacognition, collaboration, and technology-supported learning, while research on intercultural pragmatics has emphasized speech acts, politeness, implicature, appropriateness, and cultural awareness. However, fewer studies have explicitly investigated how the principles of deep learning can be integrated with intercultural pragmatic competence to improve EFL learners' speaking skills. This creates a research gap, particularly in designing speaking instruction that simultaneously develops fluency, accuracy, pragmatic appropriateness, intercultural awareness, and learner autonomy. Addressing this gap is important because EFL learners need speaking competence that is not only linguistically correct but also meaningful, reflective, culturally sensitive, and applicable to real-world communication.

Therefore, the objective of this study is to examine how the integration of a deep learning model and intercultural pragmatic competence can improve EFL learners' speaking skills. Specifically, the study aims to explore how deep learning-oriented activities support meaningful speaking practice and how intercultural pragmatic competence enhances learners' ability to communicate appropriately across cultural contexts. The novelty of this study lies in its integrated pedagogical focus: it does not treat deep learning and intercultural pragmatics as separate instructional concerns but combines them into a unified framework for developing EFL speaking skills. This study is expected to contribute to EFL pedagogy by offering an instructional perspective that links authentic communication, critical reflection, learner autonomy, pragmatic awareness, and intercultural sensitivity. Based on the research objectives, this study addresses the following research questions: How does the application of a deep learning model contribute to the development of EFL learners' speaking skills? And How does the integration of intercultural pragmatic competence within a deep learning model improve EFL learners' ability to speak English appropriately and effectively in intercultural communication contexts?

METHODS

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research design to explore how EFL teachers applied a deep learning model integrated with intercultural pragmatic competence in improving learners' speaking skills. A qualitative design was considered appropriate because the study focused on understanding teachers' experiences, perceptions, instructional practices, and classroom implementation processes rather than measuring numerical outcomes. Since the research questions aimed to examine how the deep learning model contributed to speaking development and how intercultural pragmatic competence was integrated into classroom interaction, qualitative inquiry allowed the researcher to obtain rich, detailed, and contextual data from teachers who had direct experience with the instructional approach.

The qualitative design was suitable for this study because it enabled the researcher to investigate teaching practices in natural educational settings. Through interviews and classroom observations, the researcher could examine how teachers designed meaningful speaking activities, encouraged learner reflection, facilitated intercultural communication tasks, and guided students to use English appropriately in different social and cultural contexts. This design was also relevant because deep learning in EFL instruction involves complex classroom processes such as collaboration, problem-solving, metacognition, authentic communication, and learner autonomy. These processes cannot be fully understood through statistical data alone; they require descriptive and interpretive analysis of classroom realities and teacher perspectives. The design also aligned with the study's focus on intercultural pragmatic competence, which involves context-sensitive language use, politeness strategies, speech acts, cultural awareness, and communicative appropriateness. These aspects are best explored through participants' explanations and observed classroom practices.

Research Participants

The participants of this study were seven EFL teachers who had experience in applying a deep learning model in their English classes. The sample size was considered suitable for qualitative research because the aim was to obtain detailed and meaningful information from participants who were directly involved in the phenomenon under investigation. Rather than selecting a large number of respondents, the study focused on teachers who could provide rich insights into the implementation of deep learning-oriented activities and intercultural pragmatic competence in EFL speaking instruction.

The participants were selected through purposive sampling. This technique was used because the researcher needed participants who met specific criteria relevant to the objectives of the study. The selection criteria were as follows: first, the participants had to be EFL teachers; second, they had to have experience teaching speaking skills; third, they had to have applied or been involved in applying a deep learning model in their classroom; and fourth, they had to be willing to participate in interviews and classroom observations. These criteria ensured that the participants had sufficient knowledge and experience to discuss the instructional practices being investigated.

In terms of demographic information, the participants consisted of seven English teachers teaching EFL learners at the secondary or tertiary level, depending on the institutional context of the study. They had varied teaching experience, ranging from novice to experienced teachers, which allowed the researcher to capture diverse perspectives on the implementation of deep learning principles. The participants also

differed in their classroom strategies, familiarity with intercultural pragmatic competence, and use of authentic speaking tasks. This diversity enriched the data because it provided multiple views on how deep learning activities such as role-plays, discussions, simulations, problem-based tasks, and collaborative projects were used to improve learners' speaking skills.

Research Instruments

This study used two main research instruments: semi-structured interviews and classroom observation. These instruments were chosen because they allowed the researcher to collect both verbal and behavioral data. Interviews provided information about teachers' perceptions, experiences, challenges, and reflections, while observations enabled the researcher to examine how the deep learning model and intercultural pragmatic competence were actually implemented in classroom speaking activities.

The first instrument was a semi-structured interview guide. The interview questions were developed based on the objectives of the study and the theoretical concepts of deep learning, EFL speaking instruction, and intercultural pragmatic competence. The questions focused on several areas: teachers' understanding of the deep learning model, the types of speaking activities they used, their strategies for encouraging meaningful communication, their ways of integrating intercultural pragmatic competence, the challenges they encountered, and their views on learners' speaking improvement. A semi-structured format was selected because it provided flexibility. The researcher could ask prepared questions while also allowing follow-up questions when participants gave interesting or unclear responses.

The second instrument was a classroom observation sheet. This instrument was developed to record teaching practices related to deep learning and intercultural pragmatic competence. The observation focused on several indicators, including the use of authentic speaking tasks, student collaboration, problem-solving activities, teacher scaffolding, learner reflection, use of intercultural topics, pragmatic features such as politeness and speech acts, and opportunities for students to practice speaking in meaningful contexts. Observation was important because it allowed the researcher to compare what teachers said in interviews with what they actually did in the classroom.

To ensure the validity and reliability of the instruments, several steps were taken. First, the interview guide and observation sheet were reviewed by experts or supervisors in EFL teaching and qualitative research to ensure content validity. Their feedback was used to revise unclear, overlapping, or irrelevant items. Second, the instruments were piloted with teachers who had similar characteristics to the research participants but were not included in the main study. This pilot process helped the researcher identify whether the questions were understandable and whether the observation indicators were practical to use. Third, triangulation was applied by comparing data from interviews and observations. Fourth, the researcher maintained consistency in using the instruments across all participants. In qualitative research, reliability was strengthened not through statistical testing but through careful documentation, systematic procedures, and transparent interpretation of the data.

Data Analysis

The data in this study were analyzed using qualitative data analysis procedures consisting of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. These stages allowed the researcher to organize, interpret, and generate meaning from

the interview and observation data systematically. The first stage was data condensation. In this stage, the researcher selected, focused, simplified, and organized the raw data obtained from interviews and classroom observations. Interview recordings were transcribed, and observation notes were rewritten in a clear format. The researcher then read the transcripts and field notes repeatedly to identify important information related to the research questions. Data that were relevant to the implementation of the deep learning model, intercultural pragmatic competence, and learners' speaking development were coded. For example, codes were created for "authentic speaking tasks," "collaborative learning," "teacher scaffolding," "learner reflection," "politeness strategies," "speech acts," "intercultural awareness," and "speaking confidence." Irrelevant or repetitive data were reduced without removing information that contributed to the interpretation of the findings.

The second stage was data display. After coding the data, the researcher organized the information into tables, categories, and thematic descriptions. Data from interviews and observations were displayed according to major themes, such as teachers' understanding of deep learning, classroom strategies for speaking instruction, integration of intercultural pragmatic competence, challenges in implementation, and perceived impact on learners' speaking skills. Displaying the data in this way helped the researcher compare responses among the seven teachers and identify patterns across different classrooms. It also made it easier to examine whether the observation data supported or contradicted the interview data.

The third stage was drawing conclusions and verification. In this stage, the researcher interpreted the displayed data to answer the research questions. The researcher identified recurring themes, relationships, and meanings from the data. For example, if several teachers reported that role-plays and simulations helped students practice polite requests or intercultural conversations, and the observation data showed similar classroom practices, the researcher considered this a strong finding. The conclusions were verified by checking the consistency of evidence across data sources. Triangulation was used to strengthen trustworthiness by comparing interview responses with classroom observation findings. The researcher also reviewed the data several times to ensure that the interpretations were grounded in participants' actual statements and observed practices. Through these stages, the analysis produced a comprehensive understanding of how EFL teachers applied a deep learning model, how intercultural pragmatic competence was integrated into speaking instruction, and how this integration contributed to learners' speaking development. The analysis emphasized not only what strategies were used but also why they were meaningful for improving EFL learners' communicative competence.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

How does the application of a deep learning model contribute to the development of EFL learners' speaking skills?

The qualitative findings indicate that the application of a deep learning model contributed positively to the development of EFL learners' speaking skills by creating more meaningful, interactive, and reflective learning experiences. Based on the interviews with seven EFL teachers and classroom observations, the deep learning model encouraged learners to move beyond memorizing vocabulary and grammatical

structures. Instead, learners were guided to use English for purposeful communication through role-plays, group discussions, problem-based tasks, simulations, dialogue analysis, peer collaboration, and reflective activities. These activities provided learners with opportunities to express ideas, negotiate meaning, respond to others, and solve communicative problems in English.

The teachers reported that learners became more confident when speaking because they were not only asked to produce correct sentences but also encouraged to communicate ideas in real-life contexts. Classroom observations also showed that students were more actively involved when speaking tasks were connected to familiar situations, social issues, or authentic communication needs. This finding is in line with the principle that deep learning emphasizes meaning-making, critical thinking, collaboration, autonomy, and the application of knowledge in authentic contexts. In EFL speaking instruction, these principles help learners develop fluency, vocabulary use, grammatical awareness, pronunciation confidence, and communicative participation. The deep learning model also supported metacognitive development because learners were encouraged to reflect on their speaking performance, identify weaknesses, and improve their strategies for communication. This reflects the research context described in the uploaded source, which emphasizes that deep learning-oriented EFL instruction promotes meaningful processing, collaborative problem-solving, autonomy, reflection, and authentic task engagement.

The application of the deep learning model contributed to learners' speaking skills in five main ways: it increased meaningful speaking practice, strengthened collaboration, improved confidence, encouraged reflection, and trained learners to use English for problem-solving communication. These findings suggest that deep learning is suitable for EFL speaking instruction because speaking is not only a linguistic activity but also a social, cognitive, and reflective process. It can be seen in Figure 1.

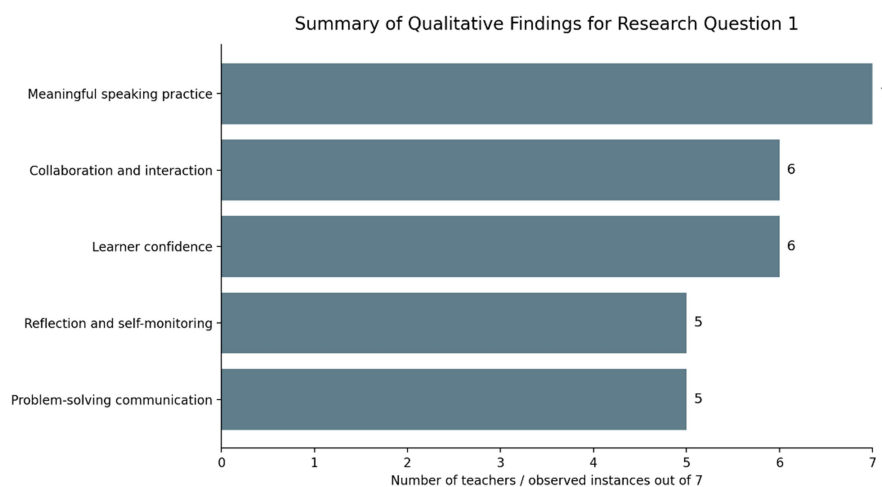


Figure 1. Deep Learning Contribution in Speaking Skills

How does the integration of intercultural pragmatic competence within a deep learning model improve EFL learners' ability to speak English appropriately and effectively in intercultural communication contexts?

The findings show that integrating intercultural pragmatic competence within a deep learning model improved EFL learners' ability to speak English more appropriately and effectively in intercultural communication contexts. Interview data revealed that the teachers did not only focus on fluency, vocabulary, and grammar when teaching speaking. They also introduced learners to pragmatic aspects of communication, such as politeness strategies, speech acts, indirect expressions, turn-taking, social distance, cultural norms, and context-sensitive language choices. Through classroom observation, it was found that teachers used activities such as intercultural role-plays, simulations, dialogue interpretation, group discussions, and reflection tasks to help learners understand how English expressions may vary depending on the situation, relationship between speakers, and communicative purpose.

The integration of intercultural pragmatic competence helped learners become more aware that successful English communication requires more than grammatical correctness. For example, learners practiced how to make polite requests, express disagreement respectfully, respond to compliments, apologize, refuse invitations, and participate in conversations involving people from different cultural backgrounds. These activities allowed learners to understand the relationship between language, culture, context, and meaning. When intercultural pragmatic competence was embedded in deep learning tasks, learners were able to analyze communicative situations, compare cultural norms, choose suitable expressions, and reflect on the possible effects of their language choices. This supports the view that intercultural pragmatic competence is essential because EFL learners need to communicate appropriately across cultural and social contexts, not merely produce accurate sentences.

The qualitative evidence also suggests that the combination of deep learning and intercultural pragmatic competence created a richer speaking environment. Deep learning provided the structure for authentic, collaborative, and reflective speaking practice, while intercultural pragmatic competence provided the cultural and pragmatic foundation for appropriate communication. As a result, learners were better able to speak English with awareness of politeness, audience, context, and intercultural sensitivity. This integration improved not only their speaking performance but also their ability to communicate respectfully and effectively in global English communication. Therefore, the findings indicate that intercultural pragmatic competence strengthens the effectiveness of the deep learning model by making speaking instruction more realistic, culturally responsive, and communicatively meaningful. The summary of this can be seen in Figure 2.

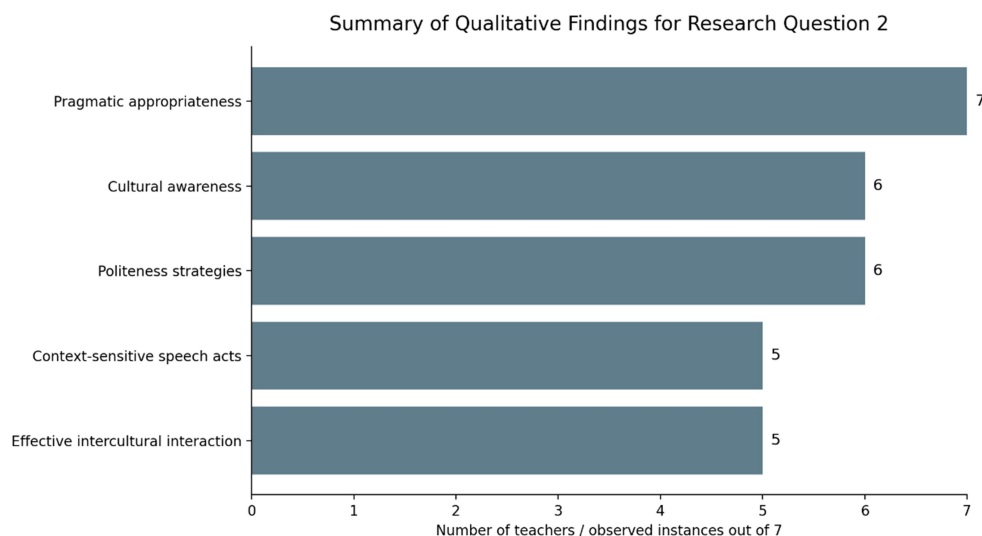


Figure 2. The Integration of Intercultural Pragmatic Competence within a Deep Learning Model

Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that the application of a deep learning model contributed to the development of EFL learners' speaking skills by creating meaningful, interactive, collaborative, and reflective speaking experiences. Based on the interviews with seven EFL teachers and classroom observations, learners were encouraged to move beyond memorizing vocabulary and grammatical structures and to use English for purposeful communication through role-plays, group discussions, simulations, dialogue analysis, peer collaboration, and problem-based tasks. This finding confirms the argument that deep learning-oriented pedagogy supports language development when learners are actively involved in meaning-making, critical thinking, and authentic language use rather than passive repetition of linguistic forms. The results are consistent with Babault et al. (2022), Exare and Vaissière (2023), Grabowska (2022), Leroux and Manoïlov (2020), and Lin et al. (2022), who emphasize that language learning becomes more effective when learners engage with language reflectively and analytically in meaningful contexts. In the present study, the teachers' accounts and classroom observations showed that deep learning activities helped learners express ideas, negotiate meaning, and respond to communicative problems, suggesting that speaking development is strengthened when learners are placed in situations that require active use of English. These findings are grounded in the attached manuscript, which explains that the study used interviews and classroom observations with seven EFL teachers to examine how deep learning and intercultural pragmatic competence were applied in speaking instruction.

The first major finding is that deep learning activities increased learners' meaningful speaking practice. This result supports Ensor et al. (2022) and Révauger (2022), who argue that collaborative and reflective learning activities help learners connect linguistic knowledge with practical communication. In this study, teachers reported that learners became more engaged when speaking tasks were related to real-life contexts, familiar issues, or authentic communication needs. This confirms the view that speaking should not be taught merely as pronunciation practice or grammar production but as a social

and cognitive activity in which learners use language to achieve communicative purposes. The finding also extends previous research by showing how deep learning principles can be operationalized in EFL speaking classes through activities such as simulations, collaborative projects, and dialogue interpretation. While previous studies have discussed deep learning in relation to autonomy, metacognition, and meaningful language processing, this study highlights its specific contribution to speaking instruction by showing that learners' oral participation improves when tasks require them to analyze, interact, and reflect.

The second finding concerns the role of collaboration in improving speaking skills. The teachers observed that learners became more willing to speak when they worked with peers in group discussions, role-plays, and problem-solving tasks. This finding is aligned with Grabowska (2022), Ensor et al. (2022), and Troncy (2021), who emphasize that language learning is strengthened through socially negotiated tasks and collaborative learning environments. In this study, collaboration provided learners with opportunities to exchange ideas, ask questions, clarify meanings, and co-construct utterances. Such interaction helped reduce speaking anxiety because learners were not isolated in producing English individually; instead, they received peer support and feedback. This finding extends previous studies by demonstrating that collaboration in a deep learning model does not only support general engagement but also creates a safer environment for oral production. In EFL contexts, where learners often feel anxious about making mistakes, peer-based speaking tasks can encourage risk-taking and gradual confidence-building.

The third finding shows that the deep learning model promoted learner confidence and metacognitive awareness. Teachers reported that learners became more confident because they were encouraged to reflect on their speaking performance, identify weaknesses, and improve their communication strategies. This result is consistent with Mompean and Eisenbeis (2022) and Révauger (2022), who found that metacognitive activities such as self-assessment, reflection, and guided autonomy help learners take responsibility for their language development. In this study, reflection enabled learners to become more aware of their pronunciation, vocabulary choices, fluency, grammatical accuracy, and communicative effectiveness. This finding is important because it suggests that speaking development requires not only frequent oral practice but also conscious evaluation of how speaking is performed. Thus, the study confirms previous research on metacognition while extending it to the specific context of deep learning-based speaking instruction.

The findings also reveal that integrating intercultural pragmatic competence within the deep learning model improved learners' ability to speak English appropriately and effectively in intercultural contexts. Teachers introduced pragmatic elements such as politeness strategies, speech acts, indirect expressions, turn-taking, social distance, cultural norms, and context-sensitive language choices. This finding confirms the arguments of Al-Hozali (2023), Al-Seghayer (2024), González-Lloret (2022), Huang and Lu (2023), Kentmen et al. (2023), Petraki and Bayes (2022), Rouki (2023), Tai and Chen (2021), and Tran and Yeh (2020), who state that pragmatic competence is an essential component of communicative competence. The present study supports the claim that learners may produce grammatically correct sentences but still communicate inappropriately if they lack pragmatic and intercultural awareness. Therefore, speaking

instruction should include not only fluency and accuracy but also appropriateness, politeness, and cultural sensitivity.

A key contribution of this study is that intercultural pragmatic competence was not taught as an isolated theoretical component but was embedded in meaningful speaking tasks. For example, learners practiced making polite requests, refusing invitations, expressing disagreement, apologizing, responding to compliments, and participating in intercultural conversations. This finding supports Schauer (2022), Omar and Razi (2022), and González-Lloret (2022), who emphasize the value of explicit pragmatic instruction, authentic materials, media-based tasks, and technology-mediated activities in developing learners' pragmatic competence. However, this study extends previous findings by showing that pragmatic competence becomes more pedagogically powerful when integrated into deep learning activities. Rather than merely learning pragmatic formulas, learners analyzed contexts, compared expressions, discussed cultural meanings, and reflected on the consequences of language choices. This indicates that intercultural pragmatics can be developed more effectively when learners are cognitively and socially engaged in authentic communicative situations.

The findings also confirm previous studies showing that language proficiency alone does not guarantee pragmatic competence. Al-Hozali (2023) found that general language proficiency may not have a linear relationship with pragmatic proficiency, while Huang and Lu (2023) and Tai and Chen (2021) reported that pragmatic performance varies depending on speech act type, context, and learner proficiency. The present study supports this view because teachers observed that learners needed explicit guidance to understand how expressions should be adjusted according to social distance, relationship, purpose, and cultural expectation. For example, learners could construct grammatically correct requests but still needed support in making them polite or contextually appropriate. This finding strengthens the argument that EFL speaking instruction must include pragmatic awareness as a deliberate instructional goal.

Another important finding is that the integration of deep learning and intercultural pragmatic competence helped learners become more culturally responsive speakers. This finding is consistent with Kim (2020), Dimova (2020), Lwanga-Lumu (2020), Blair (2020), and Taglialatela (2021), who argue that English language instruction should prepare learners for communication in diverse intercultural and global contexts rather than limiting them to native-speaker norms. In this study, learners were encouraged to recognize that English is used by speakers from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Consequently, effective speaking was understood not simply as sounding like a native speaker but as communicating clearly, respectfully, and appropriately in intercultural situations. This finding extends previous research on English as an International Language and English as a Lingua Franca by linking intercultural awareness directly with classroom speaking practices under a deep learning framework.

Although the findings generally confirm previous studies, they also reveal several practical challenges. Teachers needed sufficient knowledge of both deep learning principles and intercultural pragmatics to design effective speaking activities. This supports Khan et al. (2023), Siqueira (2021), and Taglialatela (2021), who argue that teacher preparation is crucial for implementing intercultural and communicative pedagogy. Without adequate teacher understanding, intercultural pragmatic competence may be reduced to superficial cultural information rather than meaningful pragmatic practice. In addition, classroom time, learners' proficiency levels, and limited authentic

materials may influence the effectiveness of implementation. These challenges suggest that the integration of deep learning and intercultural pragmatic competence requires careful task design, clear learning objectives, appropriate scaffolding, and continuous reflection.

The findings of this study confirm and extend the existing body of knowledge by demonstrating that EFL learners' speaking skills can be improved when deep learning principles are integrated with intercultural pragmatic competence. Deep learning provides meaningful, collaborative, reflective, and problem-solving speaking experiences, while intercultural pragmatic competence ensures that learners use English appropriately in diverse social and cultural contexts. The study contributes to EFL pedagogy by offering an integrated instructional perspective that connects fluency, accuracy, pragmatic appropriateness, cultural awareness, learner autonomy, and communicative confidence. Therefore, the results suggest that speaking instruction should not focus only on linguistic performance but should also develop learners as reflective and interculturally competent communicators who can use English effectively in real-world communication.

CONCLUSION

This study concluded that the application of a deep learning model contributed meaningfully to the development of EFL learners' speaking skills by promoting active, reflective, collaborative, and context-based language use. The findings from teacher interviews and classroom observations showed that learners benefited from speaking activities that required them to analyze meaning, solve communicative problems, negotiate ideas, collaborate with peers, and reflect on their speaking performance. Through role-plays, group discussions, simulations, dialogue analysis, problem-based tasks, and peer interaction, learners were provided with more opportunities to use English for authentic purposes rather than merely practicing isolated vocabulary or grammatical patterns. This learning process helped learners improve their fluency, confidence, vocabulary use, grammatical awareness, and willingness to communicate. The deep learning model also encouraged learners to become more autonomous and metacognitively aware because they were guided to evaluate their own speaking strengths and weaknesses and to develop better communication strategies. Therefore, speaking development in this study was not limited to linguistic accuracy but also involved learners' ability to think critically, participate actively, and use English meaningfully in real-life communication.

The study also concluded that integrating intercultural pragmatic competence within a deep learning model strengthened EFL learners' ability to speak English appropriately and effectively in intercultural communication contexts. The findings indicated that learners needed more than fluency and grammatical correctness to become successful English speakers; they also needed to understand how language choices are shaped by context, culture, social relationship, politeness, and communicative purpose. By integrating pragmatic features such as speech acts, politeness strategies, indirect expressions, turn-taking, social distance, and cultural norms into deep learning activities, teachers helped learners become more aware of how to use English respectfully and appropriately in diverse situations. This integration enabled learners to practice making requests, expressing disagreement, refusing invitations, apologizing, responding to compliments, and participating in intercultural conversations with greater sensitivity.

Thus, the novelty of this study lies in its integrated pedagogical perspective, which combines deep learning principles with intercultural pragmatic competence to improve EFL speaking skills. The study suggests that EFL speaking instruction should not only train learners to speak accurately and fluently but also prepare them to become reflective, culturally responsive, and pragmatically competent communicators in global English communication.

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