



Developing a Reflective Deep Learning Module to Enhance Students' Social Awareness in Cross-Cultural Contexts

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Article Info	Abstract
Received: 2025-12-13 Revised: 2026-06-26 Accepted: 2026-06-27 Keywords: Reflective Learning; Deep Learning; Social Awareness; Cross-Cultural Competence; Intercultural Education; English as a Foreign Language Learners DOI: 10.24256/ideas.v14i1.8821 Corresponding Author: Sinta Nova sintanovia004@gmail.com Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris, Universitas Muhammadiyah Kotabumi	<i>The necessity of equipping students for multicultural interactions has become progressively vital in higher education. Students of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) must develop both linguistic proficiency and reflective awareness, along with social sensitivity, as they engage with culturally diverse contexts. Many learners, however, acquire only theoretical cultural knowledge, lacking introspective skills and emotional insight. This study seeks to develop and assess a reflective deep learning module based on the ADDIE (Analysis, Design, Development, Implementation, Evaluation) framework to improve students' social awareness in cross-cultural settings. Data were acquired using needs analysis questionnaires, reflective journals, interviews, and classroom observations, utilizing a research and development methodology including 24 sixth-semester students in the analysis phase and 10 students in the pilot phase. Research indicates that reflective journaling, case-based learning, role-playing, attentive observation, and experiencing cross-cultural simulations markedly enhanced students' capacity to interpret cultural differences, empathize with others, and respond effectively to intercultural issues. The kids' narratives illustrate a shift from superficial cultural acknowledgment to profound emotional, cognitive, and behavioral understanding. This study enhances the existing research on reflective deep learning as a transformational pedagogical method in EFL teaching, presenting a viable strategy for fostering cross-cultural sensitivity in higher education institutions.</i>

1. Introduction

The growing scale of global communication and intercultural engagement has made intercultural competence a central goal of higher education, including English language teaching in EFL contexts. While linguistic proficiency remains essential, learners are increasingly expected to develop the interpretive, emotional, and social capacities needed to engage meaningfully across cultures.

Recent studies support this shift: Rahman and Novitasari (2025) found that reflective and collaborative tasks, such as photovoice-based reflection, helped university students build openness and critical cultural awareness, while Wibowo et al. (2024) showed that experiential learning approaches similarly strengthened students' intercultural communicative competence. Together, these studies suggest that structured reflection and experiential engagement - not cognitive input alone - are what enable learners to translate cultural knowledge into genuine intercultural sensitivity.

Despite this evidence, conventional EFL curricula in many contexts continue to prioritize the transmission of cultural facts and communicative norms, with limited attention to the reflective processing that turns such knowledge into social awareness. More specifically, what remains absent is a structured, module-based intervention that deliberately combines reflective practice with deep learning strategies to cultivate social awareness, rather than treating reflection as an incidental by-product of activity design. Addressing this gap calls for a practical instructional model that EFL practitioners can both implement and evaluate systematically.

This study responds to that need through a research and development (R&D) approach, using the ADDIE model (Analysis, Design, Development, Implementation, Evaluation) to design and evaluate a reflective deep learning module. The module is intended to help students move beyond surface-level cultural knowledge toward reflective, emotionally engaged, and socially aware understanding of intercultural situations. Specifically, this study addresses the following research questions:

1. How is the reflective deep learning module designed to enhance students' social awareness?
2. What are the effects of the reflective deep learning module on students' ability to interpret and respond to cross-cultural situations?

Literature Review

1. Reflective Learning

Reflective learning is widely regarded as the mechanism through which experience is converted into deep understanding, rather than simply accumulated. This idea traces back to Dewey (1938), who described reflection as a deliberate, active process of examining one's thoughts, actions, and experiences in light of new information — learning, in his view, comes not from experience

itself but from thinking carefully about it. Kolb (1984) operationalized this insight in his Experiential Learning Theory, positioning reflection as the pivotal stage that links concrete experience to abstract conceptualization; without it, he argued, experience risks producing only shallow, unprocessed understanding.

Boud, Keogh, and Walker (1985) extended this further by framing reflection as an emotional as much as cognitive process, in which learners revisit experiences, re-examine their feelings, and reconstruct meaning from them — a view echoed by Boyd and Fales (1983), who similarly described reflection as an internal process of reworking prior understanding. Read together, these accounts converge on a single idea: reflection is not a passive afterthought to experience but an active, emotionally engaged process that determines whether learning becomes meaningful at all.

This understanding of reflection has direct relevance to intercultural and EFL education. Rosmilawati, Meilya, and Darmawan (2020) found that structured reflection helps learners recognize their own cultural biases and develop empathy across varied cultural contexts, while Rahman and Aim (2024) similarly showed that reflective inquiry strengthens students' cultural literacy by prompting critical interpretation of cultural phenomena in relation to personal experience.

Although these two studies differ in focus — one centers on bias recognition and empathy, the other on critical interpretation — both point to the same underlying mechanism: reflection enables learners to process intercultural experience at a personal, interpretive level rather than treating culture as abstract information to be memorized. This convergence suggests that reflective learning is not merely beneficial but foundational to intercultural education, since it is the process through which cultural knowledge is transformed into lived, socially aware understanding.

2. Deep Learning

Where reflective learning explains how experience becomes meaningful, deep learning describes the quality of engagement that results. The distinction originates with Marton and Säljö (1976), who separated surface learning — reliant on memorization — from deep learning, which involves genuine conceptual understanding and critical engagement with ideas. Biggs and Tang (2011) built on this distinction in higher education, arguing that deep learning occurs when students actively connect new concepts to prior knowledge, critically analyze arguments, and apply ideas to real situations; crucially, they stressed that this cannot happen through passive instruction alone but requires active involvement, of which reflection is a key part.

Haryatmoko (2025), writing within the Indonesian context, reinforced this link, describing deep learning as inherently reflective, critical, and creative, and arguing that it cultivates ethical reasoning, metacognitive skill, and social

intelligence — capacities directly relevant to navigating complex cultural situations.

This theoretical link between deep learning and intercultural competence is borne out empirically. Wibowo, Santoso, and Hikmah (2024) demonstrated that experiential learning combined with structured reflection significantly improved students' intercultural communication competence, with particular gains in empathy, perspective-taking, and adaptive cultural behavior. Taken together with the theoretical accounts above, this finding suggests that deep learning is not confined to cognitive mastery; it incorporates emotional, social, and metacognitive dimensions that are activated specifically through reflection — reinforcing, from a different angle, the same conclusion reached in the previous section.

3. Intercultural Competence

Intercultural competence (IC) refers to the ability to communicate and act appropriately and effectively with people from different cultural backgrounds. Two models dominate this field, each illuminating a different facet of IC. Bennett's (1993) Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS) frames intercultural sensitivity as a developmental trajectory moving from ethnocentrism toward ethnorelativism - that is, IC is something learners progress toward over time, not a fixed trait. Deardorff's (2006) Pyramid Model complements this by specifying what that progression consists of: foundational attitudes such as openness and respect, combined with knowledge and skills, which together produce internal outcomes like empathy and adaptability.

Read together, Bennett explains the trajectory of IC development while Deardorff specifies its components - and both models share an implicit premise directly relevant to this study: IC cannot be transmitted as content, since it depends on the kind of internal, attitudinal shift that only sustained engagement and reflection can produce.

Recent empirical work in Indonesian higher education substantiates this premise. Rakhma, Kafah, and Soali (2025) found that Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) activities - by exposing students to authentic international exchange - improved students' interpretive ability, open-mindedness, and cultural awareness, while Rahman and Novitasari (2025) similarly found that photovoice-based collaborative reflection helped students develop empathy and critically examine cultural contexts. Despite using different instructional formats (online exchange versus reflective photo-elicitation), both studies arrive at the same conclusion: IC develops not through the academic transmission of cultural facts, but through structured reflection on direct or mediated experience.

This convergence reinforces the pattern already established in the Reflective and Deep Learning sections above - that meaningful learning, in this case the internal shift Bennett and Deardorff describe, requires deliberate

reflective processing rather than content delivery alone.

4. Social Awareness

Social awareness refers to the ability to perceive and respond appropriately to others' emotions, perspectives, and social cues, particularly across cultural boundaries. The OECD (2018) identifies it as a critical global competency for navigating diverse societies with empathy and respect. Gudykunst (2004) explains why this competency is necessary in intercultural contexts specifically: individuals from different cultural backgrounds follow different norms for expressing emotion and interpreting social cues, and this mismatch is a frequent source of miscommunication when social awareness is lacking. Phongsirikul and Thongrin (2019) extend this from explanation to intervention, showing that reflection exercises and facilitated dialogue measurably improve students' sensitivity to intercultural cues and their ability to read others' emotional states.

This body of work points to a conclusion consistent with the previous three sections: social awareness is not an innate trait or a by-product of exposure to other cultures, but an outcome that emerges specifically through critical reflection on real experience, emotional processing, and deliberate engagement with others. In this sense, social awareness functions less as a separate construct and more as the applied expression of reflective deep learning within intercultural contexts - the point at which reflection, critical understanding, and intercultural sensitivity converge into observable interpersonal behavior.

5. Synthesis: Toward an Integrated Framework

Across the four areas reviewed reflective learning, deep learning, intercultural competence, and social awareness - a single pattern recurs. Each body of literature, independently, arrives at the same conclusion: meaningful growth in cultural understanding requires active, emotionally engaged reflection on experience, not the passive transmission of cultural knowledge.

Reflective learning (Dewey, Kolb, Boud) supplies the mechanism; deep learning (Marton & Säljö, Biggs & Tang, Haryatmoko) describes the depth of processing that mechanism enables; intercultural competence (Bennett, Deardorff) describes the developmental outcome of that processing in cross-cultural contexts; and social awareness (OECD, Gudykunst, Phongsirikul & Thongrin) describes how that outcome becomes visible in interpersonal behavior.

What remains absent from this literature, however, is a structured instructional module that deliberately integrates these four elements — reflection, deep learning, intercultural competence, and social awareness — into a single, implementable design, rather than addressing them as separate theoretical or empirical strands. This is the gap the present study addresses through the design and evaluation of a reflective deep learning module developed using the ADDIE model.

2. Method

Research Design

This study employed a Research and Development (R&D) design using the ADDIE model (Analysis, Design, Development, Implementation, Evaluation). ADDIE was selected because it provides a structured yet flexible framework for developing pedagogically grounded interventions, and because its iterative nature aligns naturally with the reflective, deep learning principles the module was designed to teach.

Participants

Twenty-four sixth-semester EFL students at Universitas Muhammadiyah Kotabumi took part in the initial needs analysis. Based on this analysis, 10 students volunteered to participate in the four-week pilot implementation of the module. All 24 students therefore informed the module's design, while the smaller group of 10 trialed the module directly.

Instruments

Three instruments were used during the analysis phase: a requirements assessment questionnaire (covering students' intercultural communication experience, confidence in interpreting cultural interactions, and familiarity with reflective learning), semi-structured interviews with 10 volunteer students, and classroom observation during speaking classes. During implementation and evaluation, reflective journals, facilitator observation notes, peer feedback sessions, and summative tasks (a final reflective essay, an oral presentation on a self-selected intercultural experience, and a cultural case analysis) were used to assess student development.

Procedure

Analysis. The needs analysis showed that students understood basic cultural concepts (e.g., greetings, customs) but struggled to interpret deeper cultural meaning and emotional nuance, particularly tone and body language. Interviews revealed a recurring pattern: students could describe what happened in a cultural interaction but not why — confirming a gap between cultural knowledge and reflective cultural awareness.

Classroom observation further showed that reflection was rarely practiced, with students tending to repeat textbook explanations rather than connect them to lived experience. These findings established the need for a structured reflective deep learning module.

Design. Learning objectives, content, instructional strategies, and assessment criteria were developed based on reflective learning (Dewey, 1938; Kolb, 1984; Boud et al., 1985), deep learning (Marton & Säljö, 1976; Biggs & Tang, 2011), and intercultural competence frameworks (Bennett, 1993; Deardorff, 2006). The module consisted of four thematic units — understanding cultural perspectives, identifying emotional and social cues, addressing intercultural

conflict, and cultivating empathy through reflection — each containing learning objectives, stimulus questions, experiential tasks, reflection prompts, and assessment components. Instructional strategies included role-plays, culture simulations, photovoice tasks (adapted from Rahman & Novitasari, 2025), case-based analysis, and facilitated group discussion.

Development. Instructional materials were built from authentic intercultural case studies relevant to Indonesian students' experience. A reflection journal template was developed integrating Dewey's reflective cycle, Kolb's learning stages, and Boud's emotional processing, prompting students to address what happened, how they felt, why they interpreted it as they did, how cultural values shaped the encounter, and how they might respond differently in future. Assessment rubrics evaluated critical thinking, social awareness (empathy, open-mindedness, sensitivity), depth of reflection, and language clarity. Two intercultural education experts validated the module, and revisions were made based on their feedback regarding clarity and task instructions.

Implementation. The module was piloted with 10 students over four weeks, one thematic unit per week. Each week followed a consistent cycle: a warm-up activity (photo-sharing, short video prompts, or personal narrative), an experiential task (simulation, role-play, or photovoice presentation), a reflection session (individual journal writing followed by small-group discussion), and teacher facilitation using probing questions (e.g., "What alternative interpretations could exist?", "How might someone with a different viewpoint feel?") to encourage higher-order, deep-learning engagement with the material.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data from the questionnaire were analyzed using descriptive statistics (frequencies and percentages) to identify general patterns in students' prior intercultural experience and confidence levels. Qualitative data — from interviews, observation notes, and reflective journals — were analyzed thematically: responses were coded according to recurring patterns (e.g., descriptive vs. analytical reflection, recognition of cultural perspective, expressions of empathy), and these codes were grouped into broader themes aligned with the study's assessment rubric.

Journal entries collected during the pilot were additionally tracked across the four weeks to identify shifts in students' reflective depth over time, from primarily descriptive accounts in early weeks to more analytical and perspective-taking responses by the final week.

3. Results

The pilot implementation of the Reflective Deep Learning Module produced measurable shifts across three interconnected domains: reflective competence, intercultural social awareness, and deep learning behavior. Rather than isolated gains, the data reveal a cumulative transformation — as students developed reflective depth, their intercultural sensitivity and critical engagement with course material deepened in parallel.

1. Development of Reflective Competence

The most significant transformation observed was the shift from **descriptive to analytical thinking**. Early journal entries were predominantly surface-level; students narrated cultural encounters without interrogating meaning, emotion, or perspective. By Week 4, the pattern had reversed: entries consistently demonstrated higher-order reflection.

This progression is evident across three measurable dimensions:

Analytical vs. Descriptive Thinking. Initial entries read as factual logs. By Week 4, students were identifying underlying cultural assumptions, interpreting emotional dynamics, and questioning implicit social norms embedded in interactions — a qualitative shift consistent with Dewey's (1938) argument that reflection converts raw experience into structured meaning.

Emotional Recognition. Students initially struggled to name affective responses, particularly discomfort or confusion arising from cultural difference. Later entries showed expanded emotional vocabulary alongside meta-awareness — students began examining how their emotional reactions shaped, and sometimes distorted, their interpretations of others.

Perspective-Taking. Perhaps the most striking shift was the movement from egocentric framing to relational reasoning. Whereas early entries defaulted to "my perspective," later reflections actively imagined the encounter from the other cultural actor's standpoint — a capacity central to Boud et al.'s (1985) model of reflective learning.

2. Growth in Intercultural Social Awareness

Gains in reflective depth were inseparable from improvements in intercultural perception. As students learned to examine their own assumptions, their ability to read and interpret cultural cues increased markedly.

Decoding Social and Emotional Cues. In Week 1, students consistently misread or overlooked nonverbal signals — pauses, indirect responses, gestural norms, and variations in personal space. By Week 4, accuracy in identifying these cues had improved, and students recognized that communication breakdowns often stemmed from differing cultural expectations rather than interpersonal conflict.

Reduction in Stereotypic Interpretation. Early interviews revealed reliance on broad cultural generalizations. Through photovoice activities and case-based

analysis, students encountered the internal diversity of cultural groups, which disrupted these oversimplifications. By Week 4, most students demonstrated more nuanced cultural reasoning, with a notably lower frequency of categorical attributions.

Increased Empathy. Reflection journals showed a progressive increase in empathic reasoning: students more frequently wrote about imagining others' emotional positions, adjusting interpretations in light of cultural context, and recognizing the limits of their initial judgments. This aligns with Deardorff's (2006) model, in which empathy functions as a core indicator of intercultural competence — not as sentiment, but as a cognitive-affective skill developed through structured practice.

3. Deepening of Learning Behaviors

The reflective and intercultural gains co-occurred with observable changes in how students engaged with course content — a pattern consistent with the shift from surface to deep learning described by Marton and Säljö (1976).

Active Conceptual Application. Rather than memorizing cultural definitions, students began connecting theoretical frameworks to lived experience. They used concepts to generate explanations, interrogate assumptions, and propose alternative cultural interpretations — behaviors that distinguish deep learning from rote reproduction.

Critical Analysis. The final cultural case analysis provided a performance-based measure of this shift. Students successfully identified culturally salient features, analyzed power distance and context norms, examined emotional regulation across cultures, and grounded their interpretations in reflective evidence — moving well beyond factual recall. Several cited personal intercultural experiences as supporting evidence, demonstrating the internalization of analytical frameworks (Biggs & Tang, 2011).

Transfer Across Contexts. Students showed the ability to apply insights from one cultural scenario to unfamiliar contexts — for example, extending understanding of indirect communication norms to new cultural situations not covered in class. This capacity for transfer is a hallmark of deep learning and higher-order cognitive functioning.

4. Student Feedback

End-of-module feedback reinforced the quantitative and qualitative findings, pointing to affective and motivational dimensions of the learning experience.

Students described the module as **feeling "real," "meaningful," and "emotionally connected to life"** — language that suggests the reflective tasks achieved authentic engagement rather than performative compliance. Many

reported it was their first experience of systematically examining a cultural encounter rather than simply recounting it.

Reported increases in **confidence** were also notable: students felt better equipped to navigate cross-cultural misunderstandings and less anxious about making errors. Several characterized reflections itself as "eye-opening" — a metacognitive shift in which the process of reflection became valued, not merely the content it produced.

Students also proposed concrete extensions: longer photovoice projects, additional case-based video materials, and guest speakers from diverse cultural backgrounds — suggestions that indicate sustained motivation and a desire for deeper engagement beyond the module's scope.

4. Discussion

This study developed and piloted a Reflective Deep Learning Module to enhance intercultural competence and social awareness in EFL university students. The findings confirm that systematically integrating reflective practice, experiential learning, and deep learning strategies produces meaningful shifts in how learners perceive, interpret, and respond to cultural difference — not as discrete outcomes, but as an interconnected developmental process.

1. Reflection as the Engine of Cultural Understanding

The most foundational finding is that reflection functioned as the mechanism through which experience became cultural understanding. Students moved from descriptive recounting to critical analysis and emotional interpretation — precisely the iterative, meaning-making process Dewey (1938) described. This shift was not merely cognitive: consistent with Boud, Keogh, and Walker (1985), students learned to treat emotional discomfort not as noise to suppress but as a signal revealing underlying cultural norms.

Critically, this study extends prior work by Rosmilawati, Meilya, and Darmawan (2020) and Rahman and Aim (2024) by embedding reflection within a structured deep learning framework rather than deploying it as a standalone technique. The evidence suggests this integration — not reflection alone — is what produced sustained interpretive growth. Reflection without conceptual scaffolding risks remaining introspective without becoming analytical; this module addressed that gap.

2. Deep Learning as the Cognitive Infrastructure for Intercultural Competence

As reflective capacity deepened, students demonstrated qualitatively different cognitive engagement with course content. Rather than acquiring cultural facts, they interrogated assumptions, decoded unfamiliar cues, and transferred conceptual understanding across novel situations — behaviors that align with the deep approach articulated by Marton and Säljö (1976) and the constructive alignment principles of Biggs and Tang (2011).

The module's design — combining photovoice, cultural simulations, and case-based reasoning — created the conditions necessary for deep learning to emerge. This corroborates Wibowo, Santoso, and Hikmah (2024), while adding an important qualification: experiential tasks alone are insufficient. The data suggest that without structured reflective integration, experiential activities risk producing engagement without comprehension. In the Indonesian higher education context, this aligns with Haryatmoko's (2025) argument that deep learning cultivates not only analytical capacity but also the ethical and creative dimensions of thought — both of which appeared in students' evolving intercultural reasoning.

3. From Cultural Knowledge to Intercultural Action: A Developmental Trajectory

A central finding is that students did not merely accumulate cultural knowledge — they demonstrated a shift in intercultural orientation. Using Bennett's (1993) Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS) as a lens, the progression observed moves from ethnocentric to ethnorelative positioning: students who initially defaulted to stereotyping and hasty generalization increasingly demonstrated acceptance, perspective-taking, and adaptive interpretation.

This trajectory aligns with Deardorff's (2006) framework, which identifies empathy, openness, and flexible interpretation as internal outcomes that emerge specifically when learners are given structured opportunities to reflect and engage experientially. The photovoice activities and guided journaling were particularly effective in generating the meaningful personal connection that makes this shift possible — consistent with findings by Rakhma, Kafah, and Soali (2025) and Rahman and Novitasari (2025) on collaborative reflection in intercultural education.

The key implication is that intercultural competence is not taught through content delivery; it is developed through designed experiences that make cultural assumptions visible and open to revision.

4. Social Awareness as an Integrated Outcome

Social awareness emerged not as a separate learning goal but as a natural consequence of deepened reflection and intercultural engagement. Students' growing ability to recognize emotional and social cues — particularly those that vary cross-culturally — reflects what Gudykunst (2004) terms interpretive acumen: the capacity to read cultural expression without defaulting to one's own normative frame.

Reflective journaling was the primary vehicle for this development, prompting students to examine their own emotional responses alongside their interpretations of others. This dual-focus — on both self and other — is what

distinguishes productive social awareness development from simple cultural exposure. The finding extends Phongsirikul and Thongrin's (2019) work by demonstrating that this capacity scales when embedded in a systematically designed module rather than emerging incidentally.

5. Theoretical Contribution: A Unified Framework

The primary theoretical contribution of this study is the articulation of a coherent instructional model linking three previously separate constructs:

Structured Reflection → Deep Learning → Intercultural Competence

Each dimension is necessary but insufficient alone. Reflection provides the interpretive lens for making cultural experience meaningful. Deep learning supplies the cognitive infrastructure to connect concepts across contexts. Intercultural competence establishes the affective and behavioral goals that give learning its direction. Together, they constitute an integrated developmental pathway — one in which growth in any dimension reinforces the others.

This synthesis responds to a gap in the existing literature: while reflection, deep learning, and intercultural competence have each been studied extensively, their co-constitutive relationship within a single instructional design has received limited empirical attention. This study provides early evidence that intentional integration produces outcomes greater than any component in isolation, consistent with the multidimensional frameworks proposed by Bennett (1993) and Deardorff (2006).

6. Limitations and Considerations for Scalability

Several limitations must be acknowledged. The pilot involved a relatively small, homogeneous student cohort within a single institutional context, which constrains the generalizability of findings. The absence of a comparison group means that observed gains cannot be attributed exclusively to the module design, as maturation and other contextual factors may have contributed.

The module also places substantial demands on instructors: effective facilitation of guided reflection and experiential activities requires training, time, and comfort with emotionally engaged pedagogy — resources that are unevenly distributed across institutions. Scaling this model to larger cohorts or under-resourced settings would require adaptation, and the fidelity of the reflective components may be difficult to maintain without ongoing professional development.

Future research should pursue longitudinal designs, comparative groups, and implementations across diverse institutional and cultural contexts to establish the scope and durability of these effects.

7. Implications for EFL and Intercultural Education

Three actionable implications follow from the findings:

First, reflective practice must be structurally embedded in intercultural curricula — not offered as an occasional supplement — with explicit scaffolding that moves students from description to analysis.

Second, experiential activities acquire their educational value primarily through reflective integration. Task design should pair immersive activities with guided processing tools (journals, structured debriefs, collaborative analysis) to ensure experience translates into comprehension.

Third, intercultural education should be reoriented around perspective-taking and emotional processing rather than cultural fact acquisition. Competence develops through the revision of assumptions, not the accumulation of information.

Taken together, these implications call for a reconceptualization of intercultural training in EFL contexts — from content-centered to experience-and-reflection-centered pedagogy, grounded in the same deep learning principles that define rigorous academic education more broadly.

5. Conclusion

This study designed, implemented, and evaluated a Reflective Deep Learning Module aimed at enhancing intercultural competence and social awareness among EFL university students. Built on the ADDIE instructional design framework, the module integrated reflective journaling, photovoice activities, experiential tasks, and case-based discussion to cultivate the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral capacities required for meaningful intercultural engagement.

The pilot findings demonstrate that structured integration of reflective practice and deep learning principles produces interconnected, developmental gains — not isolated skill improvements. Three primary areas of growth were observed:

Reflective Competence. Students progressed from surface-level cultural description to analytical, emotionally informed interpretation. They developed the capacity to examine assumptions, interrogate cultural values, and articulate insight — a trajectory consistent with the reflective learning models of Dewey (1938), Kolb (1984), and Boud et al. (1985).

Intercultural Sensitivity and Social Awareness. Through sustained reflection, students became more adept at reading social and emotional cues across cultural contexts, demonstrated measurably greater empathy, and showed a reduction in stereotypic reasoning. These shifts align with Bennett's (1993) DMIS framework and Deardorff's (2006) model of intercultural competence, both of which position empathy and perspective-taking as developmental outcomes rather than innate

dispositions.

Deep Learning Engagement. Students moved beyond factual recall toward critical analysis, conceptual application, and cross-contextual transfer — behaviors characteristic of the deep approach described by Marton and Säljö (1976), and consistent with the constructive alignment principles of Biggs and Tang (2011) and Haryatmoko's (2025) framework for ethical and creative cognition.

Taken together, these findings support the study's central claim: that reflection, deep learning, and intercultural competence are not parallel goals but mutually reinforcing dimensions of a single developmental process. The module's most significant contribution lies in demonstrating that this integration — when intentionally designed — can produce transformative learning within an EFL context.

Educational Implications

The findings carry concrete implications for EFL instruction, curriculum design, and intercultural pedagogy.

Embed reflection structurally, not supplementarily. Reflection yields its full developmental benefit only when it is a sustained, scaffolded component of the curriculum — not an occasional add-on. EFL instructors should build reflective cycles into regular classroom practice, with explicit progression from descriptive to analytical engagement.

Pair experiential tasks with structured meaning-making. Experiential activities alone risk producing engagement without comprehension. Transformative learning occurs at the intersection of experience and guided reflection. Curriculum design should sequence action, observation, reflection, and conceptualization — ensuring that each activity generates interpretive work, not merely affective response.

Treat social and emotional awareness as core learning outcomes. Language education encompasses more than linguistic competence. Empathy, self-awareness, and social sensitivity are not soft additions — they are foundational to effective intercultural communication and should be explicitly assessed and developed, particularly in multicultural and international learning contexts.

Prioritize perspective-taking over cultural content delivery. Intercultural competence is not built through the accumulation of cultural facts but through the habitual practice of imagining other standpoints, decoding unfamiliar signals, and engaging with difference with intellectual humility. Instructional design should center these capacities as primary goals.

Ultimately, this study affirms that preparing EFL learners for intercultural communication demands more than information — it demands the deliberate creation of learning environments where experience is examined, assumptions are challenged, and understanding is constructed through reflection. The

Reflective Deep Learning Module offers one evidence-based pathway toward that goal, and invites further investigation into its long-term effects, scalability, and adaptation across diverse educational contexts.

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