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Collaborative curriculum making at a local level: the Culture and Language integrated Classrooms (CLiC) project – integrating linguistic and cultural learning in the day-to-day practices of language teachers

Ruth Koro ● and Lesley Hagger-Vaughan ●

School of Education, University of Nottingham, Nottingham, UK

ABSTRACT

Despite international trends, fostering learners' intercultural understanding (ICU) remains subordinate to linguistic proficiency in language education policy and everyday practice in England, whilst making the case for intercultural learning requires teachers to commit much additional time and effort in a performance-driven, examination-led education system in which pedagogy and curricula are increasingly prescriptive. This paper employs a curriculum making lens to explore the affordances and constraints experienced by language teachers in their efforts to integrate linguistic and cultural learning into their practices, through participation in the Culture and Language integrated Classrooms (CLiC) Project. Participants reported that collaborative curriculum making empowered them to critically navigate policy and enabled them to enact locally relevant language curricula that contributed to learners' ICU. By highlighting the importance of incorporating explicit intercultural objectives into schemes of learning and revisiting common topics through an intercultural lens, this research in turn highlights the importance of developing more holistic formative assessment tools and approaches which can map progress in intercultural learning. The study also brings to the fore the value of 'meso curriculum making' through the creation of trusted, local, communities of practice which facilitate opportunities for collective language teacher agency through collaborative curriculum making.

Introduction

Globalisation, new technologies and human migration flows have heightened the need for an enhanced focus on intercultural goals in educational policy and practice (Campos 2009), an imperative reflected in many L2 curriculum frameworks (ACTFL 2017; Council of Europe 2018, 2020; OECD 2021).

Research also points to the value of integrating language and culture to enhance language learners' intercultural communicative competence (ICC) and enable them to contribute to, and thrive, in linguistically and culturally diverse societies (Kramsch 1995; Liddicoat 2020; Liddicoat and Scarino 2013), and to the central role that language teachers can play in this process (Byram and Wagner

2018). The literature also highlights how school leaders, language teachers and young people value the development of intercultural understanding (ICU) as a fundamental and motivating element of language learning (Hagger-Vaughan 2016, 2018, 2020; Koro 2017, 2018; Woore et al. 2020).

In England, the Languages programmes of study at Key Stage 3 (KS3, for learners aged 11–14) state that 'learning a foreign language is a liberation from insularity and provides an opening to other cultures' (DfE 2013: 1). Meanwhile, the 2023 Languages GCSE Subject Content (for learners aged 14–16) states that the study of a language 'should also build students' confidence and broaden their horizons, enabling them to step beyond familiar cultural boundaries' (DfE 2023: 3). However, current policy documents reveal that the approach taken towards cultural learning is often contradictory: while overarching aims claim a commitment to cultural learning, this aspect is subordinate to linguistic proficiency in national pedagogical guidance for language teachers (Ofsted 2021; Teaching Schools Council 2016), which for the most part focuses on grammar, vocabulary and phonics (Woore, Molway, and Macaro 2022). Many also argue that the value attributed to cultural learning in the language curriculum has diminished over the past decade (Coffey 2022; Hagger-Vaughan 2018; Pachler and Broady 2022).

Research also suggests that 'the cultural turn in language teaching' (Byram, Holmes, and Savvides 2015: 129) is not yet reflected in the day-to-day practices of language teachers in English secondary schools, and that a systematic integration of language and culture is not widespread. Structural factors such as accountability measures, high-stakes testing and a performance-driven educational landscape, in which language pedagogy and content are increasingly prescribed, are experienced by teachers as barriers to this integration, and contribute to the inferior status of cultural learning (Young and Sachdev 2011). A lack of guidance and professional learning opportunities also suggest that intercultural learning 'will remain firmly embedded within the rhetoric of curriculum policy and fail to become a reality in the MFL classroom' (Peiser and Jones 2012: 185), limiting opportunities for learners to access cultural learning and to develop the necessary communicative, linguistic and intercultural competencies.

This study responds to a gap in recent research on the integration of language and culture in England's language classrooms and builds on practice-based empirical studies in anglophone and international contexts (Casoli-Uvsløkk and Brevik 2023; East et al. 2022; Eddy 2022; Fielding 2020; Kohler 2020; Wagner, Perugini, and Byram 2017). The study also seeks to contribute more broadly to research into language teacher agency and curriculum making and sets out to amplify the voices of secondary language teachers who participated in a local collaborative curriculum making programme – the Culture and Language integrated Classrooms (CLiC) project, facilitated by teacher educators at a university in the Midlands. Employing a curriculum making lens, drawing on a curriculum making heuristic framework (Priestley et al. 2021), and situating teachers as policymakers (Ball, Maguire, and Braun 2012), we consider the affordances, constraints and tensions teachers experienced in exercising their critical, collective and individual professional agency (Biesta 2015; Tao and Gao 2021) as they endeavoured to make and enact locally relevant curricula integrating linguistic and cultural learning to meet the needs of language learners in (spite of) a high-stakes and prescriptive policy context.

Background

The language-culture nexus

Due to the intrinsic relationship between language and culture (Boylan and Huntley 2003; Canale and Swain 1980) learning a language can serve to contextualise a culture and its people, while learning about culture can promote more effective language acquisition through the meaningful contextualisation of discourse (Arens 2010; Nechifor and Borca 2020; Tomlinson and Masuhara 2004). As a result, this language-culture nexus needs to be reflected in the language learning classroom.

However, cultural teaching can be complex, from the selection of content to ensuring the representation of diverse perspectives. Furthermore, languages and cultures are not static, and pedagogies need to be responsive and enable learners to gain – and successfully apply – the skills to navigate multifaceted and changing contexts (Hennebry 2014; Kim 2020).

Explorations of culture in communicative language policy and practice also often centre on factual knowledge, and can be superficial, simplistic and reductive in nature (Scally, Parrish, and Montgomery 2022). While cultural facts can provide a useful first foray into cultural exploration, the simple acquisition of cultural knowledge is not sufficient; what is required instead is what Byram (1997) terms 'critical cultural awareness' in his seminal model of intercultural communicative competence (ICC) – a complex interface of skills, knowledge and attitudes. By going beyond superficial contextualisation and providing them with opportunities to consider their own cultural standpoint and identity, as well as others', learners can be empowered to value their own culture and encouraged to consider and respect those beyond their habitual sphere (Guerrero Moya, Ortiz, and Niño Díaz 2016).

The bigger picture: why does intercultural learning matter?

Providing language learners with opportunities to discover, explore, compare, contrast and reflect both on their own and on others' culture (Porter et al. 2022) and to understand, value and respect other viewpoints (Boix-Mansilla 2015; Houghton 2009) are key elements of developing intercultural competence. Therefore, in globalised contexts, fostering the development of learners' intercultural attitudinal attributes (Koro 2017) can help them become active global citizens who can contribute to greater social justice (Sobre 2017).

Intercultural language learning can also play a significant role in addressing the challenge of maintaining learner motivation. By exploring content that is personally meaningful and relevant, and by considering both their own and others' perspectives, learners are more likely to engage deeply with tasks (Salmon, Gangotena, and Melliou 2018), leading some to contend that policymakers and educators should seriously consider the importance of moving away from approaches centred on mere knowledge accumulation, and the value of providing learners with cognitively engaging content and processes that fully involve them (Ghasemi and Dowlatabadi 2018).

Yet approaches focusing mostly on linguistic goals (as is the case in England) reduce language teaching to a series of unchallenging, unmotivating, high-control and repetitive activities, which focus on accuracy and recall, rather than on enabling learners to apply understanding and explore culture (Wingate and Andon 2017). The authors see this as a 'serious underestimation of pupils' cognitive and intellectual capability' (452), which fails to foster their confidence in applying linguistic skills for real purposes, or to bolster their desire to persist with language learning; as a result, Wingate and Andon suggest that 'it may be time for a post-communicative approach, in which the value of language learning is no longer promoted in utilitarian terms' (148).

By enabling a move away from 'finite' bodies of knowledge towards an ever-evolving process of critical intercultural engagement and self-actualisation, intercultural pedagogies promoting the combined exploration of language and culture through relevant and cognitively challenging content are therefore often presented as potential solutions to achieve the democratic and holistic goals of language education (Coyle, Hood, and Marsh 2010; Koro 2018).

Integrating language and culture in the classroom: some challenges

Despite their intrinsic connection, there has been a tendency to decontextualise language from culture in many teaching contexts (Kim 2020). Cultural goals are often presented as a desirable ideal rather than a practical imperative in curricula, and are rarely a reality in classrooms – and while many language teachers view this as a key goal and motivation for their own teaching

(Fielding 2020; Woore et al. 2020), there is often a tension between their beliefs about the importance of cultural learning, and the place that it is afforded in everyday practice – owing to a range of institutional, policy, pedagogical and societal barriers (Koro 2017).

There is also evidence that some teachers underestimate the value of culture in the language classroom (Kim 2020), or feel unprepared to teach cultural aspects, whether due to their individual lack of cultural knowledge or training (Hennebry 2014), or as a result of an over-reliance on content and approaches they are familiar with (Spenader, Wesely, and Glynn 2020). This is compounded by insufficient clarity in the curriculum, leading to ambiguity and anxiety when faced with the risk of 'diluting linguistic objectives with socio-cultural ones' (Peiser and Jones 2012: 183).

The complexity in defining what should be taught is also seen by some as the reason why linguistic, rather than cultural aspects tend to be favoured in both policy and practice, being easier to catalogue and measure (Kovács 2017). This is particularly marked in England, where an over-emphasis on the linguistic over the cultural dominates policy and as a result, everyday teaching practices (Hennebry 2014).

Starkey (2007) further argues that a perennial challenge lies in the way traditional materials present other cultures, emphasising difference and perpetuating stereotypes in the name of generating interest. References to culture in curriculum and practice also too often fail to take a more inclusive stance on what perspectives are explored and represented (Panford 2021); furthermore, despite heightened opportunities, there is also evidence that language teachers are yet to make the most of new technologies to access a broader range of authentic materials (Koro 2017) to remedy this.

Cultural learning in the languages education policy context of England

In England, prior to the change of government in 2010, ICU was one of four key concepts underpinning the study and assessment of languages at KS3 (DfES 2003; QCA 2007). While this remains a fundamental aim of many language education frameworks across the world (ACTFL 2017; Council of Europe 2018, 2020; OECD 2021), current policy documents in England indicate a move away from this growing practice (APPG 2021; Gruber and Hopwood 2022; Koglbauer 2022) despite broad statements of a commitment to intercultural goals. The conceptualisation of language learning is a decontextualised one, with limited attention afforded to the intercultural dimension - or to the vast body of research in this field - within the current guidance shaping languages education in schools, such as the MFL Pedagogy Review (Teaching Schools Council 2016) or the Ofsted Curriculum Research Review of Languages (2021). Furthermore, the status afforded to cultural learning has also diminished in key assessment frameworks such as the Modern Languages GCSE for French, German and Spanish (ALL 2021; APPG 2021; ASCL 2021; British Academy 2021; CLIE 2021; UCML 2021) – meaning there is 'no imperative for teachers to cover this vital area' (Blow and Myers 2022: 244). One such example is the highly prescriptive designated vocabulary list which allows for just twenty additional items 'to refer to relevant geographical or cultural places/events' (DfE 2023: 6), leading to widespread concern and posing a significant challenge for GCSE awarding bodies in selecting 'cultural' vocabulary that goes beyond stereotyped and static representations of cultures – and leaving little room for the development of intercultural learning in practice (Milton 2022).

The critique extends to the Ofsted Curriculum Research Review for Languages (2021), where emphasis is placed on what are deemed 'the three pillars of progression' (11): phonics, vocabulary, and grammar, with the notable absence of an intercultural strand. An underlying message appears to be that learners need to achieve linguistic proficiency before being given the opportunity to access cultural learning; Woore, Molway, and Macaro (2022) contend that this could lead to demotivation and to learners never reaching 'the "destination" of cultural encounters' (149). Porter et al. (2022) also counter the position that the use of authentic materials poses a risk of cognitive strain,

and highlight the importance of learners' engagement with cultural content throughout their language learning journey. Some also question the legitimacy of a regulatory body to conduct such a review, and raise concerns about the powerful status of this document potentially undermining teachers' pedagogical agency by prescribing 'what content to prioritise, what to limit and what to omit' (Ofsted 2021 quoted in Pachler and Broady 2022: 135). There is therefore widespread concern that language teachers will shy away from critically interpreting the curriculum (Parrish 2020) and feel constrained to belie their values (Lanvers 2018) by teaching in a narrow, formulaic manner, further impacting the motivation of language learners.

Teachers as curriculum makers

It is in response to this policy context that the CLiC curriculum design project is situated, positioning language teachers as 'curriculum makers', providing them with spaces for collaborative action and the confidence and skills to interpret and translate policy into practice in meaningful ways (Hagger-Vaughan 2018). In doing so, the project aims to address the ongoing tension between 'what matters and what counts' (Hagger-Vaughan 2020: 529) through the integration of linguistic and cultural learning, and by positioning teachers as key actors rather than merely subjects in the language education policy process (Braun, Maguire, and Ball 2010).

Priestley and Philippou (2018) conceptualise curriculum making as 'a process of interaction of teachers, pupils, materials and the official context in class, entailing the construction of personal meaning by the participants in the process' (153), highlighting the contextual nature of curriculum making, an aspect seldom reflected in narrow conceptualisations of curriculum delivery or implementation. Curriculum making is seen as 'emerging within and between' (Priestley et al. 2021: 3) non-linear, non-hierarchical layers or sites of activity (Table 1 and Figure 1).

'Meso' curriculum making offers important opportunities for the participatory construction of locally relevant curricula (Coffey 2022; Hall and Thomson 2017) and has the potential to 'act as a driver for influencing macro curriculum making' (Alvunger et al. 2021: 285), while enabling teachers to feel greater ownership through an enhanced understanding of underpinning theories and concepts, and the provision of the necessary space in which to exercise pedagogical agency and be seen as professional experts, an aspect potentially undermined in national policy (Pachler and Broady 2022).

Tao and Gao (2021) also highlight the essential role of professional learning in enabling language teachers to develop critical collective pedagogical agency and to become 'reflexive and reflective agents' (1) who are empowered to 'make pedagogical decision that advance their professional ideals' (Gao 2019: 164), while Hagger-Vaughan (2018) points to the important role teacher educators in universities have to play as intentional meso actors who can help teachers make sense of the curriculum in local contexts, and enable them to maintain a focus on the bigger picture of why language learning matters.

With this role in mind, the Culture and Language integrated Classrooms project was designed and conducted and is detailed in the following section.

Table 1. Sites of curriculum making (adapted from Priestley et al. 2021: 13).

| Sites of activity	Examples of activity
Supra	Transnational curricular discourse generation, policy borrowing and lending, policy learning
Macro	Development of national policy curriculum frameworks; legislation to establish agencies and infrastructure
Meso	Local curriculum making; production of guidance; leadership of and support for curriculum making; production of resources
Micro	School level curriculum making; programme design; lesson planning
Nano	Curriculum making in classrooms and other learning spaces; pedagogic interactions; curriculum events
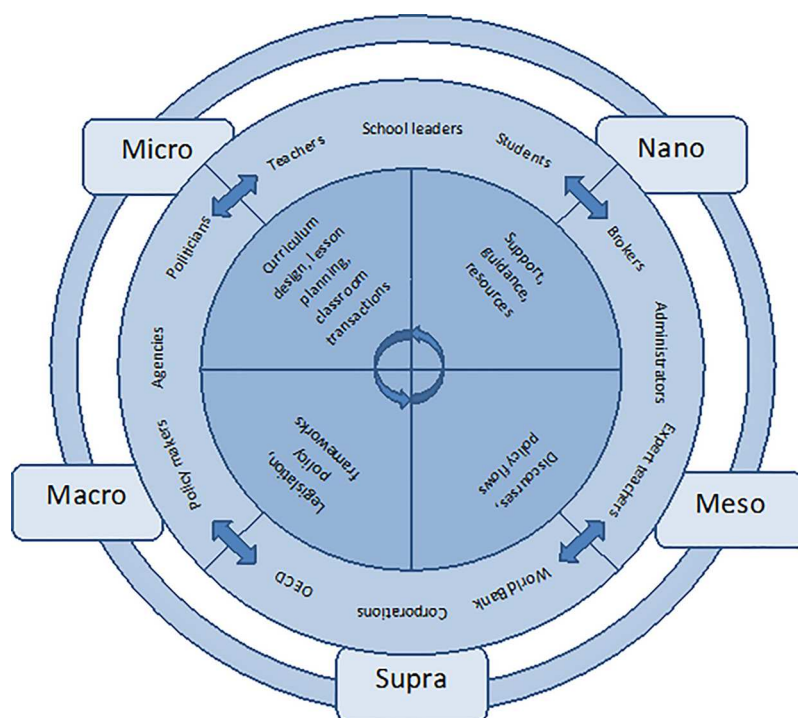
Figure 1. Sites, Actors and Activities (from Alvunger et al. 2021: 275).

The CLiC curriculum design project: outline and methodology

Context and rationale

In light of the lack of professional learning and curriculum making agency available to language tea-
chers, and in the context of the diminishing place of cultural learning in policy and day-to-day prac-
tices, teacher educators/researchers from a university in England facilitated a pilot collaborative
curriculum and assessment design project, Culture and Language integrated Classrooms (CLiC).
The CLiC project was situated in an existing and thriving regional language educators' network,
the Languages Education Research Group (LERG), a well-established community of practice
(Wenger 1999) facilitating ongoing knowledge exchange between the university and local
schools, with teacher educators as 'key actors in local innovation ecosystems' (Marzocchi et al.
2023: 679), contributing to local public engagement of social value (Johnson 2022) and to improving
education for school pupils through its civic role (Brabner 2019).

Structure

The project followed a phased approach (Dalby and Noyes 2022) focused on translating research
around the integration of linguistic and cultural learning by situating language teachers as 'curricu-
lum makers' (Priestley et al. 2021), through their participation in four workshops, the use of a plan-
ning framework (Appendix 1 in online Supplemental material) and through the adaptation of a
model sequence of lessons (Appendix 2 in online Supplemental material) supporting the integration
of linguistic and cultural learning in schools' local contexts.

    The **Discovery Phase** allowed for the collaborative consideration of the 'bigger picture' of
language education, providing a trusted space for teachers to reflect on their professional identities
and views on languages and culture. Participants explored research and practice in the field of

intercultural competence, reflected on their current approach to the integration of language and culture, and identified the affordances and constraints in their own contexts. Mindful of the complexity of terminology in the field of intercultural communicative competence (Byram, Holmes, and Savvides 2015) and the subjectivity of concepts such as 'culture', 'cultural pedagogies' and 'cultural awareness', a key element of this phase was an exploration of the theoretical underpinnings of key terms in the literatures and policy documents.

During the **Planning Phase** participants identified a critical friend (Stenhouse 1975) from within the community of practice to provide constructive mutual support as reflective practitioners (Kelley et al. 2022; Schön 2017). They then collaborated on the adaptation of a KS3 sequence of lesson, integrating culture and language by redefining common topics through a cultural lens (Koro 2018) with the support of a simple visual flowchart (Appendix 3 in online Supplemental material) and employing the CLiC Planning Toolkit (Koro and Hagger-Vaughan 2021) – comprising the planning framework (Appendix 1 online) and a digest of national and international models, including the NCSSFL ACTFL Can-Do Statements for Intercultural Communication (2017) and the CEFR descriptors (Council of Europe 2020) – to help teachers articulate both linguistic and cultural objectives.

During the **Intervention Phase** teachers taught, assessed and evaluated their sequence of lessons with ongoing support from their critical friend – through informal discussions, inter-school visits and an online workshop to discuss progress. Participating teachers also explored ways to collect evidence of, and assess the (inter)cultural learning progress.

During the **Review Phase** participants evaluated their lessons and participated in the optional research element of the project, which included 1:1 semi-structured interviews and a focus group. An important aspect of this phase included the development of practice-based case studies (Appendices 4 and 5 in online Supplemental material), and the co-planning and co-hosting of a dissemination conference for language teachers in the region. The event served as a catalyst for future knowledge exchange activities and provided an opportunity for teachers involved in the CLiC pilot to act as critical friends for others who joined the second wave of the project (ongoing).

Research questions

The study aimed to respond to the following research questions:

1. What helps and what hinders language teachers to integrate linguistic and cultural learning as part of day-to-day teaching, learning and assessment of modern languages at KS3?
2. How has the CLiC pilot project supported language teachers to integrate linguistic and cultural learning as part of day-to-day teaching, learning and assessment of modern languages at KS3?
3. What are the implications for future professional learning for language teachers?

Sample and participants

Participation in the research element of the CLiC Project was entirely voluntary. A purposive sample (Patton 2020) was recruited via emails sent to all teachers who had participated in the project. An information sheet and consent form outlining measures to ensure compliance with national and institutional ethical guidelines were sent to potential participants to gain informed consent (Seidman 2019).

Seven teachers agreedto participate; these were all language teachers who worked in local schools within our Initial Teacher Education partnership, and a trusting relationship had already been established though membership of the LERG and/or involvement in mentoring beginning teachers. While the sample group was small, this was in line with the intent of this pilot wave of the CLiC Project, and the participating teachers and schools were illustrative of the differing local contexts in our partnership (Table 2).

Method

The study adopted a case study approach (Creswell and Poth 2016; Yin 2009) in order to gain an in-depth and nuanced understanding of teachers' lived experiences and perspectives in different contexts (Cohen, Manion, and Morrison 2011), as well as drawing on a range of theoretical resources including Hall and Thomson's place-based methods for researching schools (2017). In order to give voice to our participants, we adopted a semi-structured approach to interviewing, drawing on Brinkmann and Kvale's (2018) conceptualisation, 'where knowledge is constructed in the interaction between the interviewer and interviewee' (4) and participants felt safe to 'use their own words' (Clarke and Braun 2013: 78) in a trusted space (Seidman 2019). We also believed that engagement in the interviews would provide a further 'catalyst for professional learning in practice' (Husband 2020: 1). The questions (Table 3) were also designed drawing on a number of theoretical tools including Priestley et al.'s curriculum making heuristic (2021) and Lave and Wenger's (1991) notion of communities of practice, as well as exploring key themes from the reviewed literature. In our study, at participants' request, questions were shared in advance which allowed for 'enhanced participant engagement and reflexivity, reduced interview anxiety, and more thoughtful responses' (Haukås and Tishakov 2024: 1).

Data collection and analysis

The qualitative data collection took place in stages. In stage one, retrospective 1:1 interviews were conducted online with participants. This was followed by a focus group two months later. We considered the potential and pitfalls of online research methodologies (Alhejaili, Wharrad, and Windle 2022; de Villiers, Farooq, and Molinari 2022); these methodologies were discussed in advance with participants and identified as a preferred approach. The interviews and focus group were conducted on Microsoft Teams and recorded. Automated transcripts were checked then verified by researchers and participants to ensure that their voices had been accurately represented.

A cyclical approach was adopted to analyse the data and drew on Braun and Clarke's six phases of thematic analysis (2006), allowing for multiple readings by both researchers following the 1:1 interviews and the focus group. To extend agency, encourage democratic conversation (Oancea and Bridges 2010) and ensure ethical representations of participants' contrasting voices (Myhill et al. 2023), we followed a generic inductive approach (Thomas 2006) to extract emergent themes from the 1:1 interviews and establish links with our aims (Liu 2016) in the construction of focus group prompts.

We also acknowledge Bathmaker's (2010) argument that different ways of dealing with analysis have an effect on the interpretive representation of the data, on the story that we tell - and that our chosen analytical perspective provides a distinct lens on the research issue at hand – making it possible to see some things but not others. We also take the position that as researchers, we can only observe facts through the use of lenses made up of concepts and theories (Silverman and Marvasti 2008). The research questions and our chosen methodological approaches were also shaped by our own positionality (Sprague 2010) as teachers, teacher educators and researchers committed to the practical application of educational research and to the importance of linguistic and cultural learning in day-to-day practices. Our lens is also shaped by our broad and deep experience of working at macro, meso, micro and nano levels of curriculum making in a range of regional, national and international contexts.

Our aim was also that participation in the research would extend the agency of participants within our own community of practice, and that the first wave of the CLiC Project would act as an initial pilot made of a small yet representative sample, ahead of further dissemination and before broadening participation in subsequent waves of the project. While we acknowledge the limitations of the small sample group, we also take the stance that an in-depth consideration of the voices of individual teachers can provide valuable insights into the curriculum making process and the

Table 2. Participating teachers' contextual information.

Name	Role	Years teaching	School type	Age range	School size (number of pupils)	Staff in the ML department	Languages taught at school	Geographical context	Socio-economic context *	Linguistic context **
Nathan	Head of Spanish, teacher of Spanish and French. PGCE ML mentor.	3 years	Academy within larger Trust	11–18	~1900	12	Spanish, French, Mandarin	Urban and rural	IMD: 10 FSM: 10.7%	EAL: 9%
Maya	Head of Faculty, teacher of Spanish. PGCE ML mentor.	23 years	Academy within larger Trust	11–18	~1900	12	Spanish, French, Mandarin	Urban and rural	IMD: 10 FSM: 10.7%	EAL: 9%
Sara	Teacher of German, Spanish and French. PGCE ML mentor.	5 years	Single-academy Trust	11–18	~1350	5	German, Spanish, French, BSL	Suburban	IMD: 10 FSM: 21.2%	EAL: 6.2%
Margot	Teacher of French and Spanish.	2 years	Single-academy Trust	11–18	~1300	5	French, Spanish	Urban and rural	IMD: 2 FSM: 34.1%	EAL: 5.5%
Hannah	Head of Department, teacher of French and German. PGCE ML mentor.	20 years	Academy within larger Trust	11–18	~1800	10	French, Spanish, German	Urban city and town	IMD: 8 FSM: 21.6%	EAL: 9.1%
Edith	Head of Department, Teacher of German and French.	8 years	Academy within larger Trust	11–19	~1200	4	French, Spanish, German	Urban city and town	IMD: 2 FSM: 31.2%	EAL: 17.3%
Libby	Teacher of French and German. ITT Coordinator; PGCE ML mentor.	6 years	Community School	11–18	~1000	4	French, German	Suburban	IMD: 9 FSM: 18%	EAL: 28.2%

*IMD = Index of Multiple Deprivation Decile in 2019, with 1 = Most Deprived; 10 = Least Deprived. FSM = Disadvantaged pupils in receipt of Free School Meals.
**Proportion of pupils with English as an Additional Language (EAL) at the school.

Table 3. Overview of interview questions and themes.

Theme	Questions
Participating teachers' role and professional identity	Current role
	Length of service
	Languages taught
	Views on the purposes of languages education
	Past / current involvement with the university's existing community of practice
Participating teachers' local context	School demographic profile (socio-economic and linguistic)
	Languages on offer
	Size of languages department
	Pupils' perception of the subject
	Subject-specific professional development available
	Approaches to designing curriculum content
Languages education policy landscape	Views on the current National Curriculum and MFL Pedagogy Review, Ofsted's Languages Research review and recent changes to the GCSE subject content – perceived strengths and challenges.
Integrating language and culture in day-to-day practice	Current practice to integrate cultural learning
	Affordances and constraints to the integration of linguistic and cultural learning
Evaluation of participation in pilot CLiC project	Motivation to participate
	Structure of the project
	Role of the workshops / materials in supporting the integration of linguistic and cultural learning
	Adaptations to the language curriculum
	Usefulness of the CLiC planning toolkit /framework
	Perceived impact on assessment approaches
	Perceived impact on learners' engagement
Community of practice	Value of the CLiC community of practice to support professional learning, collaboration and curriculum-making
Next steps	Identified gains from participation
	Ways the CLiC programme could be developed further and disseminated more widely
	Implications for future practice
	Opportunity to add other comments / thoughts

interrelationship between the different sites of curriculum making (Priestley et al. 2021); furthermore, following Thomson and Hall (2016) we take the view that it is vital for us as teacher educators/ researchers to adopt research approaches that simultaneously allows us to 'see both the bigger picture and the small one' (11) through 'analysis at a smaller scale' Thomson, Hall, and Jones (2010: 640).

Results and discussion

What hinders language teachers' ability to integrate linguistic and cultural learning as part of their day-to-day practice?

In line with the literature, teachers cited a range of barriers to the integration of linguistic and cultural learning in their day-to-day practice. Figure 2 presents the responses from the participating teachers, grouped thematically. Issues commonly identified could broadly be split into macro- and meso/micro- level barriers (Priestley et al. 2021).

Macro-level barriers

Many teachers highlighted curriculum and assessment pressures at national and local levels:

I think it's […] the demands of having to cover the curriculum in a certain way […] (Margot)

I've got a friend in another [school] who's currently being expected to use a certain template for every lesson. (Nathan)

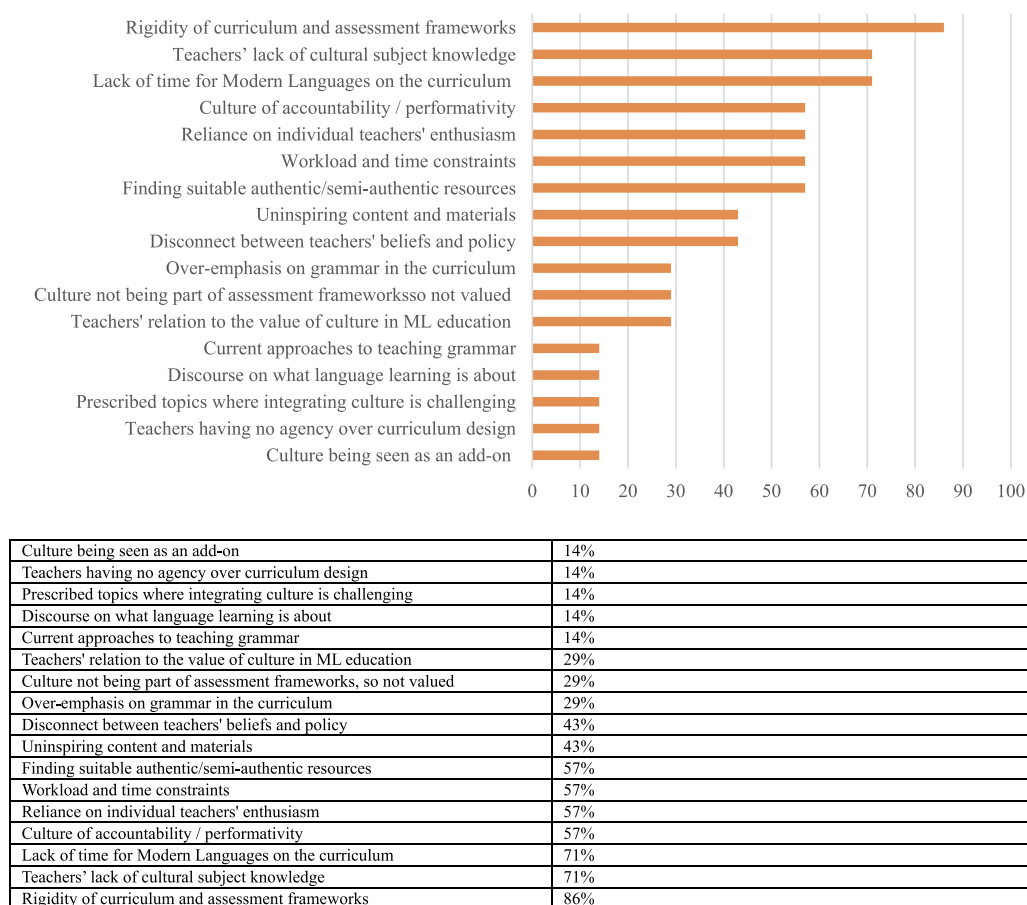| Culture being seen as an add-on	14%
Teachers having no agency over curriculum design	14%
Prescribed topics where integrating culture is challenging	14%
Discourse on what language learning is about	14%
Current approaches to teaching grammar	14%
Teachers' relation to the value of culture in ML education	29%
Culture not being part of assessment frameworks, so not valued	29%
Over-emphasis on grammar in the curriculum	29%
Disconnect between teachers' beliefs and policy	43%
Uninspiring content and materials	43%
Finding suitable authentic/semi-authentic resources	57%
Workload and time constraints	57%
Reliance on individual teachers' enthusiasm	57%
Culture of accountability / performativity	57%
Lack of time for Modern Languages on the curriculum	71%
Teachers' lack of cultural subject knowledge	71%
Rigidity of curriculum and assessment frameworks	86%

Figure 2. What hinders language teachers to integrate linguistic and cultural learning as part of day-to-day teaching, learning and assessment of modern languages at KS3? (*n* = 7). The data is summarised in the following table.

Teachers also raised concerns about the constraints of a measure-driven, examination-led education system resulting in a 'culture of performativity' (Ball 2003), leaving some lamenting a prescriptive curriculum, their lack of agency, the tokenistic approach to culture in curriculum and assessment documents (Kovács 2017; Peiser and Jones 2013; Young and Sachdev 2011), and an over-focus on linguistic goals (Wingate and Andon 2017), leaving little room for the development of intercultural communicative skills:

> I don't agree with what the National curriculum requirements are for KS3 […] there's far too big an emphasis on grammar [and] on phonics. That's useful, but it's to the point of obsession, […] They're not learning to communicate. (Edith)

> The [new Languages subject content for GCSE is] going to reduce the GCSE to learning unrelated and out of context vocabulary […] I don't think it will create good communicators. (Nathan)

> It doesn't actually require students to have any [cultural] knowledge […] I don't think it actually really achieves all that much in terms of testing them on anything other than their linguistic ability. (Libby)

As a result, many felt a stark tension between their beliefs and practice (Hagger-Vaughan 2018; Koro 2017, 2018):

> Why are we teaching languages? I feel like there's a huge disconnect between real life language learning and what we could really do with languages, and what the GCSE expects us to do. (Margot)

Meso and micro-level barriers

Teachers noted that exemplar materials (for instance those from the National Centre for Excellence for Language Pedagogy (NCELP) or the Oak National Academy) offered few cultural insights:

> That's been quite limited. We'd rather show them other things […] it makes it more real for them. (Hannah)

Another teacher also noted that a lack of cultural subject knowledge was often a barrier, reflecting concerns expressed in the literature (Wagner, Perugini, and Byram 2017):

> … teachers [are] less likely to do cultural things because […] they […] don't know if it's even necessarily right. (Libby)

Yet despite these constraints, it was evident, albeit unsurprising given their participation, that the teachers eschewed a narrow conceptualisation of language learning, and that the interrelationship between language and culture was recognised (Boylan and Huntley 2003).

> It almost shouldn't be called language learning. Because it's not just language, it's culture as well, so it should be cultural learning. (Hannah)

In fact, some macro-level constraints, such as the schools' contexts, presented even more of an imperative to integrate language and culture, echoing calls for more intercultural pedagogies (Koro 2017; Porto 2018) to combat deficit discourses and to account for the increasing diversity of linguistic and cultural repertoires in classrooms:

> I think recent political events in this country – without mentioning the B word – have meant that we're in a position where we're sleepwalking towards isolationism as a nation, and for me actually being able to communicate does not just mean a student being able to gloss the language [but] a student […] having a certain degree of cultural sensitivity, an understanding […] of difference as a positive and something that very much enriches our society. (Nathan)

> It's just too easy to allow the main view to be [that] we don't need to learn other languages [or] that we don't need to experience anything that's not our culture because ours is the best one. […] If that's left unchecked, [it can] really develop [negative attitudes]. (Edith)

> I've got a girl from Poland in my group who's very demotivated in every subject, but she loves my French lessons. […] it's [important to creat[e] that discussion about their own cultures as well. (Hannah)

What helps language teachers to integrate linguistic and cultural learning as part of their day-to-day practice?

With strong beliefs in the importance of developing learners' intercultural understanding, teachers cited a number of aspects which helped them integrate cultural learning into their day-to-day practice.

Using a broad range of (semi) authentic materials, including music, song, video clips, films and online resources in the target language

Some teachers suggested that drawing from a broad range of authentic materials and using these with younger learners was the most helpful way to engage them, noting that access to culturally relevant resources was easier than ever. This reflects Porter et al.'s (2022) view that engagement with cultural content needs to occur early on, and confirms Woore et al.'s (2022) argument that access to authentic content can be source of motivation and should not be dependent on linguistic proficiency:

> By giving [learners] access to the authentic resources […] quite young, […] they suddenly realised they could do it and that was nice. (Libby)

Teachers' and learners' funds of knowledge

Drawing on their own and learners' cultural experiences was seen as valuable to contextualise content and to foster engagement:

Students' personal experience, and teachers' personal experience are both enablers. (Nathan)

I think what helps is […] genuine interest. (Margot)

This echoed the view in the literature that learners need to be provided with content and tasks that are engaging, relevant and meaningful to foster motivation, deep learning (Ghasemi and Dowlatabadi 2018) and critical intercultural awareness (Byram 1997).

How has the CLiC project supported language teachers to integrate linguistic and cultural learning as part of their day-to-day practice?

During the intervention phase, participating teachers used the framework and model provided (Appendices 1 and 2 online) to adapt a sequence of lesson integrating linguistic and cultural learning, and taught this in their respective schools. They were also asked to produce individual case studies to share their adapted sequence overview, set out the practical approaches taken to integrate linguistic and cultural learning, and reflect on key outcomes for their learners (Appendices 4 and 5 online).

Teachers reported that participation had enabled them to enhance planning practices by carefully sequencing and mapping cultural learning into existing schemes of work:

Having the CLiC project ticking over all year has helped me to make things more structured and logical in terms of what I teach and my lesson sequences. (Libby)

They did this by revisiting content through the lens of culture (Koro 2018), rather than seeing culture as an add-on, and valued the phased, non-prescriptive approach of the project which provided a framework while enabling them to adapt existing materials in locally relevant ways (Coffey 2022):

It opened my eyes to the whole way of thinking about how [culture] fits into a lesson. […] even if you don't use the format, [it supports] the thought process. […]a lot of people think [that integrating culture involves] a stand-alone module or […]re-do[ing] what [they]'ve already got […]. But actually, coming to the CLiC project has made me realise that there is a way to put culture into everything without reinventing the wheel. (Sara)

A more systematic integration of linguistic and cultural learning enabled greater awareness of the need to map out a more holistic view of learners' progress:

Our current descriptors don't include culture, […], so it was nice to merge [cultural and linguistic descriptors] […] [and] build […] a more holistic view of a student's progress than you would just [with] numbers in a spreadsheet. (Sara)

Interestingly, teachers felt better equipped to align the integration of linguistic and cultural learning with departmental and school-based demands, while ensuring adherence to their broader goals and beliefs:

the CLiC [project] has been very instrumental and influential on our curriculum maps and our journey, and it has been really impactful on our core values and how we've revisited what we want to achieve as educators of languages. […]one of those big ideas is intercultural understanding, and it's one that is now mapped out throughout the curriculum. (Maya)

A second aspect which came to the forefront was the way in which the CLiC project had provided teachers with the necessary 'know-how' to enact this more integrated approach in practice; they found the language used in the CLiC Planning Toolkit (Koro and Hagger-Vaughan 2021) particularly useful to articulate clear intercultural objectives and to share these with learners:

I found the keywords from the Toolkit really helpful. [They provided a] sense of clarity and simplicity [which was] really helpful for my own planning and for […] sharing with the students. (Maya)

The language that was used – compare, demonstrate, evaluate – really gave a grounding to what the meaningful outcomes were. (Nathan)

Thirdly, the CLiC project provided teachers with the opportunity to exercise much-needed collective and individual pedagogical agency (Biesta 2015; Tao and Gao 2021) through curriculum making at meso and micro level (Priestley et al. 2021), giving them the freedom to critically interpret curriculum (Parrish 2020) and to create their own in a way which was contextually relevant (Hall and Thomson 2017), while building on existing good practice; as a result, teachers felt empowered to affect broader policy (Alvunger et al. 2021; Ball, Maguire, and Braun 2012), and with much dedication and an intentional focus, they achieved a long-awaited reconciliation between their beliefs and practice:

> Actually, I know a lot about intercultural communication and that was quite a confidence booster […] to think I do have stuff to contribute. (Margot)

> I felt it was such a powerful tool to be able to have that freedom and to put it into practice in the classroom. So, to combine the ideal with the day-to-day practice drudgery. It was just like the perfect combination for me, so it was really empowering. (Maya)

> it's given me the inspiration to keep going and to change my students' learning and not just keep teaching the same thing every year because that's boring. And to bring in more culture and actually do what I set out to do when I started teaching seven years ago, which was to bring the wider world to the local area – and it's given me the opportunity to do that. (Libby)

> It's helped me understand that there are ways round what I viewed as constraints […] It made me feel confident in myself as a Head of subject, and in the fact that I could actually make that curriculum change as well. (Nathan)

Finally, all teachers noted that local collaborations had been a key benefit of their participation:

> I've gained a community which I didn't have before, a community of language teachers who have a lot of similar ideas, we're on the same page and we want to promote language learning, which is something I felt I had a little bit lost […] I think the CLiC project has definitely made a big difference […] in terms of having those people to bounce off and knowing […] that we can work together to promote languages. I think the community aspect is really, really important. Thanks! (Libby)

Implications and conclusions

The voices of the teachers in this research bring to the fore concerns around centrally prescribed approaches to languages pedagogy and the underpinning messages included in Ofsted's Curriculum Research Review (2021); they point to an ongoing tension between teachers' beliefs and day-to-day practices within a curriculum policy context which frame languages education in such a way that cultural learning is seen as desirable, rather than as intrinsic to language learning.

The research also highlights the value of collaborative curriculum making in empowering teachers to critically navigate national language education policy in order to integrate linguistic and intercultural learning and enact locally relevant, theoretically informed language curricula which build on the cultural and linguistic repertoires of young people in order to develop their intercultural communicative competence.

Furthermore, the research highlights the important role that teacher educators/researchers can play in developing teachers' curriculum making capacity, by facilitating knowledge exchange and crafting professional learning opportunities which combine research, scholarship and practice. The experience of the participating teachers also helped shape the professional learning available to language educators in the region and strengthened the development of an intercultural pedagogy within the local Languages PGCE course (Bastos and Araújo e Sá 2015).

Findings from the study also indicate that whilst it is essential to offer all young people an engaging, culturally rich languages curriculum that incorporates authentic resources and situates learning in diverse cultural contexts, this alone is insufficient. The teachers in this study highlighted the importance of incorporating explicit intercultural learning goals which encourage the development of critical cultural awareness in the curriculum. This in turn points to the need to develop appropriate and more holistic formative assessment tools and approaches evidencing progress in intercultural

learning (Byram 2021; Kohler 2020), for instance through portfolio approaches which foreground learners' reflectivity and reflexivity and capture the development of their intercultural skills, knowledge and attitudes.

Supporting the language-culture nexus in day-to-day practice will equip young people with the intercultural communicative competencies they need in order to contribute to and thrive in increasingly diverse local and global communities now and in the future. Language teachers need to have opportunities to engage in collaborative communities of practice, and the agency to shape a curriculum that will align with their beliefs and provide all learners with the rich language learning experiences they deserve. Intercultural learning should be afforded a central place in the languages education of *all* young people rather than feature as an extra-curricular activity for the few. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the findings point to the need for further research *with* young people in order to gain a deeper understanding of their views on why language learning matters in globalised contexts, and on what a culturally rich languages curriculum should look like.

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ORCID

Ruth Koro 🄳 http://orcid.org/0000-0002-3323-4327
Lesley Hagger-Vaughan 🄳 http://orcid.org/0009-0007-1180-3182

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