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METHODOLOGICAL POTENTIAL OF THE 5K MODEL FOR DEVELOPING UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE

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Abstract
The article examines the methodological potential of the 5K model for developing intercultural communicative competence (ICC) in university students learning English. The analysis is deliberately conceptual rather than experimental: no claims of measured effectiveness are made. The 5K configuration used in the paper comprises Critical Thinking, Creativity, Collaboration, Communication, and Connected-Culture. Through comparative conceptual analysis, the five components are mapped onto established ICC constructs in the work of M. Byram, D. K. Deardorff, C. Kramsch, and the CEFR Companion Volume. The analysis shows that the 5K model can serve as a task-design framework when each component is operationalized through observable intercultural actions: interpreting cultural evidence, generating alternative communicative strategies, negotiating meaning collaboratively, selecting linguistically and sociopragmatically appropriate forms, and mediating between cultural perspectives. The paper proposes a five-stage instructional sequence—analysis, alternative generation, collaborative negotiation, communicative performance, and intercultural reflection—and specifies task types and assessment indicators for each stage.

Keywords: 5K model, intercultural communicative competence, critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, communication, Connected-Culture, mediation, English language teaching.

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Introduction

Contemporary foreign-language education increasingly treats successful language use as more than grammatical accuracy or lexical range. In intercultural situations, a learner must interpret culturally conditioned meanings, recognize differences in communicative conventions, adjust verbal and non-verbal behaviour, and negotiate understanding with interlocutors whose assumptions may differ from their own. This position is consistent with Byram's model of intercultural communicative competence, in which linguistic, sociolinguistics and discourse competences interact with attitudes, knowledge, skills of interpreting and relating, skills of discovery and interaction, and critical cultural awareness [3]. It is also compatible with Deardorff's process model, where attitudes, knowledge and skills lead to internal shifts and, ultimately, to effective and appropriate communication and behaviour in intercultural situations [4].

The methodological problem is therefore not simply how to add cultural information to an English lesson, but how to design learning activity in which students actually perform the cognitive, collaborative, linguistic and reflective operations required by intercultural communication. In this respect, competency frameworks associated with twenty-first-century learning can provide a useful task-design perspective. The Partnership for 21st Century Learning identifies four learning and innovation skills—Critical Thinking, Communication, Collaboration and Creativity—as interconnected rather than isolated outcomes [2]. In Uzbek pedagogical research, a five-component configuration has also been documented under the label "5K model": Critical Thinking, Creativity, Collaboration, Communication and Connected-Culture [1].

A terminological qualification is necessary. The four-component 4C framework of twenty-first-century skills developed by the Partnership for 21st Century Learning is internationally established and source-documented. Connected-Culture, by contrast, is not presented in that framework as a fifth "C". In the present article, the term is used only in the sense in which it appears in Uzbek pedagogical research: as a component emphasizing cultural connectedness and the ability to relate learning to cultural contexts [1]. This distinction is important because it prevents the local 5K configuration from being incorrectly attributed to the Partnership for 21st Century Learning. The purpose of the article is to

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determine, at the conceptual and methodological level, how this 5K configuration can be aligned with recognized ICC constructs and converted into observable learning actions in university English instruction.

Research Methodology

The study uses comparative conceptual analysis and pedagogical modelling. The analytical corpus consists of: the Framework Definitions issued by the Partnership for 21st Century Learning for the functions of Critical Thinking, Creativity, Communication and Collaboration [2]; Byram's model of intercultural communicative competence [3]; Deardorff's process model of intercultural competence [4]; the CEFR Companion Volume, particularly its constructs of mediation and plurilingual/pluricultural competence [5]; Kramsch's interpretation of the relationship between language, culture and the learner's "third place" [6]; and the 5K configuration documented in Uzbek pedagogical research [1].

The components were compared according to three criteria: conceptual function, communicative function, and observable learning outcome. Conceptual function refers to the mental operation required from the learner, such as analysis or perspective comparison. Communicative function identifies how that operation contributes to interaction. Observable outcome specifies what a student can actually do in a task. This procedure avoids treating the 5K labels as general slogans and allows each component to be connected with concrete ICC performance.

Results and Discussion

Within the 4C framework of twenty-first-century skills, critical thinking includes analysing evidence and arguments, evaluating alternative points of view, making judgments, drawing conclusions, and reflecting critically on learning processes [2]. In intercultural language education, these operations are directly relevant to the interpretation of culturally conditioned behaviour. A learner should not infer intention from a single familiar cultural norm; instead, the learner must examine context, compare plausible interpretations and identify the evidence supporting

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each interpretation. This function corresponds closely to Byram's skills of interpreting and relating and to critical cultural awareness [3].

Operationally, Critical Thinking in an ICC lesson can be represented by tasks built around a critical incident. For example, students are given a short exchange in which an English-speaking interlocutor uses an indirect request. Instead of asking whether the utterance is simply "polite" or "impolite," the task requires students to identify the linguistic markers of indirectness, infer possible social meanings, compare them with request conventions in their own cultural experience, and justify which interpretation is most contextually plausible. The assessable outcome is not the reproduction of a cultural fact but the ability to provide an evidence-based interpretation and to revise an initial judgment when new contextual information is introduced.

The 4C framework of twenty-first-century skills defines creativity through idea generation, elaboration, refinement and the production of useful new solutions [2]. Within ICC, creativity is methodologically relevant when learners face situations in which a single memorized formula is insufficient. Intercultural communication often involves ambiguity: a direct refusal may threaten rapport, an indirect refusal may be misunderstood, or a culturally familiar joke may fail with a new interlocutor. The learner therefore needs a repertoire of alternative ways to achieve the same communicative purpose.

Creativity should consequently be operationalized as strategy generation rather than as decorative or artistic activity. After analysing an intercultural problem, students can be required to produce three functionally different responses—for example, a direct but mitigated refusal, an indirect refusal with explanation, and a face-saving alternative proposal—and then explain how each option changes the interpersonal meaning. This activity develops the capacity to adapt discourse rather than merely reproduce prefabricated expressions. It also supports the CEFR view of the learner as a social agent who mobilizes available linguistic and cultural resources according to the demands of a situation [5].

The same framework describes collaboration as respectful work with diverse teams, flexibility, compromise, shared responsibility and recognition of individual contributions [2]. These features are not peripheral to ICC; they constitute conditions under which intercultural meanings are negotiated. A

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collaborative task becomes intercultural when participants must compare perspectives, make differences explicit, and reach a communicatively workable decision without erasing those differences.

A suitable task format is a perspective-negotiation case. Small groups receive the same intercultural scenario but different role cards containing partially conflicting expectations. The group must identify the source of misunderstanding, establish which expectations are negotiable, and produce a joint interaction plan. Assessment can focus on turn-taking, explicit acknowledgement of another perspective, use of clarification questions, willingness to reformulate one's position, and evidence of negotiated rather than imposed agreement. These indicators correspond to the interactional dimension of Byram's model [3] and to the process orientation of Deardorff's framework [4].

4. Communication as Linguistic, Sociolinguistic and Pragmatic Realization

Communication is the point at which cognitive and intercultural understanding becomes observable language behaviour. The 4C framework describes effective communication as the clear articulation of ideas through oral, written and non-verbal forms, effective listening, purposeful language use, and communication in diverse environments [2]. In foreign-language teaching, however, communicative success must also be evaluated for appropriateness. A grammatically correct utterance may still be pragmatically inappropriate if it ignores status, distance, degree of imposition, turn-taking conventions or culturally expected mitigation.

For this reason, the Communication component should be assessed through performance tasks that require learners to select forms for a specified social context. Examples include making a request to a lecturer versus a peer, disagreeing in a seminar, apologizing after different degrees of offence, or mediating between two speakers who interpret the same message differently. The assessment criteria can include linguistic accuracy, clarity, sociopragmatic appropriateness, discourse management, repair strategies and responsiveness to the interlocutor. This treatment is consistent with Byram's integration of linguistic, sociolinguistic and discourse competences into ICC [3].

Within the 5K configuration documented in Uzbek pedagogical research, Connected-Culture is presented as the fifth component alongside the four Cs [1]. For the purposes of ICC methodology, the component is most defensibly

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interpreted not as knowledge of national facts but as the learner's ability to connect cultural perspectives, relate cultural practices to underlying meanings, and mediate between different interpretive frames. Such an interpretation avoids essentializing cultures as fixed lists of traits.

This reading is supported by two established theoretical directions. First, Kramsch argues that language learning places the learner in an interpretive space between familiar and target cultural meanings, often described through the notion of a "third place" [6]. Second, the CEFR Companion Volume explicitly expands language education through plurilingual/pluricultural competence and mediation; the Council of Europe identifies mediation as especially important in plurilingual and pluricultural encounters [5]. Therefore, a Connected-Culture task should require relational work: students compare meanings across contexts, explain one perspective to another interlocutor, identify a possible source of cultural misinterpretation, and reformulate a message so that it becomes accessible without distorting its intent.

Table 1. Operational alignment of the 5K components with ICC learning outcomes

5K component	ICC function	Observable student action	Suitable task type
Critical Thinking	Interpretation, comparison, critical cultural awareness	Justifies an interpretation using contextual evidence and revises judgments when evidence changes	Critical incident; discourse comparison
Creativity	Adaptive strategy generation	Produces and evaluates alternative ways of performing the same speech act	Scenario redesign; multiple-response task
Collaboration	Negotiation of meaning and perspective	Acknowledges different positions, asks for clarification and reaches negotiated decisions	Role-based case; collaborative problem-solving
Communication	Linguistic, sociolinguistic and pragmatic realization	Selects accurate and context-appropriate verbal/non-verbal forms and repairs misunderstanding	Role-play; simulation; mediated dialogue
Connected-Culture	Cultural relating and mediation	Explains cultural meanings across perspectives and reformulates messages for mutual understanding	Cultural comparison; mediation task; reflection

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The conceptual mapping above permits the 5K components to be organized as a learning sequence rather than taught as five separate skills. The proposed mechanism consists of five stages: (1) analysis of an intercultural situation; (2) generation of alternative communicative responses; (3) collaborative negotiation of interpretations and strategies; (4) communicative performance in a role-play or simulation; and (5) intercultural reflection and mediation. The sequence can be represented as Critical Thinking → Creativity → Collaboration → Communication → Connected-Culture. This arrow should not be understood as a rigid developmental hierarchy. In authentic interaction, the components recur and overlap; the sequence is a pedagogical device for task design.

At the first stage, learners identify the communicative problem and analyse the cultural and linguistic evidence. At the second stage, they generate more than one possible response and predict the interpersonal consequences of each. At the third stage, they compare options with peers and negotiate a shared strategy. At the fourth stage, they perform the interaction, where linguistic and sociopragmatic choices become observable. At the fifth stage, they explain what cultural assumptions shaped the interaction, how misunderstanding was managed, and how the message might be mediated for a different interlocutor. Reflection therefore closes the task by converting performance into explicit intercultural learning.

This mechanism also provides a basis for assessment. Instead of assigning a single holistic score for "intercultural competence," the teacher can collect evidence across dimensions: interpretation quality, strategy flexibility, collaborative negotiation, communicative appropriateness, and mediation/reflection. Deardorff's study is particularly relevant here because it concludes that intercultural competence is best assessed through a mixture of methods, including observation and judgments by self and others rather than through a single instrument [4]. Accordingly, a 5K-based ICC assessment can combine an analytic performance rubric, peer feedback, teacher observation and a short reflective commentary.

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Conclusion

The analysis indicates that the methodological value of the 5K model lies not in the labels themselves but in their conversion into observable intercultural actions. Critical Thinking supports evidence-based interpretation and critical cultural awareness; Creativity supports the generation of adaptive communicative strategies; Collaboration provides the interactional space for negotiating perspectives; Communication realizes linguistic, sociolinguistic and pragmatic choices in performance; and Connected-Culture can be methodologically defined as cultural relating and mediation. This interpretation is consistent with established ICC theory while preserving the specific five-component configuration documented in Uzbek pedagogical research.

For university English teaching, the proposed model is most appropriate for scenario-based tasks, critical incidents, role-plays, simulations, comparative discourse analysis and mediation activities. Its use should not be presented as empirically proven until tested through a controlled pedagogical study. At the current conceptual stage, the principal contribution is a source-grounded operational framework that links 5K components to specific ICC processes and assessment evidence. This framework can subsequently be used to design experimental materials and criteria for measuring changes in students' intercultural communicative performance.

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