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Deep Learning Approaches Integrated with Intercultural Pragmatic Competence for Enhancing EFL Learners' Speaking Skills

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ABSTRACT

The development of EFL learners' speaking skills remains challenging, as many learners continue to experience limited fluency, low confidence, insufficient opportunities for authentic communication, and difficulties in using English appropriately across different social and cultural contexts. These challenges indicate that speaking instruction requires not only linguistic practice but also learning approaches that promote meaningful understanding, higher-order thinking, and intercultural pragmatic competence. However, previous studies have largely examined Deep Learning Approaches and Intercultural Pragmatic Competence as separate concepts, resulting in fragmented evidence regarding their integration in EFL speaking instruction. This study aims to systematically synthesize previous research on the integration of Deep Learning Approaches and Intercultural Pragmatic Competence in EFL speaking instruction. A qualitative Systematic Literature Review (SLR) was conducted following the PRISMA 2020 guidelines. Relevant articles published between 2015 and 2026 were retrieved from Scopus, DOAJ, and Google Scholar and analyzed through thematic analysis and narrative synthesis. The findings reveal four major themes: publication trends and research characteristics, implementation characteristics, effects on EFL speaking development, and challenges, research gaps, and future research directions. The synthesis indicates that the integration of these two dimensions promotes meaningful, learner-centered, and contextual learning and is associated with improvements in speaking fluency, vocabulary, pronunciation, grammatical accuracy, confidence, and communicative appropriateness. However, implementation varies depending on learner characteristics, teacher readiness, instructional design, and learning environments. The review also highlights the limited availability of integrated pedagogical frameworks, assessment instruments, and longitudinal studies. Therefore, future research should focus on developing comprehensive instructional models and assessment frameworks while utilizing digital technologies to support authentic intercultural communication across diverse EFL contexts.

Keywords: *Deep Learning Approaches; Intercultural Pragmatic Competence; Speaking Skills; English as a Foreign Language (EFL); Systematic Literature Review.*

INTRODUCTION

Speaking skills are one of the most important components of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning because they enable learners to express ideas, interact with others, and participate in communication across various contexts (Rampeng et al., 2025). However, developing effective speaking skills remains challenging for many EFL learners. Previous studies have identified several barriers, including limited vocabulary, low self-confidence, communication anxiety, insufficient opportunities for authentic speaking practice, and difficulties in using language appropriately according to social and cultural contexts (Haerazi

& Irawan, 2026; Elmahdi et al., 2025; Chaya & Inpin, 2020). These challenges indicate that speaking instruction cannot focus solely on linguistic accuracy or the memorization of language forms. Learners also need opportunities to develop deeper understanding, engage in meaningful communication, and recognize how language use is influenced by social and cultural contexts. Therefore, EFL speaking instruction requires learning approaches that can simultaneously support cognitive engagement and the development of appropriate communication in diverse cultural settings.

The development of globalization, digitalization, and technological advancements has further increased the need for EFL learners to communicate effectively in complex and multicultural environments. Language learning is therefore no longer focused solely on mastering linguistic aspects, such as grammar and vocabulary, but is also directed toward developing critical thinking, problem-solving, collaboration, creativity, and the ability to communicate effectively in various social and cultural contexts (Alsaraireh, 2022). This paradigm shift has encouraged educational institutions to adopt learning approaches that foster meaningful learning, reflection, high cognitive engagement, and the ability to connect knowledge with real-world experiences. One approach considered relevant to these demands is Deep Learning Approaches (DLA), which emphasize meaningful learning, reflection, active knowledge construction, and the application of knowledge in authentic situations (Xu et al., 2025). Unlike surface learning, which tends to emphasize memorization, DLA encourages learners to critically explore concepts, analyze different perspectives, solve problems, and apply their knowledge to real-world situations (Iswandari & Ardi, 2022). In EFL instruction, these characteristics provide opportunities for learners to engage in contextual, collaborative, and reflective communication activities (Fathi et al., 2024).

However, meaningful and cognitively engaging learning alone may not be sufficient to ensure that EFL learners can communicate appropriately across cultural contexts. Learners also need Intercultural Pragmatic Competence (IPC), which integrates pragmatic knowledge, cultural awareness, and the ability to adapt language use according to the norms and expectations of different communicative contexts (Pereira & Wahi, 2019). IPC involves more than understanding the literal meaning of utterances; it includes interpreting communicative intentions, selecting appropriate politeness strategies, recognizing cultural values, and responding effectively to communicative situations involving speakers from different cultural backgrounds (Mcconachy, 2019). As opportunities for international and digitally mediated communication continue to increase, IPC has become an important component of EFL instruction because learners need to use English appropriately with people who may have different cultural expectations and communication norms (Sharma et al., 2022). Thus, speaking instruction needs to address not only grammatical competence but also pragmatic and intercultural dimensions of communicative competence (Hartiningsari et al., 2026; Weng et al., 2023).

Existing studies have examined the contribution of DLA to EFL learning and have reported its potential to support higher-order thinking, meaningful learning, student engagement, reflection, and problem-solving. Martyna (2024); Bardis et al. (2021) argue that DLA emphasizes active student engagement in constructing knowledge, while Zhou et al. (2024) explain that its implementation in EFL instruction can encourage reflection, critical thinking, and problem-solving through authentic learning activities. Strategies such as project-based learning, problem-based learning, inquiry-based learning, and collaborative learning have also been identified as forms of deep learning-oriented instruction in language education Vu & Dinh (2021). Similarly, Zarrinabadi et al. (2021)report that students involved in deep learning-based instruction demonstrate higher levels of engagement, motivation, and autonomy than those experiencing conventional learning approaches. These findings suggest that DLA can provide a pedagogical foundation for developing speaking skills through active exploration, reflection,

collaboration, and the application of knowledge in meaningful communication contexts (González-lloret, 2019).

At the same time, previous research has demonstrated the importance of IPC in supporting effective oral communication. Nurmala & Dewanti (2024) explain that IPC enables learners to use language appropriately according to social and cultural norms and communicative purposes. Zhang et al. (2025) emphasizes that the development of IPC contributes to speaking development, particularly in interpreting communicative intentions, selecting appropriate politeness strategies, and adapting language use to different interactional contexts. Furthermore, role-plays, cross-cultural communication simulations, virtual exchanges, and authentic materials have been reported as useful activities for developing cultural awareness and oral communication skills (Oktavianus & Rido, 2025; Amaliah, 2024). Ravindran & Mansour (2023) also found that IPC-oriented instruction can support improvements in fluency, accuracy, self-confidence, and learners' ability to negotiate meaning during communication. These findings demonstrate that DLA and IPC address complementary dimensions of EFL speaking instruction: DLA emphasizes deeper cognitive engagement and meaningful learning processes, whereas IPC emphasizes the appropriate use of language within social and cultural contexts.

Despite these developments, the existing evidence remains fragmented. Previous studies have investigated DLA and IPC across different research contexts, instructional strategies, educational levels, and research designs, but their findings have generally been discussed separately or across isolated dimensions. Research on DLA has tended to emphasize cognitive development, meaningful learning, critical thinking, problem-solving, and learner engagement, while studies on IPC have more frequently focused on cultural awareness, pragmatic knowledge, politeness strategies, and communicative competence (Kiruthiga & Christopher, 2022; Robert, 2022). Consequently, the existing literature does not yet provide a systematic picture of how DLA and IPC are integrated in EFL speaking instruction, how this integration is implemented, what speaking-related outcomes are associated with it, and what challenges and contextual factors influence its implementation. Yan et al. (2024) further indicate that studies connecting these dimensions are conducted across diverse contexts and designs, making the evidence difficult to compare and synthesize. Therefore, the stronger research gap lies not necessarily in the absence of studies on DLA or IPC, but in the lack of a systematic synthesis that brings the fragmented evidence together and maps the relationship between these two dimensions in the development of EFL speaking skills (Robert & Meenakshi, 2022).

This gap provides a strong rationale for conducting a Systematic Literature Review (SLR). Rather than assuming that empirical studies integrating DLA and IPC are entirely absent, this study seeks to systematically identify, organize, and synthesize the available evidence to clarify publication trends, research characteristics, implementation patterns, speaking-related outcomes, challenges, and future research directions. The novelty of this study therefore lies in its systematic synthesis of research addressing the intersection of Deep Learning Approaches and Intercultural Pragmatic Competence in EFL speaking instruction. Through this synthesis, the study aims to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how cognitive, communicative, pragmatic, and intercultural dimensions can be connected within EFL speaking instruction (Wulandari & Salsabilla, 2026).

Based on this research gap, this study aims to conduct a systematic literature review of research concerning the integration of Deep Learning Approaches and Intercultural Pragmatic Competence in improving the speaking skills of EFL learners. Specifically, this study aims to (1) identify publication trends and research developments concerning the integration of Deep Learning Approaches and Intercultural Pragmatic Competence in EFL speaking instruction; (2) analyze the characteristics of the studies, including research contexts, participants, methodologies, and implementation strategies; (3) synthesize the findings regarding the

contribution of the integration of these two dimensions to EFL learners' speaking development; and (4) identify challenges, research gaps, and opportunities for future research. Through this systematic synthesis, the study is expected to contribute theoretically by clarifying the current state of research at the intersection of deep learning and intercultural pragmatic competence. Practically, the findings are expected to provide a reference for educators, curriculum developers, and researchers in designing EFL speaking instruction that is more meaningful, contextual, and responsive to the demands of communication in multicultural and digitally connected environments.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach using the Systematic Literature Review (SLR) method to identify, analyze, and synthesize research findings on the integration of Deep Learning Approaches and Intercultural Pragmatic Competence in improving the speaking skills of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners. The SLR method was selected because it provides a systematic and transparent process for synthesizing existing research and identifying research trends, implementation characteristics, key findings, and research gaps. The literature review process followed the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA 2020) guidelines to support a systematic process of identification, screening, eligibility assessment, and selection of relevant articles. The literature was obtained from three scientific databases, namely Scopus, DOAJ, and Google Scholar, covering publications from 2015 to 2026. The search strategy employed combinations of keywords and Boolean operators, including ("Deep Learning Approaches" OR "Deep Learning") AND ("Intercultural Pragmatic Competence") AND ("Speaking Skills" OR "Oral Communication") AND (EFL OR "English as a Foreign Language"), to identify literature relevant to the research focus.

To ensure consistency during the literature selection and data collection process, the researchers used several research instruments consisting of a search strategy, an inclusion and exclusion checklist, a screening form, and a data-extraction sheet. The search strategy was used to identify relevant articles across the selected databases, while the screening form and inclusion/exclusion checklist were used to assess the relevance and eligibility of the retrieved literature. The data-extraction sheet was used to record important information from each selected article, including author(s), publication year, country or research context, research objectives, research design, participant characteristics, implementation strategies, research instruments, and key findings related to Deep Learning Approaches, Intercultural Pragmatic Competence, and EFL speaking skills. These instruments were developed by the researchers based on the objectives and research questions of the study and were applied consistently throughout the selection and data-extraction processes. No standardized or previously validated data-extraction instrument was adopted, as the instruments were specifically developed to accommodate the focus and characteristics of the present SLR.

The retrieved articles were screened according to predetermined inclusion and exclusion criteria. The inclusion criteria consisted of: (1) research articles published in peer-reviewed journals; (2) published between 2015 and 2026; (3) written in English; (4) discussing Deep Learning Approaches, Intercultural Pragmatic Competence, EFL speaking skills, or the relationship among these aspects; and (5) available in full text. Articles were excluded if they were conference proceedings, book chapters, editorials, opinion articles, conceptual papers without empirical discussion, or publications that did not have a clear relevance to the research focus. The article selection process consisted of several stages, beginning with the identification of relevant literature, removal of duplicate records, screening based on titles and abstracts, and full-text assessment based on the established criteria. Articles that met all eligibility requirements were included in the final synthesis. The screening and selection process was

documented using the PRISMA 2020 framework to provide a transparent account of the literature selection process.

Following the selection process, data were extracted systematically using the researcher-developed data-extraction sheet. The extracted information was organized according to study characteristics, research methodology, implementation strategies, and findings related to the integration of Deep Learning Approaches and Intercultural Pragmatic Competence in EFL speaking instruction. The extracted data were then analyzed using thematic analysis and narrative synthesis. Thematic analysis involved coding recurring concepts and grouping similar findings into broader themes, while narrative synthesis was used to compare and integrate findings across studies. The analysis focused on four major areas: publication trends and research characteristics, implementation characteristics, the effects of integrating Deep Learning Approaches and Intercultural Pragmatic Competence on EFL speaking skills, and challenges, research gaps, and future research directions.



Figure 1. Research Procedure Systematic Literature Review (SLR)

Figure 1 presents the systematic stages of the literature review process, beginning with the formulation of the research focus and identification of databases and search strategies. The process continued with literature retrieval, duplicate removal, title and abstract screening, and full-text eligibility assessment based on the established inclusion and exclusion criteria. Articles that met all criteria were included in the final analysis. The selected articles were then subjected to systematic data extraction using the researcher-developed data-extraction sheet. The extracted data were subsequently coded and analyzed through thematic analysis and narrative synthesis to identify research trends, implementation characteristics, effects on EFL speaking skills, challenges, research gaps, and future research directions. This systematic procedure was designed to ensure that the literature selection and synthesis process was transparent, consistent, and aligned with the objectives of the study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings of the Systematic Literature Review (SLR) on the relationship between Deep Learning Approaches (DLA), Intercultural Pragmatic Competence (IPC), and EFL learners' speaking development. Following the PRISMA 2020 procedure, the selected studies were examined through data extraction, thematic analysis, and narrative synthesis. Rather than treating DLA and IPC as isolated concepts, the synthesis examines how the two dimensions are positioned in EFL speaking instruction, how they are implemented, what outcomes are associated with their implementation, and what conditions and limitations influence the reported findings. Based on the synthesis, the findings are organized into four areas: (1) publication trends and research characteristics, (2) implementation characteristics, (3) effects on EFL speaking development, and (4) challenges, research gaps, and future research directions.

Table 1. Summary of Research Aspects: Deep Learning Approaches, Intercultural Pragmatic Competence, and EFL Speaking Skills

No	Focus and Scope	Author	Insights or Research Variables Discussed
1	Deep Learning Approaches in	(Salas et al., 2019), (Alom et al., 2019),	DLA is commonly implemented through learner-centered activities, including problem solving,

No	Focus and Scope	Author	Insights or Research Variables Discussed
	EFL Speaking Instruction	(Mishra et al., 2021), (Fernández-garcía & Fonseca-mora, 2019)	collaborative discussion, inquiry, reflection, and authentic communication tasks. These activities encourage learners to actively construct meaning and apply English beyond isolated linguistic exercises. However, the outcomes are influenced by instructional design, teacher facilitation, and learner engagement.
2	Intercultural Pragmatic Competence in EFL Speaking Development	(Tuerah et al., 2025), (M. Li, 2026), (Jiang, 2022), (Guo & An, 2025), (Saeed, 2025).	IPC-oriented instruction emphasizes learners' ability to interpret communicative intentions, select contextually appropriate expressions, and adapt language use to different social and cultural contexts. Role-play, authentic materials, cross-cultural discussion, and communication simulations are among the strategies used to develop these abilities.
3	Integration of Deep Learning Approaches and Intercultural Pragmatic Competence	(Huseynova, 2026), (Sztencel, 2020), (Kasim & Sueb, 2024), (Hanifa, 2018).	The integration connects higher-order learning processes with contextual and culturally appropriate language use. Learners analyze communicative situations, reflect on cultural differences, negotiate meaning, and apply language in authentic contexts. Nevertheless, integrated implementation remains diverse, and a consistently established instructional framework is not yet evident across the reviewed literature.
4	Effects on EFL Speaking Skills	(Sykes & Cohen, 2018), (Barbulet, 2025), (Bărbuleț, 2024), (Tajeddin & Malmir, 2024).	Reported outcomes include improvements in fluency, vocabulary, pronunciation, grammatical accuracy, confidence, and communicative appropriateness. These outcomes are generally associated with repeated opportunities for active interaction, contextualized speaking practice, reflection, and teacher supported feedback. The magnitude of improvement varies according to learner proficiency, motivation, instructional quality, and learning environment.
5	Implementation Challenges and Research Gaps	(Wulandari & Salsabilla, 2026), (Pinza-tapia et al., 2021), (Ni et al., 2025), (Alvarez et al., 2024).	Challenges include teacher readiness, limited authentic intercultural interaction, insufficient learning resources, differences in learner characteristics, and limited integrated assessment instruments. The literature is also fragmented across research contexts and methodological designs, indicating the need for systematic instructional frameworks, assessment tools, longitudinal studies, and cross-context research.

Table 1 synthesizes the major research aspects identified across the reviewed literature. The studies indicate that DLA and IPC have generally been examined through related but not always integrated lines of inquiry. DLA research tends to emphasize meaningful engagement, higher-order cognitive processes, reflection, and active knowledge construction, whereas IPC research focuses more strongly on contextual language use, communicative intentions, cultural norms, and pragmatic appropriateness. Studies addressing speaking development provide a point of connection between these dimensions because speaking requires learners not only to produce

linguistically accurate utterances but also to interpret situations and respond appropriately to interlocutors.

The synthesis also indicates that the relationship between DLA and IPC is more complex than simply combining two instructional approaches. DLA provides learning processes through which learners analyze, reflect, collaborate, and solve communicative problems, while IPC provides the contextual and intercultural dimension that guides how language is interpreted and used. Consequently, the potential contribution of their integration lies in connecting how learners learn with how learners use language appropriately in context. However, the reviewed studies employ different instructional strategies, participants, settings, and outcome measures. Therefore, the evidence should be interpreted as a developing body of research rather than as evidence of a single, standardized instructional model.

1. **Trends in Research Publications on the Integration of Deep Learning Approaches and Intercultural Pragmatic Competence in Improving the Speaking Skills of EFL Learners**

   The reviewed literature indicates that research related to DLA, IPC, and EFL speaking has developed from relatively separate research interests toward increasing attention to their potential relationship (Syarifudin, 2019). Earlier studies tend to establish conceptual and pedagogical foundations, particularly concerning meaningful learning, higher-order thinking, communicative competence, and the contextual use of language. Subsequent studies increasingly examine classroom practices such as collaborative learning, authentic communication, role-play, cross-cultural interaction, and reflective activities (Alqarni et al., 2026). This development suggests that speaking instruction is gradually being conceptualized as a multidimensional process in which linguistic knowledge interacts with cognitive, pragmatic, and intercultural dimensions (Lv & Chen, 2026).

   In terms of research characteristics, the studies vary in their educational contexts, participant profiles, methodological approaches, instructional strategies, and outcome measures. Some studies focus primarily on DLA and examine learner engagement, reflection, problem solving, or higher order thinking, while others focus on IPC and examine pragmatic awareness, cultural understanding, politeness, and communicative appropriateness (Ma, 2026) Wang et al., 2024). A smaller body of research brings these dimensions closer to EFL speaking development by employinssssg activities such as simulations, role-plays, collaborative tasks, authentic materials, and cross-cultural communication (Li et al., 2026; Kiruthiga & Christopher, 2022). This variation is important because it indicates that the existing evidence cannot be interpreted as a uniform intervention effect; rather, the reported outcomes are shaped by differences in instructional purposes, implementation procedures, and learning contexts (Mehrabian, 2026).

   The main implication of these publication characteristics is that the research territory is already sufficiently developed to warrant systematic synthesis, but the evidence remains fragmented. The central issue is therefore not simply the absence of studies on DLA or IPC, but the limited systematic understanding of how findings from these related research strands can be connected to explain EFL speaking development (Zhao, 2026). Differences in terminology, research design, implementation strategies, and outcome indicators make it difficult to determine which components are consistently associated with speaking development and under what conditions (Hasan, 2025). Thus, the present review contributes by organizing this dispersed evidence and identifying relationships, patterns, and unresolved issues across the literature rather than treating individual studies as isolated findings

2. **Characteristics of the Implementation of Deep Learning Approaches Integrated with Intercultural Pragmatic Competence in the Speaking Instruction of EFL Learners**

The synthesis shows that DLA is generally implemented through learning activities that require learners to actively process and apply knowledge rather than reproduce predetermined linguistic forms. In EFL speaking instruction, these activities include collaborative discussion, problem-solving, inquiry, project-oriented tasks, reflection, and authentic communication (Fahriansyah et al., 2026; Shazly, 2021). Their relevance to speaking development lies in the opportunity they provide for learners to formulate ideas, negotiate meaning, respond to problems, and explain their perspectives. However, these activities become consistent with a deep-learning orientation only when learners are required to process and apply knowledge meaningfully; simply assigning group work or speaking activities does not automatically constitute deep learning (Kim, 2016).

IPC is incorporated through activities that make the social and cultural dimensions of communication explicit. The reviewed studies identify role-play, cross-cultural discussion, authentic materials, communication simulations, virtual interaction, and analysis of pragmatic situations as relevant strategies (Indahtriyani, 2025; Wei & Ji, 2018). These activities allow learners to examine differences in communicative norms, interpret speakers' intentions, consider politeness and appropriateness, and adapt their responses according to the context. The contribution of IPC therefore depends on whether classroom activities move beyond introducing cultural information and instead require learners to make decisions about language use in specific communicative situations (Echcharfy, 2019; Gomez, 2018). This distinction helps explain why contextualized interaction appears to be an important condition for developing pragmatic and intercultural competence.

When the two dimensions are considered together, their integration can be understood as a relationship between deep cognitive engagement and contextualized communicative decision-making. Learners are expected not only to speak but also to analyze a communicative situation, consider alternative interpretations, reflect on cultural differences, and select an appropriate response (Zand-moghadam & Adeh, 2020). Nevertheless, the synthesis reveals considerable variation in how this integration is operationalized. Teacher readiness, task design, availability of authentic materials, learner proficiency, opportunities for intercultural interaction, and classroom conditions all influence implementation (Fira et al., 2024; Ziashahabi et al., 2020). The absence of a consistent framework across studies consequently makes it difficult to identify a single best model for integrating DLA and IPC, highlighting the need for more explicit and replicable instructional designs.

3. The Effect of Integrating Deep Learning Approaches and Intercultural Pragmatic Competence on Improving the Speaking Skills of EFL Learners Based on Published Research Findings

The reviewed studies report positive outcomes across several dimensions of EFL speaking, including fluency, vocabulary, pronunciation, grammatical accuracy, confidence, and communicative appropriateness. However, the effects are not uniform across all studies or speaking dimensions. Some studies emphasize linguistic outcomes such as fluency and accuracy, whereas others highlight learners' confidence, interactional ability, or pragmatic appropriateness (Hazaymeh, 2019). This variation suggests that the contribution of the integration should not be reduced to a single measure of "speaking improvement." Instead, its effects appear to operate across both linguistic performance and context-sensitive communicative ability (Huang, 2021; Laughlin et al., 2015).

A possible explanation for these outcomes lies in the interaction between the learning processes promoted by DLA and the communicative demands emphasized by IPC. DLA-oriented activities require learners to analyze problems, construct responses, collaborate, and reflect on their performance (Saleem et al., 2021; Ghasemi & Mozaheb, 2020). When these processes are applied to intercultural speaking situations, learners have opportunities

to consider not only *what* to say but also *why*, *to whom*, and *in what way* something should be said. Role-play and simulation, for example, can require learners to respond to culturally different interlocutors, while reflection allows them to reconsider whether their language choices were appropriate (Lee et al., 2023). Thus, speaking development may occur because learners repeatedly connect linguistic production with communicative intention, contextual interpretation, and feedback rather than practicing language forms in isolation (A. Xu et al., 2024).

Nevertheless, the reported effects should be interpreted in relation to the conditions under which instruction occurs. Learner proficiency and motivation can influence how effectively students participate in cognitively demanding and interculturally oriented tasks. Teacher competence affects the quality of scaffolding, feedback, and discussion, while access to authentic intercultural interaction determines whether learners can apply pragmatic knowledge beyond classroom exercises (Zhou et al., 2024). Differences in assessment instruments also make direct comparison across studies difficult, particularly when some studies measure linguistic accuracy while others emphasize confidence or intercultural communicative competence (Liao & Li, 2020). Therefore, the synthesis supports the potential value of integrating DLA and IPC but does not justify the conclusion that the integration produces identical effects across all EFL contexts (Altwijri & Alghizzi, 2024).

4. Challenges, research gaps, and recommendations for future research on the integration of deep learning approaches and intercultural pragmatic competence in the speaking instruction of EFL learners

The synthesis identifies several challenges affecting the implementation of DLA and IPC in EFL speaking instruction. The first concerns teacher readiness and instructional design (Elmahdi et al., 2025). Integrating cognitive engagement with intercultural pragmatic development requires teachers to construct tasks that are simultaneously linguistically meaningful, cognitively demanding, and culturally contextualized (Syarif et al., 2017). Additional challenges include limited access to authentic intercultural interaction, insufficient learning resources, differences in learners' proficiency and cultural experience, and classroom environments that may restrict extended communicative practice. These factors help explain why positive findings reported in individual studies cannot automatically be generalized to other educational settings (Haerazi & Irawan, 2026; Chaya & Inpin, 2020).

A second issue concerns the fragmentation of the existing evidence. The reviewed studies differ in terminology, research design, participants, instructional duration, assessment procedures, and definitions of learning outcomes. In addition, research frequently examines DLA or IPC independently, while studies that explicitly connect both dimensions to speaking development remain less consistently represented (Omar, 2024). More importantly, the existing literature lacks sufficient systematic synthesis showing which implementation components recur across contexts and which outcomes are most consistently associated with particular instructional conditions (Alsaraireh, 2022). This represents a stronger justification for the present SLR: the need is not merely to demonstrate that studies exist, but to organize fragmented evidence into a clearer account of how DLA and IPC are related to EFL speaking development (González-lloret, 2019).

Future research should therefore move beyond repeated short-term effectiveness studies toward the development and empirical testing of explicit integrated instructional frameworks. Such research should examine how specific DLA components such as reflection, problem-solving, collaboration, and inquiry can be systematically connected with IPC components such as pragmatic interpretation, cultural awareness, contextual language choice, and interactional adaptation (Oktavianus & Rido, 2025 Ravindran &

Mansour, 2023). Researchers should also develop or validate assessment frameworks that can simultaneously capture linguistic performance and intercultural pragmatic competence. Longitudinal and cross-context studies, including digitally mediated intercultural communication, would further help determine whether the observed benefits are sustained over time and whether the proposed integration remains effective across different learner populations and educational environments (Amaliah, 2024).

To provide a more systematic overview of the evolution of research focus, the results of the literature synthesis were then visualized in the form of a mind map. This visualization aims to illustrate shifts in the direction and focus of research on the integration of the Deep Learning Approach and Intercultural Pragmatic Competence in EFL students' speaking instruction, based on publication periods. Through this presentation, the development of each research variable can be observed chronologically, making it easier for readers to understand the evolution of concepts, implementation characteristics, and the issues of concern to researchers during each research period.

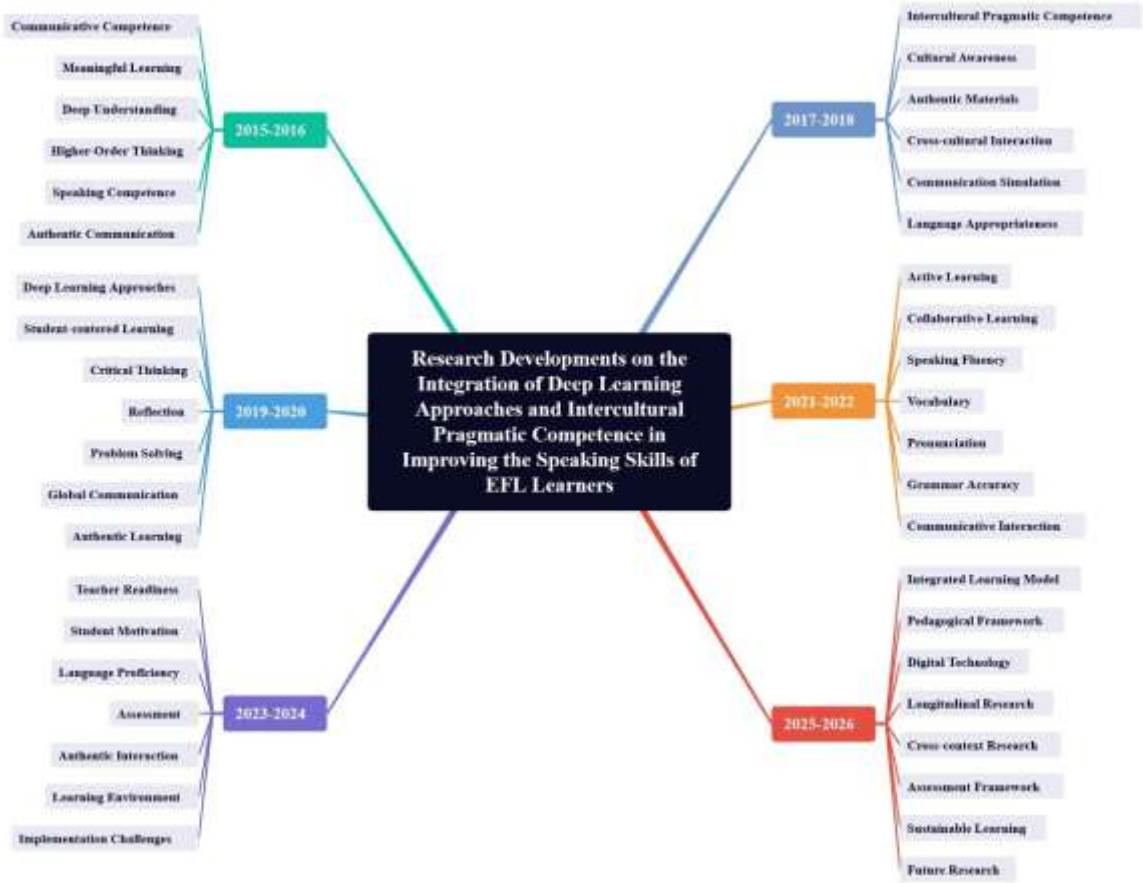


Figure 2. Research Developments on Integrating Deep Learning Approaches and Intercultural Pragmatic Competence in EFL Learners' Speaking Instruction

Figure 2 illustrates the development of research themes concerning Deep Learning Approaches (DLA), Intercultural Pragmatic Competence (IPC), and EFL speaking instruction across different publication periods. During 2015–2016, research primarily emphasized communicative competence, meaningful learning, deep understanding, higher-order thinking, speaking competence, and authentic communication, providing a conceptual foundation for subsequent developments. During 2017–2018, greater attention was directed toward Intercultural Pragmatic Competence, particularly cultural awareness, authentic materials, cross-cultural interaction, communication simulation, and language appropriateness. In 2019–2020,

the research focus increasingly shifted toward Deep Learning Approaches, reflected in student-centered learning, critical thinking, reflection, problem-solving, global communication, and authentic learning. During 2021–2022, the two research dimensions became more closely related to speaking development through active and collaborative learning, with attention to speaking fluency, vocabulary, pronunciation, grammatical accuracy, and communicative interaction. In 2023–2024, researchers increasingly addressed the conditions and challenges affecting implementation, including teacher readiness, student motivation, language proficiency, assessment, authentic interaction, and the learning environment. Finally, the 2025–2026 period indicates a movement toward more systematic research directions, including integrated learning models, pedagogical frameworks, digital technology, longitudinal research, cross-context research, assessment frameworks, sustainable learning, and future-oriented research. Overall, the figure indicates a gradual expansion of the research focus from foundational concepts of meaningful and communicative learning toward the development of more integrated, contextualized, and systematic approaches to EFL speaking instruction.

The development shown in Figure 2 suggests that research on EFL speaking has progressively moved beyond a predominantly linguistic orientation toward a broader conception of communication that incorporates cognitive, pragmatic, and intercultural dimensions. The earlier emphasis on meaningful learning, higher-order thinking, and authentic communication provides a foundation for DLA, while the subsequent attention to cultural awareness, cross-cultural interaction, and language appropriateness strengthens the role of IPC in speaking instruction (Tuerah et al., 2025). The convergence of these research strands in the later periods indicates that speaking development can be understood not only as the ability to produce accurate language but also as the ability to construct meaning, interpret communicative situations, and make contextually appropriate linguistic choices. From this perspective, DLA and IPC represent complementary dimensions: DLA supports the cognitive processes involved in analyzing, reflecting, and constructing meaning, whereas IPC supports the pragmatic and intercultural processes required to use language appropriately in diverse communicative contexts (M. Li, 2026).

At the same time, the progression identified in the literature does not necessarily indicate that an integrated DLA-IPC framework has already been established. Instead, the findings reveal that research remains heterogeneous in terms of instructional strategies, research contexts, assessment practices, and methodological approaches (Guo & An, 2025). The increasing attention to integrated learning models, pedagogical frameworks, digital technology, and comprehensive assessment in the 2025-2026 period suggests that researchers are beginning to address these limitations, but further empirical evidence is still needed to determine how DLA and IPC can be systematically integrated into EFL speaking instruction. This finding reinforces the contribution of the present SLR by organizing the fragmented research developments and identifying the conditions, outcomes, and unresolved issues associated with the integration of cognitive, pragmatic, and intercultural dimensions (Saeed, 2025; Jiang, 2022). Future research should therefore focus on developing and testing explicit integrated instructional frameworks and assessment approaches that can simultaneously address speaking performance and intercultural pragmatic competence across diverse EFL contexts

CONCLUSION

The results of this systematic literature review indicate that the integration of deep learning approaches and intercultural pragmatic competence is an increasingly prevalent approach in speaking instruction for learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL). Research trends indicate a shift in focus from mastery of linguistic aspects toward the development of more comprehensive communicative competence through meaningful learning, higher-order thinking, reflection, problem-solving, and the ability to use language appropriately in social and

cultural contexts. The literature synthesis also indicates that the implementation of these two concepts fosters more active, contextual, and learner-centered learning, thereby positively contributing to improvements in speaking fluency, vocabulary mastery, language accuracy, pronunciation, and confidence in communication. Thus, success in speaking instruction is no longer determined solely by mastery of language structure but also by students' ability to construct meaning and communicate effectively in multicultural environments.

Nevertheless, the synthesis results also indicate that research on the integration of Deep Learning Approaches and Intercultural Pragmatic Competence still faces various challenges. Variations in learner characteristics, educator readiness, instructional design, availability of learning resources, and implementation contexts mean that the effectiveness of this approach has not yet yielded fully consistent results. Furthermore, most studies still focus on testing the effectiveness of learning, while the development of integrated learning models, comprehensive pedagogical frameworks, integrated assessment instruments, and longitudinal and cross-contextual research remains relatively limited. Therefore, future research should be directed toward developing learning models that are more systematic, adaptive, and applicable to various EFL learning contexts, while also leveraging digital technology to expand cross-cultural interactions. Overall, the results of this study provide a conceptual contribution by presenting a comprehensive synthesis of research developments in this field and offering practical implications for educators and researchers in designing speaking instruction that is more effective, contextual, and relevant to the demands of 21st-century global communication competencies.

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