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Research Article

Learning English Across Cultures: The Academic Library as an Intercultural Language Learning Space in Nigeria

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Abstract

Nigerian universities bring together students from many ethnic and linguistic backgrounds, yet there is little evidence that they deliberately provide organised spaces in which those students can learn from one another across cultural differences. University libraries are open to students of all disciplines and are less evaluative than lecture rooms. They are therefore well placed to offer such opportunities, but their role in language learning is usually limited to collections and information literacy instruction. This paper proposes that the academic library can be rethought as an intercultural learning space, in which library-based language programmes support the development of intercultural competence and of students' confidence in using English, the two aspects most likely to change through such programmes, and contribute over time to intercultural communicative competence. Using a conceptual design based on a purposive integrative review, the paper brings together Byram's model of intercultural communicative competence, Deardorff's process model of intercultural competence, intergroup contact theory, scholarship on the library as place and contact zone, and work on translanguaging and cultural competence in librarianship, and relates these to the linguistic and cultural diversity of higher education in Nigeria. From this synthesis it develops the Library Intercultural Learning Space Model. The model proposes that institutional enabling conditions, namely multicultural collections, inclusive spaces, interculturally competent library staff, partnership with English departments and supportive policy, make possible six types of library-based language programme: conversation circles, multicultural reading circles, language exchange in tandem, Human Library dialogues, cultural exhibitions and screenings, and translanguaging-friendly information literacy sessions. These programmes are expected to work through four learning processes, namely structured contact, dialogue and mediation, guided reflection, and use of the full linguistic repertoire, to build the attitudes, knowledge, skills and critical cultural awareness required for intercultural interaction, and to enhance students' confidence in using English. Confidence is treated as a psychological outcome that may support, but does not itself demonstrate, communicative competence in English. Resource constraints, language anxiety, intergroup tension and language hierarchy are identified as conditions that may weaken these effects at different stages, from implementation and participation to the quality of interaction. The relationships are theoretical expectations rather than demonstrated findings. To guide empirical research and practice, six groups of propositions, containing ten directional predictions and one exploratory research question, are presented, together with practical recommendations for university libraries, English departments and university management.

Keywords

Academic Libraries, Intercultural Communicative Competence, Intergroup Contact, Library Programmes, Multilingualism, Nigeria

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1. Introduction

Nigeria is one of the most linguistically diverse countries in the world. More than 500 languages are spoken within its borders [1], alongside English, which is the official language and the medium of instruction from the later years of primary school to university [2, 3]. This diversity is reflected in its universities. Federal universities in particular admit students from all over the federation, in line with the constitutional principle that public institutions should reflect the federal character of the nation [4]. Speakers of Igbo, Yoruba, Hausa, Ibibio, Tiv, Edo and many other languages may therefore be found in the same lecture room, using English and, often, Nigerian Pidgin as common languages, but bringing different histories, religious traditions, customs and assumptions about communication [5, 6].

This diversity is an educational resource, but it is not automatically used as one. Evidence from secondary schools in Lagos shows that cross-group friendships and discussion in diverse settings are associated with more positive attitudes towards other ethnic and religious groups, whereas mere exposure to diversity has mixed effects [7]. It is reasonable to assume, although it has not been systematically documented, that many university students also form friendships and study groups mainly with those who share their language and home region, so that contact across groups remains superficial. This assumption is treated here as a contextual premise that requires empirical confirmation. Studies of intergroup contact have shown that diversity alone does not reduce prejudice or build understanding; contact must take place under supportive conditions, including equal status, shared goals, cooperation and institutional support [8, 9]. There is little published evidence that Nigerian universities deliberately create environments in which these conditions are met. The curriculum is organised by discipline, and the general studies courses in the use of English and in Nigerian peoples and culture are usually taught in large classes that leave little room for planned interaction between students of different backgrounds.

At the same time, employers, professional bodies and international frameworks increasingly expect graduates to communicate effectively and appropriately with people from other cultures. This ability is referred to in the literature as intercultural communicative competence, which combines linguistic competence with the attitudes, knowledge and skills needed to interact across cultural boundaries [10-12]. For Nigerian students, intercultural communicative competence matters both within the country, where national cohesion depends on understanding across ethnic and religious lines, and beyond it, in international study and work conducted largely in English.

The university library is an exceptionally suitable place in which to develop this competence. It is open to students of every discipline and year, it is a shared space that belongs to no single group, it holds materials that represent many cultures, and it is less evaluative than the lecture room [13, 14]. International library guidance already commits libraries to serving culturally diverse communities and to fostering dialogue between cultures [15]. Academic libraries in other countries have begun to use conversation groups, language exchanges and Human Library events to bring students of different backgrounds into structured contact [16-18]. In Nigeria, on the other hand, discussion of the library's cultural role has focused mainly on preserving and promoting national culture through collections [19], and discussion of its role in language learning has focused on collections and information literacy instruction [20, 21]. Each existing framework explains part of the problem. Models of intercultural competence describe what students need to learn, but not where, outside the classroom or study abroad, a university can organise that learning [11, 12]. Contact theory describes the conditions under which contact reduces prejudice, but not the campus settings in which those conditions can be created [9]. Scholarship on the library as place describes the library's openness to students' cultures, but not the programmes and processes through which that openness becomes learning [13]. The contribution of this paper is therefore integrative and contextual rather than entirely new: it brings these frameworks together, applies them to Nigerian university libraries, and proposes relationships that none of them states on its own, namely that particular library programmes activate particular learning processes, that the use of students' full linguistic repertoires shapes participation and the quality of contact, and that different moderating conditions act at different stages. To the best of the authors' knowledge, such an integrated framework has not previously been proposed for Nigerian university libraries.

This paper attempts to fill that gap. Its central argument is that the academic library can be reimagined as an intercultural learning space, in which deliberately designed language programmes bring students of different linguistic and cultural backgrounds into structured contact and, through that contact, foster intercultural competence and confidence in English, and so contribute over time to intercultural communicative competence. The paper has three aims: first, to synthesise research on intercultural communicative competence, intergroup contact, the library as place and contact zone, translanguaging and cultural competence in librarianship; second, to present the Library Intercultural Learning Space Model, setting out its enabling conditions, programme types, learning processes, outcomes and moderating conditions; and third, to derive testable propositions and practical recommendations for Nigerian university libraries, English departments and university management. The paper is conceptual. It reports no new data; it builds an argument from existing theory and evidence and presents a model that future empirical research can test, refine or reject.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Key Concepts

Four related constructs are distinguished in this paper. *Intercultural competence* is the combination of attitudes, knowledge, skills and critical awareness that allows a person to interact effectively and appropriately with people from other cultures. Byram [10, 11] describes it in terms of five elements: attitudes of curiosity and openness; knowledge of social groups and their practices; skills of interpreting and relating; skills of discovery and interaction; and critical cultural awareness. Deardorff's [12] definition is similar but is not tied to a particular language. *Communicative competence in English* is the linguistic, sociolinguistic and discourse competence required to use English accurately and appropriately. *Confidence in English* refers to a learner's willingness and perceived ability to use English in a given situation; it is a psychological state that may help to develop communicative competence but does not itself demonstrate accuracy or appropriateness. *Intercultural communicative competence*, following Byram [10, 11], is the combination of intercultural competence with communicative competence in a shared language, so that a person can communicate effectively and appropriately across cultures in that language. In the Nigerian setting the shared language is usually English, occasionally Nigerian Pidgin, and the cultural boundaries that matter most are often those between Nigerian ethnic and linguistic groups rather than between nations.

Library-based language programmes are planned, recurring activities, organised or hosted by the library, in which language use and cultural exchange are the main purpose rather than a byproduct. They are not the same as ordinary information literacy instruction, which focuses on finding and evaluating information, or collection development, which provides materials without organising interaction around them. Information literacy sessions fall within the definition only when they are deliberately adapted for language and intercultural purposes, for example by forming groups of students from different language backgrounds and inviting them to use their full linguistic repertoires while working with English sources; such adapted sessions are included among the six programme types in Section 4.2, whereas ordinary information literacy instruction is not. Examples include conversation circles, reading circles, language exchanges, Human Library events and cultural exhibitions [16-18, 22].

An *intercultural learning space* is a physical or virtual setting that is deliberately arranged so that people of different backgrounds can meet on equal terms, engage with one another's perspectives and reflect on what they learn. The term draws on Elmborg's conception of the library as a "third space" between the cultures that users bring with them and the academic culture of the institution [13], and on Pratt's concept of contact zones as spaces in which cultures meet and grapple with one another [23].

2.2. Theoretical Foundations

2.2.1. Intercultural Communicative Competence

Byram's model [10] remains the most influential account of intercultural communicative competence in language education. It holds that the ability to communicate effectively across cultures depends not only on linguistic accuracy but also on the willingness and ability to see another person's point of view, to relate it to one's own and to reflect critically on both. Byram distinguishes the intercultural speaker, who acts as a mediator between cultures, from the imitation of an idealised native speaker. The revised edition of the model [11] gives greater weight to critical cultural awareness and to education for democratic citizenship, which makes it relevant to national settings in which cultural difference carries political weight. Byram also stresses that intercultural competence can be developed outside the language classroom, including through fieldwork and encounters arranged outside formal teaching, provided that these encounters are followed by reflection. Kramsch [24] similarly argues that culture is learned through the negotiation of meaning in context, in a "third place" between the learner's own culture and the culture being encountered.

2.2.2. The Process Model of Intercultural Competence

Deardorff [12] developed a process model of intercultural competence from a consensus among leading intercultural scholars. The model begins with requisite attitudes, namely respect, openness and curiosity, which make it possible to acquire knowledge and skills, such as cultural self awareness, listening, observing and interpreting. These lead to desired internal outcomes, such as adaptability, flexibility and empathy, and in turn to desired external outcomes, which Deardorff defines as behaving and communicating effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations. Deardorff stresses that intercultural competence develops continuously and that attitudes are the starting point of the process. The model matters for the present argument because it shows that intercultural learning moves from attitudes to behaviour over time, and that programmes which change attitudes, even before they change behaviour, are a legitimate first step.

2.2.3. Intergroup Contact Theory

Allport [8] proposed that contact between members of different groups reduces prejudice when four conditions are met: equal status within the situation, common goals, intergroup cooperation and the support of authorities, law or custom. Pettigrew and Tropp's [9] meta analysis of more than 500 studies confirmed that intergroup contact typically reduces prejudice, and found that the effect was stronger when Allport's conditions were present, although the conditions were not strictly necessary. Contact theory explains why diversity alone may not produce intercultural learning, and it specifies conditions

that a library programme can be designed to meet. A conversation circle in which all participants are students, work towards a shared task and are welcomed by library staff meets these conditions more fully than casual proximity in a reading room.

2.2.4. The Library as Place, Third Space and Contact Zone

Bennett [14] describes a shift in the academic library from a place organised around collections to a place organised around learning, in which the design of space and services follows from the way students learn. Elmborg [13] goes further and describes the library as a "third space" in which students can bring their home cultures into contact with academic culture, and in which librarians can make room for that negotiation rather than requiring students to leave their identities at the door. Oldenburg's [25] account of third places, informal public settings outside home and work where people meet as equals, also helps to explain why the library can feel less hierarchical than the lecture room. Pratt [23] cautions, however, that contact zones are also sites of unequal power, where some languages and ways of speaking carry more prestige than others. A library that seeks to be an intercultural learning space must therefore consider which languages and voices are welcomed, not only whether different groups are present.

2.2.5. Translanguaging and Plurilingual Competence

Garc á and Wei [26] describe translanguaging as the use by multilingual speakers of their full linguistic repertoire to make meaning, without strict separation between named languages. The Council of Europe's companion volume to the Common European Framework of Reference [27] likewise recognises plurilingual and pluricultural competence, and places mediation, the activity of making meaning accessible to others across languages and cultures, at the centre of the framework. Both perspectives treat multilingualism as a resource rather than a hindrance. Yu and Matteson [28] apply translanguaging to information literacy instruction for multilingual students and argue that acknowledging students' full repertoires can make library instruction more inclusive and less intimidating. Norton's [29] work on identity and investment adds that learners participate more fully when they can claim a legitimate identity in the setting; programmes that value students' home languages may therefore increase, rather than reduce, their investment in English.

2.3. Review of Related Literature

2.3.1. Linguistic and Cultural Diversity in Nigerian Higher Education

Nigeria's linguistic diversity has been extensively documented [1, 5]. English is the language of government and education, three major languages, Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba, are used at regional and national levels, and hundreds of other languages are spoken by smaller communities [2, 6]. Because language is closely tied to ethnic identity, competition between ethno-linguistic groups has been a recurring feature of national life [6]. Language policy has also been unsettled. In 2022 the Federal Government adopted a National Language Policy, developed by the Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council, which aimed to promote the use of Nigerian languages in education and public life and required the mother tongue to be used as the language of instruction in the early years of primary school [30]. In November 2025 the Federal Government announced, in an official press release, that the 69th National Council on Education had agreed that English shall remain the medium of instruction from primary to tertiary education, and that the mother tongue policy had been cancelled and its implementation discontinued [31]. The same release announced an inclusive language policy that promotes the learning of at least one Nigerian language alongside English, and stated that its implementation would require further collaboration among curriculum developers, teacher education institutions and state ministries of education [31]. These are policy announcements; the detailed instruments for implementing them had not been published at the time of writing. These changes show that the relationship between English and Nigerian languages remains contested, and that students arrive at university with very different experiences of learning in English and in their home languages. They come to university as adults who share English but may know little about one another's languages, histories and cultural norms. Attitudes to language varieties also matter. Aboh [32] found that Nigerian university students' evaluations of Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba varieties of English differed according to their discipline and the type of secondary school they had attended, and Nwoda [33] found generally unfavourable attitudes towards Nigerian Pidgin among Nigerian students studying in the United Kingdom. Such attitudes suggest that the languages students bring to the library do not carry equal prestige. Among secondary school students in Lagos, Demarest and Langer [7] found that cross-group friendships and discussion in diverse settings were associated with more positive intergroup attitudes, and concluded that actual positive contact matters more than mere exposure to diversity. Comparable studies of university students, and of intercultural programmes in Nigerian university libraries, appear to be lacking, so claims about university students in this paper are presented as contextual assumptions.

2.3.2. Libraries and Language Learning Programmes

Libraries in several countries have established programmes in which language practice and cultural exchange are the main purpose. Zhao et al. [16] describe an English conversation group for international students led by an academic library, which moved online during the pandemic and helped students stay connected to the university, the library and one another.

Steckel [17] offers practical guidance for starting a conversation hour in an academic library, drawing on models from public libraries and connecting learners in different English programmes. Tandem language learning, in which two learners with different first languages help each other to learn, has a long history in higher education and rests on the principles of reciprocity and learner autonomy [22]. These programmes are usually designed to support international students' English, but the same formats can be adapted to bring together domestic students of different language backgrounds, as in Nigeria.

2.3.3. The Human Library

The Human Library is a format in which people from groups that are often stereotyped act as "books" that readers can "borrow" for a conversation. In a systematic narrative review, Lam et al. [18] found that Human Library events were frequently reported to reduce prejudice and stereotypes and to lower social distance towards the groups represented, although evidence of effects on empathy, knowledge and behaviour was mixed and most studies used non-experimental designs. The review linked these effects to intergroup contact theory, suggesting that the benefits arose from direct contact with members of specific groups rather than from general exposure to diversity. The format is therefore a promising, if not yet well-evidenced, way of organising structured intercultural contact that libraries can host at little cost.

2.3.4. Cultural Competence in Librarianship

Overall [34] proposed a framework of cultural competence for library and information professionals, in which cognitive, interpersonal and environmental domains work together, and argued that librarians need self awareness, knowledge of other cultures and the ability to create welcoming environments. Mestre [35] examined the diversity training received by academic librarians and how it shaped their efforts to promote cultural competency, and found that only a small proportion had been trained to lead such efforts. The IFLA/UNESCO Multicultural Library Manifesto [15] commits libraries to serving all members of culturally diverse communities, to promoting linguistic diversity and to fostering intercultural dialogue. Together, these sources suggest that the intercultural role of the library depends not only on its programmes but also on the competence and attitudes of its staff.

2.3.5. Nigerian Libraries, Culture and Language

Nigerian library scholarship has emphasised the role of libraries in preserving and promoting national culture through collections, archives and exhibitions [19]. Studies of students' use of Nigerian university libraries show that use is uneven and that many students use the library mainly as a place for private study [36]. Recent conceptual work has called for closer collaboration between libraries and English departments in teaching academic language [21] and for integrating information literacy with task-based language teaching [20]. Research on library anxiety has also shown that students who study in a second language may hesitate to approach librarians because they fear being judged on their spoken English [37, 38]. This suggests that any library-based language programme in Nigeria should be designed to reduce, rather than heighten, such anxiety.

2.4. Gap in the Literature

Three gaps emerge from this review. First, research on intercultural communicative competence has concentrated on the foreign language classroom and on study abroad, and has given little attention to the intercultural learning that could take place among domestic students in multilingual countries. Second, library programmes that support language learning have mainly been designed for international students in English-speaking countries, and their potential to develop intercultural competence among domestic students of different language backgrounds has not been examined. Third, Nigerian library scholarship has treated culture mainly as heritage to be preserved rather than as a dimension of student learning to be developed through interaction. Existing models therefore leave three questions unanswered: which library programmes are most likely to produce intercultural learning, through which processes, and under what conditions in a multilingual setting where English is a second language. To the authors' knowledge, no framework has yet brought these strands together to address these questions for undergraduates in Nigerian universities.

3. Materials and Methods

The paper adopted a conceptual research design based on an integrative review of literature. The aim of an integrative review is to generate new frameworks and perspectives by critically synthesising existing literature rather than simply summarising it [39], and the approach corresponds to what Jaakkola [40] describes as a theory synthesis design, in which a conceptual article brings together theories from different fields to explain a phenomenon that none of them explains fully on its own. A systematic review was not undertaken, because the aim was to build a model rather than to estimate the size of effects.

Scope and sources. The review was purposive and nonsystematic. It covered literature from the foundational statement of intergroup contact theory in the 1950s to 2025, with most attention to work published since the 1990s, when the models of intercultural communicative competence and of the library as a learning place were developed. Searches were conducted in Google Scholar and on publisher and journal websites using combinations of the following terms: "intercultural communicative competence", "intercultural competence", "intergroup contact", "library as place", "third space", "contact zone", "translanguaging", "plurilingual", "cultural competence" with

"librarian" or "library", "conversation group" or "conversation hour" with "academic library", "Human Library", "language exchange" or "tandem", and "Nigeria" combined with "language policy", "Pidgin", "language attitudes", "interethnic" and "university library". Policy documents were obtained from the websites of IFLA, the Council of Europe and the Nigerian Federal Government, and further sources were identified from the reference lists of key works. The number of records screened was not recorded, and no retrospective count is reported. The final synthesis draws on the sources listed in the references. Before submission, the bibliographic details of journal articles and conference papers were checked against publisher, journal, Crossref, OpenAlex or ERIC records, including whether each DOI resolves to the stated work, and the details of books and policy documents were checked against publisher, library catalogue or issuing-body records.

Choice of theoretical traditions. Five traditions were chosen because each explains one part of the phenomenon: intercultural communicative competence describes the intended outcome; the process model of intercultural competence explains how that outcome develops over time; intergroup contact theory specifies the conditions under which contact produces learning; scholarship on the library as place, third space and contact zone explains why the library is a suitable setting and what risks it carries; and translanguaging and plurilingual competence explain how multilingual students can use their full repertoires in the process. Literature on cultural competence in librarianship, library-based language programmes and Nigerian language and education was then added to relate these theories to the setting of the paper.

Selection and evaluation. Sources were included if they offered a foundational theoretical statement, a widely cited model, a review of evidence, or a description or evaluation of a library programme relevant to language or intercultural learning, or if they provided direct evidence on language, ethnicity or language policy in Nigeria. Opinion pieces without an evidential or theoretical basis, and studies of school libraries or public libraries that could not be related to higher education, were excluded. Three principles guided selection: relevance to the relationship between language, culture and library services; attention to higher education, with priority given to multilingual settings and to Nigeria; and recognition of the work in its field. Each source was read for its central claim, its evidence base and its fit with the other strands. Evidence was weighted by type: meta analyses and systematic reviews were given more weight than single studies, and empirical studies more weight than descriptive accounts of practice, which were used to illustrate feasibility rather than to establish effects. Because much of the evidence on library programmes comes from settings outside Nigeria, and much of it is descriptive, claims about Nigerian students are presented as theoretical expectations rather than established facts.

Treatment of contradictory perspectives. Where the literature offered competing views, these were retained and incorporated. The most important example concerns contact itself. Contact theory predicts that contact reduces prejudice, while the concept of the contact zone warns that contact can reproduce inequality when some languages and groups dominate. The model therefore treats the conditions of contact, and attention to language hierarchy, as essential components rather than optional features.

From synthesis to model. Model development proceeded in four steps. First, the central claims of each tradition about intercultural learning were summarised. Second, these claims were organised into a sequence of enabling conditions, programmes, learning processes and outcomes. Third, conditions that might weaken the expected effects were identified from the literature on intergroup contact, language anxiety and Nigerian higher education. Fourth, the expected relationships were stated as propositions. Because the paper is conceptual, its findings are arguments and hypothesised relationships rather than measured effects, and they should be judged by their clarity, coherence and usefulness for empirical research.

4. The Library Intercultural Learning Space Model

The model proposes that, under institutional enabling conditions, the library can offer a set of language programmes; that these programmes operate through four learning processes; and that these processes develop intercultural competence and confidence in English, which over time may contribute to intercultural communicative competence. Moderating conditions may dampen these effects at different stages, and the process is expected to be iterative rather than strictly linear: students' initial attitudes influence whether they take part, and positive experiences encourage continued participation. Figure 1 presents the model, Table 1 links each programme to the learning processes it is most likely to activate, and Table 2 sets out the propositions.

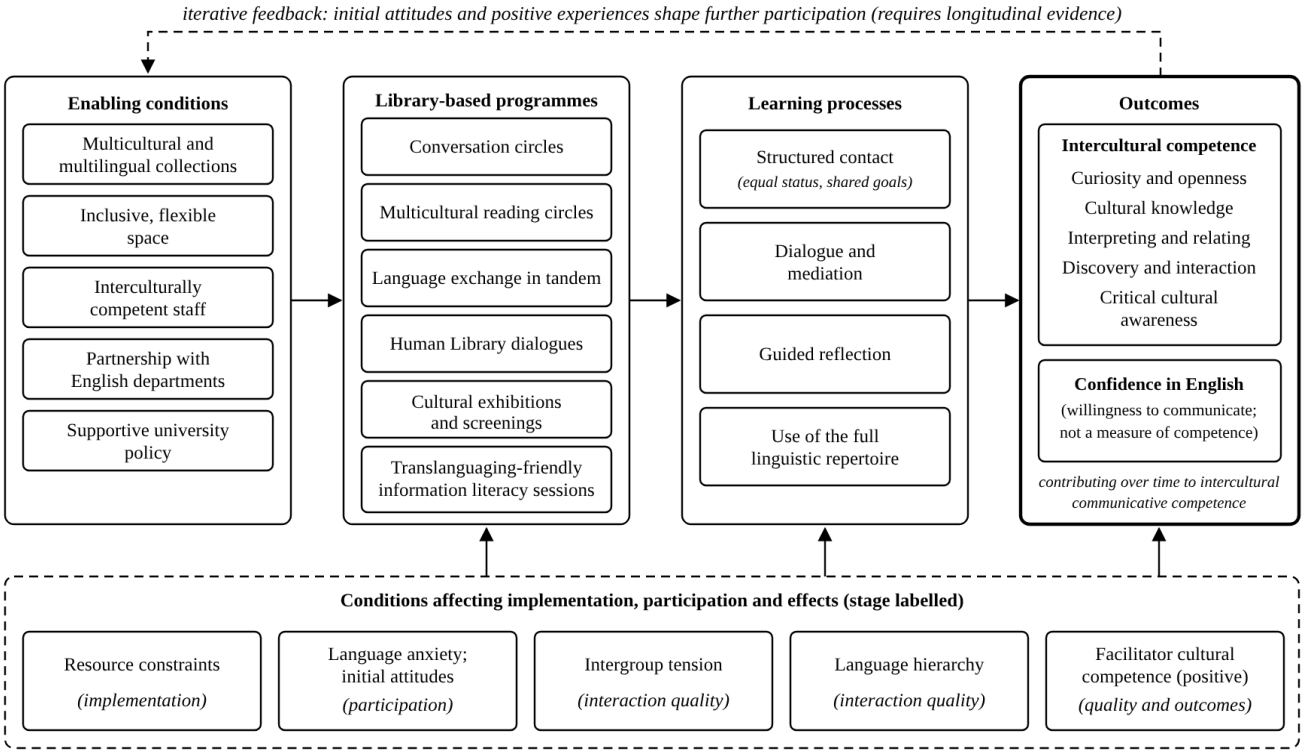


Figure 1. *The Library Intercultural Learning Space Model.*

Enabling conditions make possible library-based language programmes, which are expected to work through four learning processes to develop intercultural competence and confidence in English, contributing over time to intercultural communicative competence. The lower panel groups conditions that act at different stages, as labelled: some determine programme availability or participation, while others moderate the strength of effects; the cultural competence of facilitating staff is expected to strengthen rather than weaken the effects. The figure shows principal outcomes only; reduced anxiety about speaking English is a possible secondary outcome (P2b). The dashed line indicates an iterative feedback relationship that requires longitudinal evidence. Source: the authors.

4.1. Enabling Conditions

Multicultural and multilingual collections. Literature, oral histories, music and films from many Nigerian cultures, in English, in translation and where possible in Nigerian languages, provide the materials on which programmes can be based [15, 19]. Nigerian literature in English is particularly useful, because it represents many cultures in a language that all students share.

Inclusive and flexible space. Programmes need rooms or areas in which small groups can talk without disturbing others, furniture that can be arranged in circles rather than rows, and access to a screen for films and presentations. Such spaces signal that conversation is welcome in the library, and they form part of the shift towards the library as a learning place that Bennett [14] describes.

Interculturally competent staff. Librarians need to be aware of their own cultural assumptions, informed about the cultures of their users and skilled in creating a welcoming environment [34, 35]. Staff attitudes towards Nigerian Pidgin and indigenous languages deserve particular attention, because a librarian who corrects a student's English in public may undo the effect of a well-designed programme.

Partnership with English departments. English lecturers bring expertise in language teaching and in Nigerian and African literature, and can link library programmes to courses in the use of English and communication skills. Such partnership extends the model of library and English department collaboration already proposed for academic writing [21] and for information literacy [20].

Supportive policy. University management can recognise participation in programmes, for example through general studies credit or co-curricular transcripts, and can provide modest funding. The IFLA/UNESCO Manifesto [15] offers a policy framework for such support.

4.2. Library-based Language Programmes

The model identifies six types of programme that are expected to be achievable in Nigerian university libraries at modest cost.

Conversation circles. Small, mixed groups of students meet regularly to talk about agreed topics in English with a trained facilitator, who may be a librarian, an English lecturer or a senior student [16, 17]. Groups are purposefully composed of

students from different language backgrounds.

Multicultural reading circles. Students read and discuss short works of Nigerian and African literature that represent cultures other than their own, such as stories, poems and plays in English or in translation. Discussion focuses on the customs, values and relationships the work portrays, and on how readers from different backgrounds interpret it.

Language exchange in tandem. Pairs of students with different first languages, for example an Igbo speaker and a Yoruba speaker, teach each other basic expressions in their languages and explain the cultural meanings behind them, using English as the shared language of explanation [22]. The goal is not proficiency in a new language but an understanding of another culture and respect for its language.

Human Library dialogues. Students, staff or community members from different ethnic, religious or regional backgrounds serve as "books" and hold conversations with "readers" about their experiences, following agreed ground rules [18].

Cultural exhibitions and screenings. Displays and film screenings organised around cultural festivals, languages or regions, followed by a guided discussion in English, introduce students to cultures other than their own and give student groups an opportunity to present their own.

Translanguaging-friendly information literacy sessions. In Table 1 these are called multilingual information literacy sessions. They are information literacy sessions in which students may use Nigerian Pidgin or their home languages to discuss tasks while working with English sources, so that skill development is combined with recognition of students' full language repertoires [26, 28].

Not every programme is expected to activate all four learning processes to the same degree. Table 1 lists the processes each programme is most likely to activate and the conditions under which intercultural learning, rather than mere exposure, is expected. In general, intercultural learning is expected when a programme involves sustained interaction between students of different backgrounds followed by reflection; programmes that provide exposure without interaction are expected mainly to raise curiosity.

Table 1. *Library-based programmes, the learning processes they are most likely to activate, and conditions for intercultural learning.*

Programme	Primary learning processes	Conditions under which intercultural learning is expected
Conversation circles	Structured contact; dialogue and mediation	Groups are mixed by language background, meet regularly and discuss topics that invite comparison of experience
Multicultural reading circles	Dialogue and mediation; guided reflection	Texts represent cultures other than readers' own and discussion compares interpretations across backgrounds
Language exchange in tandem	Structured contact; dialogue and mediation; use of the full repertoire	Partners are matched by language and availability, meet over several weeks and explain cultural meanings, not only words
Human Library dialogues	Structured contact; guided reflection	Conversations are prepared, follow agreed ground rules and are followed by reflection
Cultural exhibitions and screenings	Guided reflection, only when a facilitated discussion follows; otherwise the programme provides exposure, which is a programme feature rather than a learning process	A facilitated discussion follows; without it, effects are expected to be limited to curiosity
Multilingual information literacy sessions	Use of the full repertoire; dialogue	Groups are mixed by language background and tasks require students to explain ideas to one another; otherwise the main benefit is lower anxiety rather than intercultural exchange

Note: The mapping indicates expected emphases, not exclusive effects; it is a hypothesis for empirical testing.

4.3. Learning Processes

Structured contact. Programmes are designed to meet Allport's conditions: participants have equal status as students, work towards a shared purpose such as finishing a reading or preparing a presentation, cooperate rather than compete, and are visibly supported by the library and the university [8, 9].

Dialogue and mediation. Participants explain their own cultural practices and interpret those of others, often switching between registers and languages. This is the mediation that the Council of Europe [27] regards as central to plurilingual and pluricultural competence, and it corresponds to Byram's skills of interpreting and relating [10].

Guided reflection. Facilitators ask participants to consider what surprised them, how their own assumptions shaped their reactions and what they would do differently. Reflection is

what turns contact into learning, and Byram [11] and Deardorff [12] both treat it as essential to the development of critical cultural awareness.

Use of the full linguistic repertoire. Participants may draw on all their languages, while English remains the shared language of the group. This helps to reduce the anxiety associated with performing in formal English [37, 38] and signals that students' home languages are legitimate, which may increase their commitment to the programme [26, 29].

4.4. Outcomes

The model distinguishes proximal outcomes, which are expected to change during a period of participation, from a more distal outcome that is expected to develop over longer periods. The first proximal outcome is ***intercultural competence***, defined in Byram's terms as attitudes of curiosity and openness, knowledge of other Nigerian cultures, skills of interpreting and relating, skills of discovery and interaction, and critical cultural awareness [10, 11]. Following Deardorff [12], changes in attitudes are expected first, with changes in knowledge, skills and behaviour developing over longer periods of participation. The second proximal outcome is *confidence in English*, meaning greater willingness to speak English in academic and social settings and greater ease in approaching librarians and lecturers. Confidence is treated as a psychological outcome and a facilitating condition, not as evidence of communicative competence: a student may become more willing to speak without becoming more accurate or appropriate. Anxiety about speaking English has a dual status in the model: it is a baseline condition that may prevent or limit participation (Section 4.5, P6a), and it is also a possible secondary outcome, since regular participation in a supportive setting may reduce it (P2b). Regular practice in English during programmes may also contribute to *communicative competence in English*, but this is expected to develop gradually and is not the main aim of the programmes. *Intercultural communicative competence*, the combination of intercultural competence with communicative competence in English, is therefore treated as a distal outcome to which the programmes contribute, rather than one they can produce on their own. Further longer-term outcomes, such as improved relationships between groups on campus and readiness for international study and work, are plausible but would require longitudinal evidence.

4.5. Conditions Affecting Implementation, Participation and Effects

The conditions in this section are expected to act at different stages of the model, and they are not all moderators in the statistical sense. Resource constraints and initial attitudes are better understood as antecedents: resource constraints determine whether programmes are available at all, and initial attitudes influence which students choose to participate. Language anxiety acts mainly as a determinant of participation. Intergroup tension, language hierarchy and the cultural competence of facilitators are moderators in the narrower sense, because they are expected to change the strength of the relationship between participation and outcomes. For simplicity, Figure 1 groups all of these as conditions, labelled by the stage at which each is expected to act.

Implementation: resource constraints. Limited space, unreliable electricity and internet access, heavy staff workloads and crowded timetables may determine whether programmes are offered at all, and how often.

Participation: language anxiety and initial attitudes. Students who are anxious about speaking English in public may avoid programmes or participate minimally [37, 38], and students with little initial curiosity about other cultures may not attend. Small groups, permission to use home languages and non-judgemental facilitation are expected to reduce the effect of anxiety. Because voluntary participants are likely to be more open to begin with, initial attitudes are also a source of self selection that research must take into account.

Interaction quality: intergroup tension and language hierarchy. Where relations between particular ethnic or religious groups are tense, contact may be uncomfortable and may confirm rather than challenge stereotypes [9, 23]. If English or one of the major Nigerian languages dominates every interaction, speakers of smaller languages may feel marginalised [2, 23, 32]. These conditions are expected to weaken outcomes indirectly, by lowering the quality of contact rather than by preventing participation. Careful facilitation, ground rules, attention to equal status and deliberate inclusion of speakers of minority languages are expected to reduce these risks, but they may not remove them.

Outcomes: facilitator cultural competence. The cultural competence of facilitating staff [34, 35] is expected to strengthen the relationship between participation and outcomes, by improving the quality of dialogue and reflection. Unlike the conditions above, it is a positive moderator.

4.6. Feedback

The model is iterative. Students' initial attitudes influence whether they participate, and positive experiences are expected to increase their willingness to participate again, to recommend programmes to others and to use the library more generally. Over time, the library may come to be seen as a place where students of all backgrounds belong, which would strengthen the enabling conditions themselves. This feedback relationship is plausible but has not yet been demonstrated.

4.7. Propositions

The model yields six propositions for empirical testing, several of which are divided into separate predictions so that each

can be tested individually. In all, Table 2 contains ten directional predictions, stated as propositions, and one exploratory research question (P5c). The predictions are hypothetical, and associations observed among voluntary participants should not be interpreted as causal effects without a suitable design. They are selected, testable priorities rather than a complete account of every relationship in the model.

Table 2. *Propositions and exploratory research question derived from the Library Intercultural Learning Space Model.*

No.	Proposition	Model components	Main theoretical basis
P1	Students who participate regularly in library-based language programmes show greater gains in intercultural competence (attitudes, knowledge and skills) over a semester than comparable students who do not participate, after controlling for initial intercultural attitudes.	Programmes → intercultural competence	[10, 12]
P2a	Regular participation is associated with an increase in confidence in English, measured as willingness to communicate in English.	Programmes → confidence in English	[11]
P2b	Regular participation is associated with a decrease in anxiety about speaking English in public.	Programmes → anxiety	[37, 38]
P3	Among participants, gains in intercultural attitudes appear earlier than gains in intercultural knowledge, skills and behaviour.	Processes → outcomes over time	[12]
P4	Programmes that meet more of the conditions of equal status, shared goals, cooperation and institutional support are associated with larger gains in intercultural competence than programmes that meet fewer of them.	Structured contact → intercultural competence	[8, 9]
P5a	Programmes that permit the use of students' full linguistic repertoires attract higher and more sustained participation than programmes conducted only in English.	Use of full repertoire → participation	[26-28]
P5b	Such programmes are associated with lower anxiety among participants than programmes conducted only in English.	Use of full repertoire → anxiety	[26, 29]
P5c	Exploratory research question: changes in confidence in English are compared between such programmes and programmes conducted only in English, without a directional prediction.	Use of full repertoire → confidence in English	[26, 27]
P6a	Higher language anxiety at the outset predicts less frequent and less sustained participation.	Participation stage	[37, 38]
P6b	Intergroup tension and language hierarchy within a group predict lower participant-rated quality of contact, and lower quality of contact is associated with smaller gains in intercultural competence.	Interaction-quality stage	[9, 23]
P6c	The cultural competence of facilitating staff strengthens the relationship between participation and gains in intercultural competence.	Positive moderator of outcomes	[34, 35]

Note: The propositions are hypotheses to be tested empirically; arrows indicate expected directions of influence, not demonstrated causal effects.

Plausible indicators exist for each construct. Intercultural competence can be assessed with self-report scales based on Byram's and Deardorff's models, combined with reflective journals and observation of interaction during programmes [11, 12]. Confidence in English can be assessed with measures of willingness to communicate, and anxiety with measures of speaking anxiety; these should be analysed separately. Participation can be recorded through attendance registers. The four contact conditions in P4 can be measured with short participant rating scales, for example on whether all members were treated as equals and whether the group worked towards a shared task, together with an observation checklist completed by a trained observer. Because participation is voluntary, P1 and P2 are open to self-selection bias: students who choose to attend may already be more open or more confident. Studies should therefore measure outcomes before and after participation, compare participants with similar nonparticipants or with

students on a waiting list, and control for initial attitudes. P3 requires repeated measurement at three or more points, for example at the start, middle and end of a semester, so that the order in which changes appear can be established. P5a and P5b require comparison of programmes that differ in language policy. P5c is exploratory, because there is not yet enough evidence to justify a directional or noninferiority prediction; if a later study tests noninferiority, the acceptable margin of difference should be specified in advance. P6a requires measurement of anxiety before participation begins, P6b requires ratings of contact quality during sessions, and P6c requires comparison of groups led by facilitators who differ in cultural competence. To avoid circular measurement, facilitators' cultural competence should be assessed independently of programme outcomes and before the programme begins, for example through a self assessment based on Overall's [34] framework combined with ratings by a trained observer of a recorded or observed session. Because intercultural communicative competence is a distal outcome, it should be assessed separately from self-reported confidence. A future study could, for example, observe students in a structured intercultural interaction task, such as explaining a cultural practice to a partner from another background and resolving a misunderstanding, and rate their performance with two rubrics, one for English language use and one for intercultural appropriateness. Such rubrics would need to be validated, and ratings should be made by at least two trained raters working independently, with inter-rater agreement reported.

4.8. Feasibility and Participant Safeguards

The six programmes differ in the resources they require. Conversation circles, multicultural reading circles, cultural exhibitions and translanguaging-friendly information literacy sessions can be run with existing staff, collections and space, and are good starting points. Language exchange in tandem requires the matching of partners by language, timetable and interest, and some monitoring of whether pairs continue to meet. Human Library dialogues are the most demanding: they require the recruitment and preparation of "books", skilled facilitation and clear protocols, because conversations about ethnic or religious identity can be sensitive [18].

All programmes should observe basic safeguards. Participation should be voluntary, and students should be free to withdraw from a session or a programme at any time without penalty. Groups should agree ground rules at the start, including respect for all members, no ridicule of accents or language use, and confidentiality about personal stories shared in the group. Facilitators should be trained to handle difficult conversations, to intervene when remarks become hostile and to refer students to counselling or welfare services where necessary. Human Library "books" should give informed consent, decide in advance which questions they are willing to answer and be able to end a conversation at any time. Where programmes are evaluated for research, the usual requirements of ethical approval and informed consent will apply.

5. Discussion

5.1. Contribution of the Model to Existing Theory

The model's contribution lies in the integration of existing theories and their application to a new setting, and in three relationships that the source theories do not state on their own, although elements of them may be found in other literatures: that particular library programmes activate particular learning processes (Table 1); that the use of students' full linguistic repertoires shapes both participation and the quality of contact (P5a to P5c); and that different moderating conditions act at different stages, from implementation to outcomes. Its contribution to each tradition is outlined below.

Intercultural communicative competence. Byram's and Deardorff's models were developed mainly with foreign language learning and international mobility in mind [10, 12]. The present model extends them to domestic intercultural learning in a multilingual country, where the shared language is a second language for most participants and the most salient cultural boundaries lie within the nation. It also identifies the library as a setting outside the language classroom in which such learning can be organised.

Intergroup contact theory. Contact theory specifies the conditions under which contact reduces prejudice [8, 9], but it does not identify the institutional settings in which those conditions can be created on a university campus. The model proposes that library programmes are one such setting, and it adds language, through the use of a shared second language and the welcoming of home languages, as a condition that shapes the quality of contact.

Library as place. Scholarship on the library as place and third space [13, 14] has explored the library's potential to welcome students' cultures, but has rarely spelled out the programmes and processes through which that potential is realised. The model specifies six programme types and four learning processes, and links them to defined outcomes. It also draws on the concept of the contact zone [23] to identify language hierarchy as a risk that library programmes need to manage.

Nigerian library scholarship. Nigerian work on libraries and culture has emphasised heritage and preservation [19]. The model reframes culture as a dimension of student learning, and positions the academic library as an active contributor to intercultural education and national cohesion, consistent with international library guidance [15].

5.2. Illustrative Application

The following hypothetical example illustrates how the

model might be applied. It is a constructed example, not a report of data. A university library, working with the Department of English, launches a fortnightly reading circle for first-year students. Each circle has eight members drawn from at least four language backgrounds. Over a semester the circle reads short stories by writers from different parts of Nigeria. At each meeting a librarian facilitates discussion of how the story presents family, authority and community, and invites members to compare these with practices in their own communities. Members may express an idea in Pidgin or in their home language before restating it in English. At the end of each meeting members write a short reflection. In the model's terms, the reading circle depends on multicultural collections, a suitable room, a trained facilitator and departmental partnership; it works through structured contact, dialogue, reflection and use of the full repertoire; and it is expected to increase curiosity about other cultures, knowledge of them and confidence in speaking English. If one member is too anxious to speak, or if tension between two groups surfaces in discussion, the facilitator's response becomes decisive, as the moderating conditions suggest.

5.3. Implications for Practice

For university libraries. Libraries can begin with programmes that require few resources, such as a conversation circle or a reading circle using existing collections, and extend to language exchange and Human Library events as staff gain experience and safeguards are put in place (Section 4.8). Staff development in cultural competence [34, 35] should precede or accompany programme development. Libraries should also review their service practices, so that students who use Nigerian Pidgin or their home languages at service points are not corrected or turned away.

For English departments. English lecturers can help design programmes, recommend texts for reading circles, train student facilitators and link programme participation to courses in the use of English and communication skills. This extends existing proposals for collaboration between libraries and English departments [20, 21].

For university management. Management can recognise participation through general studies credit or co-curricular transcripts, provide modest funding and suitable space, and include intercultural competence among the intended outcomes of undergraduate education. The National Universities Commission could encourage such practice through its guidance on library services and general studies.

5.4. Limitations and Suggestions for Further Research

The model is developed from theory and a purposive, non-systematic review of literature rather than from new data. Much of the evidence on library-based language programmes and on Human Library events comes from settings outside Nigeria, is descriptive and relies on non-experimental designs [18]. Nigerian universities also differ considerably in student composition, facilities and institutional resources: a federal university with a national intake differs from a state or private university that draws mainly on one region, and the model may need to be adapted to each. Claims about students' social groupings and about the scarcity of structured intercultural opportunities are contextual assumptions that require empirical confirmation. The model also assumes that students will choose to participate, whereas competing demands on their time may limit participation, and it does not examine the experiences of international students in Nigerian universities, who are relatively few. Future research should pilot the programmes described here and evaluate them with mixed methods, comparing participants with similar nonparticipants before and after a semester; should develop and validate measures of intercultural competence suited to domestic intercultural contact in Nigeria; and should examine how facilitators manage intergroup tension and language hierarchy in practice.

6. Conclusions

This paper has argued that the academic library can be reimagined as an intercultural learning space in which library-based language programmes may develop intercultural competence and confidence in English among Nigerian undergraduates, and contribute to their intercultural communicative competence. The Library Intercultural Learning Space Model proposes that enabling conditions, namely multicultural collections, inclusive space, interculturally competent staff, partnership with English departments and supportive policy, make possible six types of programme, which are expected to work through structured contact, dialogue and mediation, guided reflection and use of the full linguistic repertoire to develop intercultural competence and confidence in English, and so to contribute over time to intercultural communicative competence. Resource constraints, language anxiety, intergroup tension and language hierarchy may weaken these effects at different stages, while the cultural competence of facilitating staff may strengthen them. These relationships are theoretical expectations that require empirical testing.

The model makes three contributions. Theoretically, it extends models of intercultural communicative competence and intergroup contact to domestic intercultural learning in a multilingual country, and specifies the library programmes and processes through which such learning may occur. Practically, it gives librarians, English lecturers and university managers a set of feasible programmes and the conditions needed to make them work. Methodologically, it offers six groups of propositions, containing ten directional predictions and one exploratory research question, and suggested indicators to guide empirical research. In a country in which national cohesion depends on understanding across linguistic and cultural lines, the academic library may be able to contribute to that understanding not only through what it holds, but also through

the encounters it makes possible, a possibility that empirical research should now test.

Abbreviations

CEFR	Common European Framework of Reference for Languages
ICC	Intercultural Communicative Competence
IFLA	International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

Author Contributions

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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