Cultural competence checklist for ESL educators

Use this checklist to audit your classroom or tutoring sessions for cultural inclusivity and to identify potential "invisible" barriers.

1. Classroom dynamics and participation

- [ ] **Wait time:** Do I provide at least 5-10 seconds of silence after a question to allow students from "reflective" cultures to process their thoughts?

- [ ] **Questioning style:** Am I relying solely on "open-air" questions, or do I provide structured ways (like anonymous polls or small groups) for "high-power distance" students to participate?

- [ ] **Error correction:** Do I use "face-saving" techniques, such as correcting the class as a group rather than singling out an individual's mistake?

2. Materials and curriculum

- [ ] **Representation:** Do my reading materials feature names, locations, and scenarios from various cultures, or only Western ones?

- [ ] **Idiom transparency:** Have I explicitly defined the "cultural root" of the metaphors I use (e.g., explaining why we say "on the same page")?

- [ ] **Contextualizing history:** When using historical or social references, do I provide a brief "backgrounder" for students who didn't grow up with that history?

3. Non-verbal and sociolinguistic cues

- [ ] **Body language:** Am I aware of different norms regarding eye contact and physical proximity to avoid making students feel uncomfortable?

- [ ] **Pragmatic instruction:** Am I teaching "softeners" (e.g., "Could you please..." vs. "Give me...") to help students navigate the politeness levels of English?