

# EFL Learners' Attitudes toward Intercultural Communicative Language Teaching and their Intercultural Communicative Competence Development

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## Abstract

Intercultural communicative competence (ICC) is seen as one of the key competences in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, so one of the ultimate goals in English language training programs is to educate learners to become intercultural speakers who can deal with linguistic and cultural complexity and take part in multicultural situations. However, the integration of intercultural content into English language education is still ignored in the Vietnamese context. This empirical study, therefore, endeavored to integrate intercultural content into an English communicative language course in order to explore EFL learners' attitudes towards intercultural communicative language teaching (ICLT) and their ICC development in the Vietnamese context. It involved forty-seven EFL learners who were learning an intercultural communicative language course at a foreign language center in

Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. Three research instruments, namely questionnaire, language test, intercultural competence test and semi-structured group interview were employed to garner data. The preliminary findings revealed that EFL learners' attitudes towards intercultural communicative language learning were positively changed, and their ICC (both language competence and intercultural competence) developed in similar patterns. This study is hoped to shed light to the implementation of ICLT in the EFL context of Vietnam and other similar contexts.

**Keywords:** Intercultural communicative language teaching, intercultural communicative competence, EFL learners, Vietnamese context

## บทคัดย่อ

ความสามารถด้านการสื่อสารระหว่างวัฒนธรรมนับเป็นความสามารถที่สำคัญในศตวรรษที่ 21 ดังนั้นจุดมุ่งหมายด้านหนึ่งของการเรียนการสอนภาษาอังกฤษก็คือ การสอนให้ผู้เรียนมีความสามารถด้านการพูดที่จัดการกับความซับซ้อนของทั้งภาษาและวัฒนธรรมในสถานการณ์แบบพหุสังคม ได้อย่างมีประสิทธิภาพ แต่อย่างไรก็ตาม การบูรณาการเนื้อหาด้านวัฒนธรรมให้เข้ากับการเรียนการสอนภาษาอังกฤษไม่ได้รับความสนใจในบริบทของประเทศเวียดนาม ดังนั้นการศึกษาครั้งนี้จึงเป็นความพยายามที่จะนำเอาเนื้อหาเกี่ยวกับความแตกต่างทางวัฒนธรรมเข้ามาพนักเข้ากับการสอนภาษาอังกฤษเพื่อ การสื่อสารและศึกษาทัศนคติของผู้เรียนที่มีต่อการสอนดังกล่าวและการพัฒนาของความสามารถด้านการสื่อสารระหว่างวัฒนธรรมในบริบทของประเทศเวียดนาม โดยมีกลุ่มตัวอย่างเป็นผู้เรียนวิชาภาษาอังกฤษเพื่อการสื่อสารระหว่างวัฒนธรรมที่ศูนย์ภาษาต่างประเทศ เมืองโซลิกินห์ ประเทศเวียดนามจำนวน 47 คน โดยใช้ แบบสอบถาม แบบทดสอบความสามารถด้านภาษาและด้านความแตกต่างระหว่างวัฒนธรรมร่วมกับ การสัมภาษณ์กลุ่มแบบกึ่งทางการในการเก็บข้อมูล ทั้งนี้ผลการวิจัยพบว่าผู้เรียนมี การเปลี่ยนแปลงทัศนคติเกี่ยวกับการสื่อสารระหว่างวัฒนธรรมไปในทางบวก และมี การพัฒนาของความสามารถด้านการสื่อสารระหว่างวัฒนธรรม (ทั้งด้านภาษาและด้านความแตกต่างระหว่างวัฒนธรรม) ในทิศทางเดียวกัน จึงหวังเป็นอย่างยิ่งว่าผลของการวิจัยนี้ จะเป็นประโยชน์ในเรื่องการสอนภาษาเพื่อการสื่อสารระหว่างวัฒนธรรมสำหรับผู้เรียนภาษาอังกฤษในฐานะภาษาต่างประเทศ ทั้งในประเทศไทยและประเทศอื่นๆ ที่มี บริบทใกล้เคียงกัน

**คำสำคัญ:** การสอนภาษาเพื่อการสื่อสารระหว่างวัฒนธรรม ความสามารถด้านการสื่อสารระหว่างวัฒนธรรม ผู้เรียนภาษาอังกฤษในฐานะภาษาต่างประเทศ บริบทของประเทศเวียดนาม

## 1. Introduction

The notion of intercultural communication has long been addressed in multifarious disciplines of study such as anthropology, communication, linguistics, psychology, and sociology (Bennett, 1998). The contributions of these fields can be seen as perception, interpretation, attribution (psychology, linguistics, communication), verbal communication (linguistics, communication), nonverbal communication (communication), communication styles (linguistics, communication), and values (psychology, anthropology, sociology) (*ibid.*). It is well known, with regards to the field of English language education, that intercultural communication has played an increasingly pivotal role in educating ESL/EFL learners to become intercultural speakers with intercultural communicative competence (ICC) who can deal with linguistic and cultural complexity and take part in multicultural situations (e.g., Deardoff, 2009; Jæger, 2001).

Albeit the concept of ICC is coined from the combination of intercultural competence (IC) and communicative competence, many components in the definition of IC and ICC overlap with each other, resulting in the interchangeability of usage. This vague distinction between IC and ICC, furthermore, sometimes causes confusion in addressing the right phenomenon. Among some scholars who have tried to differentiate the two terms, Byram (1997) points out that ICC is an umbrella term that covers many components including linguistic competence, sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence, and IC. By proposing a model of ICC, he further explains the term ICC as the ability that enables one to interact effectively and appropriately in a foreign language with people from different cultures.

Chen and Starosta (1999), similarly, define intercultural communication (or communicative) competence as “the ability to effectively and appropriately execute communication behaviors that

negotiate each other's cultural identity or identities in a culturally diverse environment" (p. 28). Intercultural competence, they argue, consists of three key components of intercultural communication competence: intercultural sensitivity (affective process), intercultural awareness (cognitive process), and intercultural adroitness (behavioral process), all of which are defined as verbal and nonverbal skills needed to act effectively and appropriately in intercultural interactions. Wiseman (2002), in another aspect, includes motivation as an additional element in his definition of ICC apart from knowledge and skills. This unique element, which is not commonly found in other definitions of ICC, is defined as "the set of feelings, intentions, needs and drives associated with the anticipation of or actual engagement in intercultural communication" (p. 4). He suggests these three elements are essential for effective and appropriate interaction in intercultural situations.

Based on different definitions, Lázár, Huber-Kriegler, Lussier, Matei and Peck (2007), an international team of experts involved in carrying out projects within the framework of the European Centre for Modern Languages, define ICC as "the ability to communicate effectively in cross-cultural situations and to relate appropriately in a variety of cultural contexts" (p. 9), which is used as a guideline for language teachers and teacher educators. This definition emphasizes two main components: skills and attitudes. The former involves development "in the areas of observation, interpreting and relating, mediation and discovery" (*ibid.*, p. 9); the latter is "to increase respect, empathy and tolerance for ambiguity, to raise interest in, curiosity about, and openness towards people from other cultures, and to encourage a willingness to suspend judgment" (*ibid.*, pp. 9–10). In short, from this brief review of ICC constructs and its definitions, it can be seen that due to the existence of various definitions and constructs of ICC, scholars have not yet reached a consensus on how

ICC should be defined and what constructs it should be composed of. Yet, in this study, ICC can be understood in the following terms:

ICC is the ability which enables one to effectively and appropriately interact in a language other than one's native language with others from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. It consists of language competence (linguistic, sociolinguistic, & discourse competence) and intercultural competence (attitudes, knowledge, skills, & awareness) that help one to be able to successfully integrate in a multicultural society.

(Tran, 2015, p. 30)

In the current context of globalization, the issue of delivering ICC to ESL/EFL learners has been identified as one of the ultimate goals in the field of English language education (e.g., Byram, 1997; Deardoff, 2009; Fantini, 2000; Lázár et al., 2007) in an attempt to present learners with cultural differences which help learners become interculturally aware of their own culture and the presence of otherness as well as to appreciate and respect them. English language education, moreover, should equip learners with the knowledge of intercultural communication and the ability to use it effectively in order to bridge cultural differences and achieve more harmonious, productive relations (Samovar, Porter, & McDaniel, 2012).

It is, nonetheless, not always agreed that the role of culture and intercultural communication in English language education are well acknowledged. Gonen and Saglam (2012) point out that "teachers in different classrooms in different parts of the world still ignore the importance of teaching culture as a part of language study" (p. 26). That is, teachers endeavor to promote only their learners' language proficiency instead of endowing them with ICC in order to function effectively and appropriately in multicultural situations. The reasons

behind teachers' ignorance of inclusion of culture and intercultural communication in English language education are that teachers are "more interested in practical aspects of communication" (Onalan, 2005, p. 217); teachers feel they do not have enough time to talk about cultural elements in their teaching practices due to the demanding curriculum (e.g., Gonen & Saglam, 2012; Hong, 2008); teachers do not know how to incorporate culture and intercultural communication in the language classroom since they lack adequate training on how to incorporate culture in their teaching practices as well as how to measure learners' IC and changes in their attitudes as a result of culture teaching (Gonen & Saglam, 2012); and most teachers have limited knowledge about intercultural communication (Sercu, 2005).

There have been different studies which attempt to include intercultural content into language education, but it is observed that the most common focus of study is the application of information and communications technology (ICT) such as computer, the Internet, video and other technologies to promote the acquisition of IC/ICC (e.g., Garretts-Rucks, 2010; O'Neil, 2008; Wang & Coleman, 2008). Other three common focuses of study are the use of new approaches in IC/ICC development (e.g., Gómez, 2012; Nakano, Fukui, & Gilbert, 2011), the contexts of ICC promotion (e.g., Ottoson, 2013; Pierson, 2010), and the characteristics / difficulties / challenges / factors in intercultural communication (e.g., Alexandru, 2012; Moloney, 2007). However, not much has been reported on action research conducted to explore EFL learners' attitudes toward intercultural language teaching in Vietnamese context. In addition, the concept of the ICC is still alien to most researchers as well as educators in Vietnam, and not many studies have been, to the best of the researcher's knowledge, found in the literature on the promotion of learners' ICC. For example, three available previous studies are: one empirical research by Bui (2012) to use the free Telecollaboration 2.0 for online intercultural exchanges

in order to enhance learners' ICC in the context of English language education in Vietnam, and the other two theoretical papers by Nguyen (2007) showing a gap to be filled regarding the development of EFL learners' ICC, and by Tran and Duong (2015) discussing the new objectives of English Language Education in the Vietnamese context in terms of Intercultural Language Teaching. Therefore, this research, part of a fifteen-month project, aims to investigate EFL learners' attitudes towards intercultural communicative language learning (ICLL) by using the ICLT model which is developed to facilitate the development of EFL learners' ICC. Two following research questions are formed.

1. What are EFL learners' attitudes towards intercultural communicative language teaching (ICLT)?
2. To what extent is EFL learners' ICC enhanced after the intercultural communicative language course?

## 2. Methodology

### 2.1 Research Setting

This project was carried out at SEAMEO RETRAC, a Foreign Language Center in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, which provided a variety of language training programs. Each of which has many levels from elementary to advanced. This center had seventy-seven English language teachers from not only English-speaking countries such as New Zealand, Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom, and the United States of America but also non-English-speaking countries like Vietnam, the Philippines, and South Korea. All these teachers held university and/or postgraduate degrees and internationally recognized TESOL qualifications. The Vietnamese teachers of English and foreign

teachers of English were scheduled to share the teaching time of each class in accordance to the level of the class.

## 2.2 Course Design

The intercultural communicative language course lasting over a period of thirteen weeks was instructed by a Vietnamese teacher of English (the researcher), who met the class twice a week, and a foreign teacher of English, who met the class once a week. Each session lasted two hours, so the total number of teaching hours for the whole course was seventy-six including seventy-two in-class teaching hours and four end-of-course assessment hours. The seventy-six hour course was divided into two parts. The first part contained the lessons taught by the researcher (70% of the teaching time) and a foreign teacher of English (30% of the teaching time), and the second part contained the end-of-course assessment (four hours) done by teachers other than those in charge of teaching the course.

## 2.3 Textbook

The *Four Corners* textbook level 2, which is part of Four Corners series by Cambridge University Press (Richards & Bohlke, 2012), was used in this project. This English textbook is comprised of twelve units, yet for the first stage of the two in the elementary level in the General English program, only six topics from Unit One to Unit Six were covered. Apart from the core elements in the course syllabus designed by SEAMEO RETRAC, additional elements of intercultural content (3 intercultural themes: *Concept of beauty in different countries* for Unit 2, *Food and drink in different countries* for Unit 4, & *Body language in different countries* for Unit 6) were integrated into the language content.

## 2.4 Participants

The participants were forty-seven EFL learners from three elementary classes who were learning General English at SEAMEO RETRAC in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. There was just over half (53.2%) of the participants were aged under 20, i.e., the participants were quite young. Additionally, around three-fifths (61.6%) of the participants were university students. That is why nearly seven in ten (68.1%) of the participants had other high level qualifications or certificates (e.g., high school baccalaureate) other than bachelor's, master's, or doctoral degrees. Furthermore, a very large majority (78.7%) of the participants had previously studied English for over five years. Just over a third (34%) of the participants reported that they had been abroad, and only a paltry number (4.3%) of the participants had taken an intercultural course before.

## 2.5 Research Instruments

This study utilized five research instruments: questionnaire, learner's diary, language test, IC test and semi-structured interview in order to collect the data. A *questionnaire* employed to obtain information from EFL learners' attitudes toward ICLT before and after the course included two main parts: background and questionnaire content. The former asked about learners' personal information, and the latter included 15 items designed with a five-point scale (*strongly disagree to strongly agree*). The total reliability of pre-questionnaire and post-questionnaire, calculated by Cronbach, was .84 and .86, respectively. The *learners' diary* was designed in terms of guided questions (11 questions) addressing two issues: attitudes towards ICLT and their ICC development. The *language test* used to collect data on learners' language competence was extracted from the assessment package for *Four Corners* level 2 by Cambridge University Press (Richards & Bohlke, 2012). There were two types of

tests: summative and formative. The former, as an achievement test, included written and oral tests: the written test (76 items) involved listening, reading, grammar, functional languages, and vocabulary; the oral test contained two main activities for pair work. The latter, as a quiz, was also comprised of two tests: written (32 items) and oral tests which were in a similar format of the achievement test. The *IC test* was utilized to generate data on learners' IC. Akin to the language test, the IC test also included two types of tests: summative and formative. The former, as an achievement test, was composed of forty multiple choice items (each of IC elements, namely intercultural knowledge, attitudes, awareness, and skills has 10 items, respectively). The latter, as a quiz, consisted of twenty multiple choice items (each of IC elements, namely intercultural knowledge, attitudes, awareness, and skills had 5 items, respectively). The *semi-structured group interview* with three questions was employed to get in-depth information on participants' reflections on ICLT and their ICC development.

## 2.6 Procedures

The data collection was completed in three stages: before, during, and after the implementation of the intercultural language course. Before the course, forty-seven participants in three classes were required to do summative tests including language test and IC and a questionnaire. During the course, these forty-seven participants were required to write their reflection on their ICLT and their ICC development in a diary three times do the formative tests (both language test and IC test) after three ICC units after three ICC units. After the course, the same number of participants delivered the same summative tests (language test and IC test) and questionnaires. However, fifteen participants (around 32% of the population) who were chosen based on their willingness for the semi-structured group interview. In another aspect, participants were allowed to use their mother tongue

to answer the questionnaires, write their reflection, and answer the questions in the interviews so that they would not encounter any difficulty due to language proficiency.

With respect to the data analysis, the statistical methods (descriptive statistics: frequency, means, and standard deviation; inferential statistics: paired-sample t-test) were employed to analyze the quantitative analysis generated from the questionnaires. Meanwhile, the content analysis was utilized to analyze the qualitative data collected from learners' diaries (141 entries) and interviews. The codes for diary were DT1, DT2, and DT3 for the first topic, second topic, and third topic, respectively, and those for interviewees were L1, L2, and so on. In order to increase the validity and reliability, all research instruments were piloted before the main study. Furthermore, double-coding was employed in order to check and increase the reliability of content analysis. Two methods for double-coding include intra-coder and inter-coder. For the intra-coding, the researcher chose three pieces of text from the interview items which had been already coded to recode them. The researcher checked the reliability which was set over 65%. For the inter-coding, the researcher had two expert inter-coders recode three pieces of text from open-ended items. The two inter-coders and the researcher had to reach an agreed level of reliability (over 65%). As the interview transcriptions were in the participants' mother tongue, the researcher had to translate all the transcriptions into English. The researcher then asked one English teacher to double-check the accuracy of the translated version.

### 3. Findings

#### 3.1 EFL learners' attitudes towards intercultural communicative language learning

With regard to the quantitative data collected from the questionnaire, it is evident in Table 1 that the mean score of the EFL learners' attitudes towards ICLT before the course was 3.35 (out of 5). This meant that learners' attitudes towards ICLT were quite positive, although they had never taken any (inter) cultural course before. After a thirteen week course, the mean score of learners' attitudes towards ICLT was 4.15 (out of 5), which indicated that there was a significant difference in learners' perceptions of ICLT ( $t = -10.588$ ;  $p = .000$ ). Accordingly, it can be concluded that learners felt more positive about ICLT after their course as their attitudes toward it had changed significantly.

Table 1 EFL learners' attitudes towards ICLT (paired samples t-test)

Items	t	Sig.	$\bar{X}$ (SD) (N=47)	
			Before	After
15 items	-10.588	.000	3.35 (.54)	4.15 (.29)

$p \leq .05$

To elaborate more, before the course, many learners (see Table 2), on the one hand, did not believe in the importance, usefulness, need, necessity ( $i_1 = 29.9\%$ ;  $i_2 = 25.5\%$ ;  $i_3 = 17\%$ ;  $i_4 = 17.0\%$ ;  $i_5 = 19.1\%$ ), and the roles of ( $i_8 = 17.0\%$ ;  $i_{10} = 19.1\%$ ) of the integration of foreign cultures into English language teaching, so

they assumed that it was not really necessary for them to acquire a knowledge of foreign cultures (i11 = 14.9%) and strategies for intercultural communication in English language classes (i15 = 25.5%).

On the other hand, however, a substantial percentage of the participants were unsure of the roles of the integration of foreign cultures into English language teaching. Nearly half of the learners were unclear whether there should be a strong focus on foreign cultures in English language classes (i3 = 46.8%), and whether it was important to integrate foreign cultures into English language classes (i4 = 42.6%). More remarkably, learners were still unaware of the elements of the IC, which consists of knowledge, attitudes, awareness, and skills. That is why they were uncertain if it was necessary and important for learners to have knowledge of foreign cultures (i7 = 44.7%; i13 = 40.4%), to develop their curiosity, openness, and readiness to learn about foreign cultures (i10 = 38.3%), to raise their awareness of foreign cultures (i14 = 38.3%), and to be taught how to communicate with people from different countries effectively and appropriately (i13 = 42.6%). Consequently, they were confused as to whether they should learn both language competence (LC) and IC simultaneously in English language classes or not (i15 = 42.6%).

Table 2 EFL learners' attitudes towards intercultural communicative language teaching

Items	Pre- (N=47) - F (%)			Post- (N=47) - F (%)		
	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree
i1. Integrating foreign cultures into English language classes interests learners to learn English.	14 (29.8)	11 (23.4)	22 (46.8)	0 (0.0)	2 (4.3)	45 (95.7)
i2. It is useful to integrate foreign cultures into English language classes.	12 (25.5)	11 (23.4)	24 (51.1)	0 (0.0)	2 (4.3)	45 (95.7)
i3. There should be a strong focus on foreign cultures in English language classes.	8 (17.0)	22 (46.8)	17 (36.2)	2 (4.3)	7 (14.9)	38 (80.8)
i4. Integrating foreign cultures into English language classes is important.	8 (17.0)	20 (42.6)	19 (40.4)	1 (2.1)	4 (8.5)	42 (89.4)
i5. There is a need to integrate foreign cultures into English language classes.	9 (19.1)	14 (29.8)	24 (51.1)	0 (0.0)	3 (6.4)	44 (93.6)
i6. Learners should develop both language competence and inter cultural competence in English language classes.	3 (6.4)	20 (42.6)	24 (51.1)	1 (2.1)	3 (6.4)	43 (91.5)
i7. It is important for learners to learn about foreign cultures in English language classes.	5 (10.6)	21 (44.7)	21 (44.7)	0 (0.0)	4 (8.5)	43 (91.5)
i8. Learning about foreign cultures in English language classes helps learners to understand more about their own culture.	7 (14.9)	16 (34.0)	24 (51.1)	1 (2.1)	4 (8.5)	42 (89.4)
i9. Learners should develop positive in English language classes attitudes toward foreign cultures.	8 (17.0)	14 (29.8)	25 (53.2)	0 (0.0)	5 (10.6)	42 (89.4)

Table 2 EFL learners' attitudes towards intercultural communicative language teaching (continued)

Items	Pre- (N=47) - F (%)			Post- (N=47) - F (%)		
	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree
i10 In English language classes, it is necessary to develop learners' curiosity, openness, and readiness to learn about foreign cultures.	9 (19.1)	18 (38.3)	20 (42.6)	0 (0.0)	3 (6.4)	44 (93.6)
i11. Knowledge of foreign cultures should be included in English language classes.	7 (14.9)	15 (31.9)	25 (53.2)	0 (0.0)	8 (17.0)	39 (83.0)
i12. In English language classes, learners should be taught how to communicate with people from different countries effectively and appropriately.	4 (8.5)	20 (42.6)	23 (48.9)	0 (0.0)	5 (10.6)	42 (89.4)
i13. It is necessary to provide learners with knowledge of foreign cultures in English language classes.	3 (6.4)	19 (40.4)	25 (53.2)	1 (2.1)	11 (23.4)	35 (74.5)
i14. Raising learners' awareness of foreign cultures in English language classes is important.	4 (8.5)	18 (38.3)	25 (53.2)	0 (0.0)	6 (12.8)	41 (87.2)
i15. Strategies for intercultural communication should be taught to learners in English language classes.	12 (25.5)	14 (29.8)	21 (44.7)	0 (0.0)	5 (10.6)	42 (89.4)

After a thirteen-week course, there was a noticeable change in learners' attitudes towards ICLT as evident through the very large number of the learners who believed in the importance, necessity and the roles (i1 = 95.7%; i2 = 95.7%; i3 = 80.8%; i4 = 89.4%; i5 = 93.6%; i6 = 91.5%) of the integration of foreign cultures into English language teaching, and were well aware of the IC components (i7 = 91.5%; i8 = 89.4%; i9 = 89.4%; i10 = 93.6%; i11 = 89.4%; i12 = 89.4%; i13 = 74.5%; i14 = 87.2; i15 = 89.4%). However, there was still a small number of learners who remained unclear as to whether the integration

of foreign cultures into English language teaching was important and necessary or not. Also, some learners had neutral opinions on whether they should be provided with knowledge of foreign cultures while learning English (i11 = 17%; i13 = 23.4%). Around one tenth of the learners were not for or against learning strategies for intercultural communication (i15 = 10.6%; i12 = 10.6%), and adjusting their attitudes toward foreign cultures in English classes (i9 = 10.6%). In addition, some others still wondered if their awareness of the importance of foreign cultures in English classes should be raised or not (i14 = 12.8%). This meant that this ICC course did not help to change these participants' attitudes towards ICLT.

When it came to the data obtained from the diaries and interviews, there was strong evidence of a positive change in EFL learners' attitudes towards ICLT. As for the data from the diaries, there were three sets of diary data which were generated from participants' reflections written during the course. It was noticeable that a large proportion of participants had positive attitudes towards ICLT as they believed in the importance, necessity and the roles of the integration of foreign cultures into English language teaching. For example, they made the following comments:

After this lesson, I understand more about different cultures, especially how people from different cultures have different concepts of beauty.... I think learning foreign cultures is very necessary and important in learning English (DT1/17).

It is necessary and important because I learn culture through learning English (DT1/39).

Many participants also added that learning about culture in English classes "should be a part of English language learning"

(DT1/24), and “it is necessary for everyone nowadays because we live in a multicultural world” (DT1/45).

Some participants, furthermore, said that including foreign cultures in English lessons could increase the learning mood in classrooms as teaching foreign cultures in English language classes “motivates learners to learn” (DT2/26), and “attracts learners’ attention more” (DT2/9) because the lessons were fun and enjoyable. They commented:

The integration of cultures into English lessons makes the lessons more interesting and enjoyable because we can discover interesting things of other cultures through learning English (DT1/23).

This is a very fun way to learn both English and culture because through learning English, we can learn more about other cultures; it is kind of boring if we learn English only (DT1/30).

Some participants, apart from the aforementioned, highlighted the value of learning about foreign cultures in English lessons. Two such examples are:

Learning different cultures helps us to be a good person and know how to communicate better with foreigners.... It helps us to know how to respect other people and avoid misunderstanding (DT2/44).

Learning about other cultures helps to eliminate the racial discrimination, understand more about other cultures, helps people to come closer, and equip me with more knowledge so that I will be able to live, study and work with foreigners, and travel to their countries (DT2/8).

Similarly, many participants mentioned that they could “understand more about the world not only the language itself” (DT3/24) when foreign cultures were integrated into language classes, and that learning about other cultures in English language classes could deepen their understanding of their own culture and help them to gain more intercultural knowledge, adjust their intercultural attitudes, raise their intercultural awareness, and improve their intercultural skills.

...it gives us information of cultural differences in concepts of beauty from different cultures... learning about other cultures can help to understand more about my own culture (DT3/36).

Because this topic widens my knowledge of concepts of beauty that I have not known before. Through such a topic, I know more about other cultures and I am confident when talking to foreigners.... When we understand about cultural differences, we tend to be friendlier to others. This makes the relationship among people better and better (DT1/39).

Some participants, nevertheless, did not comment on this issue in the diary data even though they spelled out their opinions on other issues, such as their ICC improvement and supportive factors and constraints on the development of learners’ ICC. This makes it difficult to determine their perceptions of ICLT.

Concerning the data from the interviews, the findings indicated similarity to the results obtained from the diary data. However, it was also found that a number of those interviewed shared the beliefs that it was necessary and interesting to learn different cultures in English lessons “because when we learn a language, it is advisable to learn its culture. Now English is an international language, it is better to learn many cultures” (L1), and “it is useful and applicable in

real life" (L5). They believed that "both language content and cultural content support each other: learning English through learning culture and vice versa" (L9).

Many other interviewees were eager to learn about culture included in English lessons although this type of lesson was new to them. One of many examples is:

This is very new to me, and it arouses my curiosity to learn more about both culture and language (L15).

Moreover, learning different cultures, apart from motivating learners and making them more active, could help them to understand some special features of other cultures such as slang and body language. Some interviewees stated:

The class is more active because of interesting lessons. It helps us to understand the underlying messages in other cultures such as body language (L14).

It motivates learners to learn more. We can learn some slang or body language from different cultures so that we can communicate better with foreigners (L15).

### 3.2 EFL Learners' ICC Development

#### *EFL Learners' Language Competence*

The language tests included two types: summative and formative tests. The former, which was administered twice at the beginning and at the end of the course, had the same content. The latter consisted of three quizzes, each of which was administered at the end of each ICC unit. Both the summative and the formative tests had a similar format and included a written and an oral test. In order to facilitate the data

analysis, the scores of both the summative and formative tests were converted into ten-score bands.

Table 3 EFL learners' LC – summative test (paired samples t-test)

	$\bar{X}$	t	Sig.	$\bar{X}$ (SD) (N=47)	
				Pre-test	Post-test
Written test	3.47	20.782	.000	4.82 (.01)	8.29 (.84)
Oral test	1.89	18.918	.000	5.91 (.66)	7.80 (.83)
Average	2.67	10.916	.000	5.37 (.65)	8.04 (.59)

$p \leq .05$

It can be seen from Table 3 that the results from the summative test reveal a significant difference ( $t = -10.916$ ;  $p = .000$ ) regarding the EFL learners' LC, which denotes that EFL learners' LC improved significantly after the thirteen-week course. With respect to the pre-test score, the average mean score was 5.37 (out of 10), in which the mean score of the pre-written test was 4.82 (out of 10), and that of the pre-oral test was 5.91 (out of 10). Concerning the post-test score, it is seen that the average mean score was 8.04 (out of 10), in which the mean scores of the post-written test and the post-oral test were 8.29 and 7.80 (out of 10), respectively. This meant that after the course the learners' oral score (speaking skills) had generally less improvement than their written scores (listening, reading, grammar, functional language, and vocabulary).

Two types of lessons were used in this course: ICC lessons and regular lessons. The former was the one into which IC was integrated, while the latter was the one in which only language content

was taught. There was one quiz taken at the end of each unit, hence learners had to take six quizzes (formative tests) in total, half of which were taken after three units of ICC. However, for the purpose of this study, only the results of the three quizzes taken after the ICC lessons were included in the analysis.

Table 4 EFL learners' LC – formative test

Items (N=47)	Quiz 1 $\bar{X}$ (SD)	Quiz 2 $\bar{X}$ (SD)	Quiz 3 $\bar{X}$ (SD)
Written test	8.09 (.91)	8.73 (.86)	8.64 (1.12)
Oral test	7.46 (.79)	8.10 (.77)	7.84 (.83)
Average	7.77 (.53)	8.42 (.58)	8.24 (.69)

It is worth pointing out, as shown in Table 4, that of the three quizzes, quiz 2 ( $\bar{X} = 8.42$ ) had the highest mean score, while quizzes 3 ( $\bar{X} = 8.24$ ) and quizzes 1 ( $\bar{X} = 7.77$ ) had the lowest mean scores. Similar to results of the summative tests, the results of the formative tests showed that the mean scores of the written test (quiz 1:  $\bar{X} = 8.09$ ; quiz 2:  $\bar{X} = 8.73$ ; quiz 3:  $\bar{X} = 8.64$ ) were slightly higher than those of the oral test (quiz 1:  $\bar{X} = 7.46$ ; quiz 2:  $\bar{X} = 8.10$ ; quiz 3:  $\bar{X} = 7.84$ ). Nevertheless, the scores of both written and oral tests had a similar increasing pattern.

Table 5 EFL learners' LC – Formative test (paired differences– paired samples t-test)

		$\bar{X}$	t	Sig.
Pair 1	Quiz 1 – Quiz 2	-.65	-6.044	.000
Pair 2	Quiz 1 – Quiz 3	-.47	-4.931	.000
Pair 3	Quiz 2 – Quiz 3	.18	-1.588	.119

$p \leq .05$

Furthermore, Table 5 shows that the mean score of quiz 1 was statistically different from that of quizzes 2 ( $t = -6.044$ ;  $p = .000$ ) and quizzes 3 ( $t = -4.931$ ;  $p = .000$ ), but there was no statistically significant difference in terms of the mean scores of quizzes 2 and quizzes 3 ( $t = 1.588$ ;  $p = .119$ ). Therefore, learners developed their LC during the intercultural language course. In other words, the learners' language performance improved as a result of the ICC course.

#### *EFL Learners' Intercultural Competence*

Similar to the language test, the IC test also consisted of two types of tests: summative and formative tests. The former was the pre-test and post-test taken at the beginning and at the end of the course, respectively, while the latter included three quizzes taken after the units of the ICC lessons. Both the summative and the formative tests had four main parts, namely, knowledge, attitudes, awareness, and skills.

Table 6 EFL learners' IC' pre-test and post-test (paired samples t-test)

	$\bar{X}$	t	Sig.	$\bar{X}$ (SD) (N=47)	
				Pre-test	Post-test
Knowledge	3.31	16.432	.000	4.60 (.74)	7.91 (.43)
Attitudes	2.87	13.544	.000	4.79 (.86)	7.66 (1.12)
Awareness	2.81	14.667	.000	4.64 (.82)	7.45 (.94)
Skills	2.92	16.477	.000	4.85 (.88)	7.77 (1.00)
Average	2.98	22.946	.000	4.72 (.43)	7.70 (.74)

$p \leq .05$

The results from the summative test, as shown in Table 6, indicate that there was a significant improvement in learners' IC ( $t = -24.4444$ ;  $p = 0.000$ ) after the thirteen-week course. In particular, it is worth pointing out that the pre-test mean score was nearly at an average level ( $\bar{X} = 4.72$  out of 10) although a very large majority (95.7%; see section 4.2) of the learners reported that they had never taken any intercultural course before. Moreover, it was found that at the beginning of the course the four components of IC, namely, intercultural skills ( $\bar{X} = 4.85$ ), intercultural attitudes ( $\bar{X} = 4.79$ ), intercultural awareness ( $\bar{X} = 4.64$ ), and intercultural knowledge ( $\bar{X} = 4.60$ ) were in descending order; yet, after the course, learners got the highest score in intercultural knowledge ( $\bar{X} = 7.91$ ), followed by the intercultural skills ( $\bar{X} = 7.77$ ), intercultural attitudes ( $\bar{X} = 7.66$ ), and intercultural awareness ( $\bar{X} = 7.45$ ). Overall, learners made a significant improvement in IC over the thirteen-week course, but their intercultural knowledge was the component that improved most ( $\bar{X} = 3.31$ ), while their intercultural awareness improved least ( $\bar{X} = 2.81$ ).

Table 7 EFL learners' IC – formative test

Items (N=47)	Quiz 1	Quiz 2	Quiz 3
	$\bar{X}$ (SD)	$\bar{X}$ (SD)	$\bar{X}$ (SD)
Knowledge	7.48 (.03)	7.74 (.90)	7.58 (.75)
Attitudes	6.98 (.66)	7.40 (.86)	7.24 (.53)
Awareness	6.24 (.78)	6.72 (.67)	6.68 (.67)
Skills	7.14 (.68)	7.53 (.76)	7.24 (.61)
Average	7.00 (.69)	7.35 (.90)	7.19 (.81)

Turning to the results from the formative tests (Table 7), it can be noted that there was a slight improvement in participants' IC (quiz 1:  $\bar{X} = 7.00$ ; quiz 2:  $\bar{X} = 7.35$ ; quiz 3:  $\bar{X} = 7.19$  out of 10). Similar to the summative tests, knowledge was the most significantly improved component (quiz 1:  $\bar{X} = 7.48$ ; quiz 2:  $\bar{X} = 7.74$ ; quiz 3:  $\bar{X} = 7.58$ ) of the four IC components, and awareness was the least improved (quiz 1:  $\bar{X} = 6.24$ ; quiz 2:  $\bar{X} = 6.72$ ; quiz 3:  $\bar{X} = 6.68$ ). Additionally, all four IC components had the same pattern of improvement through the three quizzes, i.e., the result of quiz 1 was the lowest and quiz 2 had the highest result. These results reveal that learners found intercultural knowledge and skills much easier to improve than intercultural attitudes and awareness.

The results in Table 8 indicate that there was no statistically significant difference in respect of the mean scores of the two paired quizzes: quiz 1 and quiz 3 ( $t = -1.282$ ;  $p = .206$ ); quiz 2 and quiz 3 ( $t = .898$ ;  $p = .374$ ), but the mean score of quiz 1 was statistically different from that of quiz 2 ( $t = -2.018$ ;  $p = .049$ ). This means that learners' IC development was relatively steady during the intercultural language course.

Table 8 *EFL learners' IC – formative test (paired differences– paired samples t-test)*

		$\bar{X}$	t	Sig.
Pair 1	Quiz 1 – Quiz 2	-.35	– 2.018	.049
Pair 2	Quiz 1 – Quiz 3	-.19	– 1.282	.206
Pair 3	Quiz 2 – Quiz 3	.16	.898	.374

$p \leq .05$

When LC and IC were combined for further analysis, it was noticed that both LC and IC had a similar pattern of increase over a period of three months. At the beginning of the course, the pre-test results (both IC and LC) were relatively high in comparison to the required level for the course. After the three-month course, as shown in Figure 1.1, the learners' level of ICC had improved despite the limited number of hours of study for intercultural language. It can be further seen that there was a rapid increase in terms of the mean scores (both IC and LC) between the pre-test and quiz 1, and then there was a gradual development in learners' ICC towards the end of the course.

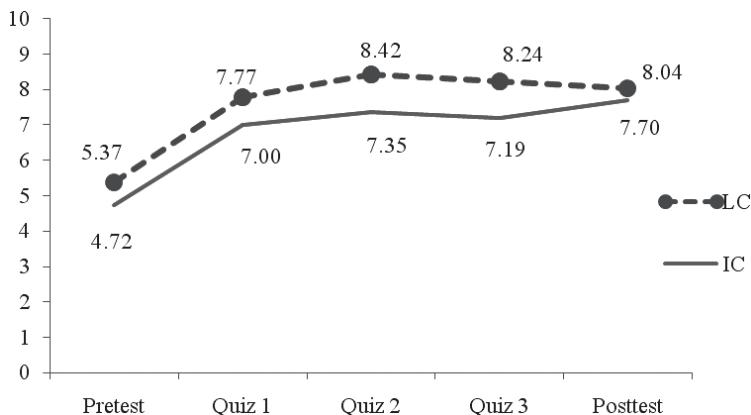


Figure 1 EFL learners' ICC

Note. LC: Language competence; IC: Intercultural competence

In order to triangulate the findings as well as to obtain in-depth information from the quantitative data analysis, the qualitative data from the interview was also taken into account. The findings revealed that the EFL learners' ICC gradually changed positively over the course.

A number of interviewees (26.7%) revealed that although they had spent years learning English previously, their English was not really at a high level due to their dislike of this subject in high school. When they took this course, albeit their IC markedly improved, they felt that their English had not improved much. However, their improvement in English met the level required by the course objectives.

In this course, I like learning about other cultures, and it helps to me learn English as well as other cultures although my English is improved a little, but I know more about other cultures (L3).

When I was at high school, I did not want to study English much. Therefore, I was not really good at English. Now my English is still weak, but I can feel my English is improved, especially my knowledge of different cultures (L7).

Some also said that their IC improved more than their LC because they paid more attention to the cultural content while studying in the course.

I prefer cultural content to English, so I know more about cultures. My English is developed a little (L4).

In addition to this, one interviewee commented that when in high school, she was unaware as to whether or not it was necessary to learn cultures when learning English. She also was not in favor of learning English. Nevertheless, when she came aboard this course, she realized that it helped change her attitudes towards learning English as well as to improve her ICC.

I used to learn English in order to pass English exams, so I did not pay attention much to language skills. Besides, I did not care whether I should learn cultures when learning English or not. However, during this course I realized that it was interesting to learn cultures through learning English. Consequently, I feel that my ICC is improved quite a lot (L5).

Meanwhile, many others (60.0%) confirmed that they had developed both their LC and IC over the course. Moreover, they expressed their hope that they would be able to have similar courses in the future as they thought that using English appropriately was important for their jobs. Just one of many examples is as follows:

After this course, my English is better and I know more about other cultures. I hope that there will be more similar courses because it is very important for me to know and use English in an appropriate way. English is important for my job (L14).

Regarding the specific elements of IC, a considerable number of those interviewed reported that their intercultural knowledge improved a lot. Two of them said:

I know different things about concepts of beauty, foods and drinks and body languages of different cultures (L2).

...my understanding other cultures is better as I know more about other cultures and my own (L15).

They additionally commented that their intercultural attitudes and awareness were positively changed. One shared:

...my attitudes toward other cultures have been adjusted because I understand more about other cultures, especially cultural difference (L11).

Their intercultural skills were also remarkably developed. They reported that they knew how to avoid cultural misunderstanding and conflict, as they had discovered in the different strategies for IC, and now knew how to use English more effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations.

...I know how to use appropriate English in different situations...I know how to avoid cultural misunderstanding (L6).

...I know how to communicate well when I meet them. I know how to avoid conflict or at least I know some

strategies when talking to foreigners when I first meet them (L8).

...I know how to use English effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations. I know different strategies for IC (L9).

It was noticeable, on the other hand, that quite a small number (13.3%) of those interviewed stated that although this type of course was of interest, they would have preferred to learn English rather than culture since their English language skills were still weak. They wanted to focus more on their grammar, and that is why their IC had not improved much. The most obvious example of this view is:

To me, it is very interesting to learn both culture and English in English lessons, but I don't want to spend much time on learning different cultures because my English is not very good. I want to improve my English grammar and skills. Therefore, after this course I do not feel much improvement in my IC (L10).

#### 4. Discussion

The findings revealed that the EFL learners' attitudes towards ICLT were positive after a thirteen-week course as they were aware of ICC and the importance of the ICC, and believed in the important roles of ICLT. In other words, learners understood what ICC was, what it was for, and how LC and IC are composed (intercultural knowledge, attitudes, skills, and awareness). This may be the result of the teacher's awareness-raising teaching strategies through the training sessions, which are a crucial aspect of ICC instruction because learner awareness is one of the necessary conditions for the learning process to take place

(e.g., Robinson, 2003; Schmidt, 1995). Through a variety of teaching and learning activities (e.g., orientation, role-plays, discussions, mini-projects), learners were engaged in different situations in which ICC was involved. Learners' awareness of the importance of ICC, as a consequence, accumulated over the course of three months. Furthermore, many learners had experienced cultural differences before as around one third (34%) of learners had been abroad. EFL learners, therefore, realized that English "is an efficient and effective tool in the process of global integration and development" (Vietnam National Assembly, 1998, 2005, 2009), and being interculturally communicatively competent is critically important for them in order to 'function effectively and appropriately with people from another language culture backgrounds in multicultural contexts' (e.g., Bennett & Bennett, 2004; Byram, 1997; Fantini, 2001; Lustig & Koester, 2003; Sinicrope, Norris & Watanabe, 2007). This was one of the factors that motivated learners to study intercultural content in English language classes and helped them to become successful ICC learners.

The EFL learners were further seen to believe that they could improve their intercultural communication through the ICC training course in terms of intercultural knowledge, attitudes, awareness, and skills, apart from language proficiency. This may be due to learners' awareness of the fact that the ICC is one of the key competences in the twenty-first century (e.g., Deardorff, 2006; Delors, 1996; UNESCO, 2006). Moreover, learners may believe that learning about other cultures could help them to understand more about their own culture and be aware of cultural differences, because in language classes where intercultural understanding is one of the goals, learners become more aware of their own culture and more knowledgeable about foreign cultures (Chastain, 1988).

Some of the learners were, nevertheless, not convinced of the value of incorporating intercultural content into the English language classes. They did, as a result, not believe that learning different cultures whilst learning the English language would widen their intercultural knowledge, adjust their intercultural attitudes, raise their intercultural awareness, and improve their intercultural skills. It is difficult to explain this result, but it may be that those EFL learners were not interested in learning cultures in English language classes due to their poor English language proficiency, hence they only wanted to focus on learning English. Another possible explanation for this might be that those learners believed that 'English is now an international language, so such language belongs to no single culture, then it would seem that it is not necessary for language learners to acquire knowledge about the culture of those who speak it' (McKay, 2000, p. 7). However, those EFL learners who only develop their English language proficiency may use English inappropriately which could lead to culture shock, misunderstandings, and communication breakdowns in multi-cultural situations due to their lack of IC.

The study also indicated that learners' LC and IC, in general, developed in a similar pattern. There was a rapid improvement from the starting point (pre-test) to quiz 1. This indicates a dramatic change in learners' ICC before the course and after the first unit of ICC. Learners' LC and IC development then fluctuated relatively often toward the end of the course. Another important point is that the findings show that the mean score of learners' IC ( $\bar{X} = 2.98$ ) between the pre-test and the post-test was higher than that of their LC ( $\bar{X} = 2.67$ ). In other words, learners made slightly more progress in IC than they did in LC. This may be due to the fact that learners were motivated to focus more on the learning of intercultural content as this type of intercultural language course was new to them. These results match those of previous studies (e.g., O'Neil, 2008; Shoman, 2011; Gómez,

2012; Ottoson, 2013). Shoman (2011) conducted a study using a framework to develop ICC and the proficiency of advanced learners of Arabic, and found that the proposed linguacultural framework not only developed learners' abilities to recognize as well as produce Arabic varieties used in Egypt but also fostered their IC abilities (knowledge, attitude, awareness, and skills). In another context O'Neil (2008) conducted research on fostering learners' IC by implementing an interactional virtual elementary classroom, and found that learners developed their LC, specifically their writing skills through the course, and that there were positive changes in learners' IC. One of the most important elements found to facilitate the participants' ICC development in these two studies was their motivation to learn cultural content through language content and vice versa. Hence, it can be noted that motivation plays a pivotal role in fostering learners' ICC enhancement.

Specifically, it was seen that learners' oral scores (speaking skill) did not improve as much as their written scores (listening, reading, grammar, functional languages, and vocabulary) by the end of the course. The results, however, also showed that learners' speaking skills at the beginning of the course were relatively good in comparison with the required level for the course. It may be understood from this that learners' speaking skills which were at a high level did not develop much after the course because it took a long time for learners to improve their speaking skills. Also, some learners found speaking skills the most difficult to develop among the four macro skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) as pointed by many scholars (e.g., Pawlak, Waniek-Klimczak, & Majer, 2011; Waniek-Klimczak & Klimczak, 2008). Therefore, it can be concluded that developing learners' speaking skills when those skills are already at a high level is a difficult and time consuming task.

With respect to the four IC components (intercultural knowledge, attitudes, awareness, and skills), the findings indicated that the order of improvement of learners' IC components was intercultural knowledge, skills, attitudes, and awareness. This means that the most significantly improved IC component was intercultural knowledge whilst the least significantly improved was intercultural awareness. It could be because intercultural knowledge is easier to acquire than the other IC components. Learners, thus, developed their intercultural knowledge most and their intercultural awareness least.

## 5. Conclusion

Since learner awareness clearly plays a significant role in the ICC learning processes, it can provide a threshold for changing learners' attitudes towards ICLT, i.e., when learners' awareness of the construct of ICC and its importance is raised, their attitudes towards ICLT will be changed. Besides, within the intercultural communicative language course, learners' LC and IC are developed in a similar pattern. This proves that learners can learn language content through learning intercultural content, and vice versa. Additionally, learners' ICC development reflected the four pillars (1. *learning to know*: intercultural knowledge; 2. *learning to do*: intercultural skills; 3. *learning to live together*: intercultural attitudes; and 4. *learning to be*: intercultural awareness) of education for the twenty-first century as identified by the International Commission on Education for the Twenty-First Century (Delors, 1996) and developed as four distinct aims of intercultural education and incorporated in the guidelines on international education suggested by UNESCO (UNESCO, 2006).

Therefore, in order to foster the implementation of ICLT in the Vietnamese context and other similar contexts, there should be a shift from the current teaching approach to an intercultural language

approach. First, teachers should be assisted to gradually acknowledge the importance of integrating intercultural content into standard English language classes and understand the underlying reasons for changing their current teaching approach to the intercultural language approach, the purpose for doing so and the benefits this could bring. Second, EFL learners should be both intrinsically and extrinsically motivated so that they can develop an interest for and a positive attitude towards intercultural communicative language learning. Moreover, as the acquisition process of ICC seems to be a matter of life-long learning, learners should be encouraged and motivated to be autonomous learners. Third, the learning materials chosen for ICLT should promote learners' ICC, and the content of the learning materials should be authentic, up-to-date, informative, and appropriate for the learners' age group and interests. As noted that in the ASEAN context, English is an official language for business, so it is advisable that English textbooks used in ASEAN countries be developed based on the importance of intercultural language education. Intercultural content in new English textbooks should be explicitly and permanently embedded, and should focus not only on the cultures from English speaking countries, but also those of other cultures around the world, with particularly strong emphasis on the diverse cultures of the ASEAN community in terms of visible or tangible cultural content (e.g., food, costumes, places, artifacts) and invisible or intangible cultural content (e.g., values, attitudes, norms of behavior). These new English textbooks should also take into equal account general culture (i.e., a broad understanding of generalizability emerging from cross-cultural comparisons that illuminate human similarities amid their cultural diversity) and culture-specific content (i.e., a deep understanding of one cultural context through detailed cultural knowledge). Finally, material designers should pay attention to the types of tasks/activities for ICLT that are based on a learner-centered approach, the lesson

goals and objectives of which curriculum designers should define clearly, so that teachers may allot an appropriate amount of time for each learning task/activity and also deliver adequate content for the different types of learning tasks/activities in each lesson.

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