



Factors influencing the Mandarin teachers' intercultural teaching beliefs and practices

Fong Peng Chew^{a,*}, Shen Min^{a,†}, Teng Teng Yap^{b,†}

^a Department of Language & Literacy Education, Faculty of Education, University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur 50603, Malaysia

^b Department of Malaysian Languages & Applied Linguistics, Faculty of Languages & Linguistics, University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur 50603, Malaysia

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Abstract

Intercultural communicative competence (ICC) has become an essential objective in foreign language education. Accordingly, language teachers are required to integrate ICC in classroom teaching. It is necessary to identify critical factors contributing to teachers' teaching beliefs and practices about the cultivation of ICC in MFL classes to provide adequate training to them. This study, therefore, examined Bruneian Mandarin as a Foreign Language teachers' intercultural teaching beliefs and practices and explored factors that could contribute to individual differences among them. A quantitative research design was adopted, wherein an online survey consisting of 55 questions concerning intercultural aspects of MFL teaching was distributed to 30 Bruneian MFL school teachers. Both descriptive and inferential statistics were employed to analyze the data. The results revealed an average intercultural teaching profile among the MFL teachers. In addition, the study found that educational levels showed significant differences among the teachers.

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Introduction

With the rapid growth of global communication and international interactions, intercultural communicative competence (ICC) that facilitates effective and appropriate communication across borders has become essential in foreign language education. Particularly, in Mandarin as a foreign language (MFL) education, the importance of ICC has become more prominent than ever in line with the rise of Chinese investment globally.

In Brunei, the role of Mandarin in education has expanded from a heritage language to a foreign language (Ho, 2009) to cope with the demands in the human resources market. In the past two decades, on top of the traditional Chinese schools in the country, all international schools, three government-owned schools, and some private schools and universities started to offer MFL to students from various ethnic groups.

In recent years, the number of MFL students in Brunei has proliferated. They are eager and required to operate between their own and the Mandarin languages to communicate in a multilingual and multicultural environment in Brunei and beyond. In this sense, ICC has become an immediate need in Bruneian MFL classrooms. Consequently, the teachers are obligated to help their students develop affectively, practically as much as intellectually, to achieve ICC (Byram & Wagner, 2018).

* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: fpchew@um.edu.my (F. P. Chew).

† Co-first authors.

E-mail address: min.shen@ubd.edu.bn (S. Min).

E-mail address: yaptengteng@um.edu.my (T. T. Yap).

However, a national curriculum of Mandarin with a focus on ICC is yet to be developed in Brunei. A clear roadmap to intercultural Mandarin teaching is also hard to find in literature. MFL teachers in the country urgently need theoretical and practical guidance on integrating interculturality into their factual teaching practices, that is, to go beyond explanation of the canonical theories and lead the teachers into a rationale for cultivating MFL learners' ICC in their classes. Therefore, it is necessary to revisit and clarify ICC-related theories and claims in a MFL context, to identify appropriate teaching objectives and strategies to achieve meaningful intercultural language teaching in MFL classes. However, most studies in the field of intercultural and language education have only focused on English as a foreign language education and are mostly based on empirical data collected from Western countries; discussions on intercultural matters in MFL education are limited.

Previous studies have suggested that not only Bruneian teachers of MFL but also foreign language teachers in general face challenges in enacting intercultural ideas in teaching (e.g., Phipps & Borg, 2009; Wanner, 2021). When teachers are the key brokers to link the theories of ICC and actual classroom activities (Young & Sachdev, 2011), it is necessary to understand the teachers' teaching beliefs and practices in terms of key factors that could impact the two, hence to provide adequate training to them. Ample empirical studies have shown that multiple factors, including teaching experience (Moye, 2021), school education (Gilakjani & Sabouri, 2017; Wang et al., 2020), professional or higher education (Chau & Truong, 2019); and contextual factors including social, psychological, cultural, and environmental realities (Bagheri & East, 2021; Wach & Monroy, 2019) could inform teachers' perceptions of teaching and learning, hence impact their instructional behaviors. However, to what extent each factor contributes to teachers' beliefs and practices remains unclear. Thus, the question is what is it that makes teachers more or less effective with intercultural language teaching? This question coupled with the lack of research on teachers' beliefs in cultivating ICC in a MFL context, justify the need for further studies. Therefore, this study sought to understand Bruneian MFL teachers' intercultural teaching profile and explore the factors that could contribute to differences among them. Accordingly, three research questions were developed:

RQ1: What are the beliefs and views of MFL teachers on intercultural communicative competence (ICC) in their teaching?

RQ2: What are the classroom teaching practices of MFL teachers on ICC?

RQ3: Do the beliefs and teaching practices of MFL teachers differ based on their age, educational level, and teaching experience?

Three null hypotheses were developed based on Research Question 3 as below:

H_{01} = The beliefs and teaching practices of MFL teachers do not differ based on MFL teachers' age.

H_{02} = The beliefs and teaching practices of MFL teachers do not differ based on MFL teachers' teaching experience.

H_{03} = The beliefs and teaching practices of MFL teachers do not differ based on MFL teachers' educational level.

Literature Review

Concepts and Principles

After the concept of culture in language teaching was first raised in the 1960s (Brooks, 1964), scholars and language educators have investigated cultural components involved in language use. To date, they have generally agreed on the significant linkage between language and culture (Brown, 2000) as both decide the efficiency of communication (Saville-Troike, 2021). Cultural components in communication are often classified as Big C and little c cultures in the literature. Little c culture is often subtle, which refers to behavior culture associated with daily human life that includes culturally-influenced beliefs, perspectives, and perceptions, or the native speakers' beliefs, values, and ways of thinking (Kramsch, 2015). In contrast, Big C Culture involves mostly visible cultural achievement or refinement (Lussier, 2011), such as holidays, art, architecture, and heritage of civilization.

With the rapid growth of cross-culture communications in recent decades, culture teaching in foreign language classrooms has shifted to an intercultural focus (Deardorff & Jones, 2012). Intercultural competence has been defined as an essential educational objective in international language educational guidelines, including The National Standard for Foreign Language Learning (NSFLL) in the 21st Century (American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages [ACTFL], 2017), the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment (CEFRL) (Council of Europe, 2001), and the International Curriculum for Chinese Language Education (ICCLE) (Office of Chinese Language Council International, 2014) of China. Accordingly, cultural components have moved from Big C culture to little c culture (Flewelling, 1994). Meanwhile, cultivating learners' ICC

has become essential in foreign language classes. The term ICC was coined by Byram (1997) by putting two phrases together—communicative competence (CC) and intercultural competence (IC). The former had become entrenched in the aim of foreign language learning in the last century but was challenged through globalization (Alptekin, 2002). The latter addresses intercultural communication, which is about the appropriateness of interactions. Therefore, ICC combines the two as abilities and competencies to facilitate effective and appropriate communication in cross-culture contexts.

Byram (1997; 2020) proposed an ICC development model that is highly relevant to foreign language education. Five interrelated components, known as *savoirs*, constitute Byram's (1997; 2020) model: attitude, knowledge, skills to interpret and relate, skills to discover and interact, and critical cultural awareness. In this model, attitude is about the foreign language speakers' way of thinking or feeling about cultural differences and intercultural conflicts; knowledge is about knowing how to communicate according to the social culture; skills refer to communicative skills and skills of cultural interpreting; critical cultural awareness was about abilities to evaluate cultural phenomena critically.

Accordingly, Byram (1997; 2020) suggested an intercultural teaching profile, which has a consensus among foreign language educators. According to Byram et al., (2002), teachers shall play an essential role in involving learners in discussions about their opinions and examining stereotypes and biases, hence challenging them by presenting intercultural viewpoints.

Teaching Beliefs and Practices

A literature review showed that several previous studies about teachers' teaching beliefs and practices of intercultural language teaching could be relevant to this study (e.g., Banjongjit & Boonmoh, 2018; Sercu, 2005; Yang, 2019). Some similarities were found in these studies. First, what teachers think and do were often studied in parallel. This has become common practice as teachers' belief is about the relationship between teachers' mental constructs and what they practically do (Borg, 2003). Second, teachers' beliefs and practices are mutually informed (Borg, 2003; Ma & Gao, 2017). Moreover, teachers generally have good intentions to integrate ICC into teaching, but they often face challenges in enacting intercultural teaching ideas. Their ICC aspects of teaching beliefs and practices are always mismatched (e.g., Phipps & Borg, 2009; Wanner, 2021).

It was generally proven that an average intercultural teaching profile could be found among the FL teachers (Sercu, 2005). They generally have good perceptions of

intercultural teaching objectives (Banjongjit & Boonmoh, 2018; Brunsmeier, 2017; Petosi & Ioannis, 2020). Teachers from a Western background often engage students in activities that promote learner autonomy (Sercu, 2005; Tyabaev et al., 2015). In contrast, other research on teachers from a Chinese background showed that the teachers often led the class activities and paid great attention to students' linguistics learning.

In addition, factors contributing to teachers' ICC teaching practices have been explored in previous studies. These contributing factors can be generally categorized into three groups: (1) experiences, mostly teaching experience (Moye, 2021); (2) education, school education (Gilakjani and Sabouri., 2017; Wang et al., 2020) and professional education (Chau & Truong, 2019); and (3) contextual factors including social, psychological, cultural, and environmental realities (Bagheri & East, 2021; Wach & Monroy, 2019). It was found that these factors could influence foreign language teachers' inception of teaching and learning, hence, influence their behaviors.

Conceptual Framework of the Study

Based on the comprehensive literature review related to intercultural language teaching and teachers' beliefs and practices reported above, the study's conceptual framework was found (Figure 1). The understanding of an envisaged intercultural language teaching profile was informed mostly by Byram's (1997; 2020) ICC model and concepts and claims about intercultural competence development (e.g., Byram et al., 2002; Kramsch, 2015). It was found that a teachers' intercultural language teaching profile could be examined by exploring teachers' beliefs about ICC-related teaching objectives, cultural components, and addressing ICC in MFL classes. In addition, an intercultural language teaching profile shall delineate teachers' teaching practices in terms of cultural topics and culturally focused activities in classes.

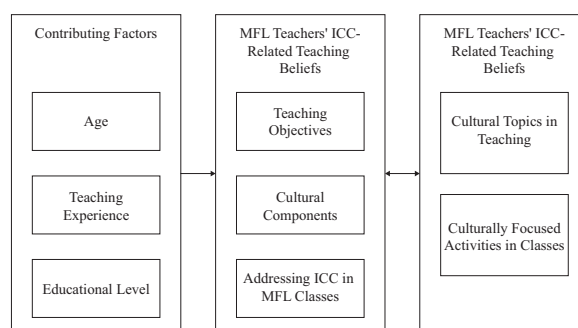


Figure 1 Conceptual Framework of the Study

Moreover, based on the concepts, ideas, and findings reported in previous studies, the researchers identified that teaching experience, education, and social and psychological realities are the mostly advocated factors that could impact language teachers' intercultural teaching profile. Accordingly, the researchers identified some variables that might contribute to the differences among the teachers, if there are any. These variables included teaching experience and educational level. In addition, age was included as a variable because it could, to a certain extent, reflect a particular group of people's consensuses of attitudes and beliefs, namely the social and psychological realities. Hence, these items were included in the survey.

Methodology

A quantitative research design was employed. An online survey was developed based on the literature review to collect the MFL teachers' personal background as well as their views and self-reported practices on teaching ICC in Mandarin classes.

Participants

A nationwide survey was distributed to in-service classroom teachers who teach MFL classes at local schools in Brunei. The overall population was estimated to be 33 teachers based on Krecjie and Morgan (1971). The teachers who participated in the survey were selected on a voluntary basis, and 30 teachers completed the survey. Therefore, the sample size achieved effective representativeness as it involved the majority of the MFL teachers' population.

All survey respondents were native Chinese speakers, with female teachers (26 respondents or 86.7%) surpassing male teachers (4 respondents or 13.3%), in the age range from 20 to 50, presenting an even distribution of age classes. Eighteen (60%) respondents had teaching experience of 10 years, while six respondents had less than two years. Twelve (40%) of the respondents held a diploma as the highest degree, while the rest held Bachelor's (8 respondents or 26.7%) or Master's (10 respondents or 33.3%) degrees, respectively. All the respondents had a term of overseas working or living experiences. Most of the respondents (18 respondents or 60%) had over ten years of overseas experience, while six (20%) had overseas experience shorter than two years.

Instrument of Study

A *Tencent Questionnaire*® online survey in the Chinese language was employed. All questions about intercultural teaching were presented in statement form on a 5-point Likert scale. The survey consisted of 55 questions that were divided into three sections:

1. Section A, about personal information of the survey respondents (6 items), including age, years of teaching experience, and highest degree.

2. Section B, about beliefs in ICC aspects of MFL teaching (31 items), focusing on ICC-related teaching objectives and cultural components, and teachers' views on addressing ICC in MFL classes;

3. Section C, about ICC-related teaching practices (18 items), focusing on two significant dimensions of ICC teaching: cultural teaching topics and activities that have been included in MFL classes.

Survey items in Section A were taken from the literature review findings stated above. In addition, survey items in Section B were derived from Byram's (1997, 2020) ICC model and canonical claims about intercultural foreign language education (e.g., Byram et al., 2002), with necessary rephrasing made concerning their relevance to the research context and its expressiveness in the Chinese language. Moreover, survey items about cultural topics and activities, in Section C, were identified based on the findings of previous studies about intercultural education in foreign language programs.

Survey questions were developed through a careful process. They were first drafted based on the literature review findings. Afterwards, the researchers invited four experienced academicians in the field of foreign language education to review the survey questions to determine if they were relevant, reasonable, and clear. To seek information-rich feedback, the researchers set up expert selection criteria that included good knowledge in intercultural language education and being knowledgeable about Chinese and Bruneian local cultures besides having teaching experience of more than five years. Then the survey was piloted with 30 MFL teachers outside the research site. The value for Cronbach's Alpha for the survey was $\alpha = .888$, which confirmed the survey was reliable. After that, the link to survey on *Tencent Questionnaire*® was administrated to the research participants ($N = 30$) through their school admins and heads of teachers.

Data Analysis

After survey responses were collected, the researchers first employed descriptive statistics in the SPSS software

more divergent. Although the results showed a general tendency that more MFL teachers agreed with the statement, a majority (40%) of the respondents were unsure about this matter, while the rest had very differing opinions.

Classroom Teaching Practices of MFL Teachers on ICC

Table 2 shows the survey respondents preferred cultural topics in their classes, among which, the most frequent included daily routine ($M = 4.27$, $SD = .884$), traditions ($M = 3.87$, $SD = .990$), cultural differences ($M = 3.60$, $SD = 1.056$), and educational system ($M = 3.43$, $SD = 1.223$). Meanwhile, these topics' popularity gained consensus among the respondents. More than half of them reported that they either very frequently or frequently included these topics, while only 3.3 percent to 6.7 percent of them very rarely touched these topics. The least favorable topics included ethnic and social groups ($M = 2.93$, $SD = 1.230$), values and beliefs ($M = 2.77$, $SD = 1.006$), and religions ($M = 2.37$, $SD = 1.299$). More than 60 percent of the respondents rarely touched the topic of religion, while only 10 percent of them very frequently included this topic in teaching. The respondents' inclusion of other cultural topics, such as technology, literature, and history, was uncertain. More than 30 percent of the respondents reported being unsure about these topics.

More than 30 percent of the respondents reported being unsure about these topics.

[illegible]

Table 2 Frequency of Cultural Topics Taught in MFL Classes ($N = 30$)

[illegible]

The teachers also reported the frequency of culturally focused activities in their classes (Table 3). The results were widely divergent among the teachers. Although there was a general tendency that the teachers often adopt teacher-led teaching activities such as cultural illustration ($M = 3.97$, $SD = 0.850$), direct

presentation ($M = 3.57$, $SD = 1.135$) than activities that require students' independent abilities ($M = 3.23$, $SD = 1.278$) and explorative skills ($M = 3.03$, $SD = 1.278$ & $M = 2.83$, $SD = 1.487$), the teachers generally reported differing culture-focused activates in their practices.

Table 3 Frequency of Culturally Focused Activities in MFL Classes ($N = 30$)

Order	Class Activities	VR	R	N	F	VF	M	SD
1	Use technology (e.g., multimedia, learning software, etc.) to illustrate a cultural theme.	0 (0%)	2 (6.7%)	5 (16.7%)	15 (50%)	8 (26.7%)	3.97	0.850
2	Tell students my understanding of Chinese culture or share my personal experiences with them.	3 (10%)	1 (3.3%)	7 (23.3%)	14 (46.7%)	5 (16.7%)	3.57	1.135
3	Divide students into groups to discuss a cultural topic.	4 (13.3%)	1 (3.3%)	10 (33.3%)	7 (23.3%)	8 (26.7%)	3.47	1.306
4	Ask students to compare Brunei culture with Chinese culture on one topic.	1 (3.3%)	5 (16.7%)	8 (26.7%)	12 (40%)	4 (13.3%)	3.43	1.040
5	Students are required to explore cultural phenomena independently.	4 (13.3%)	4 (13.3%)	8 (26.7%)	9 (30%)	5 (16.7%)	3.23	1.278
6	Ask the students to discuss the possible misunderstandings between Bruneian and Chinese people and explain the reasons.	6 (20%)	3 (10%)	7 (23.3%)	9 (30%)	5 (16.7%)	3.13	1.383
7	Ask students to explore the values, beliefs, and ideological perspectives implied in the dialogue/event/passage.	5 (16.7%)	6 (20%)	7 (23.3%)	7 (23.3%)	5 (16.7%)	3.03	1.351
8	Ask students to explore the cultural aspects of the text.	8 (26.7%)	6 (20%)	4 (13.3%)	7 (23.3%)	5 (16.7%)	2.83	1.487
Average Mean and SD							3.33	1.23

Difference of MFL Teachers' Beliefs and Teaching Practices based on Age, Teaching experience, and Educational Level

This study examined effects of various factors, including age, years of teaching experience, and educational level, on MFL teachers' beliefs and practices about teaching ICC by identifying the differences that these factors could make among the teachers. Inferential statistics, including one-way ANOVA and independent sample *t*-test were employed according to the nature of the sample.

A one-way ANOVA test was performed to compare the effect of age on the MFL teachers' beliefs about ICC related teaching objective, ICC components, addressing ICC in MFL classes, and inclusion of ICC topics and culturally focused activities in their teaching practices (Table 4). The results revealed that there was no statistically significant difference in these variables between the groups of teachers at a $p < .05$ level. Similarly, no significant

difference was found in a one-way ANOVA that was used to compare the effect of years of teaching experience on the MFL teachers' beliefs and practices (Table 5). Therefore, the null hypotheses 1 and 2 were supported that the beliefs and teaching practices of MFL teachers do not differ based on their age and years of teaching.

In terms of educational level, a significant result was found in a *t*-test that was employed to compare the mean scores between MFL teachers of undergraduate ($N=13$) and postgraduate ($N=17$) degrees (Table 6). The results indicated a significant difference between the undergraduate ($N=13$) and postgraduate ($N=17$) teachers about culturally focused teaching activities, with a large effect size at $t(28) = 2.620$, $p = .014$, Cohen's $d = .945$. Therefore, the null hypothesis 3 was rejected, concluding that MFL teachers' beliefs and teaching practices of MFL teachers differ based on their educational level especially for Inclusion of culturally focused activities in teaching.

Table 4 Results of One-Way ANOVA on Age Group

Dependent Variable	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	20–30 years (<i>N</i> = 8)		31–40 years (<i>N</i> = 12)		41+ years (<i>N</i> = 10)	
			<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Beliefs on ICC related teaching objectives	0.932	.406	4.25	0.469	4.13	0.458	4.41	0.528
Beliefs on ICC components	0.198	.821	4.44	0.456	4.33	0.363	4.33	0.474
Beliefs on addressing ICC in MFL classes	1.282	.294	3.98	0.449	4.00	0.624	4.32	0.440
Inclusion of ICC topics in teaching	0.478	.625	3.50	0.553	3.13	0.982	3.21	0.889
Inclusion of culturally focused activities in teaching	0.791	.464	3.70	0.940	3.26	1.048	3.13	0.995

Note: * $p < .05$.

Table 5 Results of One-Way ANOVA on Years of Teaching Experience

Dependent Variable	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	1–5 Years (<i>N</i> = 11)		6–10 Years (<i>N</i> = 9)		11+Years (<i>N</i> = 10)	
			<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Beliefs on ICC related teaching objectives	1.460	.250	4.33	0.463	4.40	0.490	4.33	0.463
Beliefs on ICC components	1.904	.168	4.58	0.384	4.30	0.478	4.58	0.384
Beliefs on addressing ICC in MFL classes	2.632	.090	4.13	0.570	4.35	0.412	4.13	0.570
Inclusion of ICC topics in teaching	0.147	.864	3.26	0.974	3.36	0.824	3.26	0.975
Inclusion of culturally focused activities in teaching	0.325	.725	3.53	1.162	3.35	1.136	3.53	1.162

Note: * $p < .05$.

Table 6 *T*-test Results Comparing Undergraduate and Postgraduate Educational Level Groups on ICC Teaching Objectives and Practices

Dependent Variables	Education Level	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Beliefs on ICC related teaching objectives	U	4.29	0.559	0.278	.783
	P	4.24	0.434		
Beliefs on ICC components	U	4.26	0.380	-1.188	.245
	P	4.44	0.435		
Beliefs on addressing ICC in MFL classes	U	4.15	0.525	0.480	.635
	P	4.06	0.546		
Inclusion of ICC topics in teaching	U	2.95	1.073	-1.670	.114
	P	3.49	.535		
Inclusion of culturally focused activities in teaching	U	2.84	1.048	-2.620	.014*
	P	4.15	.525		

Note: * $p < .05$.

Discussion

Beliefs and Views of MFL teachers on Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) in Their Teaching

This research aimed to investigate the impact of educational level on MFL teachers' intercultural teaching beliefs and practices. By employing descriptive statistics, the study showed that the MFL teachers generally have viewed ICC teaching in a positive light, but their knowledge about ICC teaching seemed inadequate in terms of what cultural components to include and the role of linguistic competence in ICC development.

According to the envisaged intercultural teaching profile in literature (e.g., Arasaratnam, 2016; Nardon, 2019; Ting-Toomey, 2017), teachers need to be aware that cultural competence is different from intercultural competence, as competence in one does not signify competence in another. In this sense, the teaching of interculturality shall include both target and the learners' own cultures. The MFL teachers' neglect of the students' own culture inevitably provide negative impacts on the quality of intercultural language teaching.

Regarding the role of linguistic competence, disputation was found in the literature. Although scholars have generally accepted the significant positive relationship between the level of intercultural competence and foreign language acquisition, they are still searching for a definition of the role that language plays in intercultural competence. Nevertheless, according to Byram's (1997, 2020) ICC model, the development of ICC does not necessarily build upon language proficiency. Contrariwise, good linguistic competencies do not guarantee a higher-level ICC. The divergence among the MFL teachers' views on this matter could decide whether and when they would introduce ICC to the students and result in differing teaching approaches.

Classroom Teaching Practices of MFL Teachers on ICC

Descriptive statistics were also employed to understand the MFL teachers' intercultural teaching practices. The results revealed that the teachers were comfortable or sufficiently well equipped with knowledge about Big C Culture but reluctant to deal with topics about little c culture. In addition, the teachers were favorably disposed towards teaching "easy to understand" topics but might not have been convinced that they shall discuss complex topics that may require students' higher-level cognition, such as history, politics, and most Chinese traditional values and

social norms that are novel to their students. Accordingly, the MFL teachers reported in the survey that they often use teacher-led and direct instructions to introduce cultural information. In contrast, they seemed hesitant about engaging students in activities that require independent exploration, evaluation, and analysis, namely higher-order cognitive skills.

This general tendency suggested inconsistency between the MFL teachers' beliefs and practices on ICC teaching in Mandarin classes. As proposed by language educators and scholars (e.g., Byram, 1997; 2020; Seelye, 1993; Sercu, 2005), the development of intercultural competence requires abilities in little c culture that explains the interlocutors' behaviors and mindsets. In fact, prior to the proposal of the intercultural language teaching approach, the cultural teaching classes have already shown a shift from Big C to little c culture in line with the communicative language teaching approach from the 1960s (Flewelling, 1994; Morain, 1983). Also, Byram (1997; 2020) highlighted critical cultural awareness and intercultural skills of discovery, interpreting, and relating as essential components in ICC development. The MFL teachers' neglect of little c culture and intercultural skills undoubtedly could result in an unsatisfactory intercultural teaching profile that hinders students' ICC development.

Difference of Beliefs and Teaching Practices of MFL Teachers based on Educational Level

Among various variables, this study only identified educational level as a factor that could affect teachers' practices through inferential statistics; the MFL teachers who had a postgraduate degree differed from those who did not. It seems that a postgraduate degree, other than age and teaching experience made significant differences in inclusion of culturally focused activities in teaching compared to the undergraduate teachers.

Although the results were different from previous claims that personal factors such as education, experiences, and teaching practices could contribute to teachers' belief system (Phipps & Borg, 2009), they meet what was predicted by the researchers — MFL teachers in Brunei are similar in terms of the way they think and do about teaching ICC in the classroom. In other words, it was confirmed that the teachers share a clear average intercultural teaching profile. However, higher education might be able to make a difference in the teachers' teaching practices.

The positive impact of professional coursework on teachers' existing beliefs has been greatly reported in previous studies (e.g. Makovec, 2018; Phipps & Borg,

2009; Valiandes & Neophytou, 2018). As discussed earlier, this study found the differences between the envisaged intercultural teaching profile and the MFL teachers' practices on ICC lay in the MFL teachers' perceptions of students' stages of cognitive development. Hence, it could be presumed that postgraduate education may contribute to the MFL teachers' views on higher-order cognitive skills in teaching and learning, hence improving their cultural teaching profile. However, this study is limited by the lack of information on the MFL teachers' postgraduate education in terms of its discipline, environment, and approaches. Therefore, it was not possible to understand, in this study, how postgraduate education prepares the MFL teachers with the qualities and skills to perform intercultural language teaching; or how it influences the MFL teachers in their instructional decisions. Moreover, it was difficult to measure changes in the sample because the survey collected data at a single point in time. In this sense, further studies could be carried on, to further explore how postgraduate education could contribute to the teachers' intercultural teaching profile.

Regarding the minimum impact of age and teaching experience on Bruneian MFL teachers' beliefs and practices, this study drew on the findings from the previous studies (e.g., Korthagen & Nuijten, 2018; Phipps & Borg, 2009) that teachers may hold on to a stronger core belief of teaching that exerts a more powerful influence on their behaviors than the impact of age and teaching experience. Considering that all MFL teachers are Chinese native speakers, their knowledge and views about MFL language teaching could be rooted in their Chinese identities, and most probably in the early stage of Chinese language education they had received because the thousands of hours the teachers spent in the classroom as students should have far outweighed the effects of other educational programs (Farrell, 2019; Pajares, 1992).

Conclusion and Recommendation

This quantitative study revisited and confirmed some canonical theories and previous studies about intercultural foreign language teaching in a Mandarin context from a Bruneian teachers' perspective. An average intercultural teaching profile was found among the MFL teachers. They hold on to a belief in language teaching which features linguistics-focused and lower-order cognition targeted. Although they are strongly disposed towards integrating ICC in Mandarin classes, their inadequate

knowledge of ICC could have hindered the process. On the other hand, the teachers' teaching practices are inconsistent with their intention to ICC teaching. They are not keen to include essential components of the target and students' own cultural perspectives in teaching and intend to neglect to train students' higher-order cognitive skills. This intercultural teaching profile probably has roots in the teachers' Chinese identities, and most probably, their Chinese language learning experience at school. However, their teaching practices could be adjustable through higher education.

Based on the findings, this study suggests that to improve the intercultural teaching profile in MFL classes in Brunei, the teachers could be trained to accept an alternative language teaching belief that allows the teaching and training of higher-order cognitive skills in Mandarin classes. Classroom methodologies and teaching strategies could consider embracing an adjustment towards an intercultural teaching approach, where cultural perspectives are addressed, and teachers shall motivate intercultural reflection, evaluation, and analysis among the students.

Moreover, the significant impact of higher education or professional coursework on MFL teachers' intercultural teaching profile could be acknowledged and explored further. Similar studies are recommended to be carried out in Southeast Asian countries that have similar social sociocultural, sociolinguistic, and demographic backgrounds, such as Singapore, Malaysia, and Indonesia. In addition, qualitative evidence could be collected to supplement the findings, and to provide deep understanding of the relationship between education and MFL teachers' intercultural teaching profile, hence, to contribute to the teaching and learning of Mandarin as a second/foreign language in the region.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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