

EFL high school students' perceptions of the factors affecting their intercultural communicative competence development

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ABSTRACT: *This paper presents the results of a study exploring the English as a foreign language (EFL) high school students' perceptions of the factors that affect their intercultural communicative competence (ICC) development. This mixed-methods study was conducted in the context of a high school in Lam Dong Province, and it involved 140 EFL high school students in answering the questionnaires and 12 of them in semi-structured interviews. The quantitative data were processed using the software SPSS, while the qualitative data were analyzed by the content analysis approach. The findings unraveled that participants believed that learner-related factors played an important role in shaping their ICC. Learners' psychology (e.g., confidence, calmness, risking-taking) and motivation (e.g., importance, necessity and usefulness of culture) were two major factors in contributing to their ICC development. Nevertheless, it was found out that participants were unsure of the effects of teacher-related factors (e.g., teaching methods/approaches, enthusiasm, assistance) and learning material-related factors (e.g., cultural issues, textbook contents, effectiveness) on their ICC enhancement. Such preliminary findings may imply that learners play an important role in shaping their ICC, while the teachers and learning materials are not clearly significant in developing students' ICC.*

KEYWORDS: English language learning, intercultural communicative competence, perception, upper secondary students.

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1. Introduction

In recent decades, there has been a burgeoning interest in culture and language learning in general and in English as a second language (ESL)/ a foreign language (EFL) learning in particular. Obviously, in order to fully understand and effectively learn a foreign language, learners need to know its culture (Byram, 1997; Tran & Dang, 2014; Tran, 2015; Tran & Duong, 2015; Tran & Seepho, 2015). Learners are believed to fail to master a new language without learning the context of that language. Brown (1994) states that “a language is a part of a culture and a culture is a part of a language; the two are intricately interwoven so that one cannot separate the two without losing the significance of either language or culture” (p.189). In other words, culture and language learning are two sides that are indispensable on one side or another.

Indeed, culture and language support each other to achieve the ultimate goal of using the fluent target language. This is even more essential in the era of globalization, the time when learners have more opportunities to meet people of different linguistic repertoires and cultures. Thus, it is of importance to highlight the important inseparable role of culture in language learning.

In the time of globalization and international exchanges, it is undeniable that intercultural communicative competence (ICC) plays a significant role in the field of English teaching and learning. Instead of focusing on considerable issues relating to building learners' communicative competence in English such as phonology, morphology, vocabulary, syntax, grammar and the like, language teaching and learning in recent time has concentrated much on expanding the knowledge of ICC among

ESL/EFL learners (Council of Europe, 2001). As can be seen today, the role of intercultural communication is highly emphasized in most English teaching curricula. To many researchers (Byram, 1997; Lázár, Huber-Kriegler, Lussier, Matei, & Peck, 2007), it is indispensable to include intercultural communication in learning a language because the teaching of mere English language skills can lead to amusing situations, or worse and may cause confusion and misunderstanding or “fluent fools” where there is a lack of cultural knowledge.

Recent dominant trends in intercultural communication have led to a proliferation of studies that highlight the essential role of intercultural communication knowledge in the EFL field in the world in general and in Vietnam in specific. It is found in the Vietnamese context that there is a new trend in incorporating intercultural content into English language lessons to educate English language learners to be competent in both English language and ICC so that people from different cultures can communicate effectively and appropriately with others in multicultural situations (Tran & Duong, 2015; Tran & Seepho, 2015). More specifically, in 2018, the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) of Vietnam officially stated the objectives of the new overall curriculum for upper secondary students as follows (1) provide a deeper knowledge of the country, people, cultures of English-speaking countries and other countries in the world, (2) understanding and respecting the diversity of cultures, and initially reflecting the values of Vietnam cultures [9]. Clearly, there is a growing concern about the role of ICC in Vietnam. As such, the MOET of Vietnam has recognized the crucial role of ICC and integrated cultural issues into English textbooks. However, how learners’ ICC development in the context of Vietnam is affected is still unclear as prior studies have not focused much on this issue in English language teaching and learning.

Regarding the context of a high school in Lam Dong Province, the new English textbooks have been in use for some years. Although there is a section addressing cultural issues in the new English textbooks, the culture teaching is still

delimited. It can be seen from the reality that there is a general lack of understanding and little interest in the culture learning in English classes. This study, therefore, aims at scrutinizing the high school students’ perceptions of the factors that affect their ICC development in the process of English language learning at a high school in Lam Dong Province. This study seeks to answer the following research question:

What are the factors that affect the ICC development of EFL students at a high school in Lam Dong Province?

2. Literature review

The term ICC is in the wide use and embodies a multitude of concepts, which makes it difficult to have a clear and unique definition. What is more, this term has been popularly found in almost every field in recent time, such as language learning and teaching, healthcare service, human resources management and business communication. As a result, reaching a consensus on what ICC is difficult (Deardorff, 2006). Since ICC is complex to define, it is interesting to find that various researchers use different terms interchangeably regarding the notion of ICC. Polisca (2011), for example, utilizes “cultural awareness”, “cultural sensitivity”, “intercultural awareness”, “intercultural competence” for this notion. Other researchers (Polisca, 2011; Fisher, Evans, & Esch, 2004) use the following terms referring to ICC: intercultural sensitivity, intercultural understanding, and cross-cultural communication.

In the context of language teaching and learning, Chen and Starosta (1999) define that ICC 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). Likewise, Deardorff (2006) states ICC is interpreted as “the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations based on one’s intercultural knowledge, skills and attitudes” (p.194). A further definition is given by Bennett and Bennett (2004), who define intercultural communicative competence as “the ability to communicate effectively in

cross cultural situations” (page 149). In the same vein, Tran and Seepho (2015) delineate that “ICC is the ability which enables one to effectively and appropriately interact in a language other than one’s native language with the others from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds” (p.30).

These aforementioned definitions are, to some extent, all concerned with the importance of understanding culture in language communication, which is completely true in the era of globalization and cultural exchanges. Indeed, in a time when different people with different cultural backgrounds have a growing chance of engaging with each other, learners’ ICC development is required more than ever. In other words, it can be inferred from the definitions above that every English speaker needs to develop ICC to have successful communication with people from different cultures. Moreover, when combining the definition of ICC together with the importance of culture in language teaching and learning, it can be drawn that without ICC, the major competency for the recent time, the ultimate language’s goal of learners is impossible.

Regarding the factors affecting the learners’ ICC development, three groups of factors, namely learner-related, teacher-related and learning material-related factors, can be found. As for the learner-related factors, ESL/EFL learners’ ICC enhancement can be affected by their language proficiency, psychology and motivation. Learners’ English language proficiency is considered as one of the chief elements in the success of ICC development. Prodromou (1992) describes the great impact of English language proficiency on the attitudes of learners. He mentions “The more advanced the students’ knowledge of English becomes, the more receptive they are to interesting content and a richer cultural input” (p. 48). It was found out that those who have a high level of English language proficiency have a high level of ICC (Tran & Dang, 2014; Haneda, 2008). Additionally, it is true that learners’ psychology has a great influence on their development of ICC. Dai and Chen (2014) stipulate that learners’ shyness (a feature of psychology) can impact their development of ICC. Learners’ motivation

is another factor that can influence their ICC development as there is a relationship between learners’ motivation and their ICC development (Dörnyei, 2003; Bennett, 1993).

With respect to the teacher-related factors, there are many aspects to be considered. They are teachers’ ICC level and their teaching methods/approaches. Bennett (1993) highlights the integral role of teachers in intercultural education, and advocates that in order to help develop learners’ ICC, teachers are obliged to understand their own worldviews completely. According to Saricoban and Oz (2014), it is important for teachers to possess a high level of ICC to promote their learners’ ICC. Akpınar and Unaldi (2014) offer a further explanation that teachers should have high ICC not only to fulfil the requirement of the intercultural and globalized world but also to help the next generation (learners) interact with people from other different cultures easily. What is more, teachers’ teaching methods/approaches play a significant role and highly affect the process of developing learners’ ICC (Tran & Dang, 2014; Sercu, Bandura, Castro, Davcheva, Laskaridou, Lundgren, Carmen Méndes, & Ryan, 2005). In terms of teaching style, Zhang (2007) underscores that in order to reach the aim of intercultural language teaching, which is mainly improving learners’ ICC, three needed aspects, namely sufficient intercultural knowledge, specific abilities and emotional qualities, are required. Among the specific abilities that Zhang (2007) mentions, the ability of using multiple teaching methods and approaches is highlighted.

Regarding the learning material-related factors, Rico (2012) highlights that learning materials are considered as valuable tools that facilitate connections between individuals of different cultural backgrounds. He designates as follows: “Materials could serve as the auxiliary means to promote mutual understandings between people and cultures as well as powerful tools to deal with cultural diversity” (p.90). Shardakova and Pavlenko (2004) assert that the efficacy of a textbook in improving the communicative competence of its learner is in positive accordance with the inclusion of its sociocultural identities and values. For this

critical reason, it might be logically concluded that teaching materials play a role in developing learner's ICC. However, Kiss (2017) states "Language teaching textbooks are usually heavily criticized for not preparing learners for intercultural communication and offering a rather distorted representation of culture" (p.82). In this sense, Tomlinson (2014) recommends an effective way to improve teaching materials to nurture learners' ICC, "materials need to provide more than a token acknowledgement of cultural identity and address more thoroughly the kind of cultural adjustment that underlies the experience of learning a foreign language" (p.427). Or at least, the materials should include the content of learners' culture, the target culture and the international culture (Alptekin, 2002; Cetinavci, 2012).

3. Methodology

This mixed methods study was conducted at a high school in Lam Dong Province. A cohort of 140 students was conveniently sampled from grades 10, 11 and 12. These students were learning the new English textbooks designed by MOET. Among 140 participants, 3.6% of the students were in grade 10, 42.1% were in grade 11 and the rest (34.3%) of the students were in grade 12. The portion of students learning English for 9 years is 35.7%, accounting for the highest rate in the table whereas the portion of students learning English for 7 years and 13 years is the smallest with 2,1% for each. In terms of overseas travel experience and experience of talking to foreigners, more than half of the students (57.1%) had interactions with foreigners although they (12.1%) had fewer chances to travel abroad.

This study employed the questionnaires and semi-structured interview to collect data. The questionnaire, which was designed based on the literature review and study purpose, includes two sections: Section A asks the participants' background information; Section B seeks students' perceptions of the factors affecting their ICC development. Section B has 33 items divided into three parts, namely learner-related factors (20 items), teacher-related factors (8 items), and learning material-related factors (5 items). All

these items were designed using the five-point scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The questionnaire was first designed in English, then was translated into Vietnamese, which aims at helping respondents to avoid any difficulties in understanding the questionnaire. The Cronbach's alpha of the questionnaire is .86, which means the reliability of the questionnaire was high. The semi-structured interview was designed based on the questionnaire and study purpose. It has four main questions asking students' perceptions of the factors affecting their ICC development.

Prior to data collection, both questionnaires and semi-structured interviews were piloted to ensure they were valid. Then, the copies of the questionnaire were administered to more than 200 students in person. It took participants roughly 20 minutes to answer the questionnaire. There were 164 questionnaires returned, but 140 of them were valid for data analysis. One week after, the interviews were conducted with 12 students who were willing to participate. Each interview lasted about 15 minutes. All interviews were recorded for later analysis with interviewees' consent.

In order to analyze the data, the software Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 22 was used to process the quantitative data in terms of descriptive statistics (Mean: M; Standard deviation: SD). The interval scale of the mean scores was understood as 1.00 - 1.80: Strongly disagree; 1.81 - 2.60: Disagree; M=2.61 - 3.40: Neutral; 3.41 - 4.20: Agree; and 4.21 - 5.00: Strongly agree. For qualitative data, the content analysis approach was employed. The qualitative data was identified in terms of familiarizing and organizing, coding and recoding, and summarizing and interpreting. All 12 interviewees were coded from S1 to S12. So as to ensure the reliability of qualitative data analysis, the intra-rating was used. Three pieces of qualitative data were randomly chosen for re-analysis, and the convergent results were set at 95%.

4. Results and discussion

4.1. Results

The total mean score of factors affecting high school EFL students' ICC development was 3.59

(SD=.47) out of 5. Specifically, the mean scores of learner-related factors, teacher-related factors and learning environment-related factors were 3.73 (SD = .52), 3.26 (SD=.65) and 2.94 (SD = .59), respectively. It can be interpreted that while learner-related factors had a significant impact on students' ICC development, teacher-related factors and learning environment factors did not yet seem to affect their ICC development process.

Learner-related factors

The results of learner-related factors (M=3.73, SD=.52) include psychology with M=3.52 (SD=.75) and motivation with M=3.95 (SD=.49). This can be interpreted that the majority of EFL high school students highly advocated the affection of psychology and motivation on their ICC development. Regarding the psychology (Table 1), students responded optimistically that they “always feel confident in learning about cultural issues in English” (item A1.1: M=3.54, SD=.90), “like taking risks in real situations related to cultural issues” (item A1.2: M=3.56, SD=.92), “[are] usually at ease during lessons in [their] language class” (item A1.5: M=3.53, SD=.89), and “will obtain knowledge about culture someday” (item A1.8: M=3.84, SD=.95). More interestingly, students showed their strong psychological spirit when they “don't feel shy learning culture” with their classmates (item A1.6: M=3.69, SD=.91) and teachers (item A1.7: M=3.7, SD=.99). However, they were uncertain about their levels of English (item A1.3: M=3.09, SD=.93) and of nervousness in speaking English with foreigners (item A1.4: M=3.22, SD=.88).

Table 1: Psychology

| | N = 140 | |
|--|---------|-----|
| | M | SD |
| A1.1 I always feel confident in learning about cultural issues in English. | 3.54 | .90 |
| A1.2 I like taking risks in real situations related to cultural issues. | 3.56 | .92 |
| A1.3 I am satisfied with my level of English to learn culture. | 3.09 | .93 |
| A1.4 I would not be nervous speaking English with native speakers. | 3.22 | .88 |
| A1.5 I am usually at ease during lessons in my language class. | 3.53 | .89 |
| A1.6 I don't feel shy learning culture with my classmates. | 3.69 | .91 |
| A1.7 I don't feel shy learning culture with my teachers. | 3.70 | .99 |
| A1.8 I believe that I will obtain great knowledge about culture someday. | 3.84 | .95 |
| Total | 3.52 | .75 |

As for motivation, Table 2 indicates that students believed that they really liked learning about cultures in English classes (item B2.1: M = 3.78, SD=.87), studying culture in English classes was necessary (item B2.2: M=4.11, SD=.77), important (item B2.3: M = 3.84, SD=.83) and helpful for them (item B2.6: M=4.18, SD=.73). They also supposed that studying culture in English classes helped them become more knowledgeable (item B2.4: M=4.04, SD=.67) and broaden their viewpoint (B2.5: M=4.06,

Table 2: Motivation

| | N = 140 | |
|--|---------|-----|
| | M | SD |
| B2.1 I really like learning about cultures in English classes. | 3.78 | .87 |
| B2.2 Studying culture in English classes is necessary for me because it will help me to know more about different cultures around the world. | 4.11 | .77 |
| B2.3 Learning English is important to me because I want to know as much about cultures as possible. | 3.84 | .83 |
| B2.4 Studying culture in English classes helps me become a more knowledgeable person. | 4.04 | .67 |
| B2.5 Studying culture in English classes helps me broaden my viewpoint. | 4.06 | .67 |
| B2.6 Studying culture in English classes is very helpful for me for future jobs. | 4.18 | .73 |

| | N = 140 | |
|---|---------|-----|
| | M | SD |
| B2.7 Knowing English grammar well can help me understand cultures presented in the textbooks. | 3.87 | .79 |
| B2.8 Understanding which words or expressions are acceptable and unacceptable in English-speaking cultures can help me understand more about cultures around the world. | 4.03 | .66 |
| B2.9. Good reading comprehension skill can help me comprehend cultural events that are in written form | 4.14 | .74 |
| B2.10 Good speaking skill can help me perform well in the cultural activities in and outside my classrooms | 3.98 | .72 |
| B2.11 Good listening comprehension skill can help me succeed in learning cultural issues. | 3.90 | .74 |
| B2.12 Good writing skill can help me foster my ability to explain ideas about culture. | 3.69 | .79 |
| Total | 3.95 | .49 |

SD=.67). Knowing good grammar (item B2.7: M=3.87, SD=.79), vocabulary (item B2.8: M 4.03, SD=.66) and language skills (reading-item B2.9: M=4.14, SD=.74; speaking-item B2.10: M=3.98, SD=.72; listening-item B2.11: M=3.90, SD=.74; writing-item B2.12: M=3.69, SD=.79) could help students understand and explore cultural issues while learning English.

Qualitative results indicated that students expressed their psychological and motivational factors to facilitate their learning intercultural issues in English classes. They shared:

I am a kind of active person. So, I like taking risks in real situations related to cultural issues. (S7)

My level of English is above moderate. Therefore, I don't feel nervous speaking a foreign language with native speakers. And I don't feel shy when learning English with my classmates and my teachers. (S8)

One source of my motivation can be traced to my purpose of learning English. Everyone recognizes the necessity and the importance of knowing more about different cultures around the world. Due to this aim, I find I am motivated to learn more about culture. (S11)

Teacher-related factors

Table 3 reveals that students were unsure whether their teachers “are knowledgeable about all the cultures around the world” (item C3.2: M = 3.34, SD=.76), “use various effective strategies in culture teaching” (item C3.6: M=3.23, SD=.86), and “can use multiple teaching methods/approaches in class” (item C3.7: M =

3.21, SD=.89). Furthermore, students were also uncertain if their teachers “spend much time on culture during lessons” (item C3.3: M = 3.20; SD=.82), “show great enthusiasm in teaching cultural issues” (item C3.5: M = 3.09, SD=.95), and “can help students cope with the complexities of intercultural communication” (item C3.8: M = 3.03, SD=.94). However, students agreed that their teachers had a high level of English language proficiency (item C3.1: M = 3.86, SD=.82).

Table 3: Teacher-related factors

| | N = 140 | |
|--|---------|-----|
| | M | SD |
| C3.1 Teachers' English language proficiency is at the high level. | 3.86 | .82 |
| C3.2 Teachers are knowledgeable about all the cultures around the world. | 3.34 | .76 |
| C3.3 Teachers spend much time on culture during lessons. | 3.20 | .82 |
| C3.4 Activities related to cultural issues given by the teachers are exciting. | 3.14 | .85 |
| C3.5 Teachers show great enthusiasm in teaching cultural issues. | 3.09 | .95 |
| C3.6 Teachers use various effective strategies in culture teaching. | 3.23 | .86 |
| C3.7 Teachers can use multiple teaching methods/approaches in class. | 3.21 | .89 |
| C3.8 Teachers can help students cope with the complexities of intercultural communication. | 3.03 | .94 |
| Total | 3.26 | .65 |

The qualitative results supported the quantitative ones. It was found that the interviewees expressed that the culture teaching in their English classes was not really highlighted. Most of the teaching and learning activities were relevant to the development of the English language skills. One shared:

I am always excited and eager when having English class because my teachers always organize very interesting activities such as games and role-plays in the classroom. Such activities can help me to enhance my English language skills only. (S1)

In terms of learning material-related factors, the results in Table 4 show that the respondents disagreed that “The cultural issues in the learning materials in are not well addressed in English classes” (item D4.5: $M=2.1$, $SD=.842$). They were unsure if “The textbooks are effective in developing [their] ICC” (item D4.1: $M=2.91$, $SD=.81$), “The contents of the textbooks aim at developing awareness of cultural differences” (item D4.2: $M=2.97$, $SD=.86$), and “The learning materials contribute to broadening [their] perceptions about cultures” (item D4.3: $M=3.14$, $SD=.83$). However, they agreed that “The learning materials contain pictures about different cultures” (item D4.4: $M=3.61$, $SD=.91$).

Table 4: Learning material-related factors

| | N = 140 | |
|--|---------|-----|
| | M | SD |
| D4.1 The textbooks are effective in developing my ICC. | 2.91 | .81 |
| D4.2 The contents of the textbooks aim at developing awareness of cultural differences. | 2.97 | .86 |
| D4.3 The learning materials contribute to broadening my perceptions about cultures. | 3.14 | .83 |
| D4.4 The learning materials contain pictures about different cultures. | 3.61 | .91 |
| D4.5 The cultural issues in the learning materials in are not well addressed in English classes. | 2.10 | .84 |
| Total | 2.95 | .65 |

Similar students’ comments were collected from the interviews in terms of time for cultural learning. Most of interviewees believed that one of the difficulties they faced was the limited time available. They commented as follows:

“We don’t have enough time to discuss the topic thoroughly because there are too many points to be discussed.” [S6]

“It is not enough for students to discuss and then present the discussions in the class.” [S12]

4.2. Discussion

Some significant findings from this study have been revealed. Firstly, it was found out that the psychology under the learner-related factors has been reported to have positive impacts on high school EFL students’ ICC development. Students encountered fewer obstacles in learning about culture with respect to shyness. Instead, students showed their confidence in learning cultural issues. There are similarities between the findings expressed in this study and those described by Dai and Chen (2014) in which shyness played a role in the development of learners’ ICC. Whether the process of learning about culture was low or high depends largely on the shyness factor. It seems possible that these positive results are due to the high level of students’ English language proficiency. There was a meaningful relationship between English language proficiency and positive psychology in learning a second/ foreign language. It was understood that the better English proficiency students attained, the more confident and the less shy they became Prodromou, L. (1992). Similarly, students believed that they were highly motivated to learn about cultural issues. In accordance with the present results, previous studies have demonstrated that the more desire learners wished to communicate and practice communication, the more chances there would be to develop intercultural communication (Sandra, 2004). The reason why students had positive motivation in learning can be they benefitted from their good English proficiency. Another possible explanation for this might be that students had the willingness to communicate

or the desire and interest of people in having interaction and communication. In other words, students' attitude towards cultural learning was considerably positive as they were aware of the necessity and importance of cultural learning (Dörnyei, 2003; Bennett, 1993). What is more, it was found from reality that motivation exerted its huge amount of influence over English learning and thus emphasized the importance of positive psychology in learning English in general and learning about cultural issues in particular.

The second major finding was that students were not sure if the teacher-related factors could affect their ICC development. Although Sanders (1998) states that teachers' methodology is one of the factors which has a dramatic influence on learners' academic outcomes, students in this study were unclear about their teachers' cultural teaching methods. This is due to the fact that teachers in this context may focus much on the teaching of English language skills, and they may implicitly include the culture teaching. Another plausible reason can be the time constraint which might hinder teachers from including cultural content in English classes. This is one of the common problems since time is not enough for teachers to treat all the issues in class, "teachers often give priority for language skills and ignore cultural content" (Tran & Seepho, 2017, p.5). Therefore, students may not see any significant points in culture teaching in the process of English language learning.

A similar finding is that students were unconfident whether the learning-related factors could affect their ICC development or not. This may result from the students' uncertainty of the influence of teacher-related factors on their ICC development. As the teachers might not deploy the culture teaching and learning activities in English classes, students could not be sure of the contribution of the learning materials to their ICC enhancement. Although students admitted that the learning materials feature cultural issues, they did not have much time to learn cultural issues in English classes. It can be understood since the teachers' choice of teaching methods focused

much on the English language skills, students did not appreciate the learning materials as a positive factor that could boost their ICC. This result of the current study is partially supported by the previous research carried out by Tran and Seepho (2017) and Banjongjit and Boonmoh (2018) who have asserted that one of the obstacles leading to the ineffectiveness of teaching cultural issues comes from the limited class time.

5. Conclusions

This study has unpacked that students believed that their ICC development was positively affected by the learner-related factors, but they supposed that teacher-related factors and learning-related factors did not influence their ICC development. Such findings suggest some implications. The role of culture in English teaching is integral to the development of learners' ICC. To achieve the pedagogical goals in general and cultural goals in specific, the role of the teachers in implementing the curriculum is considered as the most important since they directly teach and understand their students most. It is teachers who create the excitement and motivation for students. English teachers are advised to make full use of teaching techniques, including electronic teaching and learning resources, to raise students' interest in English learning and to achieve the goal of the teaching curricula. Furthermore, the learning-centered approach should be taken into considerations. In this approach, while learners are known as active participants, a teacher plays the role of an organizer and facilitator. Hence, it is of importance for teachers to have well-prepared lessons before class to integrate culture into language teaching effectively. A well-prepared lesson should include the cultural issues in English classes explicitly. Preparing various sources such as posters, pictures, newspapers, authentic materials or social networks related to cultural issues are good examples of effective integrating culture in English teaching. In terms of the teaching materials, it is recommended that English teachers should adapt the materials by redesigning, creating complementary activities

or selecting supplementary teaching materials to make full use of the materials. Teachers should be more flexible in using the teaching materials and adapting them to suit their own particular classrooms. Additionally, there should be workshops, seminars and training on the culture teaching in English classes so that teachers can be aware of how to integrate culture teaching into English classes.

This study still shows some shortcomings, unavoidably perhaps in a work of this range and scope. Firstly, this study was conducted with a rather small sample size of students in one context. More specifically, this investigation was conducted with students who studied the new English textbooks at a high school; thus, it

could not exemplify for the whole EFL learners in Vietnam. Secondly, the results of students' English linguistic competence level as well as their ICC were collected from students' self-assessment. Therefore, the requirements to have the precise data or to have the very accurate evaluation would be hard to reach, and the results were unlikely to reflect the real level of ICC among students. It is recommended that further study should be conducted with larger sample size and with many different schools, other research instruments better than students' self-assessment should be utilized to increase the accuracy of the evaluation, and formative and summative assessments are recommended to evaluate the true levels of ICC of learners.

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