



Teachers' Perceptions towards Promoting Intercultural Communicative Competence in the EFL Classroom

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Abstract

In language teaching, linguistic competence has typically been the main curricular focus. However, in this era of globalization, in which people from all over the world are interconnected, simply equipping learners with linguistic competence may not be sufficient. In addition, the effectiveness and appropriateness of communication play important roles in language learning. As a result, promoting intercultural communicative competence in the language classroom has become of interest to many scholars. This study was conducted to investigate the perceptions of EFL teachers towards promoting intercultural communicative competence (ICC) in EFL classes, and the strategies they use to promote ICC. The participants of the study included seven Thai teachers from an English for Workplace Communication course at KMUTT. The qualitative data from the semi-structured interviews was analyzed using Deardorff's ICC framework (2006). The findings revealed that most of the teachers perceived ICC as the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately with people from different cultures, and the ability to be aware of cultural diversity. Desired external outcome, skills, knowledge and requisite attitude towards cultural differences are the aspects of ICC that teachers have typically focused upon. Nonetheless, teachers have different perceptions towards culture, and as such their respective understandings of ICC vary slightly. The preferred strategies that most of the teachers used to promote ICC are anecdotes from the teachers' direct experience, asking students to read and discuss, and student role-play. Role-play is the most effective way to promote ICC, in the teachers' opinion.

INTRODUCTION

Several previous studies have shown that language teachers generally focus on equipping learners with linguistic competence rather than focusing on other aspects of language teaching such as intercultural communicative competence, or ICC (Jata, 2015; Budharugsa, 2011; Young & Sachdev, 2011). However, having only linguistic knowledge cannot assure success in professional communication in an international setting. Therefore, integrating ICC in EFL courses has been recommended by several research studies (The Committee for Economic Development, 2006).

To enhance ICC among learners, it is important that its concepts are clearly understood by the teachers who are responsible for the courses. Therefore, a clear understanding of ICC and its application in language teaching should be provided to all teachers in order to help them successfully promote it in their classes.

As far as related research in Thailand is concerned, there is scant existing empirical research on the perceptions of EFL teachers and their strategies used to promote ICC compared to the studies of assessing ICC. Hence, knowing the perceptions of teachers towards ICC and their strategies used to promote it can fill in the gap of the research and reflect their real understanding of the theory. The findings could be beneficial to course designers who plan courses and teacher trainers who have to train new teachers for future language courses, as well as current language teachers who want to improve their understanding of ICC.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Communicative competence and intercultural communicative competence

Reacting to Chomsky's ideas (1965) on focusing on linguistic competence, which is the knowledge of language rules and systems of native speakers, Hymes (1966) proposed communicative competence, i.e. a speaker's grammatical knowledge and social knowledge (how to use the language appropriately in a social context). It consists of what is formally possible, what is feasible, what the social meaning or value of a given utterance is, and what actually occurs.

Later, Canale and Swain (1980) defined four aspects of communicative competence, which include:

1. Grammatical competence: an ability to know and create a grammatically correct utterance.
2. Socio-linguistic competence: an ability to know the social meaning or value and produce an appropriate utterance.
3. Discourse competence: an ability to know and to produce a cohesive and coherent discourse.
4. Strategic competence: an ability to repair miscommunications and solve communication problems, such as self-correction, contextual guessing and activation of background knowledge.

However, the communicative competence model has been questioned for its reliance on native speakers' norms and the unrealistic use of English as a lingua franca. Therefore, ICC, which considers English as an international language and focuses on both native and non-native speakers' norms in local and international contexts, was introduced for use especially in ELT (Alptekin, 2002).

There are various definitions of intercultural communication. Rogers and Steinfatt (1999) defined intercultural communication as an exchange of information between people who are



from different cultural backgrounds. Additionally, Ting-Toomy (1999) (cited in Schoeffel, 2007) divided the important components of intercultural communication into four parts, which are: (1) Two people or two groups of people (2) who come from different cultures (with diverse definitions of culture) (3) having interactions (4) and negotiations for meanings. Perceptions towards culture also vary. Some may classify culture into “deep” and “surface” cultures (Weaver, 1986). Surface culture is a visible culture including the arts, folkways, food, dress etc. In contrast, deep culture is not easy to identify or understand because it exists in people’s thoughts, beliefs, and perceptions, such as concepts of justice, ethics, eye movements, approaches to problem-solving, etc. In addition, some may perceive the word “culture” differently. Culture has varied definitions, such as values, beliefs and norms held by a group of people (Deardorff, 2006). Byram, Gribkova and Starkey (2002) also suggested that interculture can be seen as beliefs, norms shared by one group of people in one country or as various kinds of identity such as age, gender, social groups, etc.

Furthermore, Hybels and Weaver (2004) stated that “when a message is created by a member of one culture, and this message needs to be processed by a member of another culture, intercultural communication takes place” (p.7). They also pointed out that to understand more about intercultural communication, people should be able to recognize their own “cultural identities”. Moreover, a person can be in a “co-culture” or a group of people who have different beliefs and behavior from the mainstream culture that they are living in, such as professional groups, homosexual groups and so on. In intercultural communication, the main identity of the person may be expressed differently depending on the situation and context. Therefore, understanding one’s own identity and being aware of the cultural differences of others may create effective citizens and reduce mistrust and miscommunications among people.

Intercultural communicative competence: Definition

Intercultural communicative competence (ICC) is a term commonly used by scholars in various fields such as communication, psychology and anthropology. Therefore, ICC can be referred to as “global competence, international competence, multicultural competence, and so forth” (Fantini, 2010, p.3). Many researchers have been interested in conceptualizing ICC, yet it is difficult to find a precise definition (Dai & Chen, 2014). According to Miike (2010, cited in Dai & Chen 2014), the diverse perceptions towards “culture” affect the way each researcher conceptualizes ICC. Therefore, there seems to be no consensus regarding its exact definition.

Some researchers defined ICC as an ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in a multicultural context (Deardorff 2004; Lázár, 2003; Wiseman, 2002; Chen & Starosta, 1998). Wiseman (2002) considered the “ability to communicate” as the knowledge, skills and motivation to communicate; Deardorff (2004) added that this ability is “based on one’s intercultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes” (p.194).

However, both Hofstede (1984) and Fantini (2000) had a different idea. Hofstede (1984) suggested that ICC is the ability to interpret non-verbal behavior, and the perception of power in an interaction. In contrast, Fantini (2000), focusing on its goal of maintaining positive

relationships between people, defined ICC as the “ability to deal with differences in a positive manner” (p.25).

In this study, a combination of the definitions offered by the aforementioned scholars was used. ICC refers to a concept that commonly deals with the ability to recognize one’s own cultural identities and understand others’, keep a positive attitude towards the dissimilarities, and interact appropriately in order to maintain a positive relationship with others who have a different cultural background.

ICC frameworks

There seem to be many ICC frameworks, but two frameworks which are the most highly cited and noteworthy in learning and teaching were reviewed. These two frameworks, Byram et al.’s (2002) and Deardorff’s (2006), share the notion that developing ICC is a long, continuing process.

For Byram’s framework (1997), he created an ICC model by focusing on preparing learners to be intercultural speakers. To achieve the goal of being an intercultural speaker, Byram et al. (2002, p.7-9) suggested that people must be equipped with five components of ICC, which are:

1. Intercultural attitudes (*savoir être*): curiosity and openness, readiness to suspend disbeliefs about other cultures and beliefs about one’s own,
2. Knowledge (*savoirs*): of social groups and their products and practices in one’s own and in one’s interlocutor’s country, and of the general processes of societal and individual interaction,
3. Skills of interpreting and relating (*savoir comprendre*): ability to interpret a document or event from another culture, to explain it and relate it to documents or events from one’s own,
4. Skills of discovery and interaction (*savoir apprendre/faire*): ability to acquire new knowledge of a culture and cultural practices and the ability to utilize knowledge, attitudes and skills under the constraints of real-time communication and interaction, and
5. Critical cultural awareness (*savoir s’engager*): an ability to evaluate – critically and on the basis of explicit criteria – perspectives, practices and products in one’s own and other cultures and countries.

Based on Byram’s model (1997), Deardorff (2006) proposed a model of ICC by adding more details to the concept as presented in Table 1.



Table 1
Deardorff's ICC framework

| Deardorff's ICC Framework | |
|--------------------------------|---|
| 1. Requisite Attitudes | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Having respect (valuing other cultures, cultural diversity) • Having openness (to intercultural learning and to people from other cultures, withholding judgment) • Having curiosity and discovery (tolerating ambiguity and uncertainty) |
| 2. Knowledge and Comprehension | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Having cultural self-awareness, deep understanding and knowledge of other cultures • Knowing culture-specific information • Having sociolinguistic awareness |
| 3. Skills | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Having skills of active listening, observing, interpreting, analyzing, evaluating and relating |
| 4. Desired Internal Outcome | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Having flexibility, adaptability, an ethnorelative perspective and empathy • Being able to see from others' perspectives and to respond to them according to the way in which the other person desires to be treated |
| 5. Desired External Outcome | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Behaving and communicating effectively and appropriately with people of other cultures |

Deardorff (2006) proposed the ICC model by focusing on five aspects of ICC: attitude, knowledge, skills, internal outcome and external outcome. She suggested that people first need to have positive attitudes such as openness and curiosity in order to welcome differences. Then they will be able to see the value in others, and they will communicate to others with a respectful attitude. Next, they should have knowledge of ICC which includes self-awareness, culture-specific knowledge, and deep cultural knowledge which may lead to understanding of other people's perspectives. Moreover, people should have the skills that can promote ICC. For example, people should be able to listen to and observe other people during conversations, and people should be able to evaluate perspectives, practices or products of their own culture and other cultures. When people are equipped with these three aforementioned aspects, internal outcome will be promoted. The "internal outcome" refers to empathy, flexibility, adaptability and an ethnorelative perspective. Finally, when people are well-equipped with the four aspects (attitude, knowledge, skills and internal outcome), they will be able to communicate effectively and appropriately, which is called "external outcome" (Deardorff, 2006).

For the purpose of this study, Deardorff's ICC framework (which is an adjustment of Byram's earlier theory) was implemented in order to clarify ICC in terms of teaching and learning.

Promoting ICC in the language classroom

Byram and Feng (2006) stated that in order to develop ICC in terms of cognitive, affective and behavioral components, one should be aware of their own cultural identity as well as others', and adapt themselves to accept the differences. Therefore, Byram et al. (2002) suggested that a teacher's knowledge of and exposure to other cultures are not important as the teacher's

ability to encourage students to be more observant, and be more aware of the power of perceptions towards their culture and other cultures.

In practice, Byram et al. (2002) also suggested that there are four recommended techniques that teachers can apply to promote ICC in a language class. First, teachers can employ comparative analysis in a lesson by encouraging students to compare and contrast the new culture with their own, based on theme and content. For example, in the theme of sports, teachers can talk about many aspects of culture such as age and gender. Suggested activities include role-play and simulations. Second, teachers are suggested to use authentic materials such as authentic texts and documents, maps, photographs, diagrams, cartoons and audio recordings in their teaching. Context of the material, such as where and when it was published, its target audience and its purpose could be discussed. Activities can include discussion and writing to show understanding of the texts and visuals. Third, teachers could select textbooks that are written with an intercultural and critical perspective to promote intercultural awareness. Otherwise, teachers can make use of existing content such as grammar exercises to broaden students' cultural views. For example, grammar exercises may contain some stereotypical statements, such as, "Jane likes cooking, while John likes playing football"; if such is the case, teachers can ask students to discuss or comment upon these statements. In addition, students can be encouraged to use the same language pattern to create new sentences in new contexts. Finally, teachers should teach some vocabulary that helps learners talk about cultural diversity, and suggest that they respect the rules of discussion as part of an overall respect for human rights.

Gudykunst (2005) also affirmed that to communicate effectively with strangers, we must be able to understand strangers' perspectives. This requires mindfulness. In other words, it requires a positive attitude or empathy towards other cultures. Therefore, in language classrooms, the strategies that are used to promote ICC should mainly focus on enhancing students' ability to be aware of their own identity, acknowledging cultural differences and developing positive attitudes towards other cultures.

Moreover, Lázár (2003) suggested that EFL teachers can promote ICC in various ways such as using movies, media, and documentaries, and speaking with people from different cultural backgrounds. Then Trede, Bowles and Bridges (2013) recommended that to develop students' awareness of cultural differences, teachers can let students do reflective exercises before and after an international experience. The main goal of the activity is to raise students' awareness of cultural differences. In addition, Jata (2015) asserted in his study that teachers should incorporate ICC by encouraging students to research other cultures, and let them discuss or reflect upon what they have studied. He also suggested that the cultural dimension should be inserted in an exam to motivate students to be curious and learn more about other cultures.

Byram and Risager (1999) asserted in their study that teachers seemed not to understand the complexity of the concept of culture in teaching. They also noticed that teachers tended to focus more on "national culture" rather than other aspects of culture found in the textbooks (p.105).



Empirical studies in ICC

Several research studies pertaining to ICC in English classes were of interest to a number of researchers. The following studies were previously carried out to ascertain teacher perceptions toward ICC and the practices promoting ICC in various contexts.

Budharugsa (2011) used closed and open-ended questionnaires to investigate perceptions of 54 Thai secondary teachers towards teaching culture in EFL classes and the ICC. The findings showed that 40 percent of the participants believed that they equally promoted linguistic competence and intercultural competence in their classes. However, in practice, 60 percent of the participants reported that they allocated more time to promoting linguistic competence rather than ICC. Moreover, 58 percent of the cultural dimension integrated in their class were related to the knowledge of foreign routines and daily life rather than promoting skills and awareness in ICC. Their teaching approach was based on the teacher-centered style. The most frequent activities used to promote ICC were telling their students what they heard and read about other cultures, and telling students what they feel is fascinating or strange about other cultures.

Young and Sachdev (2011) conducted research with 36 teachers from the USA, UK and France to investigate their beliefs and practices relating to the application of an ICC model to English language programs. By using diaries, focus groups and questionnaires, the findings showed that participants believed that the intercultural approach was appropriate and helpful, but they seemed unready to use it in practice. In addition, ICC was less of a focus in the curriculum, and there was little support in terms of suitable materials, and testing.

Jata (2015) investigated perceptions of ten teachers in a university in Albania towards teaching culture and intercultural competence in an English language class. The results from the questionnaires showed that 70 percent of the teachers rated linguistic competence as the first priority of their teaching objectives, while they rated intercultural competence skills as the lowest priority objective in their teaching. Though they saw the importance of ICC, they rarely integrated cultural awareness in their lesson because of time constraints, the curriculum's primary focus on linguistic competence, the students' existing low level of language proficiency, and unsupportive materials. Moreover, if they had time to teach culture, most of them tended to teach observable culture such as geography, history and daily life, rather than other aspects of culture.

Israelsson (2016) interviewed six secondary school language teachers in Sweden about how they perceived the concept of ICC. The results showed that the teachers understood some basic ideas about ICC, but did not have enough knowledge in the theoretical frameworks of ICC. Moreover, they did not fully integrate culture into their lessons. The researcher suggested that the knowledge, skills and attitudes in the theories should be concretized in order to help teachers acquire the concepts and apply them into practice.

Cheewasukthaworn and Suwanarak (2017) conducted research with 16 Thai EFL teachers to investigate their perceptions towards ICC, their ideas of integrating ICC in classes and the importance of ICC to their learners. Questionnaires and semi-structured interviews were used to collect data. The findings from the two methods showed that the participants understood the ICC concept in general, but not in detail. They perceived ICC as “the communication between people from different cultures, and that knowledge or awareness of cultural differences between communicators can contribute to the success of the communication.”

Moreover, they also thought that what differentiates ICC and communicative competence is the background of the interlocutor; that is, while communicative competence deals with the communication between two people, ICC deals with the communication of the interlocutors who have different cultural backgrounds. In addition, while the results from the questionnaires showed that most of the teachers believed that ICC can help improve learners’ English communicative competence, data from the interviews did not show that teachers had a significant level of belief in it. The technique that they suggested for promoting ICC in language classes is adding more information about culture and ICC components to the teaching.

After reviewing a number of empirical studies, it is clear that the majority of studies employed questionnaires and semi-structured interviews as tools to collect data with only one study using diaries and focus groups. Results from all studies were similar and showed that teachers had a general understanding of ICC, and they tended to promote ICC in terms of visible culture such as daily life behaviour rather than invisible culture such as the promotion of ICC attitude and awareness. Indeed, teachers seemed to focus more on the development of student linguistic competence rather than ICC. Furthermore, the participants of these studies were teachers who taught general English courses where ICC was not the main objective.

The numbers of studies investigating teachers’ perceptions towards ICC can reflect the importance of teachers’ beliefs in teaching. Pajares (1992) stated that teachers’ beliefs can have a great effect on the way they plan their lessons, their decision-making, and their teaching practice. Similarly, it is said that teachers’ beliefs, attitudes and practices can affect their teaching process (The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2009). In the area of intercultural communication, Deardorff (2008) suggested that teachers who have a clear understanding of ICC concepts can better accomplish the objectives of ICC learning.

This study, therefore aims to investigate university teachers’ perceptions of ICC and the strategies used to promote ICC in EFL classrooms. The course which was taught was LNG 103 (English for Workplace Communication) where promoting ICC was one of the main objectives. Furthermore, the results gathered from this study can be differentiated from previous studies which focused on perceptions of teachers in general English courses.

Research questions:

1. What are the teachers’ perceptions towards ICC in the EFL classroom?
2. What are the strategies used to promote ICC in the EFL classroom?



METHODOLOGY

Participants

The participants of this study were seven English teachers at the School of Liberal Arts, King Mongkut's University of Technology Thonburi (KMUTT). There were five full-time English teachers and two part-time English teachers. Out of these seven participants, two were males, and five were females. The criteria for choosing the participants were that they have taught LNG 103 English for Workplace Communication at KMUTT for more than two semesters since they would be familiar with the course objectives and content. Therefore, their responses may be richer and more reliable. The rationale of choosing the LNG 103 course was that it is a compulsory course offered for Thai third year students at KMUTT and promoting ICC to learners is one of the main objectives of the course. Each class lasts three hours and students need to attend the class once a week for a total of 15 weeks.

Instrument

A semi-structured interview was used in this study to investigate the two research questions and counting frequency to see the common ideas was used to present the data. The semi-structured interview was used to collect data because it can bring more in-depth responses from the participants. The interview was divided into two sections (See Appendix). The first section was demographic information questions which included participants' teaching experience, and their experience abroad. The second section of the interview aimed to investigate the participants' perceptions and strategies they used to promote ICC in their classes.

The interview questions were designed based on the research questions, and they were open-ended. Therefore, the interviewer could ask follow-up questions in order to explore the details of the answers. The questions were piloted with five English teachers and were adjusted after the piloting.

The interviews were conducted in Thai since all the participants were Thai and the use of Thai language allowed them to clearly explain their answers. Interviews were free-form discussions with questions roughly 30 minutes long. The responses were recorded and then translated into English by the researcher. Consent forms were given to the participants before the interviews were conducted.

Data analysis

After receiving data from the semi-structured interviews, responses were transcribed and coded. The coded data was then categorized into three main groups:

- teacher perceptions towards ICC
- strategies used to promote ICC
- challenges found when promoting ICC

The transcription from the first section was coded based on Deardorff’s ICC framework (2006) (see Table 1). Both the second and third sections were coded based on an emerging theme. Finally, one set of interview transcripts was sent to an external coder to certify the reliability of the codes.

The frequency of responses in each category was counted to see the most and least common ideas and perceptions of the participants towards ICC.

FINDINGS

The findings are reported under five topics, which include participants’ demographic information, teachers’ perceptions towards ICC, strategies teachers used to promote ICC in the EFL classroom, challenges in promoting ICC, and suggestions to enhance ICC in the EFL classroom.

1. Participants’ demographic information

Participants included five female and two male participants. All participants have worked at KMUTT for least two years and have been teaching LNG 103 for at least two semesters. Furthermore, all participants have overseas experience. For example, Teacher 1 (T1) spent four months in Canada as an exchange student, while T3 studied her master’s degree in the UK for one year.

2. Teachers’ perceptions towards ICC

This section discusses the teachers’ perceptions towards ICC in the EFL classroom (RQ1) based on Deardorff’s framework. Table 2 reveals that five teachers perceived ICC as a desired external outcome (ability to communicate or behave effectively and appropriately with people of other cultures), knowledge (having knowledge of their own culture and other cultures) and a requisite attitude (having respect and openness of cultural diversity). One teacher perceived ICC as skills (having skills of active listening, observing, interpreting, analyzing, evaluating and relating). None of them perceived ICC as a desired internal outcome (having flexibility, adaptability, an ethnorelative perspective and empathy).

Table 2
Teachers’ Perceptions towards ICC

| Definitions of ICC from Teachers’ Understanding | Participants | | | | | | | Total Mentions |
|---|--------------|----|----|----|----|----|----|----------------|
| | T1 | T2 | T3 | T4 | T5 | T6 | T7 | |
| 1. Desired external outcome | / | | / | | / | / | / | 5 |
| 2. Skills | | | | | | / | | 1 |
| 3. Knowledge | | / | / | / | / | | / | 5 |
| 4. Requisite attitude | / | / | | / | / | | / | 5 |
| 5. Desired internal outcome | | | | | | | | 0 |



In the aspect of a desired external outcome, five teachers perceived ICC as the ability to communicate or behave effectively and appropriately with people of other cultures. Three of them mentioned culture in the aspect of national culture. However, T3 and T6 stressed that “other culture” includes not only nationality but also different aspects of culture such as age, gender, generation etc. as mentioned in the excerpts below:

People from different cultures also means generation and social status and so on. (T3)

The different culture here includes not only nationalities but also gender, age, social status, etc. (T6)

As for the aspect of knowledge, five participants (T2, T3, T4, T5 and T7) perceived ICC as the understanding of other cultures and having knowledge of other cultures. They believed that ICC is the cultural knowledge of each country, and it cannot be ignored while learning the language. T4 and T7 clarified their understanding of having cultural knowledge as follows:

ICC is the study of cultural differences. It's the real knowledge that students need to learn together with the language. (T4)

ICC is the ability to know cultural knowledge and how to behave, [and] know everything about the different culture of each country. (T7)

Next, ICC was understood as a requisite attitude by five teachers. They perceived it as the awareness and respect of cultural diversity, as can be seen from the responses of the following participants:

ICC is the ability to be aware and [have] respect of cultural differences. If the students lack intercultural awareness, it may lead to a communication breakdown.... (T1)

People who have ICC will have awareness of cultural differences while communicating with people from other cultures. (T2)

The last category in teachers’ understanding towards ICC is skill. Only one teacher (T6) perceived ICC as the skills to understand other cultures, as she highlighted in the following excerpt:

...the ability here includes the skill to understand verbal language, non-verbal language and written language of people from different cultures. (T6)

Apart from the four points presented above, teachers were asked whether they thought that ICC is important for the EFL classroom. All of them agreed that ICC is essential and should be promoted in language classes. However, each of them had different strategies to promote ICC in their classes. The strategies used to promote it will be presented in the next section.

3. Strategies used to promote ICC in the EFL classroom

Table 3 illustrates eight strategies (in column 1) used by teachers to promote ICC in their classrooms. The strategies were categorized into three main groups which are: teacher-centered strategies (teachers dominate the class), student-centered strategies (teachers give guidance and students perform the activities), and strategies that need students’ and teachers’ collaboration (students and teachers work on the activities together).

Table 3
Strategies used to promote ICC in the EFL classroom

| Strategies/Activities to promote ICC | Participants | | | | | | | Total | Most effective strategy (based on no. of mentions) |
|---|--------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-------|--|
| | T1 | T2 | T3 | T4 | T5 | T6 | T7 | | |
| 1. Teacher-centered | | | | | | | | | |
| 1.1 Sharing teachers’ personal experience | / | | / | / | / | / | | 5 | |
| 1.2 Explaining explicitly about different cultures | | | | | / | | / | 2 | |
| 2. Student-centered | | | | | | | | | |
| 2.1 Reading and discussion (e.g. reading stories from textbooks or magazines) | / | | | / | (/) | / | / | 5 | (1) |
| 2.2 Doing role-plays | (/) | | | (/) | / | (/) | (/) | 5 | (4) |
| 2.3 Researching about intercultural issues and presentation | | (/) | (/) | | | | / | 3 | (2) |
| 2.4 Doing real-world tasks e.g. making small talk, interviewing | | | | / | | | | 1 | |
| 3. Teacher and student collaboration | | | | | | | | | |
| 3.1 Raising cultural issues and having group discussion | / | | | / | | | | 2 | |
| 3.2 Comparing and contrasting cultural differences | | | / | | | | | 1 | |

(/) is the strategy that each teacher reported to be the most effective strategy for promoting ICC, in their opinion.

For teacher-centered strategies, five teachers reported employing the strategy of sharing their own personal experience. T4 related her own experience to the class in the following excerpt:

I told my students about my experience regarding the misunderstanding of other cultures. I gave them examples of how it could cause misunderstanding in communication. For example, once my Vietnamese friend asked one senior Singaporean woman, “Why didn’t you get married?” ... the Singaporean was so embarrassed by the question. Then the atmosphere was heated.... (T4)



The other teacher-centered strategy that two teachers employed was explaining cultural differences explicitly, as shown in the following excerpt:

Sometimes, I told my students explicitly about cultural differences because many students do not have any ideas about different cultures. It's easier and saves more time to tell them what are the things that they should know and should do. (T5)

For student-centered strategies, all participants reported using these strategies. Reading and discussion task was used by five teachers, role play was used by five, presentation task was used by three teachers, and real-world task was used by one teacher. T1 clarified how she assigned students to read about and discuss cultural issues as in the following statement:

I asked my students to read stories related to culture from the textbooks and discuss among their classmates, and sometimes I also find articles from outside sources such as magazines and newspapers to be used as authentic materials. (T1)

T6 explained the way she raised students' intercultural awareness through role-play. She gave some examples as shown in the excerpt below:

One student acted as a CEO in a role play and shouted to the employee, 'Get out!'. I see that this problem came from the limitation of language knowledge. They did not understand the level of language. Therefore, I tried to insert this kind of issue [ICC awareness and appropriateness of language use] into the lesson and frequently highlighted this problem because I don't want them to misunderstand it. (T6)

T3 and T7 explained how they used research and presentation activities in their class as follows:

I assigned students to research for the stories about 'culture shock', it was a group work that required students to find the information that they were interested in relating to the cultural topic and present it to the class; students enjoyed it very much. (T3)

I showed the scoring criteria of the assignment to my students. One of the criteria is that students should show their intercultural awareness in their work. Apart from making sure that their language is correct and appropriate, students should research and present the topic which represents how they are aware of the different cultures in the workplace. (T7)

For teacher-student collaboration, two teachers (T1 and T4) employed raising cultural issues and having group discussions.

I always raise the cultural issue whenever I have a chance. I ask questions to my students, and if they have any different ideas, I ask them to discuss in groups or as a class. (T4)

The other teacher (T3) reported that she used a comparison and contrast strategy to promote ICC in her class, as she explains below:

I ask my students to compare the other cultures with their own. It helps them to be aware of their own culture and think about how it is different from other cultures. I think it helps promote the ICC awareness. (T3)

As for the most effective strategy, four teachers (T1, T4, T6 and T7) agreed that role-play was the most effective strategy, as justified by T1 below:

...it (role-play) can help students apply both their language and cultural knowledge. Some students have less exposure to cultural differences, so they cannot think of the possible cultural problems that may happen. Role-play will be like the simulation where they can use the language to solve problems that might happen in the scene. (T1)

Two teachers (T2 and T3) believed that research and presentation was the most effective strategies. T2 gave reasons to support her ideas in the following statement:

I think that research and presentation is the most effective way to promote ICC, because students can learn to find the information that they are interested in, learn to evaluate whether it is related to ICC or not and they can also practice their language through presentation skills. (T2)

Only one teacher (T5) thought that reading stories and discussing was the most effective way to enhance ICC.

In the textbook, there are some cultural activities in each lesson such as the cultural knowledge of each country. It's good to teach both language and culture by letting students read about and discuss it. Teachers can raise their cultural awareness by pointing it out from reading passages. (T5)

In the next section, teachers report challenges they have encountered in promoting ICC in the classroom.



4. Challenges in promoting ICC in the EFL classroom

Table 4
Challenges in promoting ICC in the EFL classroom

| Challenges in promoting ICC in the EFL classroom | | | | | | | | |
|--|--------------|----|----|----|----|----|----|----------------|
| Categories | Participants | | | | | | | Total Mentions |
| | T1 | T2 | T3 | T4 | T5 | T6 | T7 | |
| 1. Students | / | / | / | / | | / | | 5 |
| 2. Curriculum | / | | | | / | | | 2 |
| 3. Time | / | | | | / | | | 2 |
| 4. Materials | | | | | / | | / | 2 |
| 5. Teachers | | / | | | | | | 1 |

Table 4 presents the challenges that teachers found when they tried to promote ICC in their classes. The information can be divided into five challenging aspects, including students, curriculum, time, materials, and teachers. Five teachers thought that one challenge in promoting ICC came from the students. The teachers explained that their students had a shared, homogenous background, lacked intercultural exposure and were not open-minded enough to accept cultural differences.

Three participants (T1, T4, T6) mentioned that their students had a shared cultural background, thus they might not be aware that there are cultural differences in the world outside their own.

Most of my students come from a similar cultural background. I mean, all of them are Thai with a middle-class family and they seem not to be aware that there are other people who may be totally different from them. It is a challenge for the teacher to let them know that there are other cultures out there. (T6)

Moreover, three teachers also stated that students' lack of intercultural exposure is a problem that can obstruct the promotion of ICC.

The students who have travelled abroad seemed to understand intercultural issues faster than the others who have not visited any places outside their own country. (T4)

The second challenge for teachers in promoting ICC was the curriculum. Two participants (T1 and T5) emphasized that the curriculum focuses on enhancing language skills rather than promoting ICC.

Since the curriculum usually focuses on language content, I think it was a duty of teachers to balance between language and intercultural lesson. Some teachers might focus on only language and some might frequently integrate culture in their teaching depending on their judgment. (T5)

T7 explained one possible reason that ICC did not appear in the curriculum:

I always integrate ICC in my class because it is one of the main objectives of LNG 103. However, there is no assessment and scoring criteria regarding the intercultural aspect. Therefore, other teachers may pay less attention to promoting ICC in their class. (T7)

The third challenging issue in promoting ICC is time limitation. T1 and T5 affirmed that they did not have enough time for endorsing ICC in class since there was a lot of language content to be covered.

I sometimes cannot talk much about ICC because there is not enough time to cover all the content. So, I will insert ICC only when time permits. (T5)

The fourth challenge is the instructional materials. One participant (T5) complained that the material did not clearly explain intercultural content, while another participant (T7) asserted that the material did not contain enough cultural knowledge.

I think that the textbook that we use did not clearly explain about ICC. I wish they had one chapter to explain the concept of ICC, and the cultural points should be inserted in all of the chapters. (T7)

The last challenge in promoting ICC is from the teachers. T2 thought that the challenge came from herself, as she states below:

I do not have enough intercultural experience to share with my students, and sometimes I'm not sure about the cultural points that I will teach. (T2)

5. Suggestions to enhance ICC in the EFL classroom

At the end of the interviews, the participants were asked to give some suggestions regarding how to better promote ICC in EFL classes from their opinion. Three main points were raised by the participants. First, in terms of teachers and students, most of the participants mentioned opportunities to broaden students' and teachers' worldviews. They stated that having exchange students, teacher training in promoting ICC and having chances to go abroad to expand intercultural exposure may be better ways to promote ICC. Second, cultural content and language lessons should be promoted equally in the class. Next, the course assessment should be clearer in criteria for assessing ICC. Last, the materials used in the course should contain more cultural knowledge and activities aiming to promote ICC. The above suggestions could potentially help enhance ICC in EFL classrooms based on participants' opinions.



CONCLUSION

The study investigated teachers' perceptions towards ICC and the strategies teachers use to promote ICC in the EFL classroom. The findings revealed that teachers perceived ICC, based on Dearsordff's ICC framework (2006), as the desired external outcome (ability to communicate and behave effectively and appropriately with people from other cultures), knowledge (having knowledge of their own culture and other cultures), requisite attitude (cultural awareness, openness, and respect for cultural diversity) and skills (listening, observing, evaluating, and interpreting). None of them perceived ICC as the desired internal outcome (having flexibility, adaptability, an ethnorelative view, and empathy).

The strategies that teachers used to promote ICC in their classes were categorized into three main groups: teacher-centered strategies, student-centered strategies and strategies that need students' and teachers' collaboration. The preferred strategies that most teachers used to promote ICC are telling stories from teachers' direct experience, asking students to read and discuss, and using role-play. Role-play is the most effective way to promote ICC, in the teachers' opinion. Teachers also reported the challenges that they found in promoting ICC. Most of them related to the students' homogenous background and experience. Moreover, curriculum, time, materials and teachers are also challenging points in promoting ICC. The participants suggested that they need more supports in all of the aspects, especially clearer ICC concepts in the curriculum, and assessment of ICC. They also stressed that teacher training and supportive materials could be helpful to their future teaching.

DISCUSSION

The interesting points from the findings are that most of the teachers have similar ideas towards ICC as the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately with people from other cultures. Some teachers perceived "other cultures" as the beliefs of people of "other nationalities or countries". Of these, two teachers noted that ICC is not only the ability to communicate with people from different countries but also from other social groups such as gender, age, social status, etc. The latter idea is in agreement with the ICC concepts proposed by Byram et al. (2002) that intercultural notions can be related to various themes such as gender, age, region, religion, race, etc. Moreover, as Miike (2010, cited in Dai & Chen 2014) stated, the diverse perceptions towards "culture" can affect the perceptions of ICC. It is not surprising that the perceptions of teachers in this study were somewhat varied. Additionally, since the teachers perceive "culture" differently, their perceptions might affect their teaching strategies. For instance, they may promote ICC in different ways depending on their respective beliefs and understandings of "culture".

In terms of strategies, the teachers agreed that role-play is the most effective way to promote ICC, since they thought that it can reflect skills, knowledge and awareness in both linguistic and intercultural competences. This result is in accordance with the suggestions from Byram et al. (2002) that role-play and simulation can be a good activity to encourage comparative analysis in a language class. Nonetheless, many strategies recommended by scholars had not

been employed by most of the teachers in this study, such as using comparative analysis, which was mentioned by only one participant. In addition, some strategies suggested by other researchers were not reported at all, for instance, doing reflective exercises (Trede et al., 2013), using portfolio and discussion, and reflective writing (Byram et al., 2002). This could be because such activities may require more highly proficient language students, and may increase teachers' workload.

Based on the demographic data of the participants, it can be seen that all of the teachers in this study had experience abroad. However, some of them reported uncertainty in applying ICC concepts in their classes, saying that they needed more teacher training in promoting ICC. According to the teachers' suggestions, many of them think that both teachers and students should have experience abroad in order to enhance their ICC. However, Byram et al. (2002) affirmed that a teacher's experience is not as important as the teacher's role to encourage students to recognize their own identity and others', and their role to improve skills to observe, ask questions, and interpret the answers by themselves. It could be said that teachers' experience abroad may not affect their ability to promote ICC. Since we are now in the digital era, there are many ways to obtain intercultural knowledge without going abroad, for instance, using social media, surfing the internet, and asking people to share their experience.

Similar to Young and Sachdev (2011) and Jata (2015), the findings show that ICC and linguistic competence are not equally highlighted in language class. Due to course curriculum, time constraints, and course assessment criteria, many language curricula still focus more on giving language knowledge rather than enhancing intercultural comprehension. Therefore, all language curricula should integrate ICC into their course objectives and assessment in order to prepare students for the globally interconnected world.

Finally, it is interesting that some participants complained about insufficient cultural content in the textbook used in the course. One participant added that cultural knowledge was not clearly presented in the materials. In other words, the teachers expected a textbook with a number of cultural topics and clear explanations. However, Byram et al. (2002) suggested that even though materials may not explicitly present cultural contents to the learners, it is the teachers' duty to find other cultural perspectives from an existing topic; for instance, age, gender, and race can serve as points of discussion in a sports theme. Therefore, teachers' ability to integrate ICC in class is crucial, and teacher training is a potential solution to this issue.



IMPLICATIONS

From the results, there are some possible implications in terms of teacher's development and teaching and learning pedagogy, as follows:

1. From the results of the study, some teachers reported uncertainty in defining and promoting ICC. Therefore, EFL teachers should find opportunities to enhance their intercultural knowledge by attending ICC training courses or workshops in which the theories and strategies may be clarified and concretized by the teacher trainers. Moreover, an ICC training course which covers all five aspects of ICC should be added in both pre-service teacher training programs and current teacher training development projects.
2. Some study participants cited lack of intercultural knowledge in the textbook as a reason why promoting ICC can be a challenge. Therefore, a teacher should select the materials for their language course by considering intercultural aspects supported in textbooks. Otherwise, they can adapt the existing topics in a textbook to be discussed in critical and intercultural perspectives (Byram et al., 2002).
3. Findings show most teachers primarily used role-play to promote ICC in their classrooms as they felt it was the most effective strategy. Hence, language teachers who would like to enhance ICC in their class can create tasks which promote both linguistic competence and intercultural competence such as role-plays, interviews and simulations. Moreover, unless the ICC assessment is clear, teachers can track the students' ICC improvement by asking them to keep records such as self-reflections and portfolios (Byram et al., 2002).

LIMITATIONS

There were some limitations in conducting this research. Firstly, there was a small number of participants in this study (seven teachers). Therefore, the results from the study may not be generalisable. Secondly, only a very particular group of teachers were included in the study. The participants were Thai teachers of the LNG 103 course (English for Workplace Communication) at King Mongkut's University of Technology Thonburi, so the findings may differ if the research is carried out with foreign teachers in other language courses at other universities. Thirdly, the students on the course were also Thai. The mono-cultural group of students in the class may also effect the findings, such as the teaching strategies used along with the challenges promoting ICC. Next, other factors that may affect the results, such as gender, age, teaching experience, and educational background of the participants, were not examined. Finally, semi-structured interviews used to collect data may affect the findings. To clarify, respondents may not be able to completely answer interview questions; moreover, there might be some mismatch between participants' responses and what they actually did in their classes. Therefore, using more than one research instrument, such as classroom observation and questionnaire, may increase the validity of the research findings.

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APPENDIX

List of semi-structured interview questions

Demographic Questions

1. How long have you been teaching?
2. How long have you been teaching at KMUTT?
3. How long have you been teaching in LNG 103?
4. How many sections do you teach in LNG 103? Who are your students?
5. What is LNG 103 about? What are the objectives of the course? Can you tell me about it?
6. Do you have any experience studying or working abroad? If yes, what were the countries that you studied or worked in? And how long were you there?

Interview Questions

1. What is “intercultural communicative competence”, from your understanding?
2. Do you think that ICC is important for the EFL classroom? Why?
3. Did you have a chance to promote ICC in your class? If yes, how did you promote ICC in your class?
4. What activities do you think are effective in promoting ICC?
5. Did you provide any extra materials? If yes, what were they?
6. What are the problems you found in promoting ICC in your classroom?
7. What are your suggestions to successfully promote ICC in the classroom?