Intercultural Language Education: Supportive Factors and Constraints on EFL Learners' Intercultural Communicative Competence Development

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative research aims to explore the supportive factors and constraints on the development of EFL learners' intercultural communicative competence (ICC) in the EFL context of Vietnam. Forty-seven EFL learners who were learning General English at a foreign language center in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, were involved in this study. Two research instruments, namely diary and semi-structured group interview, were employed to garner data. The findings revealed that there were more supportive factors (active learners, inspirational teacher, interactive learning material and task, and dynamic context) than constraints (learner differences and task administration) that affected learners' ICC development. This study recommends that different factors such as learners, teacher, learning material/task, and context, should be scrutinized so as to facilitate the development process of learners' ICC.

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Introduction

Within its new roles of an international language, a lingua franca, a world language, and a global language in the process of globalization, English has been used as a communication tool for different purposes such as business, travel, politics, etc. in multicultural situations. Apart from that, English has become one of the most studied languages around the world, and there are more non-native speakers using English than native speakers. Accordingly, English as a foreign language has been widely adopted by many countries throughout the world as the main foreign language in their educational instructions (e.g., Brumfit, 2004; Byram, 2008). In such a situation, the teaching of English has been long required to go beyond the teaching of cultures of the target language, i.e. the teaching of culture should focus on not only its target language cultures but also other cultures around the world where English is commonly used as a communication tool, in order to meet an increasing need of raising awareness of intercultural competence (IC).

Given the fact that intercultural communicative competence (ICC) is one of the key competences in the 21st century, it is agreed that one of the ultimate goals in English language training programs is to educate learners to become intercultural speakers who can deal with linguistic and cultural complexity and take part in multicultural situations (e.g., Deardoff, 2009; Jæger, 2001). It is found in the Vietnamese context that there is a new trend in integrating intercultural content into English language lessons in order to educate English language learners to be competent in both English language and IC so as to be able to effectively and appropriately interact with people from different cultures in multicultural situations. This study is, thus, aimed at exploring the supportive factors and constraints on the development of learners' ICC. The research question to be addressed in this study is formed as follows:

1. What are the supportive factors and constraints that affect the development of EFL learners' intercultural communicative competence?

Literature Review

It is seen that the concept of the ICC is variously defined by different scholars (e.g., Byram, 1997; Chen and Starosta, 1999; Sinicrope, Norris and Watanabe, 2007; Wiseman, 2002), resulting in the confusion in addressing the same issue. Byram (1997) defines that the ICC is the ability which enables one to interact effectively and appropriately with people from different cultures in a foreign language. Similarly, Chen and Starosta (1999) define intercultural communication (or communicative) competence as "the ability to effectively and appropriately execute communication behaviors that negotiate each

other's cultural identity or identities in a culturally diverse environment" (p. 28). Wiseman (2002), in another aspect, includes motivation as an additional element in his definition of ICC apart from knowledge and skills. This unique element, which is not commonly found in other definitions of ICC, is defined as "the set of feelings, intentions, needs and drives associated with the anticipation of or actual engagement in intercultural communication" (p. 4). He suggests these three elements are essential for effective and appropriate interaction in intercultural situations.

Based on different definitions, Lázár, Huber-Kriegler, Lussier, Matei and Peck (2007), an international team of experts involved in carrying out projects within the framework of European Centre for Modern Languages, define ICC as "the ability to communicate effectively in cross-cultural situations and to relate appropriately in a variety of cultural contexts" (p. 9), which is used as a guideline for language teachers and teacher educators. This definition emphasizes two main components: skills and attitudes. The former involves the development "in the areas of observation, interpreting and relating, mediation and discovery" (ibid., p. 9); the latter is "to increase respect, empathy and tolerance for ambiguity, to raise interest in, curiosity about, and openness towards people from other cultures, and to encourage a willingness to suspend judgment" (ibid., pp. 9-10).

Due to various definitions and constructs of ICC, scholars have not yet reached a consensus on how ICC should be defined and what constructs it should be composed of. However, in this study, the ICC can be understood as the ability which enables one to effectively and appropriately interact in a language other than one's native language with others from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. It consists of language competence (linguistic competence, sociolinguistic competence, & discourse competence) and intercultural competence (attitudes, knowledge, skills, & awareness) that help one to be able to successfully integrate in a multicultural society (e.g., Byram, 1997; Sinicrope et al., 2007).

From different views on ICC, it is seen that various models of ICC have been proposed to address many aspects of ICC, but Byram's (1997) model of ICC is one of the most comprehensive frameworks to develop as well as evaluate learners' ICC in different contexts. In his ICC model, Byram (1997) points out that intercultural competence (IC), which relates to other competences, namely linguistic competence, sociolinguistic competence and discourse competence, consists of five elements such as attitudes, knowledge, skills of interpreting and relating, skills of discovery and interaction, and critical cultural awareness/political education. Based upon this model, he formulates specific educational objectives which are designed for language and culture learning and serve as guiding criteria to develop and assess learners' IC in the foreign language class. Those educational

objectives are specific and detailed, but they do not specify the different levels of IC to be obtained at different stages through the process of education since he argues that establishing levels is quite problematic for the attitude factor.

There have been different studies which attempt to include intercultural content into language education. It is noticed that the most common focus of study is the application of information and communications technology (ICT) such as computer, the Internet, video and other technologies to promote the acquisition of IC/ICC (e.g., Ware, 2003; O'Neil, 2008; Garretts-Rucks, 2010). Other three common focuses of study are the use of new approaches in IC/ICC development (e.g., Meade, 2010; Nakano, Fukui, Nuspliger and Gilbert, 2011; Gómez, 2012), the contexts of ICC promotion (e.g., Pierson, 2010; Ottoson, 2013), and the characteristics / difficulties / challenges / factors in intercultural communication (e.g., Moloney, 2007; Brighton, 2011; Alexandru, 2012). However, no research has been reported conducting an action research to explore the factors that impact EFL learners' ICC development in EFL contexts including the Vietnamese context. This study is, therefore, hoped to fill up such a gap in the context of Vietnam.

Methodology

Research Setting

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

Course Design

For this study, the General English course at the elementary level was involved. The class lasting over a period of thirteen weeks was instructed by a Vietnamese teacher of English (the researcher), who met the class twice a week (70% of the teaching time), and a foreign teacher of English, who met the class once a week (30% of the teaching time). Each session lasted two hours, so the total number of teaching hours for the whole course was seventy-six including seventy-two in-class teaching hours and four end-of-course assessment hours consisting of two kinds of test: written and oral tests. The end-of-course assessment was conducted by teachers other than those in charge of teaching the course.

Textbook

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

Participants

The participants were forty-seven EFL learners from three intact elementary classes who were learning General English at SEAMEO RETRAC in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. As seen from Table 1, there was just over a half (53.2%) of the participants aged under 20, i.e., the participants were quite young. Additionally, around three-fifths (61.6%) of the participants were university students. That is why nearly seven in ten (68.1%) of the participants got other highest degrees or certificates (e.g., high school baccalaureate) other than Bachelor, Master, or Doctor of philosophy degrees. What is more, there was a very large majority (78.7%) of the participants who had learned English for over five years. Just over a third (34%) of the participants reported that they had ever been to abroad, and only a very small number (4.3%) of the participants had ever taken an intercultural course before.

Table 1 Research participants' general information

		N = 47	
		F	%
Gender	Male	16	34.0
	Female	31	66.0
Age	Under 20	25	53.2
	21-30S	18	38.3
	31-40	4	8.5
	Over 40	0	0.0
Job	Office worker	10	21.4
	University Student	29	61.6
	School student	5	10.6
	Other	3	6.4
Highest degree	BA	14	29.8
	MA	1	2.1
	PhD	0	0.0
	Others	32	68.1
Number of years' learning English	Under 1	1	2.1
	1 – under 3	1	2.1
	3 - 5	8	17.0
	Over 5	37	78.7
Overseas experience	Yes	16	34.0
	No	31	66.0
Previous intercultural course	Yes	2	4.3
	No	45	95.7

Research Instruments

As the nature of this study is qualitative, it utilized two research instruments: learner's diary (Appendix A) and semi-structured interview (Appendix B) in order to collect the data. The former was designed in terms of guided questions (5 questions), and the latter with five questions was employed to get in-depth information on participants' supportive factors and constraints on EFL learners' ICC development.

Data Collection and Analysis

Regarding the data collection, during the course, forty-seven participants were required to write their reflection on their intercultural language learning in a diary three times after three ICC units. However, there were only fifteen participants (around 32% of the population) who were chosen based on their willingness for the semi-structured group interview after the course. In another aspect, participants were allowed to use their mother tongue to write their reflection, and answer the questions in the interviews so that they did not encounter any difficulty in terms of language proficiency. To ensure the validity and reliability, learner's diary and interview questions were first reviewed by an expert in the field. They were then translated into Vietnamese by the researcher so that the participants did not encounter any problems in reporting their reflection and answering questions in their L1. The diary and interview questions in Vietnamese version were cross-checked by a Vietnamese teacher of English for their accuracy of translation. Finally, the diary and interview questions (Vietnamese version) were piloted before being used in the main study. Furthermore, the group interview was used to crosscheck the information attained from the diary.

With respect to the data analysis, the content analysis was utilized to analyze the data since it is inductive, and the investigation of the data might "lead to themes or theoretical criteria that are grounded in the data" (Lincohn and Guba, 1985; cited in Teddlie and Tashakkori, 2009, p. 251). As participants were required to write their reflection three times which generated 141 entries, so the codes such as DT1, DT2, and DT3 were made for the first topic, second topic, and third topic, respectively. Each participant was coded with a cardinal number as well. For example, the code DT2/4 means the extract is from the second time reflection in the diary written by the participant number four. Regarding data collected from group interviews, the code was made to each interviewee in terms of L1, L2, and so on.

Moreover, double-coding was employed in order to check and increase the reliability of the content analysis. Two methods for double-coding are intra-coder and inter-coder. For the intra-coding, the researcher chose three pieces of text from the diary and interview items which had been already coded to recode them. The researcher checked the reliability which was set over 65%. Concerning the inter-coding, the researcher had two experts as inter-coders to recode three pieces of text from the open-ended items. The two inter-coders and the researcher had to reach to an agreement level of reliability (over 65%). As the diary entries and interview transcriptions were in participants' mother tongue, the researcher had to translate all the entries and transcriptions into English. The researcher then asked one teacher of English to double-check the accuracy of the translated version.

Findings

1. Supportive Factors on EFL Learners' ICC Development

Based on the frequency and incidence of the responses from the diaries and interviews, four broad themes, namely the *active learners, inspirational teacher, interactive learning material and task, and dynamic context* were found as major factors that fostered the process of development of learners' ICC.

1.1 The Active Learners

The *active learners* were found as one of the factors influencing directly on their successful development of ICC. This theme was divided into three subcategories: affective, meta-cognitive, and social dimensions of ICC learning, which manifested the learners' activeness in their ICC learning.

The Learners' Affective Dimension of Learning

The findings revealed that learners with high motivation, deep interest, and positive attitudes to the learning of intercultural content in English language lessons were actively engaged in the lessons.

As being motivated to learn more cultures through learning English language, one participant wrote "I am eager to learn more about cultures in English language classes because this type of lesson helps me to understand more about my culture and improve my English as well" (DT2/11). Other comments in diaries further showed that many learners became more involved in ICC learning inasmuch as the type of intercultural language lesson motivated them to develop their ICC. One shared:

It is really useful and important to learn English through learning culture. It motivates learners to learn cultures through learning English and vice versa (DT3/44).

This finding was advocated by those interviewed. As a result of being aware of what to learn,

a lot of learners were motivated to improve their ICC. Further to this, they were intrinsically motivated to foster their ICC for "their future job" (e.g., L6, L10, L12, and L15), "overseas travel" (e.g., L5 and L9) and "overseas study" (e.g., L5 and L9).

Several learners expressed their interest in the learning of intercultural content in English language classes as it was new and they "have a chance to learn more about other cultures and English" (e.g., DT1/13, DT1/39, DT2/37, DT2/43, DT3/22, DT3/36, L6, and L13). Moreover, some reflected that this course had interesting lessons about weird things from different cultures, so they wanted to learn more about them. Examples of this point are:

…I am quite interested in learning about weird concepts of beauty from different cultures… (DT1/11).

During the lesson, I learned many interesting things about foods and drinks from different cultures, and now I am quite interested in bizarre foods and drinks around the world (DT2/6).

Aligning with this point, some informants in the group interviews commented due to the interesting lessons, "[they are] very interested in learning about other cultures, learning how to talk to foreigners, knowing some weird concepts of beauty, bizarre foods and drinks, and strange body language" (L7), so [they] really like to have a course like this because it helps [them] learn English more" (L4).

Additionally, the findings indicated that a big number of learners had positive attitudes toward the learning of intercultural content in English language classes. Many participants' responses in diaries and interviews showed that because of their positive attitudes to the intercultural language learning, they wanted to improve their knowledge of English and interculture as well as communication skills.

I feel like learning foreign cultures in English classes because it helps me to know more about other cultures, and I want to communicate better (DT1/13).

It is very new to me to learn about cultures, and I like learning about cultures very much, especially through learning English (L9).

The Learners' Meta-cognitive Dimension of Learning

As known from the abovementioned findings, most of the respondents realized the importance of the learning intercultural content in English language classes. They became active learners in their ICC learning process because they were well aware of their learning needs, adjusted their learning, and attempted to make use of opportunities to practice English and IC.

With respect to the findings from diaries, it was found that many participants indicated their awareness of what they needed to learn. They realized the international role of English nowadays was important to learn both culture and English in English classes. One commented "[a]s English is an international language, we use it as a tool to talk to foreigners. We may meet a lot of people from different countries, so it is good for us to learn different cultures in English classes (DT1/7). One added:

> I thought that we just learned only English in English classes, but it is quite important to learn cultures in English classes because English is used around the world. Now, I understand that I should focus on both English and culture so that I can avoid misunderstanding when talking to foreigners (DT2/33).

It was further noticed that some respondents mentioned in their diary that it would be incomplete if English was learned alone without its culture as well as other cultures.

> The integration of culture in English lessons is very interesting and important because it helps us understand more about other cultures and learn English through learning cultures. It would be not enough if we just learned English without learning its culture and other cultures (DT1/1).

For this point, the findings from the interview supported the evidence that EFL learners were aware of what to learn owing to the intercultural language course. Some interviewed learners believed that it was good to learn about cultures in English classes so as to avoid culture shock and to better communicate with foreigners (e.g., L2 and L8). Some others commented that they hoped that learning about cultures in English lessons might be good for their future job and later traveling abroad (e.g., L9; L10; & L15).

Moreover, many learners also reported in their diaries that they adjusted their learning by searching for more materials from different sources (e.g., internet, books) and discussing more things about culture with friends in order to adapt themselves to this course (e.g., DT1/18 & DT3/20). When the interview data was triangulated, findings displayed that interviewees were aware of the importance of the ICC, so they tried to find ways to improve their both LC and IC. For instance, one told "[b]efore I watched films to practice my English, I just cared about vocabulary, grammar, and so on. But now I pay more attention to cultural points when watching films because it is quite useful and interesting to know more about different cultures" (L9). The other said "I want to look for cultural materials written in English to read in order to know more about different cultures and improve my vocabulary" (L13).

In another aspect, the findings from both diary data and interview data indicated that respondents actively looked for chances to practice their English and IC. Many reported that they spent more time after class on improving their ICC, for example: meeting foreigners offline and online.

On the weekend, my friends and I often go to the places where there are foreigners, and we try to speak English with them. It is very fun because we can practice speaking English and learn more about their cultures (L2).

I often use Facebook, make friends with foreigners, and chat with them. Recently, I often talk to them about their culture (L15).

The Learners' Social Dimension of Learning

This is one of the characteristics that attributes to the development of learners' ICC insomuch as it indicates learners' willingness to study. It was found that learners were willing to work actively in pair or group and ask for more information during the course.

Many learners reported that they liked taking part in pair work and group work eagerly as they could practice their ICC with their peers. They mentioned that they were interested in "working in groups and sharing what they have learned from the lesson" (DT2/3), and they "like role-playing in situations that [they] may encounter in the reality" (DT3/28). Additionally, they looked forward to chances to work in groups to discuss, talk about cultures in English, and learn things from others (e.g., DT1/46; L10).

Furthermore, the findings indicated that several learners acknowledged the roles of their teachers and peers to improve their ICC.

My friend is good at English, so she can understand the lesson well. I often ask her to explain me things (DT3/2).

I learn many interesting things during this course, especially about culture. However, I sometimes don't understand some points, and I often ask my friends for help. If they don't know, I ask my teacher for that (L11).

1.2 The Inspirational Teacher

The findings indicated that the inspirational teacher fostered the development of learners' ICC by his/her teaching methodology, professional roles, and professional personae.

The Teacher's Teaching Methodology

Many comments from diaries and interviews showed that learners liked learning the intercultural language course, and they got more involved in class activities because their teacher inspired them with different teaching techniques which "are fun and attractive to learners" (DT1/16), "are interesting" (DT3/28), and "motivate [them] to learn both English and cultures" (DT2/41). What is more, one learner commented:

The class seems more involved whenever there is an intercultural language lesson because the teacher uses some techniques that motivate learners to work in pair or group (L12).

Besides, some other comments revealed that the class was more interactive and active because of the teacher's inspiring teaching steps, so it was easy for them to follow the lessons (e.g., DT3/9 & L3).

The Teacher's Professional Roles

Two of the teacher's professional roles commonly found in this study were as a facilitator and a mediator. The findings indicated that the teacher worked as a facilitator to help learners study more easily by discussing questions. One stated in his diary "[t]his lesson is new to us, and there are activities for pair work and group work, so the teacher asks us some questions before we work in group or practice with a partner" (DT1/26). The teachers also inspired his learners to get actively engaged in learning activities by giving clear guidance on tasks/activities. For example, one response in the diary showed "we work in group to make a poster of food and drink, and the teacher guides us how to do it and make an oral presentation. Then, we present it. It is enjoyable" (DT2/29). In addition, learners were assisted to explore how to do a learning task/activity. One wrote "one or two learners are invited to practice with the teacher as a model, then we start to practice role-playing… it is easy for us to understand and learn" (DT3/44).

Such findings were supported by those from group interviews. One of those interviewed confided: We have many activities during the course, and the teacher works very hard to help us learn. He raises a problem for us to discuss, we then compare our ideas with other groups (L14).

The teacher was also seen as a mediator to organize activities for learners to work in group or practice with a partner. During the course, the learners "in different groups debate with one another on confusing gestures" (DT3/25) "the meaning of a new word" (DT1/30) or "the names of bizarre foods and drinks" (DT2/6), and the teacher had to help learners resolve their differences by 'summariz[ing] the points, show[ing] the differences, and giv[ing] comments on [their] ideas" (DT2/14). When learners were required to discuss and give an oral presentation, the teacher also mediated the argument (e.g., L1 & L7).

The Teacher's Professional Personae

The teacher was commented as being enthusiastic and devoted in the process of developing learners' ICC. Many informants reported in their diaries that their teacher was "keen on explaining things that learners do not understand well" (DT1/4), "go around the classroom to help learners work in pair/group" (DT1/38), and "supply us with extra materials" (DT3/47).

Apart from that, some interviewees said that their teacher spent some time after class on talking more about what learners were confused during the class. For example, "[a]fter class, I often talk to my teacher, and he is always willing to answer my questions if I get confused with something. I feel my English is improved and I know more about other cultures" (L15).

1.3 The Interactive Learning Material and Task

The findings uncovered that the *interactive learning intercultural material and task* were important parts in developing learners' ICC.

Learning Materials

Many learners commented that they found the learning material quite useful since it was authentic, up-to-date, and informative. Some learners were interested in the vivid pictures as the material "has the pictures of [their] favorite singers" (DT1/35), in "weird facts about concepts of beauty that [they] have never known before" (DT1/12), and in "video clips about body language because it is quite hard for [them] to understand the text" (DT3/24).

What is more, the intercultural material had interesting topics that were easy to understand and relevant to learners' life.

The topic of foods and drinks is quite familiar to us, and it is interesting to learn about it (DT2/42).

We learn interesting things about beauty, food and drink, and body language that are close to our daily topics, so it is not too difficult to understand them (L5).

Learning Tasks/Activities

It was uncovered that learners' ICC development was, to some extent, supported by task types and designs. Many comments from diaries indicated that learners liked the activities that encouraged them to work with peers interactively and cooperatively and motivated them to get involved actively in learning (e.g., DT1/16 & DT3/28).

The findings from interviews were also in the same line with the aforementioned evidence. Two interviewees commented:

There are many activities for pair work and group work in this material, so we can learn from each other (L2).

To me, I enjoy working with my friends in groups because it motivates me to look for more information of English and culture. It also helps me to understand more about how to use English effectively in intercultural situations (L11).

1.4 The Dynamic Context

The findings discovered that learners' ICC development was positively influenced by both learning context and social context. The former attributed to learners' positive perceptions of their intercultural language learning while the latter motivated them to foster their ICC.

Learning Context

Due to many factors, namely teacher's teaching methodology, teacher's professional personae, and interactive learning tasks/activities, the learning context was quite favorable for learners to better their ICC. Many participants reflected in their diaries that they were eager to learn in an enjoyable, relaxing, and friendly atmosphere because of the types of learning task, e.g., "it is relaxing and enjoyable to discuss and work in groups" (DT1/26), or "drawing a poster about food and drink is very interesting because of working in groups" (DT2/4); teacher's teaching steps, e.g., "I feel relaxed and comfortable in learning it because the teacher's teaching steps are fun" (DT1/8); and teacher's devotion, e.g., "the ways of introducing foods and drinks are very interesting" (DT1/8).

A big number of interviewees added more evidence to this point. They were interested in and motivated to learn because the learning atmosphere was fun and dynamic as "we enjoy going around the classroom to role-play with friends pretending foreigners from different countries" (L2).

Furthermore, this learning context had many foreign teachers from different countries such as Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom, and the United States of America. Interviewees confided that they had chances to meet and talk to foreigners at their language center, so they were inspired to learn (e.g., L6; L9; & L14).

Multicultural Context

Several learners realized the importance of the ICC because they lived in a dynamic society in which they met people from different cultures. One wrote in her diary "[n]owadays English is an international language, so it is necessary to know about both English and other cultures so that we can communicate better. Every day we meet a lot of foreigners, and we need to understand their cultures" (DT3/32).

Some learners also mentioned that being good at ICC was useful for traveling because it helped them communicate better. Moreover, they became motivated to acquire the ICC as a result of being aware that their country was on the way to integrate into the multicultural world, and English would be an official language for communication.

> …learning cultural content in English lessons is useful when traveling, widens our knowledge, and helps communicate better. Besides, Vietnam is on the way to integrate into a multicultural world, so it is important to learn ICC (DT1/14).

> When I was told that English would be the official language in the region, I thought I needed to learn English more. However, I need to learn more about ASEAN cultures because only English is not enough (L8).

2. Constraints on EFL Learners' ICC Development

Emerging from the qualitative data analysis, two themes playing the roles of constraints on learners' ICC development were found. They were the *learner differences and task administration.*

2.1 The Learner Differences

Albeit the *active learners* who were seen as one of the factors that fostered their ICC development manifested in affective, mega-cognitive, and social dimension of learning, the findings indicated that they also shared their responsibility in slowing down their ICC improvement because of *learner differences* in terms of their low ability to learn English and personal characters.

The Learners' Ability to Learn English

The findings revealed that some learners did not have high competence in learning English even though they spent years on it. This hindered them from enjoying learning this intercultural language class.

I am not very good at remembering words well, so I find it quite hard to express my ideas in English, especially in group discussion I am a little inactive (DT1/22).

I cannot remember new words very well. I am often demotivated by not understanding the new words as well as the lessons (L11).

The learners' Personal Characters

A few study participants confided that they encountered some difficulties in learning English due to being unconfident when using English in group work. One commented in his diary "because I cannot speak English well, so I don't feel very confident with my English even when I work in group" (DT2/25).

In respect of this point, some interviewees added that they were shy and unconfident during their learning. For examples, "although I like learning English much, I am still shy when talking in English, especially when the teacher asks me to say something" (L8), and "one of the biggest constraints is that I am not confident with my English. So, whenever I want to say something, I feel quite nervous" (L2).

2.2 The Task Administration

The findings indicated that learners' developing their ICC was affected by the learning task administration in terms of time constraint and task constraint.

Time Constraint

Some participants reported in their diaries that they had some problems in understanding the lessons due to limited time for each activity although they enjoyed learning activities. They, hence, found it a little bit difficult to remember what they had learned. One shared:

There are activities for us to practice, but there should be more time to prepare. For example, the presentation should be given in advance so that learners will be able to prepare for the following lesson (DT1/39).

Supporting this point, a small number of interview informants mentioned that it took time to be fluent in using English and intercultural strategies in different situations that they might encounter in real life (e.g., L4, L13; & L15).

Task Constraint

In the same way, some other participants recommended that there should be more learning tasks/activities to practice ICC more effectively and appropriately. One mentioned "[i]n this lesson, there are some grammar points and new words about culture that are quite difficult to remember, so it is better to have more activities to practice more" (DT1/6), and another one added "if there were some activities like making a video clip about body language from different countries, it would be more interesting" (DT3/14).

Concerning this issue, some interviewees shared the same viewpoint. For instance, "There should be more activities in this step so that learners can practice using English more and understand more about other cultures and their own" (L10).

Discussions

The study showed that four factors *active learners, inspirational teacher, interactive learning material and task,* and *dynamic contexts* were seen to be interrelated to support the learners' intercultural language learning. The very first supportive factor in the developing process of learners' ICC was the *active learners* who play a significant role in the learning process (e.g., Rickinson, Lundholm and Hopwood, 2009; Wallace, 2015), and they are one of the key factors in the process of constructing their knowledge. The findings showed that learners with a high affective dimension of learning had high motivation, deep interest, and positive attitudes to study intercultural content in English language lessons and were eager to study and take part in different learning activities. One of the possible explanations may be that learners were influenced by their emotions when learning as pointed out by Caine and Caine (1991) that "[w]e do not simply learn. What we learn is influenced and organized by emotions" (p. 82). Comprehensibly, those who were motivated were seen to learn cultures through learning English and vice versa because learners' motivation "provides the primary impetus to initiate learning the second language and later the driving force" (Dörnyei, 1998, p. 117) to sustain the learning process, and it plays a pivotal role in their study since it brings feelings of fun, achievement, and enrichment of knowledge to them (e.g., Deci and Ryan, 1985; Reeve, 1996). Moreover, learners with deep interest and positive attitudes to intercultural language learning were actively involved in the learning process as positive attitudes facilitate the learning process (e.g., Slee, Campbell and Spears, 2012; Papaja, 2014).

It is widely agreed that learners' meta-cognitive dimension of learning is closely related to their affective dimension (e.g., Eisenberg, 2010; Paris and Winograd, 1990). The findings indicated that a large proportion of learners had positive attitudes toward their intercultural language learning, which entailed in increasing their meta-cognition. In other words, as learners had positive attitudes toward intercultural language learning, they were aware of their learning needs, adjusted their learning, and made use of opportunities to practice English and IC. This finding is in agreement with the idea of different scholars and researchers (e.g., Dunning, Johnson, Ehrlinger and Kruger, 2003; Kruger and Dunning, 1999) who state that learners' meta-cognition is a strong predictor of academic success, so those who have good meta-cognition manifest good academic performance in comparison with those who have poor meta-cognition.

It was found that, in relation to the social dimension of learning, learners were willing to work in pair or group and ask for more information during the lesson and course because of the learner-centered environment. This finding further confirms the idea of Jonassen, Mayes and McAleese (1993) who assert that learners get involved actively in activities with their peers to construct their knowledge because learners are believed to perform their knowledge construction best through social negotiation, and of Al-Rofo (2010) who mentions that learners' social dimension of learning appears to be one of the prominent dimensions affecting their academic achievement.

The *inspirational teacher* is thought to the one of the largest factors influencing learners' academic outcomes (Sanders, 1998). This study showed that the teacher was seen to inspire learners to improve their ICC by his teaching methodology, professional roles, and professional personae. As the teacher's teaching techniques (teaching methodology) were fun, attractive, motivating, and interesting, he 'promotes higher learner engagement by presenting activities that stimulate interest, curiosity and inquiry" (Griffin and Roberson, 2014, p. 145). This finding is also supported by the idea of Heimlich and Norland (1994) who point out that the teacher's ways of using teaching techniques can help to determine the extent of learners' learning because the teacher provides the "vital human connection between the content and the environment and the learners" (p. 109).

The findings further indicated that the teacher worked as a facilitator and a mediator (professional roles) to enable learners to be interculturally communicative competent. This accords with the ideas that the teacher acts as a facilitator to encourage and nurture the growth of learners (Fenstermacher and Soltis, 2004) and to keep discussion and planning going simultaneously and resolve the emerging conflict among team members when learners work in pair or group (Zorfass, 1999). In another aspect, the teacher was found to play the role of a mediator who fostered learners' ICC development as

pinpointed by scholars that the teacher works as a mediator to assist his/her learners in "scaffolding their learning" (Koch, 2009, p. 70) and constructing new knowledge (Oxford, 1997).

Furthermore, the teacher's professional personae were seen to be involved in promoting learners' ICC as he was enthusiastic and devoted to learners' intercultural language learning. This may be considered one of the influential components in motivating and inspiring learners to get involved actively in intercultural language learning. This finding is in agreement with many scholars' idea that when teachers show their enthusiasm for their content areas, learners are more likely to be interested, engaged, curious, and excited about learning (Smith, 2013); teacher's enthusiasm helps learners gain in confidence and satisfaction (Efklides, 2006); and "a teacher's devotion to teaching can indeed motivate most [learners] to learn actively" (Hui, 2008).

The findings unfolded that the *interactive learning materials* and *tasks* were seen to boost the learners' ICC as their curiosity and interest to learn this ICC course were triggered by the authentic, up-to-date and informative learning material and the various types and designs of learning tasks/ activities which were learner-centered. Such findings may be attributed to the use of vivid pictures, video clips, and topics that were relevant to learners' daily life and appropriate to their age, needs, and interests. As explained by Nuttall (1996), authentic, up-to-date and informative materials are "proof that the language is used for real-life purposes by real people" (p. 172). It may be also due to the purpose of the tasks/activities which were designed as communicative ones which may activate learners' communicative competence. Such findings corroborate with the ideas of different scholars who point out that authentic materials have a motivating effect that gives learners a sense of achievement and encourages them to learn further (Berardo, 2006) and "to reach a learning goal" (Proske, Körndle and Narciss, 2012, p. 1607), and they relate to the commencement of communicative movements in which learners are endowed with a sense of dealing with real life situations or simulating the real world in the classroom (Guariento and Morley, 2001).

Learners were found to be greatly affected by the *dynamic context* in which they were involved. The learning context was found as an enjoyable, relaxing, and comfortable atmosphere, so learners were interested in and motivated to learn. This result may be explained that as active learners, inspirational teacher, and interactive learning materials and tasks affected positively one another, resulting in an enjoyable, relaxing, and comfortable learning context. Such a learning context could entail motivating learners and facilitating their positive engagement. Additionally, learners were inspired to learn about ICC as they had chances to meet and talk to foreigners at their language center. This context was seen as a communicative context which attributed more opportunities to the

development process of learners' ICC. This finding further supports the idea of researchers who assert that this communicative context provides learners more opportunities for practice in real-life situations (DeKeyser, 2007), and the learning context is as "one of the most important variables that affects" learners' language learning (Collentine, 2009, p. 218).

The findings showed that learners were aware of the importance of the ICC as their country was on the way to integrate into the multicultural community because of the dynamic social context. A possible explanation for this finding may be that as a result of being aware of the new roles of the English language as an international language, a lingua franca, a world language, a global language in the process of globalization (e.g., Brumfit, 2004; Byram, 2008), and an official language for business in ASEAN (ASEAN, 2009, 2011), learners were motivated to focus on their intercultural language learning. In addition, another explanation is that the sociopolitical conditions shaped what learners need to study. This finding is advocated by the idea of Mustapha (2012) who asserts that the social context has impacts on learners' learning motivation and attitudes, which lead to the success or failure of learners' acquiring ICC.

On the other hand, although the learners were the supportive factor to foster learners' ICC development, they themselves were also seen as an internal constraint to affect their intercultural language learning because of personal differences in ability to learn English and characters. With respect to the ability to learn English, this finding may be explained by the fact that learners have different strengths and intelligences (Gardner. 1983, 2006), so it may be seen in this study context that those who had poor ability to learn English were competent in other subjects such as maths, arts, or music, and vice versa. Regarding personal characters, learners who were shy and unconfident seemed to be passive in their learning, which could slow down the process of their ICC development. This finding corroborates with previous findings which indicate that shy and unconfident learners experience anxiety about taking part in learning activities, which hinder them from acquiring the knowledge (Dunne, 2006); and learners' anxiety has negative effects on their academic performance (e.g., Brown, 2001; Macintyre and Gardner, 1994). In another aspect, learners' anxiety may be due to their family background, personal characteristics, or previous learning experience. Consequently, learners with poor ability to learn English, and shyness and lack of confidence became passive and had difficulties in their ICC enhancement, so they developed their ICC more slowly than those who were confident and good at or competent in linguistic usage.

The *task administration* found as the external constraint precluded learners from enhancing their ICC in terms of time and task constraints. Due to the limited time for some learners to practice

what they had learned, so they found it rather difficult to remember the new knowledge during the lesson. There may be two possible explanations for this finding; the first explanation may be that those who wanted more time to practice did not have high ability to learn English since different learners have different strengths and intelligences (Gardner, 1983, 2006); the second one may be that because this type of intercultural language learning was new to them, learners needed more time to get accustomed to it. This finding is in line with the ideas that the time constraints affect learners' language learning (Auleear Owodally, 2014), limit their cognitive capacities (Schumann, 1998), and affect their learning achievement (Bossert, 2006). There, thus, were negative impacts on the ways learners acquired and improved their ICC when they were under time pressure.

However, some research participants also experienced difficulties in learning intercultural language lessons as they needed more learning tasks/activities to practice English and intercultural communication strategies more effectively and appropriately. Similarly, possible explanations for this may be that learners had low ability to learn English, and the type of type of intercultural language learning was new to learners, so they wanted to have various learning tasks/activities in order to understand the knowledge more and remember it longer. Consequently, learning tasks/activities affected learners' learning performance and achievement as pointed out by Gniewosz and Eccles (2013) that when learners engage more in learning activities, their achievement can be improved. In other words, learning tasks/activities are, comprehensibly, closely related to academic achievement insomuch as the more learning activities learners engage, the higher they achieve. Thus, learners who encountered troubles in improving their ICC needed more time and activities for practicing their ICC. This finding is partly aligned with the study done by Nakano et al. (2011) who conducted a study on developing learners' IC through guest speaker sessions and found out that learners developed their intercultural attitudes, knowledge, and awareness out of four IC elements through the presentations given by speakers of other cultures after the course. They discovered that the learners did not improve their intercultural skills because they needed more sessions and activities that use their knowledge through practice.

Conclusions

The developing process of learners' ICC received more supportive factors to develop their ICC than constraints to hinder their ICC development. Four supportive factors were interrelated in assisting learners to develop their ICC. Meanwhile, two constraints were both internal and external. Therefore, in order to facilitate learners' ICC development, learners should, firstly, be both intrinsically and extrinsically motivated so that they can develop interest and positive attitudes to intercultural language

learning and become autonomous learners. Besides, learners should be also given appropriate tasks/activities in accordance to their ability and their personal characters so that they can gradually develop their ability to learn as well as become habituated to the learning context. Secondly, teachers should be flexible in using teaching techniques to different groups of learners and different types of activities so as to motivate learners to positively and actively get involved in the learning process. The teachers should attempt to constantly update and upgrade their professional expertise and practices through further education, self-instruction, trainings, seminars, conferences, and professional journals. Additionally, teachers should create an anxiety-free and dynamic learning environment so that learners can get fully engaged in their learning process. Thirdly, material designers should pay attention to the types of the task/activity for ICLT that are based on the learner-centered approach, and the curriculum designers should clearly define the aims and objectives of each lesson so that teachers will be able to set time for each learning task/activity appropriately and deliver the types of learning task/activity sufficiently for each lesson.

This study, nevertheless, still bears some limitations. The learning materials for this intercultural language course were separated in terms of language content and intercultural content insomuch as the Four Corners textbook (language content) was the core content of the training course. The additional intercultural material, hence, was designed to be integrated into this English language course, and consequently the intercultural themes were, to some extent, not very well matched. Apart from that, the time allotted for integrating intercultural content into language content accounted for only 50% of the course time. The drawbacks of this study, therefore, should be taken into account for further research

Acknowledgement

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APPENDIX A

LEARNERS' DIARY

Date:__/___/____

Unit:_____

1. What cultural aspect did you learn, and what countries was it about?

_____

_____

2. Was this cultural topic useful for you?

Why?:

_____

_____

_____

3. What do you think of the integration of this cultural topic into this lesson?

_____

_____

_____

_____

4. Was there anything that helped you learn both English and this cultural topic in this unit? If yes, what are they?

_____

_____

_____

_____

5. Was there anything that hindered you from learning both English and this cultural topic in this unit? If yes, what are they?

_____

_____

_____

_____

APPENDIX B

Interview Questions

A. Interviewees' background

Number of interviewees: _____

Names: _____   Jobs: _____

How long have you been learning English: _____

Ever been abroad: _____   What countries: _____

Ever taken an (inter) cultural course: _____   Brief content:_____

B. Guide for Focus Group Discussion

1. How do you feel when you learn about intercultural competence in English language classes?

2. To what extent do you think that your English proficiency is improved after taking this course?

3. Do you think that your intercultural competence is enhanced after taking this course?

+ If yes, how?

+ If no, why?

4. What are the factors that enable you to develop your ICC?

5. What are the factors that preclude you from developing your ICC?