Intercultural Communicative Language Learning Competencies of Undergraduate Students in an International Program in Thailand

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Abstract

The importance of understanding other cultures and intercultural communication is highlighted in today's globalized world due to the proliferation of internationalization, increasing multinational cooperation, and mobility of world population. Therefore, intercultural communication is a required competence. In this study, intercultural communicative competence (ICC) is explored in the setting of language and culture classrooms. Then, ICC is expanded to intercultural communicative language learning competency (ICLLC). Since there are only a few international undergraduate programs in Thailand targeting ICC as the expected learning outcome, the recognition of ICLLC's attributes and indicators benefits course developers and teachers realize how students develop ICLLC. This study aimed to identify ICLLC attributes and indicators, and to investigate ICLLC of undergraduate students in an international program. Firstly, a review of related literature toward intercultural communicative competence was done and followed by focus group interviews and educational connoisseurship method with 10 ELT experts to analyze and approve ICLLC attributes and indicators, teaching and learning activities, and assessment methods toward ICLLC. Twenty-four Thai undergraduates who were majoring in language

and intercultural communication at an international college in Bangkok, Thailand were purposively selected using the three entrance examination recruitment criteria: English language proficiency, intercultural knowledge, and intercultural experience. Classroom observation, stimulated recall, journal writing, and semi-structured interview were utilized to portray students' ICLLC. Analytic induction was used for data analysis. The results revealed that ICLLC consisted of four attributes and 21 specific indicators; 1) intercultural knowledge (with six indicators); 2) intercultural attitudes (with three indicators); 3) intercultural skills (with 10 indicators); and 4) critical cultural awareness (with two indicators). Students with higher levels of English proficiency and intercultural knowledge seemed to perform better ICLLC. Besides, willingness and motivation emerged as implementation forces to drive students to exhibit ICLLC. This study reveals deeper insights into development approaches to enriching ICLLC in international programs in Thailand.

Introduction

With globalization, people in all locations are more mobile than ever, and there are more kinds of mobility as well as language contact (Jenkins, et al., 2018, p.7; Neuliep, 2015: 2). This phenomenon causes individuals to be dependent on each other making the importance of intercultural communication arise swiftly (Reimers & Chung, 2016, p.2). With mobility of people, intercultural communication is necessary and has been studied in several areas including research in language and culture teaching and learning (Byram, 1997; Sorrells, 2013; Baldwin et. al., 2014; Maude, 2016).

Education in Thailand adapted its focus to follow the world tendencies and established an internationalization process of Thai higher education to develop international programs in universities mainly using English as a medium of instruction (Lavankura, 2013: 364). As a result, English proficiency of Thai undergraduates and graduates has been highlighted as a desired outcome (Nomnian, 2018, p.15). Thai universities are seeking techniques that encourage students to become more globalized in their perspectives, and higher education is placing greater value on intercultural skills. Effective intercultural interactions are required outcomes of international education, and many educational programs are putting efforts to foster intercultural communicative competence (Deardoff, 2006) and to promote intercultural contribution in communicative exchanges (Quyen, 2018, p.36).

With the notion that intercultural communicative competence (ICC) can be developed and that it can be taught consciously and subconsciously from lectures to direct experiences, the establishment of the international program of Bachelor of Arts in Language and Intercultural Communication was successfully launched at Srinakharinwrot University in 2018 with its aims to produce graduates as international communicators with ICC through the integration of languages, communication, interculturalism and diversity, and other cultures. The uniqueness of international programs in the context of the abovementioned B.A. program at the International College for Sustainability Studies, Srinakharinwirot University (SWUIC) make it intriguing to study. Albeit, the major portion of lecturers and students is Thai residing in the same country and sharing the same nationality, they are from dissimilar social groups. This means that they are likely to have different opinions, values, and beliefs (Taylor, 2013, p.2). Many undergraduate students hold the certain presuppositions and beliefs that they enter

the international program at the international college in order to improve their English proficiency and succeed in communicating with native speakers of English.

Drawing from observations as a lecturer of the B.A. program, intercultural interaction and socialization on a regular basis has not yet become a normal practice as most SWUIC undergraduate students have not extensively and willingly engaged in intercultural interactions unless they were assigned to socialize with others during class activities. They have not naturally attempted to find their own ways to practice intercultural communication in daily routines. Providing facilitated intercultural communication for SWUIC students is ultimately required to increase positive intercultural interaction and socialization among students since there are not many opportunities for them to engage in. From the observations, the students engaged more in and mostly on matters related to academic activities. However, it is also important to note that the quality of the contact is more important than the frequency or amount of contact (Tamam, 2016: 12). This research study sheds the lights in providing both quantity and quality of intercultural interactions and socialization for SWUIC undergraduate students to have intercultural communicative language learning competencies.

Building capacity for successful learners in educational philosophy does not entail only how well learners achieve the specific objectives, but also how well they increase the ability to learn (Gordon & Mwavita, 2018, p.78). Studies in recognition of the importance of developing ICC (Hismanoglu, 2011; Tran & Seepho, 2016; Tamam, 2016, Quyen, 2018) have shifted to learners' attitudes toward ICC, explore how learners process new information regarding target language and culture, and the kinds of strategies they employ to understand others, to deal with interculturally diverse interactions, and to act appropriately in intercultural settings.

With reference to the learners' diverse intercultural backgrounds and the lack of studies in intercultural communicative language learning competencies in international programs in Thailand, the acknowledgement of the ICLLC's attributes and indicators as well as students' performance of ILCCL by policy makers, course developers and teachers enables them to provide necessary learning management and facilitations to serve different needs of students for the program achievement of principal outcomes. Also, since the operation of the degree program has been available since 2018, several uncertainties and hesitations regarding teaching and learning management, recruitment process, assessment of ICLLC have been addressed. These observations were made by the main researcher as a committee member and a lecturer of the B.A.in LIC program; therefore, it is saliently worth researching how students in this unique context learn interculturally and what needs to be brought into account when making a decision on interview judgement and instructional practices. Later, the implementation of ICLLC can be proposed as development approaches to ICLLC of undergraduate students in an international program relating to intercultural communication in Thai universities. Therefore, this empirical study endeavored to 1) to identify ICLLC attributes and indicators and, 2) to investigate undergraduate students' ICLLC and ICLLC development.

Literature review

Cultures and intercultural communication

The requirement of understanding other cultures and intercultural communication in today's globalized world is increasing (Baldwin et. al., 2014). Culture is a core component of 'intercultural communication,' and it is a broad concept which is difficult to define (Taylor, 2013, p.66). Culture is a complex system of dynamic and evolving concepts, customs,

attitudes, values, beliefs, conventions, behaviors, and lifestyles of the people in a cultural group, including the artifacts they produce and the foundations they create which can distinguish them from others (Taylor, 2013: 73, Maude, 2016: 4). Communication is the process of making and transferring symbolic behavior and the interpretation of behavior between sending and receiving people. Intercultural communication is needed when culture has an impact on the communication between two or more people (Baldwin et. al, 2014). Therefore, intercultural communication is a key feature of interactions among participants who do not share the same culture in a multicultural society. In order to minimize communication breakdowns and misunderstandings, intercultural communicative competence is required.

Intercultural communicative competence and intercultural communicative language learning competencies

Communicative competence, proposed by Hymes in 1972 (Diaz Frias, 2014), intercultural competence (Deardorff, 2006) and communicative language ability are the foundation of intercultural communicative competence (ICC), which has been revised by various authors of other models of competence. Byram's ICC model (1997) has five components; 1) intercultural attitudes which are explained as curiosity, openness, or readiness to suspend disbelief about other cultures and belief about one's own; 2) intercultural knowledge which shows learning about social groups, products, practices, and processes of interaction; 3) skills of interpreting and relating which are understood as the ability to identify and explain cultural perspectives and mediate between and function in new cultural contexts; 4) skills of discovering and interacting which are the ability to acquire new knowledge of a culture and cultural practices and to operate knowledge, attitudes, and skills under the limits of impulsive communication; and 5) critical cultural awareness which designates the ability to critically evaluate the perspectives and practices in one's own and other cultures. Moreover, Chen and Starosta (1999) described ICC as consisting of intercultural sensitivity or affective process, intercultural awareness or cognitive process, and intercultural adroitness or behavioral process. Finally, Wiseman (2002) adds motivation as another element in the definition of ICC.

The integration of culture into language teaching and learning has been an important focus in language education (Tran & Seepho, 2016) since language and culture cannot be separated (Mitchell & Myles, 2004). In this study, ICLLC refers to the ability of an undergraduate student in the language and culture degree program to perform effective communication with other people from different cultural backgrounds using the summation of intercultural knowledge, attitude, skills, cultural awareness as well as willingness and motivation.

Presuppositions for building intercultural communicative language learning competencies

Since language and culture are accepted to be interwoven, then intercultural communicative competence should be a component of language classes (Zhou & Griffiths, 2011; Diaz Frias, 2014; Kim, 2019). As a result, developing ICC to understand other people with differences and to have effective communication across cultures is significant. In other words, ICC in English education has an aim at developing and achieving such components (Kim, 2019).

In this study, ICLLC refers to the ability of undergraduate students who learn languages and intercultural communication to successfully communicate or interact with other people from different cultural backgrounds by deploying an appropriate combination of intercultural knowledge, intercultural skills, intercultural attitudes, and critical cultural awareness. In order to develop learners' ICLLC, there are presuppositions, such as English language proficiency, existing intercultural knowledge, and intercultural experiences that have an impact on the level of ICLLC. These three presuppositions were used as recruitment criteria for B.A. in Language and Intercultural Communication.

Many previous studies put the focus on the importance of teaching target language culture following the growing interest in ICC and teaching world cultures (Hyland & Wong, 2013; Marlina, 2018) through the use of experiments, surveys with closed-ended questions, surveys with open-ended questions (Zhou & Griffths, 2011), interviews and focus groups, observation, language analysis, and textual analysis. However, there have been few previous studies on students' intercultural communicative language learning. Tran and Seepho (2016) explored EFL learners' attitudes towards intercultural communicative learning (ICLL) and ICC development in the Vietnamese context. Questionnaires, learners' diaries, language tests, IC tests, and semi-structured interview were used for data collection. The findings found that EFL learners' attitudes towards ICLL were positively changed, and their ICC in terms of language competence and intercultural competence were developed. Quyen (2018) conducted a qualitative case study to investigate students' perceptions to cultivating intercultural competence activities in a Vietnamese university. Students' reflections and open-ended questionnaires were used to gather data. The findings indicated that the students experienced positive knowledge, skills of interacting, and attitudes towards ICC activities.

Studies toward learners' performances and development about ICLLC have not been widely conductedin Thai context. Moreover, the integration of intercultural content into English language education in Thailand is far behind, and it is largely ignored (Tran & Seepho, 2016). To reach conclusions about teaching and learning ICLLC, identifying its attributes and indicators as well as analyzing the students' performances and development are necessary. Therefore, this study sought to contribute to the literature by revealing ICLLC attributes and indicators, including students' intercultural knowledge, attitudes, skills, cultural awareness, experiences, and performances while learning and encountering ICC. Furthermore, it also explored how students with different levels of English proficiency, intercultural experience, and intercultural knowledge develop ICLLC in the context of an international program in a Thai university. Two research questions were formed:

1) What are ICLLC attributes and indicators?

2) How do undergraduate students perform and develop ICLLC during their study?

Methodology

Research setting and participants

With the deployment of a qualitative case study method, the study was conducted during the second semester of the academic year 2019 at the International College for Sustainability Studies, Srinakharinwirot University which provided a Bachelor of Arts Program in Language and Intercultural Communication (International Program). The program received its first cohort of students in 2018, and there are two cohorts of 122 students now. This study was only one part of an empirical study aiming to initiate development approaches to ICLLC for undergraduate students in an international program at a higher education

institution. In reality, the students in the same program were different in terms of English proficiency, cultural backgrounds, schematic knowledge of cultures, and cultural experiences. The final results of the whole study sought to portray the patterns of learning performance and ICLLC development deployed by those students. Participants were 24 Thai‐national undergraduate students who were selected by purposive sampling (Creswell, 2013), and the selection of the 24 participants followed the recruitment criteria of the entrance examination: Thailand Central Admission System (TCAS): English language proficiency, intercultural experience, and intercultural knowledge which were recently deployed by the B.A. in LIC program. Linguistic proficiency, intercultural experience and existing intercultural knowledge are keys to fostering ICC as students will be able to adapt to and respect a target culture by studying and interacting in other cultural settings (Hismanolgu, 2011, p.807). These three criteria were utilized as criteria for selecting participants. The participants' demographic information is presented in Table 1.

Research instruments

The deployment of a variety of instruments was to gain data from varied perspectives and to provide the necessary triangulation. This study involved a combination of observational and self-report data (Burns & Richards, 2009: 5), and six research instruments were utilized: intercultural knowledge test, survey questionnaire, classroom observation, semi‐structured interview, simulated recall, and journal writing. The intercultural knowledge test consisted of 25 true/false/not-sure items of both general and specific knowledge. The survey questionnaire was given to students to obtain information on students' demographic information and intercultural experience. The classroom observations were deployed by the main researcher with field notes and audio recordings to indicate students' ICLLC performance and development, and observed data were used as points for interviews and recalls. The semi‐structured interviews and stimulated recalls were used for in‐depth information on students' reflections on ICLLC performance and development of their own or others. The journals were kept by individuals according to assigned topics. The semi‐structured interviews, stimulated recalls, and journals were employed to mainly portray students' ICLLC attributes: intercultural knowledge, intercultural attitudes, intercultural skills, critical cultural awareness, other implementation forces, and ICLLC indicators. Additionally, English language proficiency test scores were retrieved from students' current SWU-SET test scores.

Research procedures and data analysis

The study was divided into two phases following the two abovementioned research questions. To identify ICLLC' attributes and indicators, related literature and documents were reviewed to identify shared components of ICC. The focus group interviews and educational connoisseurship method with 10 experts who had from five to 32 years of actual experience in teaching English and cultures at higher education level, were conducted to identify ICLLC's attributes, indicators, teaching and learning activities including assessment methods. After analytic induction, the analyzed data were approved by the experts individually with some comments and suggestions through online communication.

To investigate the performance and development of the students' ICLLC, case studies of 24 participants were completed using the intercultural knowledge test, classroom observations with field notes, one‐on‐one semi‐structured interviews, stimulated recalls, and journal writings. Before the study began, 76 voluntary students were given the research ethic form, and after that they were asked to take the 25-item intercultural knowledge test in English, and its content validity was approved by the other three experts. For data interpretation, one

point was awarded to true answers, and false and not-sure answers were marked zero. The survey questionnaire together with the intercultural knowledge test was given to students during the first week of study to obtain information on students' demographic information, intercultural knowledge level and intercultural experience level. The Srinakharinwirot University Standardized English Test or SWU-SET test scores were used to represent students' English language proficiency levels. As mentioned in the research setting and participants section, students' levels of English language proficiency, intercultural experience, intercultural knowledge were deployed as criteria for selecting participants. With regards to it, 24 students were selected as research participants as shown in the Table 1. The classroom observations with field notes and audio recordings were conducted by the main researcher for eight weeks of designated activities. The delivery of semi-structured interviews and stimulated recalls were made after classroom observations. Each participant attended the interviews at least four times, and the stimulated recalls at least once. Interviews and recalls were in Thai in order for students to best convey their messages, and lasted between 15 to 30 minutes according to the students' convenience in terms of time, place, and communication channel whether it was face-to-face or a call. The individual journal writings were kept according to four assigned topics relevant to the classroom activities.

After the data collection, qualitative data gathered from focus group interviews with experts, questionnaires, classroom observations' field notes, semi-structured interviews, stimulated recalls, and journal writings were analyzed to find themes or categories using a content analysis approach. For ethical reasons, all participants' names were replaced with pseudonyms. In order to increase the validity and reliability, all research instruments were piloted. To increase the reliability, two trained external participants and the researcher separately analyzed the observational and self-report data in a limited time. The analyzed data were compared to reach an agreed level of reliability. Also, in order to increase the validity of the analysis, participating students were involved in analyzing and giving comments on the analysis of data (Basturkmen et al., 2004, p.251). The analyses were compared and induced into themes or categories.

Table 1 Participants' demographic information and their qualifications (N=24)

Participant (Code)	Gender	Year of study	English language proficiency level		Intercultural knowledge		Intercultural experience
			Scores	Levels	Scores	Levels	
Participant 1 (P1)	Male	2	86	High	21	High	High
Participant 2 (P2)	Male	2	79	High	19	High	Low
Participant 3 (P3)	Female	2	80	High	12	Low	High
Participant 4 (P4)	Male	2	82	High	10	Low	Low
Participant 5 (P5)	Female	2	67	Medium	22	High	High
Participant 6 (P6)	Female	2	59	Medium	18	High	Low
Participant 7 (P7)	Female	2	70	Medium	10	Low	High
Participant 8 (P8)	Female	2	71	Medium	8	Low	Low
Participant 9 (P9)	Male	2	38	Low	18	High	High
Participant 10 (P10)	Female	2	44	Low	16	High	Low
Participant 11 (P11)	Female	2	45	Low	9	Low	High
Participant 12 (P12)	Female	2	48	Low	11	Low	Low
Participant 13 (P13)	Female	1	82	High	18	High	High

Participant 14 (P14)	Female	1	83	High	17	High	Low
Participant 15 (P15)	Female	1	87	High	10	Low	High
Participant 16 (P16)	Male	1	82	High	11	Low	Low
Participant 17 (P17)	Female	1	66	Medium	16	High	High
Participant 18 (P18)	Male	1	68	Medium	16	High	Low
Participant 19 (P19)	Male	1	71	Medium	9	Low	High
Participant 20 (P20)	Female	1	58	Medium	11	Low	Low
Participant 21 (P21)	Male	1	37	Low	18	High	High
Participant 22 (P22)	Male	1	44	Low	15	High	Low
Participant 23 (P23)	Female	1	40	Low	9	Low	High
Participant 24 (P24)	Female	1	40	Low	8	Low	Low

Note:
1. English language proficiency using SWU-SET test:
   1.1 High = CEFR Level B2 & above, (78-100 points)
   1.2 Medium = CEFR Level B1 (50-77 points)
   1.3 Low = CEFR Level A2 (22-49 points)
2. Intercultural knowledge using intercultural knowledge test:
   2.1 High = 14-25 points
   2.2 Low = 0-13 points
3. Intercultural experience: Living or studying experiences in intercultural settings
   3.1 High = at least one year
   3.2 Low = less than one year

Findings

Attributes and indicators of ICLLC

With respect to the qualitative data analysis, four significant attributes: intercultural knowledge, intercultural attitude, and intercultural skills, and critical cultural awareness emerged from focus group interviews. Also, 21 indicators emerged and are identified in the Table 2.

Table 2 Attributes and indicators of ICLLC

Attributes	Indicators
A1: Intercultural knowledge	I1: Knowledge of target culture as culture-specific (deep culture / etic) i.e. social groups, beliefs, normal practices, interaction process I2: Knowledge of general culture or dominant culture as culture-general (surface culture / emic) i.e. costumes, food, sports, artefacts, arts I3: Knowledge of language and communication including English as a Lingua Franca, verbal and nonverbal communication I4: Knowledge of social interaction I5: Knowledge of self and others I6: Knowledge of current global affairs

A2: Intercultural attitudes	I7: General outlook, curiosity, openness, or readiness to suspend disbelief about other cultures and belief about one's own I8: Positive outlook towards learning intercultural communication I9: Empathy
A3: Intercultural skills	I10: CEFR B1 level language skills including listening, speaking, reading and writing I11: Interpersonal skills with locals and foreigners I12: Critical thinking skills I13: Ability to cope with uncertainty about intercultural issues (compromising) I14: Ability to clarify cultural perspectives and appropriately practice/use in new cultural settings I15: Ability to gain/discover new knowledge of any particular culture and cultural practices and to use the knowledge in the interaction I16: Intercultural sensitivity I17: Ability to look upon oneself from the outside / the ability to see the world through the others' eyes I18: Ability to solve intercultural issues or incidents I19: Strategies to direct own learning
A4: Critical cultural awareness	I20: Ability to critically evaluate the cultural perspectives and practices of own and other cultures and how it leads to understanding I21: Ability to evaluate others' points of view

In addition to these findings,, it was extensively highlighted that implementation forces, such as, motivation and willingness to engage in intercultural contact situation, intention of resolving intercultural issues, were considered as an activator for students' ICLLC.

Students' intercultural communicative language learning competencies

This section deals with the findings from students' classroom performances, thoughts, opinions, and perceptions toward ICLLC through classroom observations, interviews, stimulated recalls, and journal writings. The findings are displayed according to attributes and indicators of ICLLC together with three presupposed qualifications of participants: English language proficiency levels, intercultural knowledge levels, and intercultural experience levels.

The development of students' ICLLC based on intercultural knowledge

From analysis of the intercultural knowledge test, most participants had intercultural knowledge on universal manners in daily life, for example, greeting, saying *thank you*, maintaining personal space, making an appointment, being punctual, and wearing appropriate outfits. This knowledge was culture-general. Regarding culture-specific, for example, beliefs, normal practices, and orientation of life, the scores were lower, especially about verbal and nonverbal communication aspects and Asian cultures. Many participants mentioned dominant cultures, such as Western cultures, Chinese culture, and Japanese culture.

Apart from learning linguistic forms and general communication strategies, I need to pay attention to cultural aspects of different countries, especially those western countries that have major roles in world history and the power in world economic. (P2)

Western and eastern cultures are necessary as they use English to communicate. For example, I like talking with my foreign teachers because I know some of their lifestyles and I found that learning different cultures and understanding them is very useful. (P14)

From the intercultural knowledge quiz, I got that there are Asian cultures we need to learn too. (P5)

A larger portion of participants strongly believed that communication strategies including verbal and non- verbal communication, and knowledge about self and others were really important when conversing with strangers or people whom they did not know well.

We were assigned to present about immigrant workers in Thailand and we interviewed expatriates downtown. At that time, we were petrified that we had nothing about what they were talking about. Luckily, we learned types of immigration and we thought that at least we knew about their basic purpose of mobility. We used this knowledge to plan our question guidelines and we did it. We were able to understand them and could present their thoughts and feelings with more understanding. (P2)

I remembered when I was an exchange student that I was too shy to talk with others because my English was poor. I smiled a lot and kept listening to people and learn to know them. Finally, I had many friends and I could remember all their names and important information about class. (P17)

Nonverbal communication is important when interacting with Chinese and Japanese classmates. Although, we are from Asian countries with high context culture. I am a female student and I found that male Japanese students are generally more open. (P3)

There were some participants with low levels of English proficiency who mentioned a lot that language knowledge and skills were saliently important as a good base before having intercultural knowledge.

Before having good intercultural knowledge, we need to have a very good English language proficiency to be used for communication with foreigners. I could not read or speak in English, I could not express what I really want to say. (P23)

Similar to other aspects of intercultural knowledge, a few participants mentioned that up-to-date news around the world was necessary.

Sometimes I don't know what to talk with my foreign teachers and friends. I raised about the news or talk of the town to be the topic of my talk. It worked well. (P21)

Reading in Global Context course required me to practice reading a lot to promote my reading strategies, and I have also gained knowledge about world current affairs and lifestyles of people around the world. (P14)

The development of students' ICLLC based on intercultural attitudes

From the data analysis, there was strong evidence of participants' positive attitude towards ICLLC. Most participants described that they acknowledged the importance and roles

of different cultures in learning for intercultural communication. Example comments are as follows.

I used to question why people weren't direct or straightforward. I learn directness from my grandparents to say things out directly. They needed others to ask before getting what they wanted to have. For example, my close relative whose her mother is from other country never shows her expressions toward anything. I decided to ask her rather than judging her without asking and I realized that was her style. Then, I understood more about her behavior. (openness/ readiness to suspend disbelief about other cultures and belief about one's own – P2)

I always had questions why people posted this and that on their twitter, why people fought one another for different expectations, why I got B+ and my close friend in the same group got A in the previous course. I kept those questions and later found out by my own ways. Sometimes I talked to my advisor or teacher, and at another time I thought as if I were that person. Most of the time I got answers, but there were still no answers for many. (curiosity and empathy -P5)

Some participants insisted that their intercultural attitudes were improved during the program study and they commented as follows.

My attitudes toward other cultures were positively modified. I have more understanding about individual and cultural differences. I will never judge other people from their appearance and action at a time. There are more reasons than I have had in my own lists. (openness - P7)

Apart from the positive aspects of learning and encountering intercultural communication in terms of attitudes, some participants with low level of English language proficiency also reported their apprehension towards intercultural encounters as follows.

I am really feeling uncomfortable when interacting with others from different cultures. I don't know what to talk and how to act out. I tried hard to listen to their talk and sometimes I made mistakes. Every time the teacher assigned us to interview foreigners, I needed a group work – not individual work. (P12)

The development of students' ICLLC based on intercultural skills

Overall, participants with high English language proficiency, intercultural knowledge, and intercultural experience seemed to have more intercultural skills and performed those skills in their learning and living. During classroom activities, those students showed their intercultural abilities and skills when working in groups works with other foreign students. They were more eager to share ideas in group and class discussion without any reluctance. Participants with low English language proficiency struggled more during class interactions towards intercultural knowledge and intercultural experience. They reported that they avoided intercultural communication because they had less confidence and no interesting ideas to communicate. They were afraid of face-losing in front of others. Participants explained about the intercultural skills they used in their intercultural situations as follows.

Nonverbal communication is so powerful, especially with foreigners. Even we speak the same language, Asian and western people interact with others differently. They use their own ways of nonverbal communication styles. My Japanese friends always uttered a long

sound of "Ehhhhh" and I didn't get it and one day I asked them. They said it is a response made to the previous utterance from their interlocutor. The function is to substitute the response. After that I felt more comfortable when I heard it again and again. (Communication strategies - P1)

Language skills, especially speaking and listening skills and interpersonal skills from LIC 101 in the previous semester helped elevate my confidence when communicating with other classmates. It was good to have foreign students to use English with meaningful purposes. (Communication strategies and interpersonal skills - P16)

Refer to strategies to direct own learning and language learning strategies emerged from the analysis of the students' self-reflection through journal writing and interviews, students with high proficiency level of English seemed to apply indirect strategies including social strategies, affective strategies, and metacognitive strategies as they mentioned below:

During my past learning experience of English and Korean, I have my ways to talk with foreigners with more confidence. When we were assigned to work in groups, I never felt uneasy to work with foreign classmates. I like working in groups. (Social strategy - P3)

The lesson about the reading and speaking activity on dating cultures around the world, we were asked to read our parts and transferred to other group members. There were a lot of difficult words and confusing cultures, with time limitation I encouraged myself to understand all information. And when I worked in a group of people who read the same passage, I proposed a shortcut to finish the activity earlier. (Affective strategy and Metacognitive strategy - P13)

…..There are many assigned cases to study and analyze for second-year students. My friends always asked me why I finished all assignments so quickly. This is because I tried to link the cases with my past experiences and background knowledge. Sometimes I asked my parents about their thoughts and international experiences too. (Metacognitive strategy – P2)

On the other hand, students with low proficiency levels of English seemed to apply direct strategies including memory strategies, and compensation strategies, which they mentioned as follows:

Teacher assigned us to read a lot about today's migration. One of those in the reading list was really complex since it contains difficult vocabulary and unfamiliar content, and it is lengthy. I tried hard to guess meaning of words in contexts and to relate all contents into mind-mapping using keywords and colors. I remember these techniques from my English reading class. (Memory strategy - P11)

Participants with high intercultural knowledge seemed to be more flexible to new things or uncertain situations, and comfortable with ambiguity.

After watching the video about the teacher on her first day, I didn't feel awkward at all. I think that people have their own purpose on what to do and what not to do. If I were her, I might follow her action. I couldn't really give you the answer. My action would change if I were real in that situation. (P14)

The development of students' ICLLC based on critical cultural awareness

Second-year participants with higher levels of intercultural knowledge and experience were more likely to understand and have critical cultural awareness toward people than first-year participants, who had a certain level of understanding diversity and things around them with no evidence of deep discussion toward the differences. These latter students reported that the awareness was mainly from study courses, previous life experience as exchange students, and new experience gained from the program. They gave explanations as follows:

Critical cultural awareness toward mobility of people and individual differences

I never thought of causes that moved people from one place to another place until I have studied in my second year. Mobility of people started many years ago and people were either forced or unforced to relocate as immigrants such as cultural immigrants, labour immigrants, and so on. (P2)

Intercultural experience and international experience is a good source of critical cultural awareness

From my experience in an exchange study program a few years ago, I strongly believe that it helps me a lot to have more understanding and become more patient when I contact with others from different cultural background. (P1).

I live in a big province in the west of Thailand where I am living with people from Myanmar as my neighbors. I never thought of it as a privilege until I studied LIC202 Border Crossings and Diaspora Culture. I like this subject because I can connect with my childhood and relate the lecture and case studies with my personal background. (P6)

We went to help organize two international conferences where we met many international participants. I realized that working for them was a reward that we could not find in class activities. I learned a lot from working there. I could link what I learned with what I was facing in the conference work. (P9)

The performance of students' ICLLC based on implementation force

Students' motives in studying intercultural communication

There were several motives related to ICLLC implementation force. One main force that all participants mentioned was a passion to work in an international organization or environment as the personal growth motive. Different drives were reported as follows:

I was an exchange student for one year when I was in my high school. I felt like I needed to make a decision for my future in general and my future career. English is so important but English only is not enough. I needed international experience and international friends to fulfil my dream. (personal growth motive – P1)

Korean series is my favorite. My friends told me that a group of Korean boy band was coming to Bangkok for a fan meeting. I went to almost everywhere they appeared to public. Though, I could not understand them a single word at that time. Later I decided to study Korean on YouTube and internet. (media motive – P10)

English will be the most powerful language forever. I would like to work in another country because it will provide more salary and other benefits. I would also learn that

country's spoken language to get better qualifications for my future employers. (economic motive – P19)

Before going to Japan, I watched Japanese language learning video clip from mobile applications and YouTube to learn some basic phrases, for example, asking for directions and discounts. We got lost at the underground at that time, I thought that if I knew how to read and speak Japanese, our trip would go smoother and we could visit and see more of Japan and its beautiful culture. (cross-cultural motive – P13)

Willingness to communicate

Toward the end of transcribing recorded data of interviews, one interesting point of discussion was from the quiet participants (P1 and P13) in open discussion and oral activities in the classrooms. They kept silent while they were learning, and they both described that they were paying attention to the lecturers and would not like to join in the open discussion unless their names were called. Even though they were in the group of high English language proficiency, high intercultural knowledge, and high intercultural experience, they felt that they did not have willingness to interact in open discussion, and they mentioned they were unaware of being too quiet in class. This was reported by them as their learning style. Once they were asked to conduct presentations or talks, they did really outstandingly. Their learning performance and behaviors were observed. The anecdotes below are from the interviews.

The reason why I was very quiet in class was that I didn't want to dominate the class. I wanted to listen to others' ideas and opinions. This might be my learning preference. But when I had to discuss, I always did my best. (P1)

I personally liked to listen to the lecturers and paid as much as attention to the lecture as I realized that any points raised by the lecturers would be a main frame to study for exams, especially when lecturers analyzed cases as an example. (P13)

Exposure to intercultural situations

Students with high English language proficiency level had more exposure to and more engagement in settings where intercultural communication took place, such as, international conferences, special talks by foreigners, language summer camps abroad, overseas exchange study programs, group work with foreign students, etc.

I loved the experience given by the program to work as a liaison at international conferences about English language teaching and multilingual education managed by an international organization. There I had chances to work with others from different universities and to communicate with conference participants from different countries around the world. (P4)

For me, I have never been abroad and that was a good chance to be a part of an international conference in January. It was a three-day event with international participants. I wasn't reluctant to offer myself to be a registration team member. I knew that I wouldn't have this experience from anywhere else. (P15)

Students with both higher and lower English language proficiency level also attempted to engage themselves with Japanese and Chinese students to help develop their Japanese and Chinese languages, their preferred third languages.

When the group of 20 Japanese students came to study with us, I thought that this was the best chance for me to practice my Japanese and learn new words from native speakers. Also, I would like to make friends with them for future exchange study that I would participate in. It was such a good experience to me because I had never been abroad. (P12)

Discussion and Conclusion

This study was a beginning that shed more light on the development of ICLLC in language and culture classroom settings. The approval of the importance of ICLLC, and its four significant attributes and 21 indicators can be implemented in ICLLC teaching and learning activities, extracurricular activities, learning facilitations, and assessment at the higher education level. Motivation and willingness emerged as an implementation force to achieve competence, which were aligned with the studies and work of Kim, 2019. Furthermore, English language proficiency, intercultural knowledge, and intercultural experience were likely to have an effect on students' ICLLC; the higher levels performed the better ICLLC. This was similar to the study of Zhou & Griffiths (2011), which also found that language proficiency and experience facilitated ICC. This correlation may be because intercultural knowledge and existing experience influence intercultural attitudes and practices. Higher levels of English proficiency may encourage students to be more active in intercultural interactions. English language proficiency and skills were saliently significant to students' development of ICLLC in an international program setting where the English language was principally used as a medium of instruction and communication. Pertaining to intercultural attitudes, most students had positive attitudes towards ICLLC. Correspondingly, students seemed to perceive that they could improve their English language proficiency and ICLLC throughout the four-year degree program. They also self-reported that their critical cultural awareness was enhanced during the study.

During the development period of ICLLC, the students had a positive perception that they could advance their ICLLC along with the English and third language proficiency. It was noticeable that participants with higher level of English proficiency had higher scores of intercultural knowledge. In contrast, intercultural experience did not have an impact on intercultural knowledge. This meant that intercultural knowledge came from formal education rather than direct experience. With many students' dream job opportunities in international affiliations, students strongly believed learning about other languages and cultures benefited them to have more understanding about their own culture and cultural differences and to become an intercultural communicator. This was a result of the expected learning outcome of the program that highlighted the development of ICLLC for learners, which was the key competence of graduates in the twenty-first century (Deardorff, 2006; Reimers & Chung, 2016).

One important issue apart from the main findings is the language used as a medium of communication among people with different backgrounds. It influences the practice and success in intercultural communication. The evidence is the ninth participant (P9) reported that his English language proficiency was not good, and this drew him to be an incompetent English language learner. P9 represented a participant with low English language proficiency and intercultural knowledge levels but a high intercultural experience level as he grew up with people from a neighboring country. He was in good terms with them and they all used Thai (his native language) as the medium of communication. In this particular case, he was successful in the real intercultural setting. Unfortunately, English was the medium of instruction in the international degree program and brought-in activities were interculturally

contextualized. As a result, this participant was not as competent as when he was in his own real context. This raises the controversial issue of the importance of English language proficiency and the language that is used as a mediating language in the development of ICLLC.

Several curricular factors were also noted in this study. First, intercultural-related content needed to be finely selected, and teaching and learning activities needed to vary. Also, the assessment needed to be aligned with the course objectives, expected outcomes; focused attributes and indicators. In-program activities, such as field trips, intercultural visits, as well as extracurricular activities, such as being a liaison at an international conference were required for students to practice and experience intercultural settings. This helped boost students' development of ICLLC. Also, motives in studying intercultural communication (Baldwin et. al., 2014) and working in an international environment were major influencers to students to reach their goal of being competent in intercultural communication. Sometimes in intercultural communication, the message sent was not the message received (Neuliep, 2015, p.33). This issue could be the possible cause of apprehension or anxiety with learners of different languages and cultures in multicultural settings which were reported in this study.

As ICLLC is the expected learning outcome and competence for language learners in the 21st century, it is recommended that the authorities and language and culture program providers in any macro and micro educational levels should pay close attention to the attributes and indicators of ICLLC for best implementation. Congruently, implementing diversity and providing diversity experiences to students through a curriculum are recommended, and Tamam (2016, p.50) proposed it through strategic planning to enhance a higher level of intercultural interaction among students in international settings. This strongly confirmed that culture should be incorporated into language education as it was in line with the study of Newton (2016), Quyen (2018, p.36) and Duyen (2019, p.24), and language and culture education is instrumental in creating a competent communicator able to function effectively in intercultural settings.

Regardless of the time constraint for data collection including classroom observation and self-reporting, limited sample size, exclusivity of the context together with the possible subjective bias from the main researcher as an insider of the research setting, the study results may not be generalized to other cases in other settings.

Implications

Since intercultural communicative language learning competencies do not naturally occur as an innate competence, the development of it must be intentional through curricular and extra-curricular determinations. Generally, the study can portray some insightful results for the capacity-building program provided that it is not to investigate who are more advanced toward intercultural knowledge and skills but who has more understanding in a real-life intercultural communication (Neuliep, 2015). The results of investigating the necessary components of ICLLC and students' performance and development of ICLLC during study can be utilized as a framework toward developing ICLLC. The attributes and indicators induced from the study can be a good base for a component of developing the learning process, teaching activities, and assessments in Thai contexts. The findings directly benefit SWUIC teachers who may have different ways of dealing with diversity through teaching and learning management and priorities, class activities, and assessments. Any study programs concerning language and culture can rethink their orientations and efforts to improve the program outcomes. Also, this study provides an approach to program development and meaningful

advice to teachers and program providers when designating intercultural journey for students. The teachers should bring in a variety of ICLLC activities in different intercultural settings as ICLLC tasks are associated with the students' intercultural encounters and entail intercultural communicative performances. Finally, fostering ICLLC is key to creating successful and powerful communicators in the target language. Since ICC development is just as much a prominent ingredient of language development, ICLLC should be incorporated into foreign language learning as a necessary complement, not a supplement.

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